

## BOOK REVIEW

Virgil *Aeneid* VIII: A Selection. Edited by KEITH MACLENNAN. London-Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. vi + 284. Hardcover, \$13.69. ISBN 978-1-4725-2787-5.

The commentary to *Aeneid* 8 edited by Keith MacLennan fills a gap in the set of Virgilian commentaries recently published by English scholars and especially by Nicolas Horsfall, who notably edited Books 7 (2000), 11 (2003), 3 (2006) and 2 (2008) in the collection of the “Mnemosyne Supplements” (Brill, Leiden), and Book 6 (2013) with the German publisher De Gruyter (2 vols., Berlin-Boston). MacLennan’s book, however, is not a large scale commentary along the lines of those of Eduard Norden, A. S. Pease and Horsfall: it rather follows the shorter and “handy” style of the Virgilian commentaries published in the “Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics,” notably *Aeneid* 9 by Philip Hardie (1994), Book 10 by Steven Harrison (1991), Book 11 by K. W. Gransden (1991) and Book 12 by Richard Tarrant (2012). As for *Aeneid* 8, the last commentaries were edited more than 40 years ago, in the 70s, by P. T. Eden (Leiden, 1975), Gransden himself (Cambridge, 1976) and C. D. Fordyce (Oxford, 1977). MacLennan’s commentary is mainly addressed to students as a didactical tool and I can already say that it fully reaches the alleged purpose, thanks to a careful selection of information and a clear and plain language that does not fall into trivialization. On the other hand, several scholars may regret that a scientific and wide-ranging commentary of *Aeneid* 8 (which is one of the most important books of the poem) is lacking up to now.

The book opens with an introduction that gives an overview of the historical background from the civil war to the Augustan principate (1-4), Virgil’s life and works (4-9), with particular regard to the *Aeneid* including a summary of the poem (9-27), and a special focus on Book 8 (28-46). There is also a “practical guide” to Virgil’s style, namely a detailed stylistic commentary of two short passages of Book 8 (lines 102-104 and 228-232) chosen for exemplary purposes, followed by some indications and recommendations concerning different aspects of the texts (such as focalization, intertextuality, structure, etc.) worth noticing in order to better appreciate the poem (46-55). This section may seem banal

to scholars and advanced readers, but it will prove to be useful to students and a wider audience. The same can be said of the next chapter of the introduction, dealing with rhythm and meter, resulting in fact in a summary of the general principles of Latin prosody and metrics and a description of the hexameter scheme and its main characteristics (55-60). The introduction ends with a necessarily very selective survey of the reception of *Aeneid* 8 in literature and figurative arts from Late Antiquity up to 20<sup>th</sup> century (60-65), but one might wonder about the selection criteria.

As for the text, MacLennan follows the Oxford edition of Mynors (1969) but adds much more punctuation, changes the consonant *u* to *v* and accusative plural in *is* to *es*. She departs from Mynors' text in only one instance, in keeping the manuscript reading *in* instead of Markland's conjecture *it* at line 588 (*in medio, chlamyde et pictis conspectus in armis*, referring to Pallas, who comes out of his city at the side of Aeneas), and I fully appreciate her choice. I wonder, however, why she does not follow a more recent edition, such as that by Gian Biagio Conte in the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana* (Berlin-Boston, 2009) or, even better, the revised version of that by Mario Geymonat (Rome, 2008). MacLennan's edition does not include a translation: students are supposed to translate the Latin text with the help of a vocabulary at the end of the volume (260-284), but some difficult or ambiguous passages are translated in the commentary. This is the case regarding line 169, *ergo et quam petitis iuncta est mihi foedere dextra*, translated by MacLennan as follows: "and so the right hand of friendship which you are seeking has been joined in a solemn undertaking." It is of course a good translation, and it is understandable that the pronoun *mihi* is not translated, as MacLennan explicitly claims (135); but she should at least address the *dativus ethicus*, in accordance with her didactical purpose.

The commentary turns out to be almost always reliable, properly informed, well organized, balanced and clearly written: it is a good work, within the limits of its educational objective, although some items are too short and lacking in depth, even with respect to a student audience. For instance, there are just few words of commentary on the "keynote adjective" *pius* at line 84 (111), as well as on the pregnant expression *fatis egere volentem* at line 133 (125) that would have required a reference to Stoicism. Linguistic observations are frequent (as appropriate in a didactical work) and usually correct – but not in the case of the verb *videre* at line 107: it is defined as a "syncopated perfect" that is supposed to derive from the original and non-syncopated form *viderunt* (118), whereas it is an archaic perfect that already existed before the latter.

The books have two useful indices: an index of (grammatical, rhetorical and metrical) terms and an index of proper names (249-259), but regretfully not a bibliography. On the other hand, there is a short review of further readings (66-67) that covers exclusively English books and that is (inevitably, through no fault of the author) a long way from being exhaustive.

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