

BOOK REVIEW

A Classical Greek Reader. By MARK RILEY and edited by GILES LAURÉN. Sophron, 2013. Pp. viii + 302. Paperback, \$12.95. ISBN 978-0-989-78360-6.

The title of Riley's *A Classical Greek Reader* is somewhat misleading for those who might expect a volume so entitled to contain excerpts from such "standard" authors as Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon, Sophocles, *et al.* *A Classical Greek Reader*, however, is purposely designed as an alternative to the typical Greek canon for intermediate and advanced readers. In place of Homer and Herodotus, the text contains a broad selection of prose from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods of Greek literature, among them passages from Dio Chrysostom, Arrian, Strabo, Pausanias, and Theophrastus. The only poetry that appears in the text is an excerpt from *Aeschylus' Persians*.

The text itself is essentially a re-issue of Edgar Marchant's *Greek Reader* (Clarendon 1905), itself based on Wilamowitz's *Griechisches Lesebuch* (1902-1904). Riley's additions to Marchant's selections are minor, albeit welcome and interesting: a six line excerpt from Aesop, a selection from *Lysias' Against Eratosthenes*, and a portrait of the emperor Justinian from Procopius. Riley's other additions, such as the inclusion of a glossary and his amplification of the notes, which he has placed at the bottom of the page rather than at the end of the text, are major improvements. His essay at the end of the text on the history of Greek fonts, however, is somewhat out of place, and would have been better replaced by an appendix on Greek grammar and syntax, which the text lacks altogether.

What weaknesses a *Classical Greek Reader* possesses are largely inherited from Marchant. Riley follows Marchant in his somewhat truncated version of Wilamowitz's original, which itself contained selections from Aristotle, Plato, scientific and mathematical writers, and Christian authors. In this way, Wilamowitz's text did much more than Marchant or Riley in expanding Ancient Greek instruction beyond Homer and Xenophon. Wilamowitz did so, moreover, in a clearer and more systematic fashion than Riley and Marchant, dividing the content of his reader thematically by topic, with separate sections on philosophy, medicine, science, etc. This organization is lost, however, in Marchant, and thus Riley's text, which seemingly haphazardly jumps from century-to-century and topic-to-topic,

from Alexander, for example, to Aesop, then on to Pericles, Scipio, and so on. It would take a talented and wide-ranging instructor indeed to make a seamless leap from the text's juxtaposition of Aeschylus' account of the Battle of Salamis and Hero's Theory of the Vacuum. To compound this problem of organization, the table of contents of the work is inadequately descriptive. Selection IV, typical of the text, is entitled "The Mutiny of the Macedonians," with no indication of the date of the text or the author.

The introductions to the selections themselves are in general very informative and well-done, if somewhat old-fashioned in their approach, given that little has been altered from Marchant's century-old introductions. By way of example of the sometimes archaic flare of the English in the text, the definition given in the glossary for the Greek possessive adjective *sos* is "thy." The vocabulary in general, however, is totally complete, but limited to the meanings of the words as they appear in context: a good way to avoid confusion for students but perhaps not best for their long-term mastery of the manifold shades of meaning typical of Greek vocabulary. The vocabulary appears at the end of the text, which some instructors will like, but some students may not, especially those accustomed to navigating through Classical texts via the web on Perseus, the Dickinson College Commentary series, or "Pharr-formatted" texts.

The notes are outstanding in terms of pointing out idiom and historical and cultural context, but are severely lacking in helping students navigate through some of the more difficult grammar and syntax of the passages. While some of the most difficult vocabulary is fleshed out in the notes, in helpful hyphenated fashion to help sharp students detect familiar roots, for an intermediate Greek student the notes do not offer quite enough help. For example, on page 98 of the text, there is neither a note nor explanation for the use of an optative in an indirect question or for the use of an historical infinitive.

As for the more basic functional and aesthetic aspects of the text, the Greek font is highly attractive and legible. The margins of the text, however, are quite small, as is the spacing between lines, making it difficult as a note-taking text. The text is also somewhat riddled with typos. I stopped counting misnumbered notes at twenty. Furthermore, the majority of cross-references were not updated from Marchant's to Riley's text, and the typist frequently inserts spaces in the middle of words, both Greek and Latin, or otherwise introduces errant spellings or punctuation marks.

In the end, *Riley's Reader* will appeal to somewhat more advanced students, who do not need the extra reading help provided in texts like Bolchazy's "Transitional Reader" series. It will also appeal to instructors who would prefer to work through an alternate canon or do something other than a single author approach, like Benner's *Iliad*, or the more standard canon issued in JACT's *A Greek Anthology*. While Riley's text is not as user-friendly or well-edited as those noted above, for the economically-conscious consumer the \$12.95 price tag will certainly be attractive.

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