

*Littera legitera. Testi grammaticali latini dell'Alto Medioevo.* Presentazione e edizione critica a cura di LUIGI MUNZI. AION – Annali dell'Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale', Quaderni 11. Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli 2007. ISSN 1128-7217. 180 pp. EUR 48.

This book includes a collection of early medieval treatises on the letters (*litterae*) of the alphabet, many of which are edited for the first time here. Letters were also among the topics discussed in grammars, but these treatises focus on their distinctly Christian associations, which largely drew inspiration from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. These Christian themes, such as the invention of letters and their names in the three sacred languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, were immensely popular, and found their way onto the margins of numerous grammatical manuscripts in the eighth and ninth centuries in the form of glosses.

Nine very short treatises are edited here, together with two texts dealing with rhetorical exercises. The first treatise, entitled *De littera*, deals with the origin of writing, and is preserved in ms. *Bern, Burgerbibliothek 207*, f. 112r–113r. This text was partly edited by Hagen, who misinterpreted it as part of the grammar of Peter of Pisa, two copies of which are contained in the same manuscript. The editor has chosen to alter the unclassical graphia very little, and to avoid normalizing the spellings of proper names. Thus, we have, for instance, *Cathumus* pro *Cadmus*, *Fenices* pro *Phoenices*. However, when one and the same text makes use of different graphiae, as in *atomus* and *athomus*, the classical form is preferred. The second text, *Expositio de litteris quomodo nominantur*, is copied in three manuscripts, ms. *Bern, Burgerbibliothek 417*, ff. 94r–95r, ms. *Paris, BN, lat. 13025*, ff. 25v–26r, and *Vatican BAV, lat. 1750*, ff. 142r–142v. It deals with the invention of letters in the three sacred languages.

The third treatise entitled *De littera* is edited from ms. *Vatican BAV, lat. 6018*, ff. 51r–54r. Focussing on each letter in turn, it treats their origin, adding biblical and mystical allusions, along with miscellaneous other topics in a peculiar style, which uses a large number of both learned words and linguistic novelties (which vividly remind us of the creative use of language by Virgilius Maro the Grammarian). Copied in the same codex f. 54r and in ms. *Paris, BN, lat. 2772*, f. 89r is another treatise entitled *De littera*, which first treats issues in a more traditional grammatical vein, offering definitions of the letter, *elimentum* and *vox*, and then proceeds to deal with the three sacred languages. On the same folio of the Vatican codex is an even shorter account of twenty-one Greek letters, for which the Hebrew equivalents are given and a Latin interpretation.

The sixth treatise, ms. *Vatican BAV, lat. 6018*, ff. 97r–97v, entitled *In nomine domini incipiunt interrogationes seu responsiones* it is pointed out that in order to understand the Bible perfectly, one has to start from the study of letters. The two treatises *De littera* in ms. *Leiden, Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, B.P.L. 135*, ff. 93v–94v and *Expositio de litteris* in ms. *Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug. CXII*, ff. 3v–12v present an abbreviated version of a text edited by Hagen from ms. *Bern, Burgerbibliothek 417*, ff. 104r–109r (*Anecdota Helvetica, Grammatici Latini* 8, pp. 302–5).

This volume concludes with two treatises dealing with rhetorical exercises. These exercises take the form of an introductory phrase – a claim or an accusation put forward by a hypothetical opponent – followed by a series of possible responses by the defendant to this accusation. In the first treatise the interlocutor may choose how to defend himself against the claim "People are criticizing you" (*Obtrectant tibi homines*), by saying, for instance, that "The one who judges another, condemns himself" (*Qui alium iudicat, se damnat*). This treatise *Ob-*

*trectatorum murmurosa garrulitas et rationis laudabile consilium* is known from mss. *Paris, BN, lat. 2449*, f. 48r, *Vatican BAV, Regin.lat. 1625*, f. 65rb, and *Paris, BN, lat. 4886*, ff. 61v–62r. In the other treatise, copied in ms. *Paris, BN, lat. 4886*, ff. 62r–62v, the debate is depicted as taking place between a Christian and an unbeliever (*infidelis*), and thirty-seven answers are given to the introductory phrase "You will die" (*Moriturus es*), such as "It is then, I believe, I begin to live" and "Then I will be freed from the present evils, and enjoy the eternal goods".

Luigi Munzi is an experienced editor who specializes in early medieval grammar. Not surprisingly, then, his editorial work is based on a very sober method, and the commentary provided on each text is highly professional. These texts show that grammatical and biblical exegesis developed in parallel in the Early Middle Ages. Consequently, many features of biblical exegesis came to be transferred to grammatical texts. It was commonplace in medieval Bible study that, in addition to the immediate, literal sense of the text, a deeper meaning must be sought. The grammarians gradually transferred this method even to the study of grammatical texts, and began to approach them as if they had a deeper meaning, comparable to the figurative sense of the sacred text. The present treatises introduce many Christian themes as they pertain to one particular grammatical topic, the letters of the alphabet. Here we are dealing with the early stage in the process of Christian learning, which starts from the lowest things and gradually rises to the heights of Christian Wisdom and philosophical contemplation.

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*Ancient Graffiti in Context*. Edited by JENNIFER BAIRD – CLAIRE TAYLOR. Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-415-87889-0. XV, 243 pp. GBP 70.

The main idea behind the collective volume *Ancient Graffiti in Context* is to view the different kinds of graffiti from across the Greco-Roman world side by side and put them in a wider context. As defined by Rebecca Benefiel on p. 20 of the volume, graffiti are "writings or drawings that have been incised into a surface". Zadorojnyi and Chaniotis elaborate on the "nature" of graffiti. For Chaniotis, graffiti are "images or texts of unofficial character scratched on physical objects whose primary function was not to serve as bearers of such images and inscriptions" (p. 196); Zadorojnyi points out that the primary characteristic of graffiti in societies of mass literacy is their spatial insubordination, which means that they appear "on surfaces *where* they have no right to be" (p. 110, emphasis by the author), and that the situation in ancient societies was not entirely different. Excellent points, but for anyone who wants to create a corpus of graffiti, Benefiel's definition remains useful, as terms like "official" might cause difficulty in the ancient context. In this volume, attention is mostly given to *texts* rather than images, although some articles have a wider focus.

There are three chapters on Pompeii or its surroundings, by Rebecca R. Benefiel, Katherine V. Huntley, and Peter Keegan. Benefiel analyzes the graffiti found in the House of the Four Styles. She describes it as a "moderate-sized home" and wishes to contrast it with the other dwellings where graffiti have been studied in a similar fashion such as the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii and the Villa San Marco at Stabiae. However, although the house might not be as large as some others, it is far from modest with wall decorations in all four styles as well as a rather handsome atrium tetrastylus. The ground plan and the decora-