

AARON PELTTARI, ed., comm., *The Psychomachia of Prudentius: text, commentary, and glossary*, Oklahoma series in classical culture, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019, 344 pp., \$29.95 (pb), ISBN 978-0-8061-6402-1.

About 100 years ago Johan Bergman, five years before finishing his complete edition of Prudentius' works and 24 years after publishing his own commentary of the *Psychomachia*,<sup>1</sup> postulated the necessity of a detailed, up-to-date explanatory commentary on Prudentius' *Psychomachia*,<sup>2</sup> because the last one dated back to 1788/89.<sup>3</sup> Even though Maurice Lavarenne had presented an edition of the *Psychomachia* with a french translation and a commentary in 1933<sup>4</sup>, in 1966 Christian Gnilka still deplored the lack of a modern commentary – and justifiably so.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the progress the research on Prudentius has made during the last decades this lack of a modern detailed commentary lasted until recently. Since 2016 there are now two new detailed commentaries on Prudentius' *Psychomachia*.<sup>6</sup> Being the other commentator besides Pelttari, it seemed quite inappropriate to me to review Pelttari's commentary at the request of *Exemplaria Classica*. However, finally I agreed to undertake this task, for our commentaries differ in the conception as well as in the intended audience. So there seems to be no conflict of interest.

Aaron Pelttari is a senior lecturer at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh with a main field of research in late antique Latin literature.

<sup>1</sup> J. Bergman, ed., *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Psychomachia, rerum et verborum copia explicata, codicibus Casinensi 374 et Vaticano Reginensi 2078 in lucem prolatis illustrata*, Upsaliae 1897 and J. Bergman, ed., *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis carmina*, Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1926 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; 61).

<sup>2</sup> J. Bergman, *Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, der größte christliche Dichter des Altertums*, Dorpat 1921, 7.

<sup>3</sup> F. Arevalus, ed., *M. Aurelii Clementis Prudentii V. C. Carmina. Editio emendata cur. Jaques Paul Migne*, vol. I, Parisiis 1788 (Patrologia Latina 59); vol. II, Parisiis 1789 (Patrologia Latina 60).

<sup>4</sup> Prudence, *Psychomachie*, ed. M. Lavarenne, Paris 1933.

<sup>5</sup> C. Gnilka, *Studien zur Psychomachie des Prudentius*, Wiesbaden 1963 (Klassisch-philologische Studien 27), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Besides Pelttari's commentary from 2019 there is my own edition, translation, and commentary first published in 2016 as my PhD thesis: M. Frisch, *Kommentar zu Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, Psychomachia*, Marburg 2016; now published completely revised: M. Frisch, ed., *Prudentius 'Psychomachia'. Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Texte und Kommentare 62, Berlin-Boston 2020.

His commentary on Prudentius' *Psychomachia* contains a preface (xii–xvi), an introduction (3–37), a map of the western Mediterranean in 400 C.E. (38–9), the Latin text of the *Psychomachia* (41–74), a commentary (75–224), two appendices: a synopsis of Roman metre (225–9) and a glossary of literary terms (231–4), a bibliography (235–48) and a glossary of all Latin words used in the *Psychomachia* (249–327).

In the preface Pelttari declares the objective and conception of his edition and commentary. The book targets on students trying to read and understand the *Psychomachia*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Pelttari wishes his commentary “to be useful in some way also for more advanced readers and researchers working on Prudentius” (xiii).<sup>8</sup> For this purpose the commentary notes begin with the most essential information for the understanding of a particular passage (sometimes translations or comments on the grammatical structure) and progress to more complex background information on questions of textual criticism, the historical and literary context, and the reception of the poem, sometimes up to interpretational approaches. Pelttari presents and explains his methodical approach very thoroughly and comprehensibly.

In the introduction there is an overview of Prudentius' life and poetry (3–9), of the literary world in late antiquity (9–12), and of the *Psychomachia* itself (12–37) regarding models and intertexts referred to in the *Psychomachia* (14–6), to the theme of an inner conflict in the soul (16–9), to allegory and interpretation (19–23), to the date of composition and contemporary editions (24–9), to manuscripts and transmission (29–34), and to the reception of the *Psychomachia* (34–7). In this introduction not only a student but also an advanced reader of Latin literature approaching Prudentius and his *Psychomachia* finds all the necessary background information he needs. A map of the western Mediterranean around 400 C.E., around the time Prudentius published his works, illustrates the locations mentioned in the introduction.

The text of the *Psychomachia* is supplemented by an *apparatus criticus*. Pelttari claims that his “text of *Psychomachia* is very conservative” (31), following Cunningham's eclectic approach<sup>9</sup>, citing throughout the manuscripts A (Parisinus latinus 8084; 6<sup>th</sup> century), B (Ambrosianus D 36 sup.; 6<sup>th</sup> century), T (Parisinus latinus 8087; 9<sup>th</sup> century), E (Leidensis, Bibl.

<sup>7</sup> Having taught several reading courses on Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and *Contra Symmachum* at different German universities, I probably know all the troubles the Prudentian poetry causes students very well. Therefore, in this review I focus on the suitability of Pelttari's book for the objective intended by the author himself.

<sup>8</sup> I will discuss only marginally whether and to which extent this book is suitable for this quite different target audience.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M.P. Cunningham, “A preliminary recension of the older manuscripts of the *cath. ap. and ham. of Prudentius*”, *Sacris Erudiri* 13, 1962, 5–59 and M.P. Cunningham, ed., *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina*, Turnholti 1966 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 126).

