

2-2015

**Jay Fisher, *The Annals of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition*.  
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 206.  
Cloth (ISBN 978-1-4214-1129-3) \$69.95.**

Alison Keith  
*University of Toronto*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj>

---

## Recommended Citation

Keith, Alison (2015) "Jay Fisher, *The Annals of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 206. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-4214-1129-3) \$69.95," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 1 , 62-65.

Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol42/iss1/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.



Jay Fisher,  
*The Annals of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition.*

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 206. Cloth  
(ISBN 978-1-4214-1129-3) \$69.95.

The last three decades have witnessed a sustained revival of literary interest in Ennius' *Annales* across Europe, England, and North America, spurred by the publication of Otto Skutsch's magisterial Oxford edition of and commentary on the fragments (1985). The fascination they continue to exercise over Anglo-American scholars of Latin epic was confirmed by Sander Goldberg's study, a decade later, of Epic in Republican Rome (Oxford 1995), and has been decisively reaffirmed in a recent spate of publications devoted exclusively to the *Annales*, including two collections of conference papers—published, respectively, in the journal *Arethusa* 39.3 (2006), by guest editors Andreola Rossi and Brian Breed, and in *Ennius Perennis: the Annals and beyond* (Cambridge 2007), edited by William Fitzgerald and Emily Gowers—and Jackie Elliott's comprehensive re-evaluation of Ennius' (and Skutsch's) achievement(s) in *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales* (Cambridge 2013; a revised version of her 2005 Columbia Ph.D. dissertation). The monograph under review here, which also originated in a doctoral thesis (Princeton 2006), builds on the findings of these (and other more specialized) studies of Ennius' literary commitments. Fisher parts company with recent scholars, however, in that he aims to reorient discussion of Ennius from Vergil and Cicero on the one hand (i.e., Ennius the founder of Latin epic and Roman tragedy) and Callimachus on the other (i.e., Ennius the Alexandrian poet), to focus instead on the poet's Italic heritage. He defines "the Italic tradition" of his title as comprised of the two earlier generations of Latin texts available to Ennius, as well as the records of the "central Italian koinê" developed in the ritual tradition "common to the speakers of Oscan, Umbrian, Etruscan, and even Greek ... in the period of the seventh through the fourth centuries bce, a time of intense mutual influence among the cultures of ancient Italy" (4). It will be noted that only in the case of Ennius' epic predecessors (e.g., Andronicus and Naevius) is Fisher dealing with works of literature.

Fisher takes as his starting point Aulus Gellius' well known ascription to Ennius of a threefold linguistic patrimony (*Aul. Gell. N.A.* 17.17): *Quintus Ennius*

*tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece et Osce et Latine sciret* (“*Quintus Ennius* used to say he had three hearts, because he knew how to speak Greek, Oscan and Latin”). He endeavors to bring to light the impact of the poet’s Italic heritage, and especially its linguistic stamp, on the *Annales*. To do this he reconsiders a selection of fragments—among them some of the longest and best known (e.g. *Ann.* 34-50 and 72-91 Sk) as well as some of the shortest and most obscure—by recontextualizing them against contemporary Italic texts (in a rich mixture of Italic languages, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European), which he treats as a linguistic archive of normative ritual practices and kin relations in Italian communities. In the first chapter, “Ennius and the Italic Tradition” Fisher introduces his study and outlines his methodology. In order to illustrate his approach, he offers a reading of a line of the *Annales* concerning Jupiter Stator (232 Sk): *non semper vostra evortit nunc Iuppiter hac stat* (“not always does Jupiter upset your plans; now he stands on our side,” trans. Warmington). Fisher proceeds by identifying significant verbal iuncturae, which he terms “traditional collocations” rather than allusions, given the nature of his evidence, and investigating their formal and semantic significance in Ennius and the Italic tradition. In the case of *Ann.* 232 Sk, he notes the semantic significance of the juxtaposition of the god Jupiter with the verb *stat* in light of the god’s Roman cult title Stator, explicitly discussed by Cicero in the *Catilinarians* (1.11) in connection with the god’s support of Rome’s military interests; and he contrasts Roman worship of Jupiter Stator with the Oscan-speaking Samnites’ worship of Jupiter Versor (a reference cued by Ennius’ use of the verb *evortit* in the same line), to which the Roman god’s cult title may have responded. The conclusions Fisher draws from this initial example anticipate the results of his larger study, which emphasizes the subtlety and sophistication of Ennius’ intertextual play with the Italic tradition, but draws no broader anthropological connections between, e.g., religious rituals or kin relations across ancient Italy.

