

BOOK REVIEW

Marcus Aurelius in the Historia Augusta and Beyond. By GEOFF ADAMS. Lanham, Md. and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013. Pp. ix + 333. Hardcover, \$100.00/£59.95. ISBN 978-0-7391-7638-2.

This is a strange book, part monograph, part commentary. In his Introduction (3) Adams announces a study of the *Vita Marci Antonini* in the *Historia Augusta*, which, as he says, aimed to produce an image of the emperor's character and of his principate. "In order to perceive this style of representation it is vital to not only examine the *Vita Marci Antonini* itself, but also the wider interpretations that (*sic*) within the Marcus Antoninus tradition in the literature up to the later Roman Empire." An anacoluthon on the opening page of a book does not bode well, but Adams obviously intends to pay attention to other accounts of the emperor's life as well in Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.

However, the book is first and foremost a commentary on the *vita Marci*. Text and translation of the *Life* are presented in an Appendix and Chapters 2 and 3 follow the text section by section. Together these chapters and the Appendix make up more than half of the book. The text is mainly based on Hohl's Teubner-edition of the *HA*, and the translation is a slightly modernized version of Magie's English text in the Loeb-edition.

From time to time Adams deviates further from Magie's translation. More often than not this results in mistakes. For instance: 1.5, *avo suo iterum et Augure consulibus*, "in the second consulship of his grandfather and the first of Augur" (Magie), "when his grandfather (for the second time) and the Augur were consuls" (Adams; my italics). In 22.6 Adams prints Hohl's *sed male loquentum vel sermoni vel litteris respondebat*, but he follows Magie's translation, who read *male loquentibus vel sermone vel litteris respondebat*. This betrays either negligence or an inadequate knowledge of Latin. Unfortunately Adams' remarks in 2.2–3 suggest the latter. After naming Marcus' teachers, the biographer says *quibus omnibus ut disciplinarum auctoribus plurimum detulit*, which is explained by Adams as follows: "all of these teachers received great honours from him later because *he was* [my italics] repre-

sentative of the disciplines.” On the next page (61) we meet grammarians with Italian-sounding names like Tuticio Proculo and Polano, probably because they were introduced in a sentence beginning with *usus est*.

In his commentary Adams does not pay attention to linguistic problems or textual criticism, which is a pity, since the Latin is relatively simple, but not entirely without problems, and the text constitution is controversial in a number of places. For instance, with regard to the question of the lacuna in 6.2, Adams limits himself to paraphrasing Magie’s footnote and lamely concludes, “Without knowing the exact nature of the language it is *almost* [my italics] impossible to comment upon the thematic significance of this passage with any certainty.” Even more regrettable is the absence of historical elucidation of the many administrative and prosopographical details furnished by this *vita*, which is in this respect one of the richest in the whole of the *HA*.

What Adams offers instead is a paraphrase emphasizing time and again the great admiration the biographer displays for Marcus’ personal character and his unrivalled qualities as an emperor. This is undoubtedly correct, but it does not need to be endlessly repeated. For numerous details he refers to the extensive scholarship on the *HA* in the notes on chapters 2 and 3 (878 in total). I have not been able to check all of them, but it struck me that many of the references to studies in French, German and Italian were not helpful at all. See for instance p. 76 n. 235 (Béranger), 98 n. 422 (Neri), 119 n. 606 (Alföldy), 171 n. 132 (Hohl).

Adams rightly gives much attention to the often discussed chapters 15–19, following the report on Verus’ death in 169. These chapters are an insertion marked as such by an invocation of the emperor Diocletian in 19.12 and the concluding words *et haec quidem breviter et congeste*. Adams discusses the insertion separately in chapter 3, which is quite defensible. According to him the chapters were written by a different author. This is difficult to believe, since in 21.9 we find a back reference to 17.4 with the words *ut diximus*. On page 106 Adams argues as follows: “While the *ut diximus* could be taken as an indication of the inclusion of the interpolation as a part of the *Vita Marci*, it should not be interpreted in this manner. It appears more likely that it may be a reference to Eutropius 8.3, which provides a similar account. This seems logical in view of the numerous correlations between the text of the *Vita Marci* (let alone the *HA* in general) and other historical sources.” So the biographer refers to the work of another author, in this case Eutropius, with the words “as we said”?

To make things worse, Adams suggests that the invocation of Diocletian points to a date between 284–305 for the composition of the insertion. He must

surely know, however, that all the invocations of Diocletian and Constantine in the *HA* have been proved beyond doubt to be fakes, and he says explicitly “this book is following the line that it [sc. the *HA*] was written around ad 395 by one author” (205) How does Adams square this circle? The answer is given on p. 162: “Therefore, the interpolation has been dated to ad 284-305 *for the purposes of this book*” (my italics).

As Ronald Syme used to say, the *HA* is an embroglio. The *Vita Marci*, however, is one of the most reliable and informative in the collection. A commentary on the Latin text along with an elucidation of its historical aspects would have been very useful. Regrettably this book has little to offer on both accounts.

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