

Book reviews

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| Aaron Poochigian (trans.), <i>Aratus: Phaenomena</i> . By Daryn Lehoux | 123 |
| Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (trans.), <i>Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times</i> . By Debby Banham | 125 |
| Alexander Marr, <i>Between Raphael and Galileo: Mutio Oddi and the Mathematical Culture of Late Renaissance Italy</i> . By Renée Raphael | 126 |
| Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (eds.), <i>Collecting across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World</i> . By Christopher M. Parsons | 128 |
| Peter R. Anstey, <i>John Locke and Natural Philosophy</i> . By James A.T. Lancaster | 129 |
| Justin E.H. Smith, <i>Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life</i> . By Stephanie Eichberg | 131 |
| Rebecca Messbarger, <i>The Lady Anatomist: The Life and Work of Anna Morandi Manzolini</i> . By Anna Maerker | 132 |
| John Bender and Michael Marrinan, <i>The Culture of Diagram</i> . By Norberto Serpente | 133 |
| B. Ricardo Brown, <i>Until Darwin: Science, Human Variety and the Origin of Race</i> . By Matthew R. Goodrum | 135 |
| David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers (eds.), <i>Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Science</i> . By Casper Andersen | 136 |
| Ian Hesketh, <i>The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak</i> . By Nathalie Richard | 138 |
| Alfred I. Tauber, <i>Freud, the Reluctant Philosopher</i> . By Roger Smith | 140 |
| Vanessa Heggie, <i>A History of British Sports Medicine</i> . By Julie Anderson | 141 |
| Erling Norrby, <i>Nobel Prizes and Life Sciences</i> . By Donald Gillies | 142 |
| Mark Priestley, <i>A Science of Operations: Machines, Logic, and the Invention of Programming</i> . By Nathan Ensmenger | 144 |
| Charlotte Sleight, <i>Literature and Science</i> . By Amanda Mordavsky Caleb | 145 |
| David A. Kirby, <i>Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema</i> . By Jean-Baptiste Gouyon | 146 |

AARON POOCHIGIAN (trans.), **Aratus: Phaenomena**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. Pp. xxxiv + 72. ISBN 978-0-8018-9466-4. \$50.00 (hardback), \$25.00 (paperback).
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Translation styles come and go. In the nineteenth century and earlier, it was common – and apparently more profitable than it is today – to market verse translations of classical poetry, which could be read and hailed as poetic contributions in their own right. But rendering Greek or Latin verse into English is difficult and a range of compromises must be made: what rhythms to use (epic hexameters don't thrum very well in English), whether to rhyme, as English poems traditionally do, whether (or how) to preserve allusions that may be entirely opaque to the modern reader, how to handle poetic devices that rely on quirks of Greek or Latin, and so on. Moreover, although 'accuracy' is often given lip service, it is not always the primary desideratum of the publisher or the reader, for whom it will often be trumped by 'readability'. Finally, the tastes and expectations of readers change over time, and what appealed to Victorians may not appeal to us.

Consider the great classicist and poet A.E. Housman's 'Fragment of a Greek tragedy' (1883), his magisterial parody of ancient poetry as it was then translated. It begins with the chorus addressing a stranger in what reads like a Shakespearean sonnet on steroids:

O suitably-attired-in-leather-boots
 Head of a traveller, wherefore seeking whom
 Whence by what way how purposed art thou come
 To this well-nightingaled vicinity?

In response to the whole school of verse translations that Housman was sending up here, it gradually became common to render many classical poems into prose, and an argument was generally made about how much easier it was to capture meaning and things like philosophical nuance – particularly in didactic texts like those of Aratus or Lucretius – when the translator was not constantly fighting with metre.

In Aaron Poochigian's *Aratus*, we find the great Hellenistic astronomical poem rendered (one might say, 'bravely rendered') into rhyming pentameters. For the reasons I cited above, the two other in-print English translations of this poem both opted for prose, and for clear attempts to stick as closely to the meaning of the Greek as possible: A.W. Mair and G.R. Mair, trans., *Callimachus: Hymns and Epigrams; Aratus* (1921); D. Kidd, *Aratus: Phaenomena* (1997). What the present translation has achieved in relation to these, and what it has had to give up, may be clearer from a short comparison of Kidd's prose rendering with Poochigian's verse (more or less randomly selected). Here is Kidd (p. 83):

Impressive is the Bear, and impressive are the stars that she has nearby: once you have sighted them, you do not need any other guide, such are the stars that in beauty and magnitude move before her feet, one in front of the forelegs, one before the legs that descend from her loins, and another under the hind knees. But all of them, individually in different positions, go on their way without a name.

