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Jo-Ann Shelton, Pliny the Younger: Selected Letters. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2016. Pp. xxx + 264. Paper (ISBN 978-0-86516-840-4) \$29.00.

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much more deeply about constitutional theory and I look forward to discussing his arguments for years to come.

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Jo-Ann Shelton,
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Writing a good student commentary is a more daunting task than one might think. To begin with, it can be difficult for the expert Latinist to understand where his or her students might struggle in the Latin and even when they overcome this difficulty they must then decide how much help is too much or too little. Some seem to eschew helping students at all to pursue their own philological interests, despite the ambit of the publisher or book series. I think in particular here of Andrew Dyck's commentary on Cicero's Catilinarian orations in the Cambridge "Green and Yellow" series: it has been invaluable resource to me in my own research, while proving to be much more technical than even the students of an advanced undergraduate Latin seminar can handle. Other texts have an arrangement of text and aid to the reader that are, to put it mildly, not user-friendly. Such texts require the instructor to explain how to use the book properly before proceeding, or, by separating the commentary from the text itself, they often discourage the student from checking the notes at all.

In her new student commentary covering a total of 30 letters of Pliny the Younger, Jo-Ann Shelton has provided a valuable vade mecum to intermediate Latin students everywhere. More importantly Shelton has confronted the difficulties I outlined above with aplomb. It is a volume with much to offer the student and teacher alike with individual comments perceptively attuned to the needs of the fledgling Latinist, and countless opportunities for the instructor to not just run spot drills of syntactical and grammatical concepts, but to expand the class's perspective out from pure philology to consider questions of Roman social life explored by Pliny.

Shelton begins with an excellent introduction that concisely and cogently sets out Pliny's life and times and his literary output. Important terms about Roman

culture (e.g., magistracies) are put in bold and definitions follow in parentheses. She suggests further reading and possible thematic groupings of the letters to plan a syllabus around and excellent maps. The appendices are also rich, with texts and translations of important inscriptions mentioning Pliny, family trees, a glossary of proper names and a full vocabulary for the text. The last is particularly helpful as it saves much time in flipping through entries in a separate volume. However, Shelton does recommend that the student purchase a grammar book like Allen and Greenough's to help them along. Some guidance is provided in the text itself: one of the indices is for grammatical concepts, which can allow the teacher to better focus on those elements of syntax that students may be particularly struggling with. For example, should one's students be struggling with indirect questions, Shelton indexes the 22 instances of this construction in the notes (the index is keyed to page numbers of the commentary, not the textual loci of the Latin text itself).

The selection of letters covers many old favorites of Pliny: his introductory letter (1.1); his apologia about his activities under Domitian (3.11); letters to the historian Tacitus, including those about the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E. (1.6, 4.13, 6.16 and 6.20); a letter praising his third wife, Calpurnia (4.19); the grief over Fundanus' daughter (5.16); and of course his letters to Trajan concerning imperial policy towards Christians (10.96 and 10.97). Other letters provide entrees into topics like slavery, marriage, education, fatherhood, and death. Each letter has an accompanying introductory passage and nine images over the course of the commentary enliven the text.

The mise-en-page of the commentary and text is particularly laudable. The Latin itself is printed in larger font size, with the commentary beginning below the Latin and continuing on the facing page. The guiding principle for the amount of Latin on each page is that the Latin and the commentary should be on the same two-page spread to eliminate excessive thumbing back and forth between Latin and commentary. In general, one can feel comfortable assigning a nightly pace of a single page spread (i.e., Latin and commentary on the facing page), slowly building up the pace as the students get a better handle on both the Latin itself and the peculiarities of Pliny's style. The majority of the comments treat issues of grammar and syntax, with historical issues treated primarily in the introductions before each letter and in the notes as necessary.

Letter 6.16 is a representative example, as well as the longest text in the collection, followed closely by its sequel, letter 6.20. The introduction treats in a capsule form the life and career of Pliny the Elder, the maternal uncle of our epistolary writer. The comments themselves are kept brief and are written in an easy-going style.

While many commentaries fall into the trap of giving too little help, or sometimes all too much, Shelton has found the a happy medium here: identifying grammatical constructions, especially when the Latin may be unclear due to the word order or rhetorical devices like hyperbaton; elsewhere helping make sense of the passage where the resources of expression in the Latin language diverge from familiar English usage there. My one criticism about this particular section is that Shelton postpones discussion of the eruption itself until the notes on 6.20, only explaining in 6.16 why Pliny the Elder was stationed at Misenum as prefect of the naval fleet from about 76 C.E. onward. While this is perhaps understandable for reasons of space, since the introduction to Pliny the Elder takes up much of the introduction to letter 6.16, it seems strange to save such an important matter of context to both letters for the second of the two.

Ultimately, Shelton has produced what I believe is an excellent student commentary for Pliny's letters. A standby of Latin instruction for many years (letter 6.16, for example, is a major unit in *Ecce Romani*), Pliny not only provides practice in the language itself, but myriad opportunities to discuss elements of Roman culture and Shelton's commentary is responsive to both elements of the study of Pliny in lower level Latin courses. While the selection is not as wide ranging as Jacqueline Carlon's recent edition of fifty letters of Pliny (Oxford, 2016), Shelton includes 15 letters that are not in Carlon's selection. It is an excellent text for teachers of intermediate Latin courses at the high school and college level and a monumentum aere perennius of Shelton's work on ancient Roman culture and society and Pliny himself.

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