

Preface

A French theoretician once remarked that anthropologists can be recognised from the food stains on their clothes, given that they are inveterate frequenters of restaurants, taverns, or lunch pubs. This is probably true of all scholars of the humanities. The origins of this volume go back exactly to such an encounter of scholars over the loaded table – one evening in December 2018, when the two of us were having dinner in a neighbourhood bistrot, at the north of Athens, and discussing the organisation of an international conference at the University of Crete. As we both maintain a lively interest in Greek comedy, we came up with the idea of comic language and the linguistic techniques of humour as a conference topic. This promised to be an opulent and not overploughed field that would lend itself to fruitful scholarly exploitation. Soon we were exchanging emails and drawing up lists of the speakers we would like to have in the conference. The colleagues we approached responded readily and eagerly, and we felt a little like the mythical Jason or the legendary Germanic king Hengist putting together their brave crews for a fabulous enterprise.

The practical procedures for the preparation of the conference were also set in motion, mostly thanks to the initiatives of Kostas E. Apostolakis and the supportive milieu of the University of Crete. The Department of Philology willingly undertook to host the conference in its hospitable premises at the university campus at Rethymno, which replicate the beautiful labyrinthine style of Evans' Knossos. The Special Account for Research Funds of the University of Crete offered a generous grant to cover the organising expenses and the accommodation of the speakers. Almost everything was ready, and the conference was scheduled to take place in May 2020. Then, in the early March of that fateful year, the COVID pandemic reached Greece, and the lockdowns became our everyday reality.

At the beginning, we tried to be optimistic, in spite of the growing fear, not unlike the heroes of Camus' *The Plague*. We kept postponing the conference again and again, for a few months each time, in the hope that conditions were eventually bound to ameliorate, and that human contact would become permissible before long. We could have opted, of course, for an event online, the kind of experience that developed into a standard part of university life from a given point onwards. However, as both of us were facing on a daily basis the very unsatisfactory practice of online teaching, we were reluctant to extend this kind of virtual semi-existence to the endeavour which we had originally planned as a live exchange of knowledge and scholarly companionship. In the end, exasperated after a protracted period of continuous cancellations and deferments, we

decided to abandon the plan of the conference and to collect the written chapters from the participants, so as to prepare a collective volume.

We are most grateful to the authors who have contributed to the book. They have laboured for our common project with unfailing endurance and patience in difficult times, and have stayed with us throughout the long interval of its gestation and its metamorphoses. We feel deeply honoured that they have entrusted us with the fruits of their work. We are sorry that we have not been able to welcome them to Crete, but we hope for another opportunity in the future, when — as is usual in the wonderful world of Aristophanic comedy — language will be transformed into real things and acts.

Professor Antonios Rengakos is our *agathos daimon*. Already while we were planning the conference, he took an active interest, encouraged us, and invited us to think of the renowned *Trends in Classics Supplementary Volumes* series as a possible venue of publication of the proceedings. When we approached him later with a proposal of the volume, he warmly embraced the project and offered us his invaluable support. By now, no less than four generations of Modern Greek scholars have found a good home and a well-respected forum in the rich and prestigious *Trends* series, which is his spiritual child. We are all proud to be soldiers in his great scholarly legion — the equivalent of the magical “Dumbledore’s army” in the Greek philological world.

A big “thank you” is due to our colleague Melina Tamiolaki, of the University of Crete, who offered us valuable advice and guided us through the tricky process of applying to the university administration for funding. We owe a great debt to two charismatic young doctoral students of the Department of Philology at Crete, members of Kostas E. Apostolakis’ dynamic research team: Georgia Choustoulaki (who meanwhile has been awarded her doctorate) and Georgios Triantafyllou, who has also contributed a chapter to the collection. They provided vital assistance in editing the volume, formatting the texts and bibliographies, checking references, and taking care of innumerable practical details. Last but not least, our wives, Vaso and Konstantina, tolerated the project with their undaunted good humour and surrounded us with their inexhaustible love and solicitude. Let our profound gratitude to them serve as an envoi for this book.

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