

**Alessandro BARCHIESI, Walter SCHEIDEL (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 948 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-921152-4, hb. £ 93.00 (Oxford Handbooks in Classics and Ancient History).**

The editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* have carefully chosen the illustration for its jacket and frontispiece: a photograph of a huge foot, the sole remnant of a famous statue of Constantine. This ancient ruin can be regarded as a symbol of this field of research: scholars have a great deal of material at their disposal, but they need much thought and imagination to try to recreate the Roman world or any of its aspects.

Still, even a largely non-existent statue seems more tangible than the idea of Roman studies. AS BARCHIESI and SCHEIDEL write in their introduction to the volume (p. 5), originally the concept of Roman studies excluded literature. This limitation, which would put into contrast Roman studies and Latin studies, seems now absurd and nobody will be astonished to find in the *Handbook* many chapters on Latin literature and language. On the other hand, sometimes this distinction between *Romanitas* and *Latinitas* comes into view and confuses the reader. For instance the chapters “Epigraphy” and “Papyrology”, placed next to each other in the volume, have a different scope: the former (by John BODEL) is devoted to Latin inscriptions (sometimes on the background of Greek ones) and the latter (by Roger S. BAGNALL) mainly to Greek papyri, though it mentions in passing such Latin sources as the Vindolanda tablets and Bu Njem ostraca. No attention is given to Latin papyri, which deserve a discussion all the more since the juxtaposition of these two words is regarded as an oxymoron not only by *hoi polloi*, but also by some papyrologists. In a similar way, the chapter “Christianity” by Hagith SIVAN does not discuss the Latin Fathers and their specific role in Christian literature.

The complicated nature of the subject matter is visible in the structure of the *Handbook*. One can see at first sight that its order aims not so much at making the information easy to find as at pointing out some hitherto unnoticed connections and introducing new themes. The first part is called “Tools”. It discusses such topics as “Transmission and Textual Criticism”, “Linguistics” and “Numismatics”. The value of these disciplines as instruments for Roman studies is obvious. On the other hand, the chapter “Literary Criticism”, though its title might mean a tool useful for today’s research, in reality is devoted to Roman theories. Also the inclusion of the chapter “Translation” in this part of the *Handbook* evokes some doubts. Perhaps it should rather accompany the chapter “Reception”, printed in part II.

That part, bearing the title “Approaches” and including, among others, the chapters “Gender Studies”, “Anthropology” and “Psychoanalysis and the Roman Imaginary”, would not appear in a more traditional handbook. It certainly gives the reader much food for thought, showing that the Roman world can be investigated by means of new methods, often borrowed from other disciplines.

The next part, “Genres”, presents a traditional division of literary works: we find here, for instance, “Rhetoric”, “Epic”, “Theatre” and “Letters”. Less conventional is the title “First-person Poetry”: the author (Kathleen MCCARTHY) tries here to avoid the fuzzy notion of “lyric”.

Part IV, entitled “History”, starts with chronologically ordered chapters, from “Early Rome” to “The Later Roman Empire”. The rest consists of chapters on general subjects, for example “Power”, “Economy and Quality of Life” or “Freedom and Slavery”.

The last part, “Ideas”, contains some chapters that would justify this title, as “Philosophy”, “Political Theory” or “Christianity”. Other topics, however, would more fittingly come under the heading “Varia”. I mean, for instance, “Sexuality”, “Women”, or “Architecture”. Though the chapters “Space and Geography” and “Time and Calendar” discuss notions that can be called “ideas”, the meaning of the term is somewhat different here than when applied to philosophy or religion.

On the whole, the articles printed in this volume are of two types: those that give a complete overview of the subject matter, and those that concentrate on new concepts introduced by their authors. Let us begin with examples of the first type.

The chapter “Transmission and Textual Criticism” by Mario DE NONNO (in part I) clearly and succinctly presents the origin and history of the ancient Latin texts that are available today. The remarks on means of transmission are illustrated by many interesting examples. DE NONNO shows, for instance, that in reconstruction of the text of Plautus one should not hope to go back farther than the edition of Varro. He also mentions the exceptionally comfortable situation of an editor of Pliny the Younger’s *Letters*: their manuscripts come from two entirely separate ancient traditions. Therefore they do not have common errors and there is no need for conjectures. The lucidity of the article is marred sometimes by its translation (by Ilaria and Simone MARCHESI). Thus I am at a loss how to interpret the train of thought in the sentences commenting upon the appearance of a part of Cicero’s *Academica* in the manuscripts of his *De Finibus*: “It is certainly possible, as Leighton D. Reynolds and others proposed, that the joining of the ‘sixth book’ was not traditional, but rather the consequence of a medieval recovery. Thanks to the exemplary 1998 Oxford edition Reynolds produced, however, there is no way, now, of proving the hypothesis”.

Another chapter that can serve as an example of systematic treatment of the subject is “Early Rome” by Nicola TERRENATO (part IV). In my opinion the most important point he makes is the crucial role played in early Roman politics by elites and aristocratic *gentes* of various cities, staying in close contact with each other. Often when the ancient historians present us Rome as the driving force of various actions and accomplishments, research shows that in fact they are due to synchronized activities of those social strata.

In the chapter “Law” (in the same part), Jill HARRIES outlines the development of Roman legal system and the formation of the surviving codes and other sources. Among her many interesting observations one should mention the Orwellian nature of imperial law codes: it assured the emperors, as HARRIES says, “control over the past”: all earlier jurists’ decisions and interpretations that were not included in the *Digesta* were to be henceforth regarded as invalid.

There is, however, one passage in that chapter that seems utterly confusing. A paragraph begins with the words: “Roman civil law (*ius civile*) centred on the ‘legal action’ (*actio*)”. The rest of the paragraph is devoted to civil law in the modern sense of the term. The next paragraph starts with “Roman public law (*ius publicum*)...”. Evidently the reader is entitled to the conclusion that *ius civile* means ‘civil law’ and is the opposite of *ius publicum*. This conclusion will, however, have been shaken before the reader reaches the end of the second paragraph where we read: “Thus the Romans’ concept of their *res publica* involved the community and the gods in areas which modern legal thought might term ‘private’, but which Romans assimilated into the *ius civile*, the law as it applied to citizens”. Here we have got