

## Review of:

*Martial, select epigrams*, edited by LINDSAY and PATRICIA WATSON (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; pp. xi, 374; ISBN 0 521 55539 6

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As a result of research in the last decades, Martial seems to have been firmly re-established as a proper 'classic' of Latin literature. New editions of his whole work, notably the three volume set by Shackleton Bailey in the Loeb series, detailed commentaries on roughly half of his fifteen books of epigrams and important comprehensive studies, such as those by J.P. Sullivan (*Martial, the unexpected classic*, Cambridge 1991) and N. Holzberg (*Martial und das antike Epigramm*, Darmstadt 2002) have paved the way for a better understanding of Martial as a poet in his own right. However, one of the less practical aspects of his work is its sheer scope and volume: it comprises twelve books of mixed epigrams, and three books of special epigrams, two of them devoted to small gifts (*Xenia* and *Apophoreta*), one to the opening games of the Colosseum (*Liber de spectaculis*) in 80 A.D. What has been missing is a good and helpful anthology that enables readers to study some essential texts of Martial within a reasonable amount of space and time.

Lindsay and Patricia Watson have filled the gap by publishing an fine anthology of eighty-six of Martial's epigrams. Printed in the familiar format of the Cambridge Greek and Latin classics series (yet another testimony of Martial's reCanonization), the book expressly purposes to give a representative choice of epigrams and to convey some of the editors' enthusiasm for Martial. The result may be said to live up to such high expectations.

The volume opens, as is customary, with a succinct introduction on Martial and his work. There are sections on his life, the use of the first person, Martial's audience, Martial and Domitian, the use of personal names, the structure and style, the metres, the structure of individual books, and Martial and the wider tradition of epigram. Thus, within no more than 36 pages, the reader is initiated in the most important aspects of Martial's oeuvre. The editors do not take extreme positions but show themselves aware of modern approaches, notably concerning allegedly autobiographical details in the texts: on closer scrutiny there is often little reason to feel sure about the texts as sources of direct information about the poet's life. Thus, even some poems about the idyllic rustic life in Spain (e.g. the famous 12,18) are presented with some justified doubts and caveats: Martial seems to be more of a literator than he used to thought of until quite recently.

The poems (conveniently numbered 1 to 86, with the conventional references added in brackets and listed in concordances) are grouped along thematical lines: Martial and poetry, poet and patron, Martial and the city of Rome, women, sexual *mores*, satirical epigrams, epideictic epigrams and funerary epigrams. As the editors acknowledge beforehand (p.V), this detaches them from any deliberately structured order of the original books, but given the aims of the book, this seems both unavoidable and justified.

In the commentary, each poem is introduced with a helpful summary of the argument and the jokes, a brief general analysis on literary, intertextual and historical aspects, and some bibliographical references for further reading. The notes follow the usual format of the series, explaining difficult phrases, remarkable vocabulary, *Realien* and historical information (e.g. about Roman literary life), and occasionally some themes of wider relevance. The editors have restricted academic discussions and parallel places to a minimum, thereby keeping the notes short and easy to use.

All in all, the book presents a fair and balanced view of Martial, without censoring aspects that could in some way give offence to groups of readers. Formerly, it used to be Martial's use of obscenity that deterred many readers (while also attracting others), but nowadays the major stumbling blocks rather seem to be his lavish praise and flattery of Domitian, his apparently hostile attitude to women, and his occasional insipidness and lack of inspiration. Happily, the anthology does not exclude any of such areas, and so shows much that is typical of Martial in a short compass.

The volume includes some of the highlights of Martial's works, such as 5.34, 10.4 (with the characteristic phrase *hominem pagina nostra sapit*), 10.47, 12.18, and 12.57, but also a number of less well known epigrams, including some recasts of Catullus (3.12; 8.54 and others). Inevitably, any reader already familiar with Martial is bound to miss some of his or her favourites. Personally, I would have preferred to see some poems of the three *monobiblia* (*Xen.*; *Apoph.*; and *Spect.*) included, books which are now completely left out of account. Furthermore, the omission of Martial's sensitive and literary refined poems on deceased slave boys (e.g. 1.88, 1.101, 4.42, and 6.52) seems to be a missed chance to show one of Martial's less facile sides.

In conclusion, however, the Martial anthology of Lindsay and Patricia Watson may be said to be more than welcome. It contains a sensible and balanced choice of epigrams, and in brief adds much material that will help students to understand these poems in their context. The volume will be of particular use in university colleges, but it can also be recommended for school libraries, while even a general readership does not seem to be excluded.

