

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy
Title of case study: 'The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle: bringing late antique thought to new audiences'.
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study concerns the impact of a major translation and publishing project unique in its scale and ambition. The surviving ancient Greek commentaries on Aristotle were published in a series titled <i>Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca</i> (ed. Diels, 1882–1909). This made the texts available to readers of ancient Greek, but their length and technical nature meant that even classically trained scholars made rather sparing use of the commentaries. The Ancient Commentators Project was initiated in 1987 in order to translate these texts into English. The project has now succeeded beyond all original expectations. The 100th volume was published in December 2012, and nearly the entire corpus of late antique commentaries is now available in English.</p> <p>By making the commentaries accessible to a vastly increased audience, the project has made a contribution to the preservation and presentation of our cultural heritage. This impact has been felt especially in the field of education: the availability of these primary sources has influenced deeply and widely the design and delivery of curricula of ancient and medieval philosophy at HEIs internationally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle project began in 1987 under the direction of Prof. Richard Sorabji. Its aim was to translate the principal Greek commentaries on Aristotle into English for the first time (along with a number of related philosophical texts from late antiquity, sometimes from languages other than Greek) and publish them, accompanied by an explanatory introduction and notes.</p> <p>To date, over 100 volumes have been published with a further 20 assigned or under consideration. 86 of the 104 volumes appeared between 1993 and 2013. The next volumes will expand coverage even further. They will translate the remaining commentaries on Aristotle from Diels' original series in Greek, and will add translations of some newly discovered Greek fragments and of Syriac, Hebrew and Arabic texts of commentaries whose Greek versions have been lost.</p> <p>A number of ancillary publications have emerged from the Project: several collections of papers on the commentators, including <i>Aristotle Transformed</i> and a two-volume collection on the commentators which appeared with the Institute of Classical Studies in 2004. Particularly important for the project's impact has been the publication of Prof. Sorabji's three-volume sourcebook on the commentators (2004). These textbooks, together with the translations, have made it possible for the first time to teach this rich and important material in an accessible manner.</p> <p>As well as through publication of the volumes and other texts, the project's findings have been disseminated through Prof. Sorabji's numerous talks and media participation (print, TV, radio and online). The publication of the 100th volume was marked with a four-day international conference in December 2012, in London (Institute of Philosophy and King's) and Oxford (Wolfson College).</p> <p>The first 100 volumes were digitalized by December 2012, and paperback editions have been added at less than half the price of the hardback. This has increased accessibility, secured long-term retention in print, and made the word indexes and translations searchable, enhancing accessibility of content and offering an indispensable resource for unfamiliar late Greek word usage. In particular, the online availability of the word indices to these volumes substantially supplements the otherwise very limited information about late antique Greek philosophical terminology provided in Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon. Indeed these indices collectively represent the largest single corpus for that terminology, and can be used by translators and classicists working on related texts and by lexicographers. This has widened and consolidated the project's contribution to the preservation and presentation of our intellectual heritage.</p> <p>The project constitutes a significant publishing enterprise, facilitated by tremendous fundraising success. For example, in the USA, the first 60 volumes have sold 45,574 copies to date. In the EU and the UK, the series sold 2,143 copies across the 100 titles in the past twelve months alone.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Overall the project has received in excess of £2.25m from government and private funding bodies, as well as from private individuals, with donations ranging from £1,000 to £500K, as detailed in section 3.

The Project has been led by Prof. Richard Sorabji (retired from King's in 2000) and, since 2000, with the assistance of Prof. Peter Adamson (at King's from 2000–present).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Commentators Volumes (104 vols.) include: Philoponus (30 vols.); Alexander (19 vols.); Simplicius (29 vols.); Ammonius (4 vols.); Themistius (5 vols.); Porphyry (2 vols.); Proclus (4 vols.); Boethius (2 vols.); Dexippus (1 vol.); Aspasius (with Michael of Ephesus and Anonymous) (2 vols.); Syrianus (2 vols.); Priscian (1 and a half vols.); Stephanus (2 vols.); Aeneas' *Theophrastus* and Zacharias' *Ammonius* (1 vol.).

In its inception, the series was published by Duckworth worldwide (except in USA, where between 1993 and 2008, it was published by Cornell). From Nov 2010 the publisher is Bloomsbury (with Bristol Classical Press imprint). Full details of publications and dates can be found at:

<http://www.ancientcommentators.org.uk/>.

Explanatory volumes:

3.2 *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, Richard Sorabji, ed., 2nd ed. with interpretation of the excavated Alexandrian lecture rooms used by Philoponus, and review of work on him from 1987 to 2009, with bibliography, Supp. 103 to the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 2010 (available on-line from 2013, Wiley-Blackwell). (1st ed. 1987).

3.3 *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD*, Richard Sorabji. Vol. 1, Psychology with Religion and Ethics, vol. 2, Physics, vol. 3, Logic and Metaphysics, Duckworth and Cornell University Press 2004.

3.4 *Aristotle Transformed, The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Richard Sorabji, ed. Duckworth 1990, 2nd edition planned.

