

REVIEWS

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Rosenmeyer, Patricia A. (2006) *Ancient Greek literary letters: selections in translation*. London; New York: Routledge. (*Routledge classical translations*.) VIII, 168 p. ISBN-10 0-415-28551-8, ISBN-13 978-0-415-28551-3 (pb).

This nicely produced volume is a welcome addition to the book *Ancient epistolary fictions: the letter in Greek literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) by the same author. Rosenmeyer has collected, translated and arranged more or less chronologically Greek literary letters from a wide range of writers and genres: classical period (Euripides, Herodotos, Thukydides, Xenophon); Hellenistic times (Antiphanes, passages from "The Greek Anthology" and Anacreontea); the Second Sophistic (Lukianos, Phlegon of Tralleis, Chariton, Achilleus Tatios, and "The story of Apollonios King of Tyre"); epistolary novella ("The letters of Themistokles", "Chion of Herakleia"); pseudo-historical letter collections of the Second Sophistic (Aischines, Anacharsis, Apollonios, Demosthenes, Diogenes, Hippokrates and Demokritos, Isokrates, Plato, Sokrates and the Socratics, "Letters of the seven sages"); and finally invented correspondences (Ailianos, Alkiphron, Philostratos). Each time period is preceded by an introductory section, from which it becomes quite clear that epistolary context is just as important as content. There is fairly good balance between introductory matter (47 pages) and the translations (113 pages). The largest selection of texts comes from the epistolary novella, containing two collections translated in their entirety and actually forming a subset of the pseudo-historical letters presented in the following chapter. Epistolary novella seems to be one of the favourite topics of the author, for she goes into much detail when discussing questions of its content and background. The selections of pseudonymous writers and the imperial epistolographers Alkiphron and Philostratos, on the other hand, have been "ruthlessly pared down," as the author admits (p. 9).

Despite the fact that the cover image of the paperback edition of the book depicts an Egyptian boy's papyrus letter to his father, Rosenmeyer does not deal with documentary letters, as is also clearly stated by the title of her work. For English translations of such letters the best source is still J. L. White's *Light from ancient letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), and some of them also are now available in M. Trapp's *Greek and Latin letters: an anthology with translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For literary letters, there is also C. D. N. Costa's *Greek fictional letters: a selection with introduction, translation and commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Fortunately, the texts selected by Costa and those presented in Rosenmeyer's edition rarely coincide. This probably has been the deliberate choice of the author.

The content of a letter is usually apparent for the addressee, and he or she does not need a commentary to understand it. In the case of documentary letters we, the modern readers, are not the addressees, and are therefore frequently in need of explanation. In the case of literary letters, and in particular fictional letters, we are the addressees, or at least these letters have

been written with a possible future reader in mind. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why all comments in this book are delegated to the introductory sections. Indeed, Rosenmeyer's edition shows that when reading these texts, one need not have a running commentary. On the other hand this directs the reader to the introductory sections whenever the text presents a problem, and sometimes no explanation is available. I will confine myself to one example. As the author states (p. 9), this collection is intended primarily for the general reader, and assumes no knowledge of ancient Greek. A Greekless reader, however, would have no clue that most of the fanciful names in Alkiphron's letters mean anything at all, unless he or she has read the introduction. And even then, some names remain unexplained. In my opinion the apprehension of the "speaking names" adds much to the delight received from reading these letters. This is especially true in the case of the letters of parasites (book 3), also pointed out by Rosenmeyer on page 134, where she translates some of these names. But what about grandiloquent names such as *Artepithymus*, *Cnisozomus*, *Turdosynagus*, *Ephalloythres*, *Gymnochairon* or *Phagodaïtes*? In addition, I see no point in Latinising all of these names so that the Greek etymology becomes even more difficult to detect. At least these Latinisations should be coherent (cf. *Stemphylochaeron* on p. 134 and *Stemphylochaerum* on p. 145).

Although this is an anthology of texts in translation, one really misses references to editions of the Greek texts that the author has used. First, this is a common scholarly practice, and second, it does matter, even if the translations are based on so-called standard editions. Take Alkiphron as an example once more. The "standard" (even if not the best) edition of his letters is that of M. A. Schepers, first published in 1905, but on the ground of some textual differences I would say that Rosenmeyer has not used this edition but rather the Loeb edition of A. R. Benner and F. H. Fobes (1949). This should have been mentioned.

On the whole, however, Rosenmeyer's book is a highly entertaining and at the same time educational selection of texts, some of which were previously inaccessible or not translated into English. Together with her more theoretical work on ancient epistolary fictions it provides a significant contribution to the study and popularity of ancient Greek epistolography.