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The Liber Spectaculorum is a very good candidate for the most problematic book in Martial’s production. To begin with, it is not apparent whether or not this is a single, homogeneous book put together by Martial for a specific occasion and addressing one and the same emperor (in such a case usually assumed to be Titus), or an anthology compiled at a later date, comprising pieces written to celebrate various occasions and directing itself to Titus as well as his brother Domitian (but never using any other address than Caesar). It is also the textually most corrupt of Martial’s books with a number of places that simply have to be emended. But it remains one of the most original – if not the most original – in his production and, focusing on a single event or at least a single feature, it is indeed something of a unicum in classical poetry as a whole.

Professor Coleman’s (C.’s) edition with commentary of the Liber Spectaculorum (henceforth LS) has been in the making for some time. As far as I know, it has been developing during the past 15 years or so, which is a fate most other commentaries can only envy. While working on the book, C. has become something of an authority on gladiatorial shows and the amphitheatre, with a considerable list of scholarly papers on the matter and frequent appearances in popular media (most famously as the historical consultant on the picture Gladiator; her insistence on not being named in the credits has become almost legendary). Add to this C.’s now classic commentary on Statius’ Silvae 4; expectations on the present volume are understandably high.

The overall structure of C.’s commentary on the Liber Spectaculorum is conventional – there is a General Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary, a Bibliography and Indices –, with some particularities prompted by the original character of the text, such as an Appendix on the Source of the Nile and the Concordances covering the numbering of the epigrams in various editions (which is necessary, as the LS is the single book by Martial that has been most frequently edited). This conventional framework is filled, however, with rather an original content. In the Introduction, which covers 68 pages (xix–lxxvi), C. professes to «chart a course in the opposite direction» from the standard order of introductory topics, as she proceeds from minutiae of the LS («The Numbering
in this Edition – The Transmission of the Text – Title – Headings – Scope and Characteristics of the Transmitted Collection – The Identity of ‘Caesar’) via chapters of a more general significance (‘The Flavian Amphitheatre – Spectacle and the Imperial Image – Monuments and Occasions as a Theme in Epigram’) to the concluding ‘The Author and his Book’, which does not, however, discuss the author as having been born in Bilbilis, coming to Rome so-and-so etc., but «in the pose he assumes in this work» (xix). This «pose», unsurprisingly, proves to be «entirely defaced» (lxxxii), the persona having divested itself of every personal trait and stepped back from the spotlight of the 1st-person singular into the mass of the 1st-person plural, becoming one voice of many in the encomiastic choir that celebrates the emperor. The device is familiar in panegyrical poetry, frequently used by Horace in the pro-Augustan poetry of Odes 3 and 4 often applied by Martial in his more straightforward panegyrics of Domitian in later books. But the introduction not only ranges from details to the big picture, it also mixes the concrete and indispensable – such as the elucidating tables on the «Distribution of epigrams in the manuscripts» (xxiv), «Chronology of the rest of Martial’s œuvre» (xxvii) and «Headings attested in the manuscripts» (xxx) – with amusing, but always relevant curiosities (like the note on the rhinoceros’ preferred living conditions in n. 112, p. lvi). More of this kind is to be found in the commentary; see in particular the detailed discussion of how the bull was induced into actually mounting the ‘false’ Pasiphae (63–65; it is very rarely indeed that we see such works as Hafez’ ‘Reproduction in Farm Animals’ quoted in the bibliography of classical texts). Doubtless the most important chapter is the one dealing with ‘The identity of ‘Caesar’) (xlv–lxiv), which occupies almost a third of the Introduction and addresses the fundamentally important question of what it is that the LS actually commemorates. The old problem here is that the book seems to incorporate poems that point to occasions that had occurred under Titus (mainly the inauguration of the Flavian amphitheatre as described in other sources) as well as under Domitian (largely related to poems 11 and 26, about a rhinoceros). As it necessarily involves a large portion of speculation the problem cannot be conclusively solved, and C.’s arguments in favor of both the Flavian brothers being discernable behind the Caesar of the LS are acceptable if not uncontroversial. She makes a thought-provoking point, though, when she says that «if one sets the conundrum aside, Martial’s ‘Caesar’ starts to look almost like an idealized abstraction, above identification; maybe that impression is not so far from the experience of some other readers among Martial’s wider public» (lxiv). It is not difficult to agree that the identity of ‘Caesar’ is not terribly important for the understanding or the literary appreciation of the epigrams. Still, the assumption that a given poem was written under Titus but published under Domitian is not always unproblematic. A good instance is epigram 34, which (on the comparison of texts by Suetonius and particularly Dio Cassius) seems to commemorate events staged by Titus in the Stagnum Augusti (C. discusses the matter in detail on 250–52). This epigram ends with the pentameter hanc norint unam saecula naumachiam (‘posterity is to know just this one naval battle’ in C.’s translation), which does seem like a problematic statement if made in the reign of Domitian about a naumachy staged by his brother. Such cases illustrate the continuing difficulty in elucidating the circumstances surrounding
the origin of the LS. But its character as a book in which the emperor plays a very significant part cannot be questioned. In this capacity, it shares several issues with later books that increasingly focus on the monarch. One is the recurring problem of commissioned vis-à-vis spontaneous panegyric, and C. ends her introduction with an important remark, as she observes that “it may be too blunt to imagine the circumstances of composition as imperial commission. … An alert client (or would-be client) was on the watch for opportunities to deploy his talents. The ephemeral nature of spectacle challenged its sponsors to perpetuate the memory of their generosity: painting and sculpture was one way; literature was another, a medium both compact and portable” (lxxiii). This statement applies to virtually all of Martial’s imperial panegyrics.

