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**Cecilia A.E. Luschnig, *Latin Letters, Reading Roman Correspondence. Illustrated by Dona Black. Focus Classical Commentaries.* Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2005. Pp. 152. ISBN 1-58510-198-2. \$18.95 (pb).**

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Word count: 531 words

Roman epistolography is a genre that seems to be somewhat neglected in university courses on Latin literature. That is unfortunate, because we possess numerous letters from important authors such as Cicero, Seneca and Pliny, and also from a number of others such as Fronto. In antiquity, letter writing was not considered a particularly high form of literature, and Roman letters are often personal and not too difficult to read. Their relative shortness allows even beginning students to read and analyse complete texts, while the variety of the material facilitates comparing authors or different types of letters.

But how to select suitable material from the enormous amount of extant Latin letters from antiquity? Cecilia Luschnig (CL) has made life easier for teachers and students by publishing a brief selection of some fifty annotated Roman letters.

After a rather elementary introduction (six pages) on ancient letter writing and a small list of formulas, as well as a useful list with suggestions for papers to be written by students using this material, the book opens with a long section of letters by Cicero. These may be considered representative for this part of his oeuvre (17 letters: Att. 1.2; 1.5; 1.13; Fam. 7.1; Q.fr. 2.10; Fam. 14.2; 14.14; 14.21; 14.8; 14.15; 14.23; 16.5; 12.4; Att. 3.3; 4.12; 4.10; 14.20). CL prints the Latin text of each letter, adding vocabulary and helpful notes at the bottom of the page. The material should enable students to read these texts independently and with relative ease and speed.

Whereas Seneca comes off rather badly with only two letters (1 and 31), Pliny is given ample room (20 letters: 1.1; 1.3; 3.5; 6.20; 1.9; 1.5; 7.19; 4.13; 6.4; 6.7; 7.4; 10.90-91; 10.120-121; 1.11; 10.88-89; 7.5; 1.24).

A fourth and more exciting section assembles 'various other people's mail'. Here we have the famous letter of Cornelia to Gaius Gracchus (Nepos fr. 59,1), a fragment of a letter of Vergil (Macr. Sat. 1,24,11), four letters of Augustus (quoted by Gellius and Suetonius), two letters of Trajan (Plin. 10,93 and 97), the beloved Vindolanda letter of Claudia Severa, and two letters dating from late antiquity (Aus. Ep. 22 and Sid. Ap. 7,18). Two extensive appendices on grammar and idiom, and suggestions for further reading conclude the small volume.

A list of what this book has to offer automatically also shows its main defects. Most of the material is 'classical' (Cicero and Pliny), and some prodigious letter writers are nearly or completely left aside: only two letters by Seneca, while the absence of Fronto and Marcus Aurelius may truly be called a missed opportunity. Surely, three or four charming, personal letters of the second century emperor and his tutor could and should have been added here. On the other hand, the absence of Christian letter writers (such as Augustine and Jerome) seems justified, for the material would easily become too much and too

complex if Christian letters had been included.

As it is, this modest book seems a useful tool for teaching Roman epistolography. It will be used with profit, particularly by beginning students, to have a first taste of letters by Cicero and Pliny. The volume may also be recommended for school libraries.

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