All volumes were vetted by an international team of anonymized experts, guaranteeing a high level of accuracy in the translations. The scholarship involved in this project has received numerous testimonials: '[A] truly breathtaking achievement with few parallels in the history of scholarly endeavour' (David Sedley, *TLS*, 21 June 2013); 'A massive scholarly endeavour of the highest importance. For such an undertaking to be commissioned in this day and age is the stuff of which legends are made' (Peter Jones, *The Times*, 17 Feb 1990).

Funders from 1993 onward include: AHRB/ AHRC; Ashdown Trust; The British Academy; The British Academy/Wolfson; Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust; Gresham Trust; Henry Brown Trust; HRB/HEFCE; Jowett Copyright Trustees; The Leventis Foundation; The Leverhulme Trust; The National Endowment for the Humanities, U.S.A; The NWO, Netherlands; The Royal Society; and two private donors. In June 2012, Dr Michael Griffin, who became co-editor in December 2012, obtained a 4-year grant of CAD \$210,000 for the Project from the Canadian funding body, *SSHRC*.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The commentaries on Aristotle constitute approximately half of the total ancient philosophical corpus, but before this Project they were barely recognized as part of that corpus by most scholars in the field, let alone the broader public interested in philosophy. Now discussion of Aristotle is routinely informed by interpretations found in the commentators, and the study of the commentators has been integrated into the study and teaching of late antiquity as a whole.

The project has transformed our understanding of the development of the Western intellectual tradition through the medieval period and beyond. Philoponus and others commentators were translated into Arabic, and Porphyry and Boethius wrote commentaries that were hugely influential in Latin medieval thought. The background of Christian-pagan philosophical controversy can now be better appreciated, and medieval discussions of topics ranging from logical theory to theories of intellect or the eternity of the universe have been brought into focus.

To take just one example, the eternity of the universe, the Project has given us English versions of Philoponus' critique of Aristotle's arguments for eternity, the responses to this critique by the Platonist Simplicius, a further massive work by Philoponus refuting Proclus on the same topic, and most recently a pair of texts by Christian authors anticipating arguments later given by Philoponus.

This has brought out the philosophical connections between cosmology and theology and revealed a subtle cultural debate between pagan and Christian intellectuals that lasted over centuries. Thus in the Islamic world Philoponus was gratefully used to stop the Aristotelian endorsement of the eternity of the universe's limiting God's creative powers, while figures like Avicenna and Duns Scotus made advances in modal logic designed to reconfigure the whole debate by severing the link between necessity and eternity.

The translations have also reached Islamicists, theologians, historians of philosophy, historians of ancient Greece and Byzantium, Medieval and Renaissance scholars, Latinists and Hellenists, historians of science and society, scholars of ancient education, literature and lexicography, and scholars working in many other areas where light is cast by the ancient commentators. What was once largely inaccessible is now easily available. As Myles Burnyeat has written, as a result of the project, '[t]he Greek commentators are now being read around the world with an intensity of interest they have not received since they were first written' (Myles Burnyeat, *Classical Association News*). The enormous scale of the scholarly task involved has also made it into the popular consciousness, with Harry Mount describing the project in a Daily Telegraph blog as 'the most extraordinary feat of British scholarship ever'.

The most easily documentable impact of the Project has been in educational contexts. Broadly speaking, the project has affected the teaching of ancient philosophy in two ways. First, it has altered the teaching of Aristotle himself. By looking at ancient commentators, we are far better placed to understand his thought. A good example is his philosophy of mind. Thus, on the mysterious 'maker intellect' of *On the Soul* 3.5, or on whether the human soul can survive without a body, the commentators offer extensive exegetical discussion where Aristotle provides only tantalizing suggestions. Indeed the commentaries are models of exegesis: every word is given careful consideration, contextualized within the purposes of the work as a whole, and interpretations are checked for philosophical plausibility and compatibility with the source author's other commitments. In this sense the project offers a unique opportunity to teach the art of exegesis while also teaching students about a previously unexplored part of the history of philosophy.

Second, the commentators can be taught as a subject in their own right. The commentaries are full of novel philosophical insights, and colleagues around the world have used the volumes to bring this material to their students. The late antique commentators provide a unique perspective on ancient philosophy. For example, one of the Project's volumes contains the commentaries of Ammonius and Boethius on *On Interpretation* 9, allowing students to see how the ancients understood Aristotle's response to the famous sea-battle argument. Furthermore, the volumes include some of the most important sources for Presocratic and Hellenistic thought (especially Simplicius). Thus for the first time it is possible for the Greek-less reader to see the context in which these earlier authors are quoted, rather than simply reading English versions of those fragments. This allows students to see figures like Parmenides, Empedocles, or Chrysippus as existing outside a body of static doctrine put forward by a handful of great thinkers (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) and as participants in an active living debate, much like philosophy today.