Vniu., Burmannus Q 3; 9<sup>th</sup> century) and S (Sangallensis 136; 9<sup>th</sup> century) and some other manuscripts only selectively in his critical notes (cf. 30-1). His text as well as the *apparatus criticus* seems to be based completely on Cunningham's edition.

The commentary presents short introductions to every part of the poem regarding content, structure, and metre if necessary. There are also short summaries for sections of verses, which allow the reader to understand each commentary note in its context. Some notes give the meaning of a word or phrase in its context, some explain morphological peculiarities, some clarify syntactical functions or connections. There are also cross-references to similar passages of the *Psychomachia*. Pelttari also provides very short overviews over questions of textual criticism, e.g., for *psych. praef.* 41-2. Furthermore, sometimes he points to parallels in ancient literature or in the bible where it is necessary for the understanding of a passage. Sometimes he provides an English translation of a word or phrase, especially when it is used in a figurative sense. There are also stylistical explanations.

Of course, neither do two commentators choose to comment on absolutely the same passages, phrases, or words nor do they always consider the same information necessary for the understanding of a passage. Anyway, there are notes in Pelttari's commentary which are too short, and which lack necessary background information.

Sometimes he seems to follow mainly the notes of Bergman's and Lavarenne's commentaries, ignoring older commentaries or recent research. Pelttari's note on *psych. praef.* 56-8, for example, only informs on one interpretation for the 318 servants of Abraham, the standard interpretation since Lavarenne's commentary. However, there are two more – quite plausible – interpretations that have been discussed by the scholars.<sup>10</sup>

Occasionally Pelttari repeats a common explanation without further questioning: In his note on *psych.* 42 on the torches used as weapons by *Sodomita Libido* he explains the *faces* – as all other commentators have done it until now – as a reference to the destruction of Sodom by fire (Gn 19, 24) which actually makes no sense, since in the *Genesis* Sodom is punished for sexual excesses by the fire, while in the *Psychomachia* – the other way around – *Sodomita Libido* herself uses the burning torches as weapons against the virtues.<sup>11</sup> There is no need for repeating the mistakes of our predecessors or just to translate wrong explanations from Latin and French commentaries into English. Writing a modern commentary should always mean to think through the old explanations, to question and review them, and if necessary to discard and to replace them.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Frisch, *Prudentius 'Psychomachia'*, 163-5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Frisch, *Prudentius 'Psychomachia'*, 203-4.

However, these critical remarks on Pelttari's commentary could probably be made on nearly every commentary.

In total, Pelttari's commentary provides – although very concise – nearly all information necessary to understand the *Psychomachia*.

The appendix on Latin metre provides the basics of Latin prosody and metre: the pronunciation of vowels and diphthongs and the difference between long and short vowels; accentuation; long and short syllables; the dactylic hexameter; elision; *ictus*; *caesura* and *dieresis*; and some notes on Prudentian peculiarities in prosody and metre.

The existence of such an appendix providing such fundamental information really puzzles me. A student who does not know these basics should never start reading the *Psychomachia* as his first Latin poem. Maybe he should not start reading Latin poetry at all before he masters the most basic rules of Latin prosody. Otherwise, a student who can read Latin poetry does not need this information.

But worse, part of the given information is simply wrong: The pronunciation of the Latin diphthongs *ae* as in English “high”, *oe* as in “boy” as presented by Pelttari (226) does not apply to late Latin, where these diphthongs were both monophthongized to a mid-open  $\bar{e}$ .<sup>12</sup> If there really was an *ictus* in the modern sense of an emphasis on the first syllable of a metre already in late Latin is at least doubtful. First evidence for this verse accentuation seems to be found since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

The glossary of literary terms is quite useful for the reader.

Pelttari's bibliography presents most of the relevant literature from the old editions and commentaries to the latest studies.

The glossary at the end provides on nearly 80 pages the whole vocabulary used in the *Psychomachia*. It may certainly be useful to have all the Latin words and their meanings in the same volume as the text and the commentary. So, you do not need any dictionary in addition. However, I doubt that it is necessary to put really every vocabulary into such a glossary. A student who wants to read Prudentius' *Psychomachia* should not have to look up words like, e.g., *a/ab*, *ac/atque*, *ad*, *adire*, *agere*, *amor*, *annus*, *aqua*, *ars*, *at*, *aut*, *bene*, *bonus*, and the like. For any advanced reader this glossary means 80 more pages, but no added value. Instead, an advanced reader or researcher will of course use a proper dictionary for those words he needs to look up, for often the basic meanings provided in the glossary do not suffice for the understanding of a particular passage.

<sup>12</sup> W.S. Allen, *Vox Latina. Pronunciation of Classical Latin*, Cambridge 1978, 60-2.

<sup>13</sup> Vgl. T. Burkard, “Wann erblickte der Iktus das Licht der Welt?“, Stefan Tilg, Benjamin Harter, eds., *Neulateinische Metrik: Formen und Kontexte zwischen Rezeption und Innovation*, Tübingen 2019, 277-334.

In summary, Pelttari's edition and commentary fulfil their purpose to make the *Psychomachia* accessible to English-speaking students, though some of the provided support aims to low, some does not suffice for a deeper, but only for a first basic understanding, some is not necessary. For an advanced reader the introduction, text, *apparatus criticus*, and commentary are quite useful for a first understanding. For an English-speaking researcher working on Prudentius the *apparatus criticus* and the English commentary offer a quick overview over the standard explanations, which were until now nearly solely accessible in French and Latin, and over a large part of the research of the last decades.

MAGNUS FRISCH  
Gymnasium Süderelbe (Hamburg)  
post@magnus-frisch.de

