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Review

Reviewed Work(s): A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto by Michel P. J. van den Hout

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MICHEL P.J. VAN DEN HOUT, *A commentary on the letters of M. Cornelius Fronto* (Mnemosyne Supplementa, 190), Leiden/Boston/Köln, Brill, 1999. XI, 725 p.

The name of the author of this commentary sounds familiar to anyone with a professional interest in Fronto. Although most readers will use the convenient Loeb edition by C. Haines, the most important editions in this century have been published by Michel van den Hout, the latest one being the Teubner edition of 1988. A full critical commentary on Fronto's correspondence was still lacking, and was recently even considered a project for which the time seemed not yet ripe (cf. Pier Vincenzo Cova, *Marco Cornelio Frontone, rassegna bibliografica 1989-1995*, BStuL 27 (1997), 591-619, esp. 593). The new commentary by Van den Hout is, therefore, more than welcome.

After an introduction of not more than 5 pages, the commentary fills well over 600 pages, and it is followed by 7 indexes, discussing grammar and style; Latin words; Greek words; Latin rhetorical, grammatical and literary terms; a general index of matters; and a comparative table of some other texts (such as Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*) with the letters. A bibliography and textual notes conclude the volume. The various indexes reflect some of the main areas of interest to the commentator. The bulk of the notes in the commentary is concerned with matters of grammar and style, while much attention is also paid to the explanation of difficult or obscure words, which seems fair enough, given Fronto's particular fancy for such idiom. Questions of chronology, ancient history and *realia* are given some room as well. To sum up, the commentary may be qualified as philological.

Having said this, it will be clear too what the book is lacking. The author feels on safe ground where grammar and style are to be discussed, but is decidedly less acute on questions of structure, narrative strategy, and literary modeling. His spare notes touching upon these areas are mostly short and categorical, although there are some exceptions (e.g. a very long note on epideictic speech: pp. 615-8). This seems to reflect a conscious choice of the author, and perhaps we should not complain too much about it.

Van den Hout has not only provided scholars with a critical text of Fronto, but also with a critical commentary on the whole corpus, and he may well be complimented for his great achievement. But, it may be added, there is still work to be done.

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