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Greek Grammar



Synopsis

Sponsored by the Department of Classics of Harvard University, a revised edition of the late Professor Smyth's A Greek Grammar for Colleges is now available. All necessary corrections have been made, and the book retains the form which has long made it the most complete and valuable work of its kind. In this descriptive grammar the author offers a treatment of Greek syntax which is exceptionally rich as well subtle and varied.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent reference book! It has passed the test of heavy usage, and it has outlasted many academic fads. Smyth does a thorough yet concise job on the known varieties of written Greek usage from the Homeric epics up to the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Smyth does not cover Hellenistic (Koinē) Greek as much, especially not for texts that have Semitic or Egyptian "flavors:" the Septuagint, New Testament and Egyptian Greek papyri. For real grammars on those, look up these authors: Wallace, Dana, Mantey, Robertson, Blass, Debrunner, Funk, Conybeare, Stock and Zerwick. Some writers in the centuries between the reigns of Augustus and Constantine, and the Byzantines afterward, tried to "return" to Classical Attic usage in writing, with mixed results. When reading them, use both Smyth and a Hellenistic/Koinē grammar together, carefully.

In this review I discuss two different editions of this book; will not allow me to separate my reviews by edition. 1. One of my students bought a paperback of this book (2010, Benediction Classics).

There is a serious problem with it. This is a reprint of the first edition of Smyth, copyright 1905. The standard edition, and the one that every Greek commentary in the world will refer to, is a later edition (copyright 1920, revised by Gordon Messing in 1956). You might think that this would not matter, but it does: not only is the pagination different, but the reference numbers have all changed in the later, standard edition. So my poor student reads in his commentary that a concept is explained at Smyth paragraph 256, goes there and discovers that his paragraph 256 has nothing to do with that grammatical problem. My guess is that the publisher of this book found a copy of the first edition, realized that the copyright had run out, and slapped together a cheap reprint. It's not worth your \$29. Buy the later edition from Harvard U. Press, and you'll be on the same page as the rest of the Greek-reading world.

2. On the NEW paperback by Martino Press (2014): We seem to be in murky waters. From what others have said, the Martino edition is an exact facsimile of the Harvard U. Press edition, first produced by H. W. Smyth, updated in 1956 by Gordon Messing. So in terms of quality, this book is what you want. The question I have regards copyright. Harvard owns the copyright to Messing's updates of Smyth's 1920 edition - so how is it that Martino Press is publishing this book? My guess is that their lawyers have argued that Messing's updates were not significant enough to warrant new copyright, which puts the 1920 edition in the public domain. But in my HUP edition, Gordon Messing's Preface states: "Some changes have been made in the historical and comparative part of the work.... A very few changes, again bearing on historical linguistics, have been introduced in Part II.... In addition, lists of corrigenda have been supplied by several scholars, and /these have been silently inserted wherever possible/ (emphasis mine). Not one or two corrections, but "lists of corrigenda". So this issue is simply this: when you buy the Martino Press edition, you are allowing this press to profit from the work that Gordon Messing did while under contract with Harvard University Press. Now, Harvard is a large institution with lots of money, and they don't depend on Smyth for their income. But for those of us who take the idea of intellectual property seriously - and I am one such - the Martino edition amounts to theft. It may not be illegal - I don't know the extent of Messing's "silent" corrections, and I'm not a lawyer. But it doesn't look ethical to me., needless to say, continues to do nothing to clarify the question of multiple editions, multiple copyrights, and multiple publishers. When you click to "look inside this book" you are shown images, not of the unethical Martino Press edition, but of the HUP edition - which holds a legal copyright on this work. I would suggest that that's the edition you should buy.

Smyth is the only grammar for ancient Greek worth buying (besides the advanced treatments of specialized topics like Goodwin on the moods and tenses and Denniston on the particles). Unlike

Latin, where the field of grammars is much wider, Smyth is the only English grammar of ancient Greek comprehensive enough to warrant any attention from Hellenists. Goodwin and Gulick's volume is too sparse in comparison (but note they cover prosody and Smyth does not) while Kaegi's is a step below theirs in depth. Ideally all intermediate level Greek students will begin to use this text as a reference grammar. Very reasonably priced for the wealth of information it contains. The book itself is also durable and will endure years of constant thumbing.

Like Kirk Ormand, I first learned of this fraudulent publication when I saw it in the hands of my Greek students. Those who had the genuine Smyth were able to find the passages I referred to; those with this fraudulent version were confused. When I inspected a copy I discovered precisely what Prof. Ormand did: that it is not Smyth's "Greek Grammar" at all, but Smyth's earlier and much shorter "Greek Grammar for Schools and Colleges." As Prof. Ormand points out, this not only causes confusion in class, but it will also result in bafflement when one follows references to "Smyth" in standard school editions of Greek texts (e.g. James Helm's popular edition of Plato's "Apology"), only to discover that the section numbers in the Benediction edition are totally different. But the reason I am writing this review is not only to heartily second Prof. Ormand, but also to protest several levels of fraud here. First, there is the fraud being perpetrated by Benediction Classics---I shall henceforth think of them as Malediction Classics. As you can see from the photo, the front cover simply states "Greek Grammar. Herbert Weir Smyth"---with no hint that this is not the Smyth "Greek Grammar" one should be getting. But it gets worse. If you inspect the copyright page, you will find...precisely nothing. Indeed, nowhere in the entire Malediction edition is there the slightest hint that this is not, in fact, Smyth's "Greek Grammar" as we have come to know and love it. This strongly suggests intentional deception. But the next levels of fraudulence are the work of , I'm sorry to say---though perhaps not fully intentional fraudulence. First, there is the fact that if you enter "Herbert Weir Smyth Greek Grammar" this "Benediction" edition is the first thing to pop up. So it's perfectly natural for a student to click on that first and go no further. Next, there is the fact that if you click on the "Look inside" feature, it will be pages from the *real* Smyth that greet you. True, there is a little note that comes up indicating that this preview is derived from the hardback (Harvard Univ. Press) edition, but how many potential buyers will be aware that what they will get if they order the book is very different from what they are seeing on the "Look inside" feature? They are forgivably apt to assume that they are just getting a paperback reprint of the hardback that the preview shows them. Then there is the fact that nearly all of the reviews (with the sterling exception of Prof. Ormand's) are in fact reviews of the genuine Smyth. For example, look at the feature that gives you

the "most useful positive review" contrasted with the "most useful critical review." The critical review is Ormand's; the positive review is by someone who was the proud owner of the real Smyth. has a long-standing habit of attaching reviews of one edition to the entry on a very different edition. This is especially annoying in the case of translations. If you look up a particular translation of a work, will shower you with customer reviews by people praising or criticizing various *other* translations. (Often, in fact, it is quite impossible to be sure just which translation a review is citing.) This also happens when one is looking at editions and commentaries---see my customer comment on Kenneth Quinn's edition of Horace's "Odes." The entry on this useful Latin text with commentary merrily cites a slew of reviews of a *translation* of Horace's "Odes." No amount of complaining about this nonsense seems to make the slightest dent on 's Olympian practices.

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