



S B Jackson

**IN MEMORIAM: S B JACKSON**  
**8 December 1946 – 26 May 2012**

*J L Hilton (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban)*

Steven Brian Jackson was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and was educated at Campbell College in the same city. In his teens he was diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis and, after experiencing acute heart failure in his thirties, lived with a complex combination of chronic illnesses for the rest of his life. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, he made the most of his earthly existence and followed the lives of others with empathy.<sup>1</sup> He chose to lead an academic career and obtained a BA Honours degree in Classics from the University of Ulster in 1971 after which he taught Classics at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution from 1971-1985. During this time he completed his MA entitled *The Argonautica according to Pindar* at the Queen's University of Belfast (1974) and began his career as a researcher with articles on Marcus Caelius Rufus (1974) and Apollonius of Tyana (1984). He was appointed Schoolmaster Fellow at Trinity College Dublin for the Michaelmas term of 1977 and Schoolmaster Commoner at St. John's College, Oxford for the Hilary term of 1984.<sup>2</sup> In 1987 he enrolled for a PhD at Trinity College, Dublin. While studying for his doctorate he took up part-time posts as lecturer at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth (1987-1988), a branch of the National University of Ireland, and then at Trinity (1988-1989). His PhD was conferred on him in 1988. This thesis, later published as *Creative selectivity in Apollonius' Argonautika* (1993), investigates the reasons why Apollonius chose to follow one mythological tradition rather than another in constructing his epic poem (he emphasizes the erotic aspects of Jason's visit to Lemnos, for example, and omits other versions) and shows that the poet was not afraid to innovate where this suited his purpose (for example, Apollonius is the first poet to portray Apsyrtus as an adult — Why?). His mentors and colleagues in his postgraduate and later years included R G Ussher, G L Huxley, D E W Wormell (whose unfinished manuscript on 'Roman exiles' Jackson was at one point editing for publication), M Davies, J M Dillon, and F Williams. He continued to correspond with many of these and other scholars throughout his life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to his wife, Leonora (née Raath), who is also a Classicist and CASA member, for supplying the accompanying photograph, correcting me on many matters of detail, and reminding me of Steven's positive attitude to life and the wide range of his interests. Steven's marriage to Leonora in 1992 truly sustained him for many more years than he might otherwise have had, as his brother Clive remarked at his funeral.

<sup>2</sup> See Steven's own account of his career in Jackson 2008:158-160.

<sup>3</sup> He also communicated with South African Classicists, of course, including those in the diaspora, especially Professor William J Dominik, at the University of Otago in

Steven Jackson's most prolific years as a researcher in the field of Hellenistic poetry and paradoxography were the 1990s, after his appointment as lecturer at the University of Natal, Durban, in 1989. During this decade he published twenty-one articles in international Classics journals in the UK, Germany, Italy and the US, on Apollonius' *Argonautica*, and on the fragments of Myrsilus of Methymna and Istrus of Paphos. Many of his articles on the latter two authors were collected together with some new studies in two monographs, one of which, *Myrsilus of Methymna: Hellenistic paradoxographer*, is cited in the third and fourth editions of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (there is no entry on Istrus). Following the publication of his collection of articles on Istrus, *Istrus the Callimachean* (2000), he was invited to present a paper on *Istrus of Paphos: Cypriot and Callimachean* at a conference on *Hellenism in Cyprus from Stasinus to Demonax* 22-25 September 2005 at Nicosia and Paphos, Cyprus, at which the keynote address was delivered by M L West. At the time of his death he was finalizing his entry on the 77 fragments of Istrus for *Brill's New Jacoby*. Dr. Monica Berti has agreed to see this work through the publication process.

Jackson was one of the founders of the research colloquia that are now regularly held in the Classics programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. He was an enthusiastic promoter of the cause of Classics (he regularly paid his subscription to the Classical Association of South Africa and chaired the Durban branch of the Association in 1994) and supported the introduction of courses such as Mythology, Classics in the Movies, The Greeks and India, and Modern Greek, although these modules — with the exception of Modern Greek, which was never successfully taught, neither at UND nor at UKZN — only really took off after he had left the university. He was a popular and charming lecturer, who did not attempt to overburden the undergraduate mind with excessive detail, but instead enlivened his lectures with a great deal of Irish humour.

Jackson was promoted to senior lecturer at the University of Natal, Durban in 1994 but, during the down-sizing of Classics at the university in 1997 his contract post, which he had decided not to convert into a permanent position for personal reasons, was terminated with effect from 31 August 2000, in spite of his excellent publication record. He was, however, appointed as an Honorary Research Associate of the University of Natal from 2000-2003. He did not renew his association with the university after this date,<sup>4</sup> but transferred his scholastic affiliation to Trinity College, Dublin, instead.

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Dunedin, New Zealand. In his latter years he maintained a close friendship with the South African Classicist, Professor Ken Matier.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Natal merged with the University of Durban-Westville to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004.

Jackson had many publication interests outside of Classics, including the study of Conan Doyle and his most famous character, Sherlock Holmes. In May 1994, he was invited to present a paper at the International Symposium of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, of which he was a life member. This conference was attended by representatives of the Metropolitan Police and Interpol as well as delegates from South Africa, the US, France, Switzerland, Ireland and Japan. At this conference he talked about ‘the background and history of two of the greatest rogues the “Dark Continent” has produced’. This paper, which was never published to my knowledge, covered the following points: the background and history of two criminals from South Africa as narrated in *The Adventure of the solitary cyclist*; a case of false leprosy in Bloemfontein during the Boer War in *The Adventure of the blanched soldier*; the presence of a couple of escaped murderers on a Union-Castle liner in *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange*; and the case involving the theft of a Thucydides unseen at Oxford in which the culprit was punished by being sent to serve in the Rhodesian police (*The Adventure of the three students*). In addition to an analysis of these stories, Jackson proposed to investigate whether Watson, who was an inveterate gambler, ever did invest in South Africa, and Conan Doyle’s abortive financial investment in the hunt for the S S Grosvenor off the coast of Pondoland as reported in the South African press.