The introduction is followed by Text, Translation, and Commentary (1–265), which comprises a new Latin text of each epigram with an accompanying apparatus criticus, an English prose translation, an Introduction to each epigram and a line-by-line commentary.

I must say at once that I am very impressed with this commentary. It is thoroughly relevant, exhaustive without being wearying, extremely readable in a way that commentaries not always are, and it manages to be all this and still restrict itself to a very reasonable length; this is obviously the work of a mature and expert scholar. Its readability is largely due to the very well-written introductions to each epigram, which are often considerably longer than the line-by-line commentary. Here, C. does full justice to the (usually extremely rewarding) subject matter, and the reader will frequently find himself wondering (in a positive sense) whether he is reading a commentary or a monograph. For instance, the introduction to epigram 3 (37–42) can be read as a miniature-monograph on ancient tourism, and the same may be said of the expositions about bestiariae in the introduction to 7 (70–75), about rhinoceroses in that to 11 (101–106) and so forth. As far as introductions go, such detailed accounts are generally welcome. Sometimes, too, they occur inside the line-by-line commentary itself; when they do, it is warranted by some unusually intricate problem, but such long notes as the one that discusses the word pegmata in 2.2 (beginning on 22 and ending on 27) put different demands on the presentation of the material. There will inevitably be those, who will turn to C.’s book for a quick explanation of pegmata and who will probably want to be presented with her conclusion (with which, by the way, I fully agree) at the beginning of the note, preceding the discussion, instead of at the very end. There are a few, less extreme instances of the same phenomenon, but on the whole, it is not a big problem in this commentary.

It is perhaps because of the subject matter of the LS that C.’s book is more focused on concrete things (’Realien’) than on literary matters such as intertextuality and allusion. Following Stephen Hinds, C. notices the magnificent allusion to Ovid’s Metamorphoses in 24.1–2, but perhaps more effort could have been put into uncovering such poetical links. Metrics and prosody receive their due share of attention in observant notes; two fine examples are found in the commentary on epigram 2, a propos of the plural atria in v. 3 (27) and of the anapaest ending of the pentameter in v. 12 (36). Some things are lacking, however; for instance, I would personally have liked to see at least a mention in the commentary of the spondaic ending of 1.5 (Mausolea, which, evidently, he has picked up from
Lucan 8.697; this Neoteric device is otherwise comparatively rare in Martial). On a more advanced level, perhaps the avoidance of hemihemimeral caesura in 1.1.9, when this could have been easily achieved using the same words, would have merited some attention; what Martial does in this line (misit utrique rudes et palmas Caesar utrique) is in practice that he allows the word-accent to fall on the first position in the fourth foot by putting a long monosyllabic word before a spondaic after the penthemimeresis. This is usually avoided by ‘refined’ poets like Vergil and Ovid in order to achieve the clash between the first position of the foot (not to use the word ‘ictus’) and word accent and the resulting tension in the middle feet of the hexameter.1 My own spontaneous guess is that Martial sacrifices the tension here because he wanted (for some reason) to avoid the juxtaposition of rudes and palmas that would be the result of an inversion and because he could let et take such a prominent position as it begins a new sentence.2 It would, though, have been interesting to know how frequent this is in Martial. Now, one has to browse through Marina Sáez’ ‘La métrica de los epigramas de Marcial’ (Zaragoza 1998) to find that the percentage of such coincidence in the fourth foot is ‘relatively high’ in Martial and particularly in the distichs, which means, I suppose, that it is lower than the roughly 50% found in «autores de técnica menos depurada como Lucrecio y Catulo» (Marina Sáez, 211).

