Discussion Notes

Response to the Review
by Silvia Luraghi of Greek Prepositions:
From Antiquity to the Present

Pietro Bortone
University of Oxford
pietro.bortone@classics.ox.ac.uk


This is a necessary response to the “review” of my 2010 book, Greek prepositions: from antiquity to the present (Oxford), published in the last issue of the JGL (11.2, Autumn 2011) by Silvia Luraghi of Pavia. Silvia Luraghi’s central criticism is that in my book (Bortone 2010) I did not consider her recent publications on the same subject. She proclaims that my “reason for doing so escapes understanding”. There was a serious reason, and I had been foolishly kind in not making it public before. I shall have to put it on record now. I will also show that her other complaints are groundless.

In 2000, I completed a doctorate at Oxford on “Aspects of the history of Greek prepositions”, which was then formally deposited at the Bodleian Library. In 2001, I presented part of my work at a conference in Paris. In the audience was Silvia Luraghi, who told us afterwards that writing a book on the history of Greek prepositions was her dream. Since she admitted knowing neither Medieval nor Modern Greek, I wondered how she could achieve that (the Medieval and Modern periods were what I had especially emphasised in my doctorate, both because they were the most informative phases and because Ancient Greek had already been extensively written about). I simply replied to Luraghi that I had just finished writing such a book, and I briefly showed her a copy of my unpublished doctorate. She was dismayed. She then insistently requested
a copy of it. There was something in her tone that made me uncomfortable, so I evaded her request. She asked me again in an email, admitting that she “needed” my doctorate for what she wanted to write. She pointed out that she had discovered that I had given copies of it to others, so I had to give in. I replied cordially and I sent her a copy. She emailed me acknowledging that she had received it (20 March 2002), and asked me if I could provide her with more data. I never heard from her after that.

In 2003 I was asked to peer-review an article on the Greek preposition *metá* that Luraghi had submitted to a major journal. Virtually every word in the abstract of her article repeated things I had pointed out in my doctorate. To my further surprise, her article covered also Medieval Greek and Modern Greek. Elements of my (then unpublished) work quietly appeared throughout the article with no reference to me. A paragraph in Luraghi’s article that started with “I will argue” rephrased, from beginning to end, what I had said in my doctorate (e.g. Bortone 2000: 222). Even if, by some unlikely chance, Luraghi had really received the same training, done the same work, found the same facts, and reached independently the same conclusions as I had, years before her, she had an ethical duty to acknowledge that I had done all of this first and I had written it first—as she knew, since she had read it all in my doctorate. But in her article my name only made two token appearances in connection with marginal points. Her article also contained several statements that presented as original suggestions facts known for centuries, such as that, in Ancient Greek, the genitive with prepositions has both ablative and partitive meaning. To such statements Luraghi regularly attached bibliographical references only to herself. Even on subjects much debated in recent years, such as case syncretism, the references were only to her own publications.

Luckily, the editor of the journal already had a copy of my doctorate, and having seen the numerous and extensive parallels between my doctorate and the article submitted by Luraghi, he recognised, as he wrote to me, “just how extensively she duplicates and/or draws on your material and without attribution”. He described Luraghi’s submission of that article as “very disturbing”, and thanked me for having averted the “travesty” that publishing Luraghi’s article would have been. The journal did not publish Luraghi’s article in any form.

At the time, I decided, naively, not to publicise this incident. I simply resolved to ignore Silvia Luraghi’s publications from then on, even when I reworked my doctorate into a book. Luraghi, however, went on to publish her article, virtually unchanged, in a different journal, not exclusively dedicated to Greek (Luraghi 2005). *That article is one of the articles that, in her “review”, she chastises me for not referencing in my book.*

Much as I try, I do not see how I could be expected to quote in my book people who repeat my own ideas as theirs; furthermore, if I had done so, I would have