

HANS-JOACHIM HÄGER, *Plinius über die Ehe und den idealen Ehemann. Zur literarischen Inszenierung von Männlichkeiten und Emotionen in Ehe und Familie der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Kalliope – Stud. z. griech. u. lat. Poesie 18, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 578 pp., €82,00, ISBN 978-3-8253-4674-4.

In the last two decades or so, Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* have attracted increasing scholarly interest. Especially aspects such as Pliny's strategies of self-portraiture, book composition and intertextuality have been discussed in recent contributions. Gender Studies as well have discovered Pliny's *Letters* as a rich source for the depiction of women and construction of female identities in Roman imperial times, as demonstrated in the monographs written by Carlon (2009) and Shelton (2013).¹

By focusing on marriage and the image of the ideal husband, Häger (furthermore H.) tries to add a new perspective to previous research on gender in Pliny. The present monograph is the modified version of H.'s dissertation which he submitted in the fall semester of 2018/19 at the University of Munich. Especially the letters addressed to Pliny's wife Calpurnia (*Ep.* 6.4, 6.7 and 7.5) as well as the epistles to Calpurnia's relatives, in which Pliny's young wife is the subject (*Ep.* 4.19, 8.10-11), stand in the centre of the investigation. H. reads this group of texts as a sub-corpus within the letter collection.

H. starts his book with a review of previous research on Pliny's letters (17-31) and then outlines his own methodic approach. The aim of the study is to investigate Pliny's concept of the ideal Roman husband (*maritus*) by using an interdisciplinary combination of methods (33-46), taking not only philological and literary aspects into account but also questions regarding linguistics, social history and the history of emotions. H. asks what portrait of the ideal husband Pliny paints in his letters and to what extent Pliny's own behaviour corresponds to this image. As H. convincingly argues, Pliny's strategies of self-portrayal and "impression management" as well as raising the readers' empathy play a crucial role here.

Chapter II (47-90) is dedicated to the role of the *maritus* in Roman marriage and family life. After a brief outline of Men's Studies in the field of Classics, H. discusses the role of the *pater familias*, Roman concepts and codes

¹ J.M. Carlon, *Pliny's Women. Constructing Virtue and Creating Identity in the Roman World*, Cambridge 2009; J.-A. Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters. Women of the Ancient World*, London-New York 2013.

of masculinity as well as discourses on the ideal husband. As H. observes, it is difficult to detect a homogenous concept of masculinity in Roman antiquity. Instead, male behavior can be differentiated depending on each individual's social sphere of influence. Historical and political circumstances such as the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, which confined the scope of action of Roman aristocrats, also led to a shift in the discourses on masculine behaviour: On the one hand, the literature of the Roman Empire leaves more room for expressing male emotionality, and on the other hand, the strive for *gloria* in the field of literature plays a more important role now.

Chapter III (91-182) concentrates on the ideal of the Roman husband as sketched in Pliny's epistolary collection. H. discusses several letters where, in more or less detail, various male individuals are depicted in their role as husband (*Ep.* 8.23; 4.21; 9.13; 7.19; 3.16; 6.24; 8.5; 7.24; 6.32; 7.11; 2.20; 6.31; 1.14; 1.10). As H. concludes, Pliny's concept of the *maritus vere Romanus* is clearly based on the ideals of the *mos maiorum*. Especially virtues such as *gravitas* and *prudencia* are significant, but also *fides*, *pietas*, *verecundia*, *frugalitas*, *rusticitas*, *liberalitas*, *firmitas*, *vigilantia* and *integritas*. Good looks (*ingenua pulchritudo*) are also listed among the qualities which distinguish a Roman husband (cf. *Ep.* 1.14.8). However, in several instances the husbands mentioned by Pliny are presented as dependent on their wives in one way or another. Especially heroic matrons such as Arria and Fannia stand out and are praised as positive *exempla* by the letter writer. On the other hand, young wives such as Calpurnia recommend themselves through charm and intellectual wit rather than heroic deeds. However, no matter how positive a Roman wife is depicted in the *Letters*, her actions always serve the welfare or glory of her husband.

Chapter IV, the longest chapter of the book (183-421), discusses in much detail the six letters which are either addressed to Calpurnia or her relatives, i.e. her aunt Calpurnia Hispulla and her grandfather Calpurnius Fabatus, and highlight different episodes of Pliny's marriage. H. starts with letter 4.19 and then moves on to *Epistles* 8.10-11 with Calpurnia as their subject before he investigates the letters which Pliny wrote to Calpurnia herself (*Ep.* 6.4, 6.7 and 7.5). The analysis of each letter follows the same pattern: After a prolegomenon there follow sections on the letter's line of thought, its date and position within the collection, an interpretation of the text and some conclusive remarks. H. follows those scholars who believe that Calpurnia was Pliny's third wife (188). One of the most interesting insights of this chapter is that Pliny presents himself as well as other *mariti* of his social circle (for example Pompeius Saturninus in *Ep.* 1.16) as educators of their wives, who succeed in rousing the young women's enthusiasm for literature, polishing their literary skills and serving as their models. Although Pliny emphasizes the good looks of other potential husbands in letters of recommendation

(such as *Ep.* 1.14), in his own case it is his *gloria* rather than his *corpus* which makes him attractive to his wife (*Ep.* 4.19.5).

The chapter also contains many interesting observations concerning the letters' intertextuality. In *Ep.* 4.19, for instance, where H. discovers an allusion to Ovid's *Ars* 3.229ff., the roles and characters which we encounter in Roman love elegy appear as modified and adapted to the epistolary context: Calpurnia's aunt Hispulla resembles the elegiac *lena*, Calpurnia herself the *puella docta* and Pliny the *poeta doctus* and *amator* who, in contrast to his elegiac counterpart, always keeps his wife under control (256). Elegiac reminiscences also pervade Pliny's letters to Calpurnia, as several scholars have already pointed out. H. succeeds in detecting further allusions to Ovid (e.g. *Ep.* 19; *Am.* 1.11-12, 2.11 and 16) and Propertius (1.11-12) and also offers the stimulating idea that *Ep.* 7.5, where Pliny uses not only elegiac but also juridical language, shows similarities to a *controversia* (398-9). In his conclusion (423-40), H. argues, inter alia, that Pliny's use of elegiac motifs is eclectic and that the letters on and to his wife not only aim at presenting Pliny's marriage but especially at demonstrating his skills as a poet. The monograph is completed by a bibliography, indices and two appendices with the family trees of Pliny and Calpurnia as well as Arria.

The book, unfortunately, is not free from errors and weaknesses. For example, on pages 124-5 where letter 2.20 is discussed, H. refers to Whitton's commentary on *Epistles* Book 2 (2013: 271)² where it is stated that "the first tale resembles a satirical epigram of Agathias (*Anth. Pal.* 11.382, 6c AD)". In H.'s German paraphrase it is suddenly Pliny who borrowed from (the late antique poet) Agathias: "die Epistel 2.20, die ... Anleihen bei einem satirischen Epigramm des oströmischen Historikers und Dichters Agathias genommen hat". Given that H. discusses the letters written to Calpurnia in much detail and convincingly demonstrates how Pliny plays with elegiac motifs in these letters, it is surprising that he does not refer to other contemporary writers who combine elements familiar from Catullus and Roman love elegy with the topic of marriage and might even have inspired Pliny: Martial, for instance, mentions the poetess Sulpicia and her husband Calenus (10.35 and 38, i.e. in the same book where Martial also praises Pliny, cf. 10.20[19]), and both Martial and Statius characterize Lucius Arruntius Stella as an elegist in love with Violentilla (or Ianthis), whom he succeeded to marry (cf. *Stat. Silv.* 1.2; *Mart.* 6.21). A discussion of these passages would have helped to better contextualize Pliny's letters to his wife within post-classical Latin literature. Moreover, H.'s book could have profited from more revising and trimming as it is often very repetitive both when it comes to Latin quotations (in Chapter 4 the text of each letter is first quoted as a whole and later again piece by piece) and interpretations of the texts.

² C. Whitton, *Pliny the Younger: Epistles Book II*, Cambridge 2013.

Irrespective of these critical remarks, H. offers a valuable, although not always very reader-friendly contribution to scholarship on gender-aspects in Pliny the Younger's *Letters* and Men's Studies in the field of Classics. His findings provide a useful basis for further research on masculinity and the role of the husband in Roman Imperial literature.

MARGOT NEGER
University of Cyprus
neger.margot@ucy.ac.cy