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A. Zissos, *Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica. Book 1. Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. lxx + 450. ISBN 978-0-19-921949-0. £100.00.

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A. ZISSOS, *VALERIUS FLACCUS' ARGONAUTICA. BOOK 1. EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATION, AND COMMENTARY*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. lxx + 450. ISBN 978-0-19-921949-0. £100.00.

Just over two decades ago the text of Valerius Flaccus' Flavian epic had become readily available in W.-W. Ehlers' Teubner edition (1980), based on his thorough examination of the manuscript tradition published ten years earlier, but there was little else to guide readers: hardly any modern translations or commentaries existed and at that time the most recent commentary on the whole poem was still P. Langen's nineteenth-century commentary in Latin (1896/97). Since the late 1980s, however, Valerian studies have started to flourish and basic tools have proliferated: there are now new translations into, e.g., Italian, French and German (F. Caviglia, 1999; G. Liberman, 1997/2002; P. Dräger, 2003); further editions, particularly G. Liberman's Budé edition (1997/2002), F. Spaltenstein's commentary on the whole epic (2002/2004/2005) as well as various commentaries on single books or parts of books, even though individual commentaries on Books 3 and 8 and on the second half of Book 4 are still lacking. As for Book 1, there are, besides the relevant section in Spaltenstein, recent commentaries by A. J. Kleywegt (2005; focusing on textual and philological issues (p. ix)) and by D. Galli (2007; emphasizing the relationship to sources such as Vergil or Seneca (p. 5)). Hence, upon the appearance of A. Zissos' Oxford commentary, it might be asked whether there was a need for another commentary on Book 1.

Apart from the fact that one may argue that the first book is especially significant, people will soon be convinced, when opening Z.'s volume, that this publication was indeed necessary and adds to the resources available by notable differences from its predecessors. Z. is a profound expert on the poem, demonstrated by no fewer than ten articles from the past decade listed under 'Abbreviations and Symbols' (xi). What sets his commentary apart is its long and thorough introduction (xiii–lxx). Though naturally focused on Book 1, it equally provides an overview of the present state of research in Valerian studies more generally for a whole range of areas. Z. deals with 'The Poet' (xiii–xvii), 'The Myth' (xvii–xxvi), 'The Poem' (xxvi–xxxix), 'Poetics' (xxxix–xlvi), 'Similes, Tropes, and Figures' (xlvi–liv), 'Language' (liv–lxi), 'Metrics and Prosody' (lxi–lxvi), and 'The Manuscript Tradition' (lxvi–lxx). These topics are given comprehensive treatment, with references to the most recent bibliography as well as to major earlier studies (with very few omissions). Discussions of most of these issues from various perspectives already existed, but they tended to focus on certain aspects or particular passages, and no modern scholar has actually tried to bring these results together against the background of an overall command of the

poem, thus providing a coherent plausible description of Valerius Flaccus' language and poetics. At present, therefore, this introduction provides the most up-to-date comprehensive introduction to the poem as a whole.

In line with his earlier work that focused on narratological and intertextual questions and with his intentions stated in the preface (v: 'Much attention has been given to matters of language and poetics; and I have gone to some lengths, both in the introduction and the commentary, to locate Valerius within an unusually complex literary tradition, as well as to point out his still broadly underappreciated influence on later writers and artists.'). Z. spends more time than other commentators of Flavian epic on explaining the intricate structure of the poem, its use of earlier literature (concentrating not only on the obvious models of Apollonius Rhodius and Vergil, but including also a host of other Greek and Roman texts in poetry and prose), and its allusive style. He thereby makes an important contribution towards rehabilitating this epic as a work of poetry instead of a 'belated', 'derivative' text. Due to his approach, Z. is less helpful on the potential overall meaning of the poem or its relationship to contemporary Roman society.

The introduction is followed by the Latin text and an English translation of Book 1 (1–69). Z.'s Latin text is established on the basis of earlier editions and textual articles, taking recent re-evaluations of manuscripts into account. Moreover, he proclaims his 'comparatively free resort to emendation' in the preface and states that 'now is not the time for conservatism' (v). However, he does not seem to have introduced new conjectures of his own, but rather opted for conjectures already proposed over manuscript readings or preferred manuscript variants less favoured by editors. His changes (although they appear to be less numerous than the introductory statement suggests) tend to make grammar and sense more regular and straightforward at difficult points. As often in the case of ancient writers with complex language, there remains the thorny question of where corruption starts and what degree of obscurity and irregularity can still be justified. For making out the characteristics of Z.'s text at a glance, a list of departures from, e.g., Ehlers and Liberman would have been useful. Z.'s translation closely follows Valerius Flaccus' complex text, but is readable English and thus helps with understanding the difficult Latin (cf. p. v).

The longest section of the book is the 'Commentary' itself (71–420). Like the introduction, it is particularly strong in the areas of literary tradition, narrative techniques and use of language. Interpretative information on coherent sections such as the proem or speeches of characters is followed by more detailed notes on individual lines and phrases, covering a variety of problems. Hence a clearer layout, distinguishing more obviously between wider-ranging and detailed commentary and between the various aspects discussed for each line, might have been desirable. Since Z. worked on the premise that 'this volume is unlikely to be much consulted by beginners', he 'omitted basic explanatory material' (v). The book closes with 'Bibliography' (421–34), 'Index Nominum et Rerum' (435–44) and 'Index Verborum' (445–50).

Although one might have wished for even more elaboration in certain areas, one has to agree with Z. that 'commentators . . . must make the difficult decision to prioritize certain elements at the expense of others' (v); and one must therefore say that Z. has brilliantly achieved what he set out to do and provided an excellent starting point for future research on Valerius Flaccus' poem.

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