

## PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/208205>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2020-12-04 and may be subject to change.

---

[BMCR 2019.03.26](#) on the BMCR blog

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2019.03.26

---

**C. T. Hadavas, *Ancient Greek Epigrams: A Selection*. Lexington, KY: C. T. Hadavas, 2018. Pp. xxxiv, 144. ISBN 9781727440225. \$12.95.**

**Reviewed by Floris Overduin, Radboud University Nijmegen  
([f.overduin@let.ru.nl](mailto:f.overduin@let.ru.nl))**

This reader contains 85 epigrams, selected by the author as reading material for students at the intermediate level of their study of ancient Greek literature. The author's concern for useful study material has already been exemplified by similar readers on Lucian, Aesop, Euripides' *Cyclops*, and less common texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, or the *Pinax* of Cebes. A collection of Greek epigrams is a sensible addition. Earlier anthologies of Hellenistic and Imperial Greek poetry, such as those by Hopkinson<sup>1</sup> (not mentioned in the introduction or in the bibliography) offer excellent sections on epigram, but they are both aimed at more advanced students, and their epigram sections are of limited scope within their larger respective projects. A dedicated and inexpensive reader is therefore to be welcomed.

The setup of Hadavas' reader is diachronic, starting with Simonides and ending with Diodorus in the first century CE, and divided over four chapters: (i) Late Archaic and Early Classical Epigrams, (ii) Early Hellenistic Epigrams, (iii) Later Hellenistic Epigrams, and (iv) Epigrams of the Early Empire. This division gives the impression of a clearly delineated, yet fairly evenly spread choice of material. Within the chapters, however, the balance is very much towards the core Hellenistic material. The first chapter only contains eight epigrams, whereas the second chapter contains thirty nine poems, the bulk of which is formed by Callimachus (twenty three epigrams). The third chapter, although labelled 'later Hellenistic' (twenty eight poems), only consists of Meleager and Philodemus, augmented only by a single epigram of Archias. The final chapter, although divided over six poets, only contains ten poems. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with this selection — all poems selected are valuable in their own right, and one need not be surprised by the predominance of, e.g., Callimachus — it is not overly ambitious either. Considering the limited attention paid to later epigram, the volume could have been called 'Hellenistic epigram', as Hellenistic poets make up eighty percent of this reader. Not only is there no room for relevant later poets such as Lucillius, Nicarchus, Strato or Leonides of

Alexandria (not to mention Palladas), the selection of Hellenistic material itself is also somewhat surprising: Anyte is present with six epigrams, but Nossis is absent. Against twelve epigrams by Meleager, there is only one by Posidippus (and none from the Milan papyrus). Leonidas of Tarentum — not a minor poet — is included only three times; Asclepiades five. Without stressing the point too much, and conceding that it seems unfair to judge a book by what it is not, one can conclude that the selection was not essentially designed to be representative or to offer a broad palette of Greek epigram through the ages. The author does, however, point out that, although his selection is a personal one, he has made sure all of the four main epigrammatical domains (sepulchral, dedicatory, erotic, epideictic) are represented in this reader (p. vii).

What does this reader offer? The 34 pages of introduction cover the very basics of the development of the genre, a ‘how to read an ancient Greek epigram section’, a ‘very short history of the texts’, a very short section on influences, overviews of the poets treated in this volume, a three page list of ‘rhetorical/literary figures and grammatical terms’, a short bibliography of texts and translations, six pages on meter, and the obligatory list of abbreviations (with the interesting ‘C-to-F’ for ‘Contrary to Fact’); some abbreviations are, however, missing from the list, such as ‘intran.’ on p. 13. It is odd that Nisetich’s translation of Callimachus is listed in the main ‘bibliography’ and not in its ‘translations’ section. It also would have been useful to list all books mentioned in the introduction in the bibliography, many of which are absent. The rhetorical/literary figures list is elementary, but helpful. I very much doubt, however, that the inclusion of *pluralis maiestatis* (p. xxii) is appropriate for the epigrams treated here; ‘poetic plural’ may be as far as we can go. All in all, what we get is a bit of everything: the three short paragraphs on influences are too short to really be helpful (but serve as a place to park the useful references in the notes), but the six pages on meter are not to be complained about. It is also convenient that each poem is given a brief descriptive title in the table of contents, which makes it much easier to find what one is looking for. For an intermediate reader, the student could do worse.

