

PAOLO CHIESA, *La trasmissione dei testi latini. Storia e metodo critico*, (Studi Superiori, 1151), Roma: Carocci Editore, 2019, 276 pp., €22,10, ISBN: 978-88-430-9445-5.¹

This book offers an introduction to the transmission of Latin texts and to the methods of textual criticism. These two subjects are closely related, since textual criticism enables us to map out the transmission of a text through the comparative analysis of its different surviving versions, while a study of the transmission can cast light on the individual surviving witnesses and on the transmission as whole. There already exist many handbooks of Latin textual criticism, while on the transmission of classical Latin (and Greek) texts we have the excellent *Scribes and Scholars*, first published in 1968 by Leighton D. Reynolds and Nigel G. Wilson, translated into several languages and recently updated for the third time.² Yet I can think of no existing book that combines these two subjects to such a good effect.

Paolo Chiesa set out to create a “sussidio didattico” (p. 12), an “educational resource” aimed at undergraduate and Masters-level students of the Faculties of Letters of Italian universities. For them, it will constitute an excellent, if demanding textbook on account of its lucid exposition, its breadth of perspective and its broad range of carefully chosen and interesting examples. But the greatest strength of this book from a didactic point of view is probably its patient demonstration of how knowledge about the transmission of a text is created through the study of individual readings and the application of the “metodo critico”, the method of textual criticism that stands in the title. Chiesa justifies a *stemma* or tests a passage of doubtful authenticity through the close study of the text, its variant readings and the conjectures that have been proposed. This provides students with philological training of the highest level, and it drives home the point that stemmatic knowledge is not created by reference to authority (or to bibliography), but through the careful study of the evidence. More experienced readers will be well served by the broad range of methodological problems, which are illustrated with examples drawn not only from the transmission of classical Latin literature, but also from early Christian writings (including the Latin Bible) and the Latin literature of the Middle Ages.³ This helps

¹ This review appears as part of the research project “Textual transmission and codicology: The poems of C. Valerius Catullus”, implemented with support from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund of Hungary, financed under the 2015 OTKA postdoctoral funding scheme (reference: OTKA 2015 PD 116524). Part of the review was written in the course of a Visiting Professorship at the Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Antichità di La Sapienza University in Rome.

² L. D. Reynolds, N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, Oxford 1968 (ed. 1), 2013 (ed. 4).

³ Chiesa is the co-editor of an important new series in this field: P. Chiesa, L. Castaldi

to illustrate a broader range of problems: classical texts often survive through late, corrupt sources that are the products of a long and ramified transmission, the early part of which is generally not clear, while the transmission of medieval texts tends to be shorter, less corrupt and sometimes reasonably clear up to its very first stages. While this book might not make any radically new claim about any particular text or any problem of methodology, more than once it provides a deeper insight into a well-known phenomenon: for example, Chiesa hits the nail on its head with the observation that when Latin texts were first printed, it led to a greater risk of alterations that there was a greater separation between different work phases than when books had been copied by hand (p. 107).

A long introductory chapter (pp. 15–60) offers a chronological account of the transmission of Latin texts, from the writing materials used in classical Rome through the various phases of the transmission of Latin texts up to the age of printing. The final section of this chapter (pp. 56–60) offers a brief introduction to “scientific philology” (used thus by Chiesa, between quotation marks). The rest of the book consists of chapters that set out a methodological problem or phenomenon through a case study, or a small number of examples, which are discussed in detail. Eight chapters constitute the first part, entitled “Storia della tradizione” (pp. 61–113). These chapters are devoted to purely historical matters such as the ancient “editions” of classical Latin texts, palimpsests and the hunt for ancient manuscripts by the humanists of the Italian Renaissance. Particularly valuable is a short chapter on the *Retractationes* written by Augustine in his old age, a work in which he discusses his previous writings, including their genesis and their publication and diffusion (ch. 2, pp. 71–8). The second part, headed “Metodo critico” (pp. 115–245), consists of fifteen chapters devoted to problems of stemmatics and textual criticism. Some of these, such as the reconstruction of the archetype of Lucretius (ch. 11, pp. 135–41), will be familiar to most scholars in the field; others such as the manuscript tradition of Plautus (ch. 13, pp. 155–61) have received less attention in recent times. An interesting chapter, relying on recent work by Rossana Guglielmetti and others, discusses the diffusion of authorial variants in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (ch. 20, pp. 203–12). Appropriately, the final chapter offers a brief historical account of the textual criticism of the Latin Bible (ch. 23, pp. 231–45). The book closes with a comprehensive bibliography and a useful set of indices.

