

Ausonius: *Épigrammes, Bissula, Spectacle des sept sages*. Édition, traduction et notes de commentaire par **Giampiero Scafoglio** et **Étienne Wolff**. Presses Universitaires de Saint-Étienne: Saint-Étienne 2022. 252 S.

There are never enough commentaries on classical texts. This is certainly true for texts by canonical authors such as Homer, Virgil or Augustine, but also for lesser-known authors such as Ausonius. In recent years, there has been no shortage of attention paid to this learned 4th-century poet. Following the splendid 1991 edition of his complete works with a commentary by R.P.H. Green, several of his poems have been studied and edited again separately, in particular his most famous work, the *Mosella*.

Now, two French authors present us with a new edition of Ausonius' epigrams. Although this collection of texts is definitely one of the poet's minor works, the new book does not break new ground. In addition to Green's edition with notes, there is a complete edition with extensive commentary by N.M. Kay (London/New York 2001). One wonders what more the French authors have to offer.

Like Kay, they begin with an introduction to the texts. Ausonius' epigrams were not deliberately collected and arranged by the poet himself, unlike the books of his great predecessor in the field, Martial. However, the length of these 121 texts makes them the equivalent of an ancient book, and they can certainly be read as such. The poems are varied in both content and style, and the introduction aptly describes and analyses the material. The book then contains the Latin texts, with an opposite French translation in prose, but with an attempt to reflect the division into lines (46 pp.), and two sets of notes: textual notes (14 pp.) and a commentary (62 pp.). As a small extra, the new volume also includes two other items from Ausonius' works: his small set of poems on *Bissula* (13 pp.) and the *Ludus septem sapientum* (31 pp.), neither of which have been included in Kay's edition.

If we compare the French commentary with Kay's, we can say that it covers roughly the same themes and elements: all

the essential information (both historical and literary) and discussion can be found in both. Of course, the French authors regularly disagree with their English predecessor, sometimes rightly (as in their rejection of any transposition of lines in *Ep.* 1), sometimes less convincingly (as in 3.10, where they reject Kay's nice idea that *referre* can be ambiguous ['report' but also 'carry back'] or in 14.8 *da fruar*, where they do not do full justice to Kay's careful argument for reading *fruar* as a future indicative). More often, however, the interpretations are very similar and comparable in their attention to detail (although Kay's comments are usually slightly longer). Scafoglio and Wolff have made use of an additional MS, which had been neglected by previous editors (*Vindobonensis* 3261).

Somewhat disappointingly, some of Kay's weaker points have not been improved upon here. For example, after his meagre comments (a mere twenty lines) on *Ep.* 49, a piece obviously intended as a variant of *Ep.* 48, Scafoglio and Wolff present us with even less: only *three lines* of commentary. Surely they could have come up with something new and original here. Furthermore, Kay notes that in the MSS all Ausonian epigrams have titles that sum up their content, but since these are not by Ausonius himself, he has not included them in his edition. Meanwhile, the titles sometimes provide valuable information about the texts, and occasionally they are quoted in his commentary. Scafoglio and Wolff take exactly the same approach to these MSS titles, which seems like a missed opportunity. Surely a list of these titles somewhere in the volume would have been helpful to readers of these texts.

Ausonius' epigrams do not constitute a literary masterpiece, and remain far behind the brilliant poems of Martial. Nevertheless, there are some fine poems here, such as his remarkable lines on his own marriage and conjugal love in *Ep.* 14 and 20. His attempts at obscene verse (such as *Ep.* 43, on the motif of 'three persons in a bed') may not be as convincing on their own, but they do allow for an interesting comparison with the Latin and even Greek epigram tradition.

Overall, I found Kay's edition easier to use, typographically superior, and more balanced and complete in its presentation of the Latin texts. But it is, of course, useful and commendable that Scafoglio and Wolff have made these scholarly poems (as well as the additional *Bissula* and *Ludus septem sapientum*) available to a French readership, and they have certainly added some new details. Still, for those who already have Kay's edition, the new one is not a 'must buy'.

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