

## BOOK REVIEW

*Latina Mythica II: Troia Capta*. By BONNIE A. CATTO. Mundelheim: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2015. Pp. xv + 241. Paperback, \$25.32. ISBN: 978-0-865-16825-1.

*Latina Mythica II* is part two in a series of texts designed to accompany introductory study of Latin grammar. The text is similar to Anne Groton and James May's 38 *Latin Stories*, Mary English's *Little Latin Reader*, or Ritchie's *Fabulae Faciles*. The volume is aimed at students who have completed grammatical study *in toto*. It was originally a more ambitious undertaking, however, in the author's own words, "the power and beauty of Homer's *Iliad* bewitched [her]", and her focus became the *Iliad* (viii). Acquainting students, especially those reading Vergil's *Aeneid*, with Homer's plot and characters provided further incentive.

The mythological content covers a range of stories pertaining to and surrounding the Trojan War. It begins with two pre-Iliadic chapters highlighted by Odysseus' and Achilles' arrival at Troy and the abandonment of Philoctetes. Following the main body of the text, which covers the more memorable episodes of Homer's *Iliad*, are two post-Iliadic chapters that include the theft of the Palladium, Philoctetes' return, the deaths of Achilles, Ajax, and Paris, and more. Finally, the text concludes with an English epilogue summarizing the fate of the Trojan women and the *nostoi* of the Greek heroes.

Each chapter is organized according to the following schema: an introduction with sources, several sections of Latin text accompanied by facing vocabulary, grammar and comprehension questions, discussion questions, and a section on cultural influences. Introductions are concise, yet thorough, and present students with both traditional and more obscure sources (i.e., Apollodorus, Hyginus). Vocabulary sections avoid coddling students with words that should already be committed to memory. Familiarity with basic vocabulary (particularly that of *Latin for the New Millennium I-II*) is assumed; only extraneous words are listed, and even these are graded, disappearing after two uses, only to return after a period of dormancy. All terms appearing twice are listed in the back

of the book. Notes on more complex grammatical constructions, also graded, are embedded in the Vocabulary.

Grammar and Comprehension Questions succeed the vocabulary. Grammar questions reference bold words in the Latin text and review a wide variety of grammar, while the comprehension questions help gauge student understanding of the narrative. Each Latin passage incorporates a range of grammar that is appropriately challenging. Most are short enough to be completed in one or two class periods, and passages can be omitted without losing the sense of the story. The Discussion Questions allow teachers to build upon the content with historical, cultural, and literary information. Lastly, the Cultural Influences section at the end of each chapter offers examples from modern art and literature, but is admittedly limited in scope due to the proliferation of examples on the internet. All this is ornamented with 28 illustrations.

*Troia Mythica* clearly achieves its goal of exercising its readers' grammar and informing them of the background to the Trojan War, and so the following critique is mostly subjective. But first a few objective points. The text contains good clear Latin; nonetheless, a few errors occur. The perfect subjunctive *revereris* is mistakenly listed in the vocabulary as pluperfect (24), and *oppugnasset* occurs where the Latin would prefer the present subjunctive *oppugnet* (*Haec imago perfectam victoriam contra Troiam promisit si ipso die rex urbem oppugnasset*, 37). Likewise, while illustrations are content-appropriate, the illustration for the story of Philoctetes (13) is curiously placed under the story of Palamedes (19).

Sometimes the wording of questions is awkward or in error: "How before did Apollo deceive Achilles?" (197); "What does Achilles order Apollo do to?" (198); "Was it just the bow of Hercules that Philoctetes brought that killed Achilles [sic Paris]?" (214). Finally, inconsistencies with names arise. The sources refer to Quintus of Smyrna five times (188-206), but shifts to Quintus Smyrnaeus twice (210 and 214). Similarly, Ulixes occurs in place of Ulysses once in the discussion questions (195).

The discussion questions are oftentimes quite good. For example, in the story of Palamedes' betrayal, the author asks if his letter from Priam indicates a language barrier (19). This is a nice gateway to discussing Homer's portrayal of their shared tongue, religion, and cultural values and could easily delve deeper into more complex topics such as Homer's epic world vs. Bronze Age reality. Yet, questions from the same passage such as, "What does Ulysses do that seems to

indicate that he is insane?” and “What was odd about Ulysses’ method of plowing?” will likely elicit overlapped responses. Of course, the very oddity of Odysseus’ yoking suggests his madness.

Sometimes opportunities for questions are overlooked. For instance, the statement that all the Greeks highly valued Odysseus because of his wisdom and planning (... *omnes Graeci ob sapientiam consiliumque eum magni aestimaverunt*, 4) is a perfect opportunity to ask students to explain the difference between *sapientiam* and *consilium*, especially since many vocabularies offer “wisdom” as a translation for both. Doubtlessly, some students will simply translate “wisdom and wisdom” out of confusion.

Most grammatical questions are well-formulated and thoughtful; however, some need sharpening to avoid ambiguity. This problem muddles the following questions: “What type of adjective is *pulcherrima*?” (14); “What case and form is *nobilissime*?” (28); “What case is *sacerdotis sui* and on what does it depend?” (26); “What verb is *visa est*?” (30); “What case is *ipso die* and what does it indicate?” (36). In such instances, the information elicited is unclear, but this is easily preempted by skirting generalities such as “type” or “form,” and by avoiding vague phrases like, “on what does it depend,” or “what does it indicate.” Surely an instructor can clarify, but students already confronting a challenging language may quickly become frustrated.

In all, *Latina Mythica II: Troia Capta* is an excellent text for concluding a second semester introductory course or for beginning second year review. Its mythological content will enliven the classroom and maintain reader interest, and its price is feasible for both starving students and teachers on a shoestring budget.

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