Courses that in the last five years have used editions from the Commentators' project or Sorabji's three-volume sourcebook include (HEI followed by course level and title): Birkbeck College, London, undergraduate course 'Further History of Philosophy'; Leiden University, the Netherlands, MA seminars on 'Images of Stoic Thought', 'Ethics, Psychology and Education in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy', 'Science and Philosophy in Ancient Curriculum' and 'Memory and Imagination in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy'; Princeton University, USA, graduate seminar on 'the Presocratics'; University of Cologne, Germany, undergraduate/postgraduate seminar 'Forschungskolloquium Antike und Spätantike Philosophie'; LMU, Munich, Germany, graduate seminars on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (using esp. Alexander and Syrianus); Emory University, USA, graduate teaching used in seminars (using esp. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius and Proclus' *De Malorum Subsistentia*); University of Rome, Italy, undergraduate course on 'Aristotle's *Categories*' and MA course on Plotinus; Universidad Panamericana, Mexico, graduate seminars on the 'Commentaries on *Physics* and *Metaphysics*'; University of Paris-Diderot, France, graduate seminars on 'Physical Transmission', 'On Philoponus' Natural Philosophy', and on 'Averroes' Commentary on the *De caelo*'; University of Freiburg, Germany, undergraduate and postgraduate seminars 'On the *Categories*'; Marquette University, USA, graduate course 'The Neoplatonic

Reading of Aristotle'.

The Project has meant that the philosophy and ideas revealed by the commentators can readily be taught in undergraduate courses, Masters programmes and doctoral seminars. Nor is it only the Greek-less student who benefits from the commentaries. Even students with Greek acknowledge the importance of good editions of translations, particularly of such difficult and often technical texts. Thus one teacher says that 'The (...) volumes dedicated to Simplicius' commentary on *De caelo* are of great help, because of their textual emendations, because they offer a translation (and a translation is always welcome even for those who know Greek) and because of their illuminating introductions and annotations' (Ahmad Hasnaoui, University of Paris-Diderot, France). Similarly, New York University classicist David Konstan says: 'I can and do freely refer students to the commentators, now that most of the significant material has been translated. The impact of the project has been enormous' (David Konstan, Classics, NYU, USA).

Because of English's status as an academic lingua franca, classes and seminars across the world have been reshaped and restructured to allow students to learn from the commentators. 'It has made it vastly easier to include these materials in syllabi. I was able to structure a whole semester's graduate class on the commentator's responses to Aristotle' (Owen Goldin, Marquette University, USA). 'The Duckworth translations are (...) constantly referred to in my classes (...), by students (both undergrad and grad) in their reports, in their MA and PhD theses, etc.' (Amos Bertolacci, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, Italy). A recent (Sept. 2012) job advert for teaching in Ancient Philosophy at the University of Freiburg included 'extensive expertise in the Greek Commentators' as an asset (<http://philjobs.org/job/show/1222>). This was unheard of before the project.

Apart from their influence on the teaching of western Philosophy, the texts are also being used to teach Arabic Philosophy, in virtue of their major influence on this tradition. For instance, at McGill University, Canada, graduate seminars using the texts are offered on Arabic Philosophy, 'Modal syllogistic', 'Philosophy of language and *'ilm al-waḍ'*' and 'Dialectic and *ādāb al-baḥṭh*'. At Yale University, USA, graduate seminars using the editions are offered in both Arabic Philosophy and Avicenna. As Yale's Dimitri Gutas states, the commentators' project 'revolutionized the study of ancient philosophy and made the life of us Arabic philosophy specialists so much easier: in the past, I could hardly recommend to my students in Arabic philosophy to read any commentary in the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*. (...) Now all I have to do—and I do it as a matter of fact for my Philosophy and especially Avicenna seminars—is list the commentaries (...) that students should read, and it's done'. Overall, the educational significance of this project for understanding Arabic Philosophy has been profound. Indeed, according to A. Hasnaoui, the Commentators Project has been '[w]ithout any doubt the most important event of recent decades in the study of Arabic philosophy', (A. Hasnaoui, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*). The Commentators are also opening up teaching possibilities in the area of Jewish thought, with Bar-Ilan University, Israel, offering a new graduate seminar on Gersonides' commentaries on Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, which uses translations of Philoponus and Simplicius from the series.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Commentators website: <http://www.ancientcommentators.org.uk/index.html>

5.2 Individual Users: names and contact details of all users quoted in section 4, for corroboration of significance and reach of the impact on teaching in HEIs internationally, are available from HEI. Five contacts from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands have been uploaded.

5.3 Reviews which support claims about contribution to cultural heritage and education: D. Sedley (*The Times Literary Supplement*, 5751 (21 June 2013), 7-8); M. Fournier (*Classical Review* 63/1 (2013), 296-7); P. Steinkrüger (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2012.10.45). Others also available.

5.4 Publishers (for sales data confirming reach): *Senior Commissioning Editor*, Classical Studies & Archaeology; Bloomsbury Publishing Plc; 50 Bedford Square; London WC1B 3DP. contact@bloomsbury.com. And the Series Editor at Cornell: chs6@cornell.edu.

5.5 Full details of funding (available from HEI).