The lucidity and erudition of this handbook leave little to be desired; it has been edited carefully and misprints are rare.⁴ I was slightly surprised to find that Chiesa often simplifies the Latin texts he translates: for example, Lupus of Ferrières, *Ep.* 1.7 *sed semel pudoris transgressus limitem, etiam hoc postulo* (“and now that I have already crossed the boundaries of decency, I also make this demand”) is rendered at p. 86 as “Con grande sfrontatezza vi chiedo pure” (“with great shamelessness, I also ask you”). At p. 82, Livy 3.26.9 *togam ... e tugurio*

(eds.), *La trasmissione dei testi latini del Medioevo—Mediaeval Latin Texts and their Transmission* (Te.Tra. I–V), Florence 2004–12.

⁴ For “lino” in the antepenultimate line of p. 69, read “limo”. At p. 146, below, read “Elfriede Hulshoff Pol”.

proferre (“to bring out his toga from the hut”) is rendered as “portargli fuori la toga” (“to bring out his toga”). Evidently, the aim is to be clear and concise, rather than to reproduce all the twists and turns of the original; but one wonders how many students will be confused when they compare the translation with the Latin text.

Downright mistakes are rare. At p. 150, Chiesa quotes Tacitus, *Annals* 14.7.2 from C. D. Fisher’s Oxford Classical Text of 1906; but Fisher uses a different punctuation. At p. 158 section 3, Chiesa attributes certain disjunctive errors in the two recensions of Plautus’ comedies to the scribe of the Ambrosian palimpsest (A) and to that of the lost ancestor of the Palatine recension (P); but it is not possible to tell whether most of these errors arose in either manuscript, or in an intermediate source between A or P and the archetype; and readings are altered not only by scribes, but also by annotators and other factors such as physical damage to a codex.

A rare methodological error occurs on p. 103. A number of ancient texts reached us through a famous manuscript that was discovered during the Renaissance but has been lost since then and can only be reconstructed with the help of its descendants. Chiesa notes that such a lost manuscript should be regarded as the archetype of the transmission (“In queste circostanze, il manoscritto perduto è da considerare l’archetipo dell’intera tradizione, e va ricostruito sulla base dei testimoni *recentiores* che ne derivano”). Nothing guarantees that there should survive more than one descendant of the lost manuscript, and if there is only one descendant, then that *codex unicus* will be per definition the archetype. This is the case of the famous *Codex Traguriensis* of Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis* (now Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 7989), which descends from a copy that was made for Poggio Bracciolini in Cologne and is mentioned by Poggio in a letter to Niccolò Niccoli dated 28 May 1423.⁵ (Chiesa, p. 190 is wrong to identify the copy of the *Cena Trimalchionis* made for Poggio with the *Codex Traguriensis*: nothing about the latter manuscript supports this identification and plenty of elements speak against it, including the fact that the *Cena* appears to have been added to the *Codex Traguriensis* some time after the date of Poggio’s letter.⁶) If there do survive several descendants of a lost manuscript, then it is not inevitable that they should derive from it along several different paths; and if they all derive from the same intermediate copy, then that manuscript should be regarded as the archetype. In fact, this is the case for the author who is Chiesa’s main example for the principle quoted above, namely Catullus. His surviving manuscripts all derive from a *Codex Veronensis* (V) that turned up in Verona around the year 1300. According to Chiesa, V “serves as the lost archetype” (“vale come archetipo perduto”, p. 105); but David McKie has shown that the archetype of the surviving manuscripts of Catullus was not V itself,

⁵ On the *Traguriensis* see especially A. C. de la Mare, “The Return of Petronius to Italy”, in J. J. G. Alexander, M. T. Gibson (eds.), *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays presented to Richard William Hunt*, Oxford 1976, 220–54 and plates XXIII–XXVIII, at 239–51.

⁶ On the date of the *Traguriensis* see de la Mare, “The Return of Petronius”, 248–50.

but a lost descendant of it that is now known as A.⁷ In sum, the celebrity of a manuscript does not guarantee that it has an important position in the stemma. It is one of the challenges in the study of textual transmissions to match up the different kinds of insights yielded by historical research and stemmatic analysis.

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⁷ D. S. McKie, *The Manuscripts of Catullus: Recension in a closed tradition*, Diss. Cambridge 1977, 38-95. McKie's unpublished dissertation is not easy to access, but his conclusions are summed up in D. Kiss, "Introduction: A sketch of the textual transmission", in id. (ed.), *What Catullus Wrote: Problems in textual criticism, editing and the manuscript tradition*, Swansea 2015, xiii-xxx, at xviii.