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Concatenatio Catulliana

A New Reading of the Carmina

Author: Paul Claes

The arrangement of Catullus' Carmina is one of those controversial issues that in-cite respectable commentators to take up extreme positions. In 1914, the German scholar Bernhard Schmidt described the collection as 'a wild chaos'. Forty-five years later, his compatriot Otto Weinreich riposted with the laconic statement: 'Chaos? Cosmos!' Former attempts to detect a structure in the collection were based on rather subjective assumptions. While translating Catullus' poetry into Dutch, Dr Claes detected an objective foundation: the principle of concatenation, i.e. the recurrence of motifs and phrases in consecutive poems. The generality of this phenomenon proves that the poet conceived of the Carmina as a coherent collection, in which the poems fit like links in a chain. The discovery of this coherence suggests a new reading of Catullus, which has also implications for the constitution of the text.

Pages: 173 pp.

Language:
English

Subjects: [Greek & Latin Literature, Classical Studies](#)

Publisher: Brill

Series:
[Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology](#),
Volume: 9

E-Book (PDF)
Released online:
01 Oct 2019

ISBN: 978-90-
04-40904-0

List price
USD \$93.00

Hardback
Publication date:
01 Jan 2002

ISBN: 978-90-
50-63288-1

List price
USD \$93.00

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