After the introduction, it is time for business. The author’s choice to present one epigram per page is attractive; for longer epigrams two facing pages are reserved. Ease of use and legibility have been given attention. The author did not refrain from listing multiple references, so that Callimachus’ epigrams can instantly be traced by both their *AP* number and their place in Gow & Page, in addition to their number in Pfeiffer’s edition, which is much more user-friendly than an appendix with comparative numeration. Slightly less convenient is the fact that the epigrams are numbered per author, rather than continuously: “1. Posidippus” is followed by “1. Callimachus”.

The Greek text is followed by all of the poem’s vocabulary beyond the very basics (presented alphabetically), and then the commentary per line, which mainly deals with grammatical or syntactical issues, or hints at possible translations, although points of style or context are sometimes

included too. Often the author quotes solutions from earlier commentators (Sider on Philodemus is frequent) or editors (Fain). For points of grammar the student is often referred to Smyth. Sometimes (as on p. 88–89 or 94–95) vocabulary and commentary are swapped, presumably to avoid sections going over the page.

After that, further additions vary per poem. Sometimes a fourth delineated text block is added with a brief running commentary pointing out issues of style or aesthetics. These blocks may contain points of interest as explained by the author, but sometimes they contain large citations from dedicated scholarly publications, such as Alexander Sens' commentary on Asclepiades, Livingstone & Nisbet's introductory volume to Greek epigram, or simply an entry from the OCD (as in the case of ἠταῖροι on p. 89). Alternatively the fourth text block prints a literary translation, ranging from 1793 to 2005. One gets the impression that the choice of translation is rather arbitrary: is it included (if it is given at all) simply because it was available, whether old (1911, 1889) or more recent, or did it happen to be on the author's shelf? Or are they meant to be playful examples of what a literary translation may look like? If translations are deemed useful, then why not include one for each single epigram? Conversely, why are some epigrams given a purposeful stylistic treatment and a translation (or even two), whereas others are given a translation only, and yet others no further treatment at all, lacking the fourth text block with either translation or additional stylistic commentary? The leading principle here, as the author makes clear, is that translations and the like are only included if they do not inhibit the epigram's treatment to stay on one page, or on two facing pages, fitting besides or below the Greek text. Additional translations are compiled in the appendix, 'on account of spatial constraints' (p. 133).

The line-by-line notes to the epigrams, primarily intended for basic reading, are overall very useful, short when they can be, long if this is what the text requires. The indebtedness to Gow and Page is obvious, as the author often picks out one or two useful remarks from their commentaries. As observed above: to have all you need on one page (or two facing pages) is very convenient, and attention has been paid to a pleasant page layout. The author is also to be praised for not glossing over difficulties of interpretation, always trying to make the best of it, even when the Greek is particularly elliptical or elusive. This is particularly welcome at the intermediate level, when a student still often lacks the experience or the confidence to decide what may be meant. The author's approach ensures that the student's doubts will be based on the difficulties of the Greek, not on his own lack of knowledge.

Overall, this is quite a nice volume. For students of intermediate Greek, it offers lots of basic instruments for reading, for a very modest price. The brief introduction touches on many relevant aspects and references are up-to-date and to the point. The somewhat conservative choice of poems, despite my reservations, ties in with general idea about the canon of Greek

epigram, and the author is to be credited for not leaving out the more difficult poems.

Typesetting and printing is overall decent, apart from a glitch on p. 24, where the top half of a complete line has been erased; a blank line is missing in the bibliography on p. xxiv. There are a few minor mistakes in proofing, although the Greek itself appears to be correct: 'stong' (p. 3) for 'strong'. 'Geoghagen' (p. 12) should be 'Geoghegan', as printed correctly on p. 14. *Aithiops* (p. 49, cited from Nisetich, where it is printed correctly) should be *Aithiopsis*. 'beingthat' (p. 114) lacks a space. Somewhat unconventionally, words lemmatized are taken from the Greek text complete with their gravis accent, rather than taking the acutus accent, as is common practice for oxytone words in isolation.

---

### Notes:

[1.](#) N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology*, Cambridge 1988. N;  
Hopkinson, *Greek Poetry of the Imperial Period*, Cambridge 1994.

**[Read comments on this review or add a comment on the BMCR blog](#)**

[Home](#) [Read Latest](#) [Archives](#) [BMCR Blog](#) [About BMCR](#) [Review for BMCR](#) [Commentaries](#) [Support BMCR](#)

BMCR, Bryn Mawr College, 101 N. Merion Ave., Bryn Mawr, PA 19010