And now Poochigian (p. 6):

That bear is marvellous, and marvellous
 The stars that are nearby, before her paws.
 Just glimpse those gleaming magnitudes, and you
 Need not go squinting for a further clue –
 Each of them can be easily divined:
 There at her forelegs, there before her hind,
 And there beneath the back of her rear knee.
 Anonymous, they all wheel separately.

Here the 'easily divined' line seems to be Poochigian's own interpolation, perhaps to improve the flow, or perhaps to try and disambiguate what he meant by 'need not go squinting for a further clue'. Contrast this to Kidd's 'you do not need any other guide, such are the stars that in beauty and magnitude move', where the implication is clearer: the shape of a bear is well mapped out, and the stars that make it up are beautiful and bright. Poochigian's 'gleaming magnitudes' does not seem to me to capture the *kalos te megas te* of the original, either. On the other hand, considering the restraints imposed by the form, Poochigian does a better job of capturing many features of the Greek than I would have thought possible. And his translation is certainly very readable, almost moreish at times. I am in no position to judge his work as poetry in its own right, but suffice to say it has been well reviewed in this regard elsewhere.

There are comprehensive notes to the translation, with good comments on how the author has handled various aspects of the Greek, as well as on various poetic features of the original that have

been lost or altered in the translation, although even an alert reader could be forgiven for not knowing that these notes were there (I only found them after finishing the entire text and reading through two appendices – and how many readers will plough through all the appendices to everything they read?). After digging around some more, I did manage to find a one-sentence notice that I had missed on p. xxix of the introduction. A short indication, though, even in a footnote, at the beginning of the actual text would have been very helpful, and it is really too bad if other interested readers miss out on these notes as they add considerably to the experience of the poem.

One of the puzzling things that is sometimes difficult to explain to students is why Aratus was so wildly popular in antiquity – after all, his was easily the most widely read poem from the Hellenistic era. That fact can be a real head-scratcher for the modern reader. Poochigian's translation will perhaps help in this regard, and he manages to give the poem some real life, for which we should be thankful. Scholarly readers may prefer the more literal translation in Kidd (at five times the price – although for that money you get the Greek as well), but Poochigian won't be beat for readability.

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CALVIN B. KENDALL and FAITH WALLIS (trans.), *Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times*. Translated Texts for Historians 56. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 222. ISBN 978-1-8463-496-4. £16.99 (paperback). doi:10.1017/S0007087412000179

This fairly slim volume completes the project of making available in English the Venerable Bede's three main 'scientific' works. This is an important enterprise, bringing to a non-Latin audience a little-known episode in intellectual history: Bede is well known for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, but less well known are his biblical commentaries, preaching materials, and didactic texts on virtually every field of learning then current. Of particular interest to the history of science are his contributions to cosmology, chronology and the computus (that uniquely medieval discipline that combined astronomy and arithmetic to enable the hugely complex calculations underlying the Christian calendar), contributions all the more remarkable for being made in eighth-century Northumbria, described by Bede himself as 'the edge of the world'. Both translators in this volume are distinguished Bede scholars: historians of science are more likely to be familiar with Wallis's translation of his *De temporum ratione* (under the title *The Reckoning of Time*, also in TTH, 1999), with an excellent introduction to the computus, but Kendall has edited and translated Bedan texts both didactic and exegetical, including the *De Genesi* (*On Genesis*, TTH, 2008).

The *De Genesi* is crucial to the understanding of the two works presented here, and the relationship between them, for it is in the six days of creation that Bede's cosmography (in the *De natura rerum*, 'On the nature of things') and chronology (*De temporibus*, 'On times') have their origin. For Bede, the only reason for studying these topics was to understand God's will through his creation and its workings, just as exegesis allows us to understand it through his Word in the Bible. It is no doubt true that most of Bede's readers were interested primarily in one very specific aspect of divine intention, namely when they ought to celebrate Easter and the other moveable feasts, but for our author the universe was there to help him magnify the glory of the Lord by laying it out for his readers in all its variety and detail. This purpose is much clearer in the present two works than in the 'Reckoning of time', which has much more the character of an educational syllabus, albeit one that takes the reader from the rudiments of counting to the most abstruse calculations then possible (and it seems that Bede was working without the abacus, let alone Arabic numerals or a place system). Indeed, Bede compiled *De temporum ratione*, he tells