

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

A COMPANION TO THE  
**ANCIENT  
NOVEL**

EDITED BY EDMUND P. CUEVA  
AND SHANNON N. BYRNE



**WILEY** Blackwell

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# A COMPANION TO THE ANCIENT NOVEL

*Edited by*

Edmund P. Cueva  
and Shannon N. Byrne

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# Introduction

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*Edmund P. Cueva and Shannon N. Byrne*

The genre known as the ancient novel is of obvious importance to areas of modern studies in literature, fiction, and literary theory that have roots in classical antiquity. The ancient novel is also of interest to areas of linguistic, psychological, and sociological research that deal with texts as transmitters of cultural information. The ancient novel reflects societal and cultural changes, particularly in readers' tastes, that occurred over the period in which the novels were composed, roughly from first to the fifth or sixth century AD. But who were the readers of ancient novels, and what value did they find in a genre that had little philosophical or educational significance despite its apparent popularity throughout the Roman Empire? What accounts for the interest in novels despite the near silence on the genre in antiquity? In order to appreciate the allusions to epic, tragedy, myth, and history, ancient novel authors must have taken for granted a substantial level of education for at least some of their readership, yet the genre itself receives next to no mention from learned contemporaries or subsequent ancient commentators and scholars.

Studies in the ancient novel have changed greatly since early scholars considered them mystery texts or romances for women. The ways in which contemporaries appreciated ancient novels and how modern scholars now regard and analyze them are just a few of the subjects that this Wiley-Blackwell Companion examines. *A Companion to the Ancient Novel* pulls together different perspectives and interpretations on a wide variety of topics in a manageable

way to serve as a suitable introduction for readers new to the genre. This collection also provides unique insights for the experienced ancient novel reader, as it articulates the perplexities that have challenged scholars since the genre first caught the academic world's attention in the nineteenth century. Some contributors include excerpts of the original Greek or Latin text, but an English translation is always given to accommodate the non-classics reader.

The first section, "Novels and Authors," blends new ideas with overview material on the novels and related genres. Each contribution notes something unique about the particular work under discussion, trends in scholarship that might not otherwise make it into a collection of this kind, while at the same time covering the basics, such as what is known about author, date of work, transmission of the text and manuscript tradition, summary of the novel itself, and other necessary background information that will quickly bring new readers up to speed and prepare them for subsequent sections.

**Graham Anderson's** "Chariton: Individuality and Stereotype," begins the first subsection on the five canonical Greek novels, so called for their general similarities and completeness. As many authors in this collection do, Anderson uses a range of subheadings, such as "Literary Context," "Humor," "Historical Feel," "Characterization," and "Cultural Norms and Ethos," to focus the reader's attention, in this case, on the novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*. The author, Chariton, uses a plot typical of the five canonical Greek novels—namely, boy meets girl then loses girl—as a platform for wild adventures that keep the action moving from Sicily to Ionia and Babylon, all the while entertaining a learned if not precisely identifiable audience. The storyline, which is outright folkloric at times, is particularly cohesive and keeps the