Stefano Rocchi, *P. Annio Floro,* Virgilio: oratore o poeta? *Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Texte und Kommentare 65, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, xi+183 pp., €109.95, ISBN 978-3-11-068976-1.

Is it worthwhile to write a book of 183 pages on a fragmentary text that has come down to us as the larger part of a single page in only one manuscript? If the result is as intelligent as Stefano Rocchi's book on Florus' *Vergilius orator an poeta*, the answer is certainly affirmative. The *Vergilius orator an poeta* is a dialogue on the question of whether Virgil is rather an orator or a poet or, perhaps more precisely: whether he is to be considered the model for an orator rather than for a poet, but what the answer is to that question remains hidden in darkness as the extant fragment is limited to the introduction and setting of the dialogue. It has been surmised that the final answer will have been that Virgil is an outstanding model for both the orator and the poet, and chances are that this is correct.

The text is attributed to a Pannius Florus, who has been deciphered as P. Annius Florus and who is identified by the majority of scholars with the author of a summary history of Rome, known as the *Epitoma*, and with a poet mentioned in connection with the emperor Hadrian and to whom a few short poems are ascribed. As biographical evidence for the historian is scarce and as the introduction to the *Vergilius orator an poeta* is mainly (auto)biographical, philologists of past generations have jumped on this text discovered in 1842 to extrapolate the biographical data to the historian.

As said, the surviving fragment of the *Vergilius orator an poeta* has come down to us in a single manuscript, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium (KBR), MS 10615-729, f. 73v. The text breaks off in the word *ro[manae?]*, and a tantalising marginal note says that the author (of that note) has the text on another quire (*quaternio*). It must be one of the most 'sadistic' examples in the history of text transmission. Since its discovery, the fragment has been edited several times, each new edition adding new conjectures and corrections. In this book Stefano Rocchi publishes the first monograph on this text, with introduction, text, Italian translation and an extended commentary, in which he also discusses the issues of textual criticism. His edition succeeds to my own, published in *Wiener Studien* in 2015.

Rocchi (whom I met at the Royal Library in Brussels for what might have labelled an informal Florus reunion in July 2017) presents an overall rather conservative edition, following my own footsteps after I had rebelled

against the many conjectures and corrections that editorial history had loaded on this text. There are not many differences between our versions (which is not a criticism, but an indication that two minds may arrive at similar results independently). The most important one probably is that I consider(ed) a phrase introduced by *id est* (3.5) an interpolation, whereas Rocchi does not. Rocchi points at the use of the same formula *id est* in the historian Florus (where it occurs 12 times) and at a possible quotation of / allusion to Ov. *ars*, 3.527. The similarity with the Ovidian passage cannot be denied, but I still hesitate to adhere to my colleague's opinion: after all, a possible gloss that hypothetically could have made its way into the text, might be based precisely on that Ovidian line. My point is that an author who wants to appear learned spoils the effect by immediately explaining the difficulty he deliberately created just before. I suppose we are entitled to disagree on a single issue... On the other hand, Rocchi proposes one conjecture of his own, a *quam* in 3.5, that certainly may be correct: as the next word is *quantus* a haplography of the abbreviated form cannot be ruled out.

There is –as I see it– only one real flaw in this edition, although even this can be partly excused. It remains a bit odd that in the case of a single manuscript on which depends our knowledge of the text, there is no description of this codex in the edition. In this case I know for certain that the editor did see the manuscript itself (I met him at that occasion; in some other cases I am less sure, I am sorry to say). The absence can partly be excused by the fact that I had provided a preliminary description in my 2015 article and that the author explicitly refers to it for this aspect. Apart from my edition I had also given a transcription in an appendix, without the bias of any apparatus, as a work instrument for future work so that both the rough version as it appears in the manuscript (orthography and abbreviations included) and the proper edition would be available.

I want to stress this point of absence of a description of the manuscript, as classical scholars generally often speak *of* manuscripts, but hardly ever speak *about* them. True to say, MS 10615-729 is a catalographer's nightmare. It consists of a series of separate codicological entities roughly in two (or three) hands that seem to vie with each other who could write most text on a single leaf. This volume with more than a hundred (often rare) texts (i.a. the first poem on the battle of Hastings of 1066) that must have been produced in or near Trier in the first half of the 12th century (I would date it a trifle earlier than Rocchi does), certainly is not a beauty. Quite on the contrary. It even is not in the least exemplary as a manuscript of a monastic institutional library. I cannot liberate myself of the idea that it is the work of scribes that wanted to have as many texts in as little book as possible. Perhaps (although there is nothing to substantiate this except its material appearance and the general nature of its contents), its

origin may be connected with a school environment rather than a more formal 'library'. Since 2015, I have come across several other manuscripts, in Vienna and in Brussels, in the same hands, so the collection now known as Brussels MS 10615-729 is certainly not the only result of the work of the scribes involved.

The material appearance, however, is a source in itself and may elucidate questions of origin, provenance, environment of the codex etc., that the text itself cannot. Knowledge of who read a certain text, of its audience, is an important part of cultural history, I think, although we as scholars are normally more concerned with writers than with readers. I cannot but firmly recommend –even in this time of digitised manuscripts– to consult the original volume and to try to understand and interpret it as an object. After all, that is exactly what manuscripts are: concrete and unique material historical objects and not just abstract bearers of a text, as classical scholars often seem to think and to take for granted.

This may be the more important as –as in this case– there are various other texts connected with the text in discussion. The fragment of Florus's dialogue follows other poems often attributed to Virgil or connected with him, such as *priapea* or the *Elegiae in Maecenatem*. This is suggestive of the scope of the copy, but it may also be interesting from the point of view of the transmission of the other texts. In general, we pay too little attention to the context, i.e. the other texts in the same volume, of the texts we study, but it may be interesting to take these into account as well, as they may suggest something about the way 'our' text was transmitted and even correct our *stemma codicum*. To give one example of this 'contextual textual criticism': Vat.lat. 2212 with Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* is grouped with the Sankt-Gallen branch of the transmission of this satire, but it has the same variants in a short poem immediately following it (incorrectly attributed to the emperor Hadrian) as some other manuscripts with the *Apocolocyntosis* that are placed in another branch. I hope to develop this point elsewhere, but it may suffice that the characteristics that group the Hadrianic poem in these manuscripts are very strong evidence that they must derive from a same ancestor. If that is so, it seems inexplicable to adopt a different parentage for the *Apolocolyntosis* as well. At least, the critical evidence for Seneca's text should be reconsidered.

Rocchi, by the way, does mention the texts in the immediate surroundings, although he does not pursue this point (which I had not done so either, I admit, but these reflections date from after my own article: scholarship never stops, as they say).

In all, to return to Stefano Rocchi's book on Florus's *Vergilius orator an poeta*: it is exemplary. I can only hope that this form of classical scholarship will not dwindle and fade under the influence of more trendy

approaches. I can only hope too that my own publication will not be driven into oblivion by this book...

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