But this is a subjective and, perhaps, petty remark when made about a book that distinguishes itself by overall accuracy and sound judgment. When discussing problematic passages and evaluating previously expressed opinions, C. regularly arrives at conclusions that are very well founded but not unnecessarily complicated, whether it concerns the doubts (hard to understand in the first place) of previous scholars about the placing of the concluding distich in poem 14 (C. firmly and correctly defends them as they stand, 133) or the plausible restoration of severely corrupt lines (like 17.8, which testifies to C.’s very firm grip on the entire subject; 147).3 More often in the LS than in Martial’s other

1 The most famous instance is the first line of the Aeneid, where Vergil writes Troiae qui instead of qui Troae; while in this case, the position of Troae between two caesurae throws great emphasis on the word, in many other cases no such explanation readily presents itself, for instance in Aen. 1.271 transferrat, et Longam multa vi muniet Albam, where vi multa would have been possible, but at the cost of the tension.

2 Friedrich Marx, who studied this phenomenon thoroughly in his ‘Molossische und bakkheische Wortformen in der Verskunst der Griechen und Römer’ (Leipzig 1932), observed that a long et was avoided in combination with a spondaic word between the penthemimeresis and the (‘bucolic’) diaeresis after the 4th foot, except in a few cases; the present could be sorted with those in which et stands «nach Interpunktion oder kann als selbständiger Satzanfang angesehen werden» (214). It may be noted that Martial deviates from the general ‘rule’ also in 4.31.3 quid tibi pro meritis et tantis laudibus opem und 7.4.3 ille meas gentes et Celtas rexit Hiberos. However, these cases are no exact parallels to the present, as et coordinates two nouns and not, as here, two sentences. Besides, in pro meritis tantis et laudibus und meas gentes Celtas et rexit Hiberos, tantis and Celtas would risk being taken with the wrong noun.

3 In defense of Heraeus suggestion praemia cum laudem ferret, at hic pateram, C. points to a recent interpretation of an inscribed mould found in 1884 at Salona, which shows, in mirror-image, a pair of gladiators; this mould «may have been used to mould the base of glass bottles which, along with their contents, would be awarded to victorious gladiators as prizes. ... Hence it seems legitimate to conclude that a patera (including, perhaps, its contents) may plausibly have been offered as a costly prize». Occasionally, C. makes re-
books, interpretation is made difficult by the fact that the epigrams feel a little like emblem poems that take a simultaneous visual impression for granted (this concerns the monodistichs in particular, of which no. 18 is a very good example). In such cases too, C.’s interpretation is usually sound and often feels quite obvious once one has read her arguments; it may concern what had actually happened with the bear caught in glue (120–21) or her suggestion about an artificially created storm to make ‘Leander’s’ swim in the water-filled arena more interesting (205).

Errors of any kind, whether factual or misprints, are virtually non-existent in this book. There may be a lapse on p. 45, where C. paraphrases 3.5 qui prima bibit deprensi flumina Nili as a tribe that drinks «not from the Nile in general but specifically from its source (‘depressi … Nili’); but should not the exegetical parenthesis embrace prima … flumina rather than deprensi … Nili? In one or two other cases, a little more clarification would have been desirable. I suppose, for instance, that C. takes the Laureolus of epigram 9 to have been both crucified and torn apart by a bear (nuda Caledonio … viscera praebuit urso / non falsa pendens in cruce Laureolus; 9.3–4), although she says «instead of being crucified, ‘Laureolus’ was torn apart by a bear» on p. 84. There will always be matters about which one may have a different opinion (for instance, I side with Weinreich’s suggestion that Martial wanted to indicated catasterism for the bull who raptus abit … ad aethera in epigram 18; C. is too cautious here, I think), but being the stimuli that guarantee a continuing discussion of these important texts, such differences are to be welcomed.

The bottom line is that C.’s book is one of the most important contributions to Martial scholarship that has been made in recent years. It benefits greatly from the fortunate combination of C.’s intimate knowledge of its subject matter with her long engagement with Flavian poetry and its specific problems, and even more, perhaps, from her ability to present her material in a way that makes her book extremely useful to the specialist while still being fully accessible to the undergraduate reading the LS. The absence of a modern commentary on the LS has constituted a serious gap. We should be thankful that this gap is no more, and that we owe its filling to Professor Coleman.

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marks that leave one quite amazed at her almost encyclopedic learning; it may concern the corruption of delicii to dilecte in the mss, which has a parallel in a ms to Ovid’s Remedia amoris (the R ms has dilectae for delicii, which is not mentioned even in Henderson’s commentary) or the fact that C. is able to quote the recurrence of a corrupt variant of 24.8 in a play (premiered in 1995) by the English poet Tony Harrison (even though she, as she duly states, owes her knowledge of the play to Hallie Marshall).