In recent years, Arnaldo Momigliano has been discussing a number of classical scholars, such as Wilamowitz, Schwartz and Reinhardt, in his Pisa seminar. In this book he publishes the various contributions to his Usener seminar of February 1982. The book is a timely publication, coming shortly after H. J. Mette, Nekrolog einer Epoche: Hermann Usener und seine Schule, Lustrum 22 (1979-80), 5-106. Momigliano (9-21) himself gives an, as always highly informative, survey of Usener’s family [1], education, career and main achievements [2]. As the subtitle of the book indicates, Momigliano primarily (and rightly) considers Usener to have been a philologist who thought of philology as the key to the understanding of the past, in particular the history of religion. It is a pity, though, that neither he nor his equipe has made use of the recently published correspondence of Usener’s pupil Hans Lietzman by K. Aland, Glanz und Niedergang der deutschen Universität (Berlin/New York 1979) which contains interesting letters about Usener’s last days (no. 119, 122) and a desperate letter by his widow after the sudden death of Albert Dieterich who was about to write Usener’s biography—a work that has remained unwritten (no. 176).

The following essays discuss various aspects of Usener’s work. R. Bodei (23-42) studies Usener’s philosophical roots, his relationship with his brother-in-law W. Dilthey, and his influence on Cassirer. G. Cambiano (43-64) analyses first Usener’s interest in the organisation of scientific work as exemplified by the schools of Plato and Aristotle, and secondly his interest in astrology. This interest is shown to have been inspired by the evolutionistic principles whereby Usener hoped to retrieve aspects of archaic thinking from such murky waters. M. M. Sassi (65-91) discusses various aspects of Usener’s contributions to the history of religion. She rightly starts with his Götternamen, probably Usener’s best known work outside the immediate classical world. It is true that Usener’s terms Augenblicksgötter and Sondergötter (Usener owed the expression to his friend, the historian of religion E. Lehmann, cf. L. Deubner, Die Antike 2 (1926), 69 = Kleine Schriften (Königstein 1981), 329) have remained household terms in the study of religion, but his evolutionistic use of the terms was already rejected by his own pupils. Yet his observations on the frequency of the Sondergötter in Roman religion remain valid, and G. Piccaluga (147-159) commendably
tries to apply modern insights to this phenomenon. However, it seems to me that in this area no real progress will be made unless we come to terms with the high level of ritualism in Roman religion. Future research will have to connect this ritualism with the general character of Roman society where the internal boundaries were much stricter than in Greece; the insights of Mary Douglas will be of use in this respect. There are still some pearls to be found in Göttternamen, such as Usener's discussion of courts of justice (p. 190 ff.), but on the whole the book has rightly been neglected in recent studies of religion.

Sassi (65-91) subsequently stresses Usener's justified sceptical attitude towards the reconstruction of Indo-European mythology and his gullibility regarding the use of etymology. Unfortunately, Usener was still a convinced adept of Max Müller's nature paradigm; this makes his explanations of myths and rituals sometimes depressing reading. Moreover, even though he broke new ground in the study of ritual (especially in his study of ancient Roman charivaris: Itliische Volksjustiz, KS IV, 356-382), he never fully worked out the problem of myth and ritual; his studies in this field, however interesting a problem he often poses, usually fail to convince. Consequently, if wrongly, Usener is missing in the recent study of the history of mythology by M. Detienne, L'Invention de la mythologie (Paris 1981). Regarding the use of etymology, Usener had certainly made some progress in comparison with Welcker, his great example [3]. As he tells us himself (Göttternamen, 274 f.), he had realised that he could only penetrate the pre-literate stages of Greek religion by studying the various calendars (hence, presumably, his interest in astronomy), archaic customs such as human sacrifice, and the religion of Greek ‘Randvölker’ such as the Thracians and Macedonians. This program would still be valid today, but Usener spoil it by frequently resorting to improbable and impossible etymologies. Gottfried Hermann's judgment of Welcker also applies to Usener: "grosse Belesenheit, aber nicht genug Sprachkenntnis und Logik und zu viel Phantasie" (quoted by Welcker in his Tagebuch einer griechischen Reise I, Berlin 1865, 58).

Finally, Sassi analyses the influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Dilthey on Usener, and the latter's relation with Wilamowitz and influence on Cassirer and Aby Warburg. Here she should have paid more attention to Usener's relationship with Wilamowitz, but this omission has already been remedied by Albert Henrichs' splendid study of Wilamowitz as historian of Greek religion in W. M.