

Three Medieval Greek Romances: Velthandros and Chrysandza, Kallimachos and Chryssorroi, Livistros and

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Reviews

Gavin Betts, trans., *Three medieval Greek romances: Velthandros and Chrysandza, Kallimachos and Chryssorroi, Livistros and Rodamni*. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, vol. 98, series B, 1996. Pp. xxxiii, 192.

All too few texts in Early Modern Greek have been translated into English, or indeed any other modern language. *Digenis Akritis* is a notable exception. As a corollary few have attracted critical attention beyond a restricted group of Neohellenists and Byzantinists and even among these attention has until recently focussed on philological rather than interpretative issues. So any attempt to bring such texts before a wider audience and open them up to the scrutiny of those who are unencumbered with the traditional baggage of Byzantine and Neohellenic scholarship is to be welcomed. Gavin Betts has made just such an attempt. He has produced readable prose translations of the Palaeologan verse romances *Velthandros, Kallimachos* and *Livistros* and anecdotal evidence suggests that eyes are already being opened, though one should suspect that Roderick Beaton's *The Medieval Greek Romance* has prepared the ground for the reception of translations such as these. However, there are negative as well as positive things to say about this book.

The selection of texts is sensible up to a point. These three romances have a certain unity: they share motifs (mostly notably allegorical castles) as well as an intriguing mixture of folk-tale and courtly themes and, despite many 'western trappings', they have no ostensible western prototype, unlike other comparable texts. The curiosity of a reader happening upon these for the first time is likely to be aroused. Problems start, however, over what precisely is to be translated. We still do not have adequate editions. That, of course, is the pussy-footing response and one which Betts has anticipated and quite rightly not allowed to stand in his way: 'it seems better to present a translation now, than to wait for a surer foundation on which to base it' (p. xxxii). The problem is more serious for *Livistros* with its multiple manuscripts and versions than for *Velthandros* and *Kallimachos* which each survive in one manuscript only. It is nonetheless a real problem and one that Betts has not solved in an entirely satisfactory manner. Textual notes are appended to the translations, but this is not a bilingual edition and the notes are almost invariably meaningless without recourse to an array of editions and secondary literature, much of which is hard to come by. It is no help to be told: 'Following Hatziyiakoumis (p. 239) in *I 823*' when one has no idea what the Greek wording is at that point nor what Hatziyiakoumis' conjecture is. The solution would have been to have printed a fuller apparatus, or rather set of notes, quoting in full both the disputed line and the proposed emendation. This would satisfy the Greek reader, and leave the non-Greek reader with a greater feeling of confidence. It is the solution adopted by Cupane in her *Romanzi cavallareschi bizantini* (UTET, Turin, 1995) which, although bilingual with an Italian translation facing the Greek text, is not a fully critical edition and has dispensed with an apparatus at the foot of the page.

One might also take issue with a number of points in the introduction, though much should be forgiven as Betts has been allowed less than forty pages in which to

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