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Peter Howell, *Martial. Ancients in Action*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2009. Pp. 126. ISBN 9781853997020. £11.99 (pb).

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Peter Howell has previously published two commentaries on Martial, and in this book he aims to provide an introduction to the epigrams of Martial, as well as Martial the man. The book is part of the 'Ancients in Action' series which seeks to introduce 'major figures of the ancient world to the modern general reader, including the essentials of each subject's life, works, and significance for later western civilisation'. It is this aim which brings up the main problem with this book; following an outdated interpretation of the epigrams of Martial as seen previously in, for example, Sullivan's book on Martial (1991), we are presented with a description of Martial's 'life' with the evidence for this being randomly chosen poems taken out of context. While Howell does caution the reader that 'care is needed as the first person singular may be the "authorial" use, rather than personal' (p. 9), this is at the beginning of a chapter which then proceeds to 'tell' us about the 'life' of Martial, taking the poems as proof for his life and for daily life in Rome. Examples of this can be seen with the reference to 5.20 where Martial is said to describe the life he would like in Rome (pp. 19-20), 5.34 for the names of Martial's parents (p. 9), Martial's love for his homeland in 1.49 (pp. 23-24), and his view of provincial life as idyllic with reference to 12.57 (p. 31), among others.

The book is laid out in a simple fashion, with clearly defined subject chapters. The first chapter, 'The Life of Martial', describes what Howell feels it is possible to say about Martial based on the evidence of the poems. Apart from a mention in a letter of Pliny about the poet's death, there are no external sources which mention Martial. In the past the poems have been used as historical, valid sources for the life of Martial and daily life in Rome, particularly among nineteenth-century scholars such as Friedlander (1886). However, in the past fifteen years scholars such as Fowler (1995), Garthwaite (1993, 1998, 2001), Holzberg (2002) and Lorenz (2004) have begun to think

about the satirical aspects of the epigrams and the idea of persona as applied to the poet. Following this approach, using the epigrams as evidence for the life and personality of Martial is not possible; within the books of epigrams Martial has created the persona of the poet, who we cannot assume directly correlates to the author. However, given the aims of the series, and the intended audience, I can understand why such an old fashioned approach has been taken. This continues in later chapters such as Chapter Four: 'Martial and Domitian', Chapter Five: 'Martial and Roman Social Life', and Chapter Six: 'Martial and Patronage'. However, this old fashioned approach obscures much of the recent scholarship on the books of Martial and could prove confusing for anyone who uses this as a starting point before pursuing the topic further.

There are three chapters that work extremely well as an introduction to the topic without overly relying on the source material for personal information. The second chapter of the book, 'What is an Epigram?' introduces the reader to the origins of epigram as a poetic form, moving from epitaphs to Callimachus, the *Garlands* of Meleager and Philip, the arrangement of the epigrams within the Greek Anthology and a brief look at the recently discovered poems of Posidippus and Nicarchus. He then moves to the early Latin epigrammatists, with a brief look at Ennius, Lucilius and Catullus. This chapter also introduces the poets who are thought to have influenced Martial's own works, with a particular concentration on the importance of Catullus, whom he describes as Martial's 'most significant predecessor' (p. 42). The third chapter, 'Martial and the Epigram', while still using the persona presented in the texts as the 'real' Martial, does explore the variety of the epigrams, and mentions, albeit briefly, the way cycles of poems are used in individual books of the *Epigrams*. The final chapter of the book is a brief, but extremely useful look at the reception of the works of Martial from his own time to the present day. While not as detailed as the summary in Sullivan's book on Martial (Sullivan, 1991), it benefits from the surge in interest in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Martial by Classical scholars since its publication.

Finally, the 'Further Reading' section of the book is an excellent summary of the key texts one would need to read to explore the topic further. Personally I would have preferred a traditionally laid out bibliography, but the current format is probably less intimidating to a non-academic reader. The one omission from this section is Rimmel's recent study of Martial (Rimmel, 2008), which I presume was published after Howell had already finished the book.

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