In the second chapter, “The *Annals* and the Greek Tradition,” Fisher explores the Greek linguistic, musical, narrative and religious texture of Ennius’ epic from a variety of perspectives: he discusses Ennius’ appropriation of Greek words, syntax and metre; translation of Greek passages and adoption of Greek narrative patterns; even his adaptation of Greek religious formulae and ritual dances. Fisher’s survey of Ennius’ pervasive debt in the *Annals* to Greek cultural models is particularly interesting in its linguistic focus, as he distinguishes between translation, transliteration, “code-switching,” dialectal forms, and interlingual puns. Nonetheless, Fisher is interested in the Greek tradition primarily as a means of identifying Ennius’ debt to the Italic tradition. Thus, for example, he discusses the collocation *pedem pulsare*

(1 Sk) as a traditional expression for the performance of the Italic ritual dance *tripudium* (familiar to both Latins and Umbrians). The chapter culminates in his “radical suggestion” (48) that Ennius’ allusion at *Ann.* 469-70 to the famous Homeric topos of the poet’s inability to do justice to his material even with ten tongues and mouths (Il. 2.489-90) “appropriates a traditional collocation of the language of Latin curses.” As Fisher recognizes (49), this argument is a limit-case for his inquiry, since no extant curse tablet employs the exact language of Ennius’ adaptation of Homer’s lines; moreover, he emphasizes that Ennius does not curse his audience through the rehearsal of similar language to curse tablets, but alludes to them without enacting the ritual. His demonstration that semantic overlap between Ennius’ phrase *loqui lingua saperet* in *Ann.* 469 and Italic curse tablets succeeds in showing how Ennius adds Italic “ritual coloring” (52) to his epic, though Fisher regretfully acknowledges that “the profound influence of Greek culture on Roman and Italic culture is so deeply rooted as to exclude the possibility of a Latin text free of Greek influence” (56).

After the careful methodological preliminaries of the first two chapters, Fisher treats thematic coherence in larger passages of the *Annals* in the three main chapters of the book: Chapter 3 investigates ritual and myth in the scene of Romulus’ augury (*Ann.* 72-91 Sk); Chapter 4 treats ritual, war, and history in the sixth book of the *Annals*; and Chapter 5 explores ritual, kinship, and myth in the first book of the *Annals*. His method is especially well adapted to the episode of Romulus’ augury, since extant Italic texts are overwhelmingly religious in nature, and Fisher establishes Ennius’ pervasive use in the passage of ritual vocabulary. He extends this finding to suggest that even vocabulary in the passage for which there are no extant linguistic parallels may belong to the Latin/Italic religious lexicon, and adduces comparative evidence from later Latin authors in support. Throughout the discussion, he is concerned to advance our understanding of Ennius’ language and to highlight the literary resonances of the passage. Chapter 4 moves beyond individual lines and passages to consider the literary coherence of a single book of the *Annals* about whose contents we are singularly well informed. In some ways this is the most successful chapter of the monograph, since Fisher manages to draw thematic links between a wide variety of fragments, rituals, and military events. His discussion of Ennius’ multifaceted characterization of Pyrrhus is particularly compelling, sustained as it is over the course of the full chapter. By contrast with the unwavering focus on Pyrrhus in *Annals* 6, the diffuse discussion of Chapter 5, which ranges over several of the divine and mortal members of Rome’s founding family in *Annals* 1, struggles to build momentum, despite the inherent interest of the theme of kin relations Fisher treats here. Still, there is much to learn from the careful case he builds for a traditional

Italic collocation of paternity and genealogy.

Given the paucity of the evidence, and its overwhelmingly ritual nature, it is perhaps not surprising that Fisher should emphasize Ennius' interest in ritual throughout the *Annals*, but it is disappointing that he gives only very limited consideration to the wider relations between religion and literature in Ennius' epic. It is also disappointing that he considers genealogical relations primarily from the standpoint of Italic culture rather than textual transmission. On occasion, it is possible to get bogged down in the technical issues of the linguistic discussions, and Fisher does not always draw the literary, political or anthropological conclusions that his fascinating archive of materials warrants. Nonetheless, this is an important contribution to the study of Ennius' *Annals* and one which, it is to be hoped, will spur more efforts to open up conversations between scholars of historical linguistics and those of Latin literature.

*NECJ* 42.1

Alison Keith  
University of Toronto



Jonathan Zarecki,  
*Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice.*

London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Pp. 224. Cloth  
(ISBN 978-1-78093-295-8) \$104.00.

In the midst of a recent surge in scholarly attention to Cicero as a serious political philosopher in his own right (e.g., Y. Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics* [Princeton 2012], J. Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason* [Cambridge 2013], W. Nicgorski, ed., *Cicero's Practical Philosophy* [University of Notre Dame 2013]) comes Jonathan Zarecki's book, *Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice*. Offering an original take on Cicero's conception of the so-called "*rector rei publicae*," Zarecki ambitiously attempts to trace the development and legacy of that theoretical construct over virtually the entire Ciceronian corpus as well as against Cicero's own political behavior and personal beliefs. On the basis of this all-encompassing approach, Zarecki argues that Cicero's conception of the *rector* lies