

Paola CECCARELLI, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing. A Cultural History (600 BC-150 BC)*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. 1 vol., 464 p. Prix: 95 £. ISBN 978-0-19-967559.

The aim of this monumental study is not only to contextualise Greek letter writing between 600 and 150 BC within communicative practices, but also to look at documentary letters and letters embedded in a narrative. An important part of Ceccarelli's bibliography focuses on letters of the Classical and Hellenistic period. The book starts with discussing some problems related with ancient epistolography, such as typology of letters, or ancient Greek terminology (p. 1-19). The author points out in the second chapter (p. 23-58) that letter writing, as a communication across a spatial distance was not among the earliest uses of Greek writing. Examining the oldest extant documentary letters (she counts 42 letters that have been preserved), the author argues that for the fifth and even partly the fourth century BC it is impossible to speak of a codified epistolary style. A survey of (contemporary) curses shows the original affinity between both curses and letters. In the next chapter (p. 59-99), Ceccarelli analyses the traditions on the invention of writing. The early narratives that represent writing as an import from outside the Greek world, did not focus on the function of this new art, whereas the traditions that attributed the invention to a Greek hero, pointed to the ability of the written word to preserve information or to its potential for creativity. Further, the author goes on to discuss stories that date from the classical period and deal with the difficulties of epistolary communication. She suggests on the base of these narratives that letter writing remained until the fifth century a relatively limited activity. The same uneasiness with letter writing can still be found in a small treatise by Lucian who discusses how oral and written greeting formulae have evolved. Ceccarelli argues in the fourth chapter (p. 101-179) that the Greek historians of the fifth and the early fourth century connect letter writing rather with an oriental milieu and secretive connotations. The infrequent use of letters for official communication is proved by the fact that these documents do not have a fully developed formulary. Further, a contrastive analysis of oral and written communication in Herodotus' *Histories* shows that in both cases the messages are couched in the same terms. Most letters are mentioned because they have a peculiar external element, like means of conveyance or material support. From a formal point of view the letters in Thucydides function in the same way as oral communication. These letters are either private letters by individuals seeking power or official dispatches to cities. The work of Xenophon does not mark any important change in the treatment of written communication. A development fully operative in the fourth century is that historians now write letters that enter into public circulation. These letters either engage in intellectual disputes or are used as pamphlets to address political issues. Finally, the ubiquity of letters in Polybius' *Histories* reflects the understanding by the historian of the important role of written communication. The very fact that interest in the material support of letters has disappeared, indicates an increasing awareness of the possibilities letters have as a means of communication. The author concludes that Polybius highlighted not only the treacherous purpose that can be served by a letter, but also the authenticity and power that is guaranteed by the same instrument. In the fifth chapter (p. 183-264), Ceccarelli discusses in great detail the references to the activity

of writing and the written document in tragedians' and comedians' works to (finally) arrive at the treatment of letters. Although it is necessary –as the author puts it in the preface– to “contextualize letter writing within communicative practices, as well as more generally within the larger field of writing” (p. v), it is a little disappointing that the main attention in this chapter remains focused on writing and written documents that do not belong to the epistolary domain. As for the tragedians, it is only in Euripides' works that references to letters begin to appear. Here letters constitute a central element in the plot. The author highlights that in the majority of cases, the epistolary exchange is seen from a negative angle. Also in comedy, letters become an important element of the plot, moreover they refer to reflections about public speaking and writing within the polis. The letters present in the speeches of the Athenian orators are analysed in the following chapter (p. 265-295). Ceccarelli stresses the fact that very few private letters are mentioned in (forensic) speeches. On the other hand, official letters do abound in the deliberative genre. These letters were used for public service and interstate diplomacy. The author also argues that the letters of Isocrates are at the beginning of what will become a tradition of prose treatises in epistolary form. Finally, the official communication consisting of letters and decrees sent by *poleis* and kings in the Hellenistic period is explored (p. 297-330). Comparing the language of Hellenistic Greek royal letters and civic decrees, Ceccarelli argues that the royal letters intentionally avoided some important terms used in the decrees of the *poleis*. The two forms of diplomatic language could have coexisted as long as the city states preserved their independence. As for the letters sent by *poleis*, the author distinguishes two basic categories: official letters conveying a decision or specific information and “covering” letters meant to accompany a decree. A rather limited number of *poleis* wrote letters used for official communication (the author counts 69 letters preserved on stone). She points out that the relatively high number of letters connected with Sparta, sorts well with the picture that emerges from literary sources. The chapter terminates with the challenging interpretation that “the use of letters for official communication has to be explained by the use in a non-democratic regime of formats typical of private communication also for the sphere which we should rather define as public” (p. 330). One of attractive elements of this book is that it wants to examine how letter writing defines itself with regard to other writing practices. Moreover the author explains convincingly that the literary form of the letter form evolves with the broader historical context in which it is set. Another interesting point that emerges from this book is that it clearly examines how a letter is determined by the choice ancient society made between oral and written communication. However, it might have been interesting to examine how personal letters do correspond with ancient epistolary theory. It is generally admitted that instructions how to write letters have been around from the Hellenistic age. The first extensive discussion on epistolary theory appears in Demetrius, *De Elocutione*, 223-238. The oldest extant handbook Ps. Demetrius, *Formae epistolicae* is partly situated in the Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, this minor point of criticism does not detract from the overall quality of the work. In conclusion, this book is impressive in its chronological range and, moreover, in the texts it treats. The study gives a thorough overview of an overall domain that until now has been treated in rather detailed studies. Undoubtedly this book

