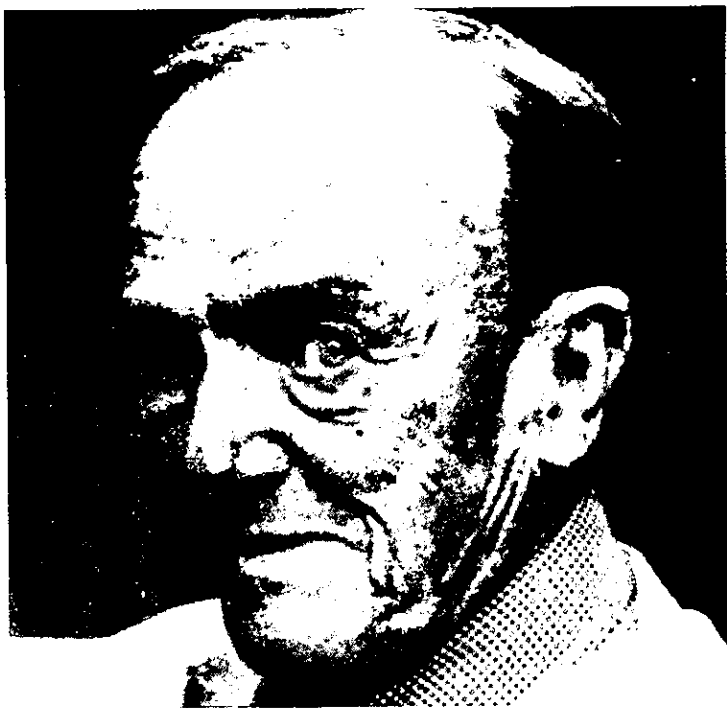


Obituary

GEORGE PELHAM SHIPP



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George Pelham Shipp, Emeritus Professor of Greek in the University of Sydney, died on 29 August 1980 at the age of eighty. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Academy and before that had been a member of the Australian Humanities Research Council from its foundation. In a distinguished career as a classical scholar he achieved international eminence for his work on the language of Homer.

Born in 1900 at Goulburn, the son of a schoolmaster, he grew up in the country and completed his schooling at Sydney High School. The direction of his interests was already clearly indicated by his Leaving Certificate pass in 1917, which included honours in Latin, Greek, French and German, as well as English. At the University of Sydney he took his Bachelor's degree in 1921 with first class honours in both Greek and Latin. Awarded the Cooper Graduate Scholarship, he continued his studies at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, reading the second part of the Classical Tripos, in which he was awarded in 1924 first class honours with distinction in Language. He then spent a further year pursuing philological study in Europe, including some time at Copenhagen.

Returning to Australia in 1925, he took up a lectureship in Latin at the University of Sydney, where he was to serve for forty years, the first half of that time in the Latin department. In 1945 he was appointed to the specially created post of Reader in Comparative Philology, which freed more of his time for research, while at the same time allowing greater benefit to be derived from his extensive knowledge of Indo-European languages. Besides offering more specialized training in Greek and Latin philology, he was also able to help students seeking to acquire Sanskrit or Old Norse. During this time he also collaborated with Dr Arthur Capell in instituting a course in Linguistics, and he continued to share in the teaching of that subject up to, and even after, his retirement. In 1954, by invitation of the Senate, he was appointed to the Chair of Greek, which he held until he retired in 1965.

Shipp had an exceptionally fine knowledge of both Greek and Latin. Although the former was to be more fully revealed in his published work, during the earlier part of his career he devoted himself more to Latin, especially to studies in its vocabulary. The most notable product of this period was his edition of Terence's *Andria* (1938), which, while designed on a modest scale primarily for undergraduate use, is of special value for its observations on the language of comedy and on points of Latin usage. A revised edition appeared in 1960 and has recently been reprinted.