The titles of his articles resembled the titles of Holmes’ stories, such as *Myrsilus of Methymna and the white goddesses*, *Callimachean Istrus and the land of the pears*, or *Callimachus, Istrus and two mortals’ deaths*. The process of the argument in many of his articles was also one that the great Sherlock would have approved of — setting out all the evidence, however obscure, rigorously analysing it for clues, however unlikely, and arriving at the logical conclusion, however unusual it might at first seem. In his articles on the fragments of Myrsilus and Istrus Jackson often applied what he himself referred to in a funding application as ‘Holmes’ vast knowledge and logic and ratiocinative thinking’. One example must suffice. In fragment 57 (Jacoby *FGrH* 334 F 57) Istrus refers to the myth of Trambelus and Apriate of Lesbos (‘not one of the better known myths’, as Jackson notes).<sup>5</sup> The only other evidence for the myth is found in a scholion on Lycophron’s *Alexandra* (467), Athenaeus (2.43 = Kaibel 2.19), and Euphorion’s *Thrax* (27) a work partly imitated by Parthenius (26). From this study it emerges that Istrus rejected the Lesbian setting of the myth, placing it in Miletus instead,

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<sup>5</sup> Jackson 2000:51. Jackson did not make life easy for his readers. The Greek text was often left untranslated and abbreviations such as CA (J U Powell’s *Collectanea Alexandrina* [Oxford 1925] and SH (H Lloyd-Jones & P Parsons, *Supplementum Hellenisticum* [Berlin 1983]) were left un glossed. He wrote uncompromisingly for experts in Hellenistic poetry.

and discounted the scholiast's interpretation of *Iliad* 1.99 as a reference to the name of the mythological character Apriate (rather than to the adjective), just as Apollonius had done. Istrus then may have been applying his antiquarian knowledge in the fragment in support of his master, Apollonius.

Since the death of his father, Eric Jackson, in 1975, Jackson had been the oldest surviving male member of the family in Ulster. He was directly related to US Confederate Major-General Thomas Jonathan Jackson, known as 'Stonewall' Jackson for his resolute defence of the rebel lines in the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) on 21 July 1861 during the American Civil War — hence Jackson's study of the Irish lineage of this soldier.<sup>6</sup> The Ulster Jacksons were a military family, who also counted John Jackson, the aide-de-camp of William III of Orange, among their number. During the religious war in Ireland between the Catholic King James II of England and the Protestant William III of Orange, John Jackson joined the cavalry regiment of Colonel William Wolseley and was promoted to the rank of Captain by Major-General Kirke in 1690. He fought at the Battle of the Boyne in this year and was reputed to have saved King William's life by deflecting a bullet with his pistol.<sup>7</sup> These Jacksons, who owed their prosperity to success in the Irish linen trade in the 18th century, played a foundational role in the formation of the Orange Order — John Jackson Jnr., for example, established the Loyal Orange Lodge No. 14 in 1795.<sup>8</sup> However, the fortunes of the Ulster Jacksons declined with the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the Great Potato Famine of 1845, which led to a diaspora of the family to the United States, Australia, and South Africa.<sup>9</sup> Jackson was never arrogant about his famous forebears and the humour of his anecdotes about the modern Jacksons<sup>10</sup> would make any reader laugh. Jackson's humanity is also implicit in many of his articles on Apollonius' *Argonautica* and explicit in his *Greece and Rome* article on Jason (1992).

Jackson was a staunch supporter of societies,<sup>11</sup> such the Hibernian Hellenists (from 1985), the American Philological Association (from 1986 — he attended the American Philological Conference in 1988), and, of course, the Classical Association of South Africa (from 1990 on). However, it is difficult to convey adequately the breadth of his interests. In addition to his membership of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, he also belonged to the Ocean Liners Society (his interest in shipping derived partly from his mother, who was a yachtswoman

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<sup>6</sup> Jackson 2008:95-96.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson 2008:26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson 2008:61.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson 2008:68-71.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson 2008:113-143.

<sup>11</sup> He also generously supported charities, especially the Missions to Seamen.

and partly from his experience of the ship-construction industry in Belfast),<sup>12</sup> the Middlesex County Cricket Club (from 1966), and the Natal Cricket Union (from 1989). His impressive collection of Wisdens testifies to his long-standing love of this<sup>13</sup> and other sports (he was an ardent supporter of Fulham Football Club, but never fully appreciated rugby). In recent years he was also planning to publish an account of cricketers travelling to Australia on the P&O liners, and a book, *Where the sun never sets*, an account of the British Crown Colonies, or British Overseas Territories, as they are now called (Bermuda, Gibraltar, St. Helena and others).

Steven Jackson was a scholar of Hellenistic poetry of international standing, who belonged to the 'old school'. He had no patience with bureaucracy and requiring him to fill out an application form for research funding drew from him acerbic comments on the encroachment of the sciences on the humanities, vividly inscribed on the document itself. Any sign of illiteracy was pounced on with relish and demolished. However, he was otherwise a genial soul, a superb raconteur, a loving husband to Leonora, and a unique colleague and friend.

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson 2008:145-146. Jackson was never happier than in the company of his wife, family and friends on a cruise on one of the P&O liners.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson 2008:148-150.

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<sup>14</sup> Only chapters not published elsewhere in journals are listed here.



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