represents a useful complement to studies that deal with the later periods of Greek epistolography.

Bruno MARIEN

Annette HARDER, Remco REGTUIT & Gerry WAKKER (Ed.), *Hellenistic Poetry in Context*. Louvain, Peeters, 2014. 1 vol., 349 p., nombr. ill. Prix : 64 €. ISBN 978-90-429-2985-2.

En 2010, le « Workshop on Hellenistic Poetry » organisé par l'Université de Groningen fut consacré au rôle que joue la poésie hellénistique dans le contexte social et culturel de sa création, cette dernière se révélant particulièrement liée aux changements et aux nouveaux développements que connut le monde au III^e siècle av. J.-C. Les articles de K. Cheshire, A. Regan et I. Schaaf traitent du rapport qu'entretiennent les textes avec la religion telle qu'elle est perçue et pratiquée dans les nouveaux royaumes hellénistiques. K. Cheshire étudie la fonction religieuse et civique de l'hymne 5 de Callimaque : le poète, en remodelant pour le public alexandrin un rituel ancien d'Argos, cité qui constitue une part importante de l'héritage culturel et religieux de la ville, utilise un élément mythologique cyrénéen, l'histoire de Chariclo, pour proposer un modèle de responsabilité civique et de piété. S'intéressant à un autre personnage féminin, A. Regan analyse les pratiques magiques de la Médée des *Argonautiques* en les comparant successivement à celles de la Médée d'Euripide, de Pindare, et aux enchantements de la Circé homérique : héritant de ces personnages antérieurs quelques traits essentiels, Médée chez Apollonios de Rhodes est enrichie d'éléments propres au monde hellénistique, se situant au carrefour de plusieurs types de personnes et de personnages appartenant au contexte et à l'imaginaire alexandrins. C'est en revanche à une inscription de la fin du IV^e siècle av. J.-C. découverte dans l'enceinte du temple d'Apollon d'Érétrie, l'*Hymne aux Dactyles érétriens*, qu'I. Schaaf consacre son étude. Situait l'œuvre dans le contexte religieux grec, égyptien et eubéen du début de l'époque hellénistique, il analyse le rôle attribué dans le récit aux trois personnages principaux – Apollon, Eurythéos et les Dactyles –, ainsi que les liens qu'ils entretiennent avec d'autres figures mythologiques. Le rôle croissant des femmes dans la société et, notamment, la modification du rôle des reines dans l'idéologie politique est un autre aspect historique dont la poésie hellénistique se fait le miroir : S. Caneva éclaire le rôle des femmes et d'*éros* dans la poésie de cour et, plus particulièrement, dans la représentation du couple royal dans les dynasties ptolémaïque et séleucide. Textes poétiques et documents épigraphiques témoignent de l'importance accordée à la coopération des époux, à leur complémentarité et à la réciprocité du sentiment amoureux ; en devenant ainsi la source personnifiée de la légitimation et de la continuité de la maison royale, cette figure de reine proche d'Aphrodite sert l'idéologie ptolémaïque. C'est également à la figure de la reine que s'intéresse D.L. Clayman, faisant écho à Stefano Caneva : il propose pour deux poèmes de Callimaque, « Acontios et Cydippe » et « Phrygius et Piéria », une datation entre 279 et 274 ; comme la « Boucle de Bérénice », ils feraient allusion à l'histoire de la reine Bérénice II et plus particulièrement à ses deux mariages, avec Démétrios puis avec Ptolémée III Évergète. Tout en réhabilitant la reine, ils attribuent à son expérience politique et personnelle des aspects poétiques, mythologiques et