With his appointment as Reader the main emphasis of his research turned to the Greek language, in particular that of Homer, where the recently

published *Grammaire Homérique* of Pierre Chantraine provided a starting-point for his work. In his *Studies in the Language of Homer* (1953) he examined aspects of the language of the *Iliad*, giving special attention to the distribution of features characterized as 'late' by Chantraine. His finding, that late forms tend to be concentrated disproportionately in similes and certain other types of non-narrative passage, was one of major significance for the study of the poem's linguistic development. The work established Shipp as a leading authority on the epic dialect. It was the principal publication among those for which in 1959 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters of Sydney University.

The greater part of his scholarly output was still to come. In *Essays in Mycenaean and Homeric Greek* (1961) he made a brief, but influential, contribution to the linguistic debate provoked by the decipherment of the Linear B tablets, sounding a note of caution against attempts to distinguish specifically Mycenaean elements in the dialect of Homer. About this time too a new direction of his interests in the Greek language was revealed in an important series of articles on aspects of Modern Greek phonology.

The years of his retirement were remarkably productive. Besides maintaining a steady flow of articles on a variety of topics, he now had the leisure needed to bring two major projects to completion. One of these was a revision and extension of his Homeric researches to include a detailed examination of the *Odyssey* as well as the *Iliad* and to present a more comprehensive treatment of the evidence. In the resulting second edition of his *Studies*, a work three times the size of its predecessor, his thesis about the distribution of late linguistic features was confirmed for the *Iliad* and shown to be applicable also to the *Odyssey*. Shipp has been taken to task by some critics for not fully drawing out the implications of his findings for the question of the composition of the epics. But that was not his purpose. What he has done is to set out clearly and in immense detail the linguistic facts relevant to that question. The problems concerning the composition of the Homeric poems will continue to be a subject of debate among scholars, but must henceforth be discussed on the basis of the evidence presented by Shipp. The book is a monument to his unsurpassed knowledge of the language of Homer.

The other project was an exploration of the modern Greek language and its dialects for the light which they might throw on the ancient Greek vocabulary by adding to our knowledge of the meanings of words and their distribution and chronology in antiquity. While others had shown the value of the Modern Greek evidence for this purpose, there had not been a systematic investigation of it on the scale now undertaken by Shipp. It was indeed a task calling for an intimate knowledge of both the ancient and modern languages such as few possess. An especially important source of material for his study were the dialects of more isolated Greek-speaking communities, whose separation from the main stream of the language's development enhanced their value for illustrating the ancient language. The fruits of his extensive studies, carried

out over many years, were gathered together in a substantial book, *Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary*, which was completed in its final form not long before his health began to fail and was published at the end of 1979. It contains a rich and varied store of material for students of the Greek language.

Shipp's influence as a teacher was considerable. Over the years many of his pupils, in whom an enthusiasm for language study was awakened by him, have gone on to make their mark in the classical languages or in other fields of philology. Others whose interests led them into a different branch of classical studies nevertheless recall their contact with his learning as an especially stimulating part of their university experience.

The interests of research and scholarship in the humanities were particularly close to his heart, and he did much to help and encourage younger scholars. He was one of those who played a leading part in the foundation of the Australian Society for Classical Studies and the establishment of its journal *Antichthon*, supporting it in its early years by the contribution of his own articles and by his advice as a member of its editorial committee. He was also a foundation member of the Sydney University Press Board.

George Shipp was an extremely modest man, who remained unaffected by the recognition of his scholarly achievements. Those who knew him were at once impressed by the acuteness and honesty of his mind and by the range of his learning even in areas where he would disclaim expertise, while his personal warmth and humanity won him both respect and affection. By nature retiring, he tended to avoid the public eye, but enjoyed company on informal occasions and, with his wife Bib (whom he survived by just one month) gave generous hospitality to his colleagues and friends. Many will also recall pleasant hours spent with him at one or other of his favourite recreations, bushwalking and tennis, both of which he pursued vigorously until late in life.

W. Ritchie