

BOOK REVIEW

Cut These Words into My Stone: Ancient Greek Epitaphs. Translated by MICHAEL WOLFE. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xxviii + 178. Hardcover, \$55.00. ISBN 978-1-4214-0803-3. Paper, \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-4214-0804-0.

The book contains 127 poems of the *Greek Anthology*, divided into five chronological groups, each preceded by a short introduction: (I) Anonymous Epitaphs of unknown Date; (II) Late Archaic and Classical Periods; (III) Hellenistic Period; (IV) Roman Empire; and (V) Late Antiquity. The volume is opened by a translator's note and a foreword by Richard Martin. The poems, presented in beautiful translations followed by the originals, are accompanied by short notes, which provide essential explanations for understanding the texts. A select bibliography and succinct biographies of the poets follow.

In spite of its subtitle, Wolfe's selection is not limited to "ancient Greek epitaphs": it also contains erotic poems (Agathias, *AP* 5.237), dedications (e.g. Leonidas of Tarentum, *AP* 6.298), satiric epigrams (e.g. Lucillius, *AP* 11.192), and general reflections on human life and its end (e.g. anonymous *AP* 10.3). The reader is thus given a comprehensive picture of the attitudes shown towards death by the authors of the *Greek Anthology* in a great variety of tones, from the mournful to the humorous. Wolfe's collection also includes some poems not transmitted via *AP*: see, for instance, anonymous Cougny II.224 = *EG* 627, from which the book derives its effective title.¹ Unfortunately, sources for these epigrams are provided in a non-scholarly way: Wolfe takes the poems from modern anthologies, such as J. W. Mackail, *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (London and New York, 1908).² This is all the more regrettable since the two volumes of Hansen's *CEG* and the five-volume collection of epigrams from the Greek East, *SGO*, edited by Merkelbach and Stauber, nowadays make epigraphic mate-

¹ See Wolfe's translation of v. 4 (where "cut" is actually a simple past translating the aorist ἐχάραξε).

² In the case of Cougny II.224, one should also note that the reference given by Wolfe is wrong: the epigram appears as number LVII of MacKail's third section, not as LIV.

rial much more accessible than it was in the past. It is thus odd to find a poem such as the epitaph on Phrasikleia, *CEG* 24, referred to by its position in P. Friedländer and H. B. Hoffleit, *Epigrammata: Greek Inscriptions in Verse from the Beginning to the Persian Wars* (Berkeley, 1948). Nor is the “New Posidippus” taken into account, in spite of the many funerary epigrams found on the papyrus: only a single poem, *AP* 7.170, of this seminal figure of the Hellenistic period is translated.

A specialized audience might also be disappointed by the very brief bibliography, limited to English titles, which does not include, for instance, an indispensable tool such as P. Bing and J. Steffen Bruss, eds., *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden, 2007), nor commentaries or studies devoted to single epigrammatists.

Some of the information provided by the author is inaccurate: that the Neronian poet Lucillius was a grammarian, for instance, is far from certain; double attributions are not mentioned—*AP* 11.113, e.g., is ascribed to Nicarchus, but according to Planudes the poem is by Lucillius, and scholars tend to prefer this ascription; *AP* 9.74, anonymous in the Palatinus 23, is given to Lucian by Planudes and by the fifteenth-century codex Riccardianus 25.³ Epigrams lack a metrical description: thus, a reader not acquainted with Greek metrics might fail to recognize that *AP* 7.155 is in iambic trimeters, since vv. 2 and 4 are wrongly indented. In claiming that the effect of Christianity on epitaphs “proved fatal” because the “independent vision and ... passionate frankness concerning life’s joys and sorrows” of the pagan epigram “gave way to the churchly emphasis on renunciation and salvation” (145), Wolfe does not take into account the crucial fact that Christian epitaphs often incorporate pagan elements. As Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epigrams* (Urbana, 1942) 30 nicely puts it, “no body of literature can develop and fulfill itself immediately without being rooted in some foregoing tradition; and as might be expected, Christians ... did not succeed in tearing themselves entirely free from the authoritative canons of classical literature. To a great extent, they did not even try to do so.”

³ At the end of v. 3, the codex offers the variant reading χ' οὔτος ἔχειν νῦν as opposed to $\kappa\alpha\iota$ πάλιν οὔτος provided by the rest of the tradition; as far as I know, none of the editors of the epigram has registered such a reading. See further my forthcoming article, “La silloge di epigrammi ‘lucianei’ del codice Riccardiano 25.”

The Greek include various typographical errors: see, e.g., εἶ for εἴ (58); ῥήματα for ῥήματα (62); εἶμ' for εἴμ' (73); τω/ for τῶ (160); in *AP* 7.744 (149) the pentameters are not indented.

This being said, Wolfe's main concern is obviously not a philological one: as a poet, he offers accurate and pithy translations of the Greek epigrams, aimed at capturing the flavor of the originals. In this regard, he greatly succeeds. Following the century-long tradition of translations of the Anthology, Wolfe's free-verse translations are able to reproduce the voice of ancient epigram.

Only occasionally is the Greek text treated freely (see, for instance, p. 114, which results from a combination of Meleager, *AP* 7.417 and 7.419, or Carphyllides, *AP* 7.260, where τέκνων τέκνα λείλοιπα, at the beginning of v. 3, is omitted, without affecting the general meaning of the poem); more often faithful, almost line-by-line translations are offered. Excessive rhetorical devices are avoided and, when used, they are sometimes "mimetic": the rhyme "see/me" in *AP* 7.507 (a), for instance, is paralleled by the homoeoteleuton at line-end ἀνδρός/ικανός in the original; the anaphora of "he once" in Leonidas of Tarentum, *AP* 7.740 beautifully reproduces the Greek ὁ πρὶν ... ὁ τὸ πρὶν / ... ὁ πρὶν ... / ὁ πρὶν. The author tends to respect the very structure of the originals: a distich is often rendered by a corresponding strophe, so that a two-distich epigram results in a poem with two strophes (e.g. Leonidas of Tarentum, *AP* 7.655). These devices, combined with a plain and simple language, produce a sober musicality that fully captures the forceful and unaffected style of the Greek texts.

All in all, this is the book of a poet, not of a scholar: it will make excellent reading for a non-specialist audience. Those not acquainted with the Greek, in particular, will be given an idea of the sound of the original poems. But more specialized readers will also enjoy the translations, and Richard Martin's dense foreword will certainly prove useful for scholars and students alike.

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