

novative or idiosyncratic Cicero and his pen pals were, if at all. I'm sure your conc. undersells itself.

Well-produced, easy on the eye, but eighty-five US dollars is going to be beyond the pockets of most individual readers. All serious libraries should have a Hall, but can't you get onto OUP to run a paperback edition? Undergrads should read this, not just the old pros.

Anyway, I need to dash—CB needs hard copy as well as e-copy and I haven't even started it yet. Just wanted to let you know I'm on the case.

All the best,

ROGER REES
St. Andrews University

Hilla Halla-Aho, **Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum: The Non-Literary Latin Letters: A Study of their Syntax and Pragmatics**. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2009. Pp. 189. ISBN: 978-951-653-363-9.

This study is a slightly revised version of the author's dissertation, which was defended at the University of Helsinki in January 2008. Halla-Aho (hereafter H.) investigates the language of the non-literary letters from Vindolanda and Egypt (with some reference also to the North African texts outside of Egypt, and the poorly preserved letters from Vindonissa in modern Switzerland). As indicated in the title, the focus is on the syntax and pragmatics of the letters; in particular, opening and closing salutations; sentence connection; "syntactic incoherence"; and word order (all of which are further described below). Although the corpora under investigation are fairly small, and their texts often fragmentary, they are of exceptional value linguistically, in as much as they offer a unique portrait of Latin. H.'s book contains several interesting and insightful (though very cautious) discussions, but its success is ultimately limited by two problems. The first is that the arguments and claims of the book are not always clearly expressed; the second is that treatment of the issues is at times superficial. The work is comprised of seven chapters, which are followed by a short excursus on anaphoric pronouns; bibliography; an appendix detailing the corpus; and subject index. Below I sketch each of the chapters and offer brief evaluative remarks.

Chapter one, "Introduction," begins with a description of the aims of the work, and is followed by a very helpful and informative description of the corpora of non-literary Latin letters; the relationship between the non-literary letters and Latin more broadly; and then a short section on scribal context. Chapter two, "Setting the Context: Variation and Change in Latin," sets the stage for the rest of the study by discussing some of the broader issues that the non-literary letters raise, such as the notion of Vulgar Latin; language standardization; substandard written language; and the differences between written and spoken language. (On this last topic, one can add J. Miller and R. Weinert, *Spontaneous Spoken Language: Syntax and Discourse* [Oxford 1998], among many other works, to the list on p. 37 n. 50.) These two chapters do

a good job of introducing the corpora and giving a broad overview of the issues involved in studying these texts. It would, however, have been helpful to have a more detailed presentation of the theoretical framework. There is a short paragraph to this effect on p. 22, in which H. situates her work within S. Dik's Functional Grammar, but there is no overall description of the pragmatic framework and concomitant assumptions (we are instead given this piecemeal as the book unfolds). An explicit summary of the claims to be made in the subsequent chapters, as well some description of how the individual chapters form a bigger picture, would also have been an improvement.

With chapter three, "Letter Phraseology," we enter into the core of the work. Here H. investigates the formulas that are used to open and close letters, and concludes (p. 62) that variation in salutation is geographically conditioned (at Vindolanda, usage is generally sparse, while in Egypt it is far more extensive, and this because of Greek influence); by contrast, social status and rank appear not to have had much effect on salutation. Chapter four takes up the issue of sentence connection, and the question of the relationship between parataxis and spoken language. H. concludes (p. 88) that the use of *et* to connect sentences in narratives is a feature of the spoken language, as are its topic-changing and presentational functions. In investigating the alternation between *rogo mittas* and *rogo ut mittas*, she claims (p. 89) that the presence of *ut* is not conditioned by register (i.e., formality) or a written/oral divide: she suggests instead that the complexity of the construction (including the distance between the matrix and embedded verbs) is relevant. Chapter five, "Syntactic Incoherence in the Letters," investigates a small handful of constructions that includes anacoluthon, contamination, and accusatives absolute. The meaning of the term "incoherence" is thus (unusually) broad here, and does not necessarily refer to constructions that cannot be parsed (be it semantically or morpho-syntactically). Indeed, the notion of "incoherence" is a complicated one, and it is dismaying that H.'s analyses at points veer off into psycholinguistic and cognitive territory without laying the necessary groundwork: e.g. p. 97, where H. tries to explain the form of a clause by claiming that its author "simply had too many things on his mind." The advantage of examining the various constructions in this chapter together was not clear to me, and in my view it would have been more helpful to have integrated the section on "thematic constituents" (pp. 106–118) with the pragmatic discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter six, "Word Order," takes up a central issue of classical scholarship: why do words show up in the order that they do, and how does the meaning (broadly construed) of a clause change if that sequence is altered? This issue is so important because it goes to the heart of our ability to read texts closely. After making some salutary remarks on the problem of using typological evidence to interpret Latin word order, H. investigates the relative ordering of verbs and objects in her corpus, and what role pragmatics plays therein. The discussion of information structure (pp. 139–153) is at times confusing, e.g. when H. uses the term *topic* to refer to two different categories, namely what she calls a "topic" and a "new topic"; in a similar vein, the terms "neutral focus" (p. 147) and "weak focus" (p. 153) are used

to refer to the same category, although neither is precisely defined. It would have been helpful if H. had made explicit exactly how she arrived at her pragmatic judgments of the sentences, as well as provided more context for the examples that she discusses (or even just included the preceding and following sentences in her quotations). The study of pragmatics and word order has witnessed significant strides over the past two decades; a good deal of this work is overlooked by H., e.g. that of Ellen Prince, Gregory Ward, Nomi Erteschik-Shir, and Devine and Stephens (their 2006 book is cited, but not discussed in any detail), as well as the recent Ph.D. dissertation of K.M. Hanna, *Basic Word Order in De Agricultura* (University of Auckland 2004). It is hard to know what to make of H.'s conclusion (pp. 153–154) that Latin word order “cannot be reduced either to syntactic or pragmatic factors.” Does this mean that a theory of Latin word order will need to make reference to both pragmatics and syntax? If so, then her analysis is ultimately aligned with those in the generative-syntax tradition. For one starts out with an assumed base configuration (the syntax part), which then gets reorganized, or “scrambled” (the pragmatics part). Or does it mean that reference to both components is necessary but not sufficient? If so, then what other explanatory mechanisms do we need to account for the observed patterns?

D.M. GOLDSTEIN
Thesaurus linguae Latinae

Stephen Halliwell, **Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity**. New York: Cambridge University Publishing, 2008. Pp. xiii + 616. ISBN: 978-0-521-71774-8. \$65.00 (Paperback). ISBN: 978-0-521-88900-1. \$140.00 (Hardback).

Extensively documented and subtly argued, Halliwell's *Greek Laughter* examines the varied faces of laughter, ridicule, and mirth among ancient Greeks. Ranging the millennium between Homer's laughing gods and stern “agelastic” church fathers, the book fills a tall order, in ten densely footnoted chapters and two appendices. A difficult work to summarize, therefore, but one might start by saying that in laughter H. pinpoints a locus of critical inquiry that runs the gamut of social settings and speech-act genres, from symposia to public religious cult, from comedy to philosophy, from unbridled literary satire to full-throated condemnation of all laughter by Christian moralists.

Chapter 1 lays a nuanced theoretical basis. H. insists that “comprehensive theories of laughter...are radically misconceived” (10), and rejects the three “canonical” theories of laughter—superiority, incongruity, and release—opting instead for indeterminacy, thick historical-cultural contextualization, and scrupulous attention to emic terms and understandings. A laugh is apparently never just a laugh: “An irreducible complexity...inheres in Greek attitudes to what takes place when human beings themselves engage in laughter” (16). Laughter is dialectical, between hidden affects and bodily signs, play and seriousness, laughers and laughed-at. The latter dimension points to the social micro-dynamics of shame and shaming, and perhaps most