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Morice's Stories in Attic Greek [book review]

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Anne Mahoney, *Morice's Stories in Attic Greek*. Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2005. Pp. 204. ISBN 1-58510-189-3. \$24.95 (pb).

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Word count: 991 words

The revised edition of *Morice's Stories in Attic Greek* by Anne Mahoney (M.) is a welcome addition to the expanding stock of well-done texts that encourage students to practice "rapid, fluent reading" (p. 2). The level, length, and standard diction of the selections in this volume are appropriate for both transitional materials in the later stages of an introductory course or for supplemental material at the intermediate level. The book's 263 short passages also provide an ideal source of readings for quizzes, exams, and "at sight" exercises, although it is the hope of this reviewer that this text is put to more widespread and innovative uses.

Morice, translator of Pindar and entomologist, constructed his collection of short passages "to supply beginners in Greek with materials for construing, easier than Xenophon, more interesting than the disconnected sentences of a Delectus, and better calculated than Aesop to familiarise a young reader with the vocabulary and idiom of the best Attic prose writers" (p. 3).

Following two short prefaces -- the former to M.'s new edition; the latter to Morice's Second Edition of 1879 -- the book contains five sections: Hints for Reading, Easy Stories, Vocabulary, Vocabulary of Proper Names, and Notes on Sources. Although the bulk of the text remains faithful to Morice's Second Edition, Mahoney has significantly revised the "Hints for Reading" (renamed from Morice's "Hints for Beginners") "in accordance with modern principles in teaching Greek" (p. 1).¹ Specifically M. urges students and teachers to avoid construing -- i.e. decoding a sentence into English after locating the main verb. This valuable section includes suggestions for "Using the Vocabulary," which provides clearly stated and useful reminders on augments, reduplication, and compounds, and "Grammar for Reading," which advocates "reading Greek as it is written, by phrases, in the normal Greek word order, rather than attempting to re-arrange it into something approximating English" (p. 1). This section also includes short notes on "Pesky Little Words," "Punctuation," and "Pronouns," and longer entries on "Subjunctives and Optatives," and finally "The Article," which contains a particularly useful summary of the topic. In all, these "Hints" are clearly written and -- at only eight pages -- will be easily digestible to the beginning reader.

The "Easy Stories" include 263 passages of approximately 100 words each. These passages fall into two main sections. The topics of the first 198 passages comprise a wide-ranging selection

tending towards the mythological, anecdotal, cultural, and scientific. Nearly all of these passages are inspired by classical history or culture, although the book's origin as an English school text can be seen in the occasional post-Classical tale.² While a majority of these passages are isolated vignettes, longer stories spanning several passages are also present. As a result, there are 118 distinct episodes in the 198 passages. Where feasible and appropriate, M. has attributed those passages that are derived from classical sources. Brief descriptions of these authors are found in book's last section, "Notes on Sources."

The final sixty-five passages are all drawn from Greek history, with passages 205-263 largely derived from Thucydides. In these passages, the practice of separating augments and prepositional elements from verbs with a hyphen is abandoned. These passages conclude with a cliffhanger, as the news of the Sicilian disaster reaches Athens.

Most of the passages have two or three notes that focus on grammar, with the occasional comment on cultural material. Earlier passages are slightly more heavily annotated; but even here the number of notes never passes a half-dozen. Notes occasionally include references to Latin constructions, but these only serve to supplement the clear information of the note and a knowledge of Latin is never assumed.³ Brief information about the individuals and places that appear in the stories is provided not *ad loc.* but in the separate "Vocabulary of Proper Names." The limited number of notes, fewer than in the typical beginning or intermediate reader, is in keeping with the M.'s desire to promote reading over decoding. Given the book's complete vocabulary, the paucity of notes is unlikely to hinder most students.

The entries in the forty-six-page "Vocabulary" are abbreviated but functional. Nouns of the first and second declensions receive only a headword, gender, and brief definition; the practice of giving consonant stems for the third-declension in place of the full genitive may require some adaptation by students. Likewise, principal parts of verbs are listed only when they are not predictable, although most irregular and suppletive stems are supplied.

The book is admirably error-free. The presentation of the text is generally commendable. The printing is clear and the Greek font is large enough to be read easily. Students will, for example, have no difficulty distinguishing smooth and rough breathings. Notes appear in a smallish, but still readable, font that helps maintain the focus on the Greek text, where it belongs. The paperback is well produced with an elegant, conversation-starting cover that features the Attic black-figure painting of Achilles and Ajax playing dice. Its glued spine withstood several readings without unusual wear and should capably withstand the rigors of classroom use. One minor complaint: the text runs a bit too close to the binding at the center of the book, causing the last letters on each verso to be slightly obscured and distorted -- although still legible -- when the book is opened normally. Since the stories in the first three-quarters of the work are arranged largely on the principle of variation, indices, whether by ancient source or topic, would be welcome, although an enterprising educator can compile such lists without too much difficulty.

In summary, M.'s *Morice's Stories in Attic Greek* is a valuable resource for educators looking to ease students into reading un-modified Greek with facility and at a reasonable speed. It is substantial enough to function as the central text in the later stages of an elementary class or the beginning of an intermediate course, for which its abundance of short passages on varied topics

also renders it a valuable supplementary text.

Notes:

[1.](#) While reviewing this book, I was unable to secure a copy of Morice's Second Edition for comparison, and so I have based my comments on the differences between the two editions on M.'s own notes in the preface.

[2.](#) E.g. King John (p. 16), Canute (p. 31), and Louis VII (p. 81), and the traditional bell-tower tale from the town of Atri (pp. 56-57).

[3.](#) E.g. "Recall that ὄτι with a superlative adverb or adjective means 'as X as possible,' so here 'as fast as possible.' The idiom is like Latin *quam rapidissime* (p. 25); "Genitive absolute. Remember the genitive absolute (like the Latin ablative absolute) has a logical connection, but not a grammatical connection, with the rest of the sentence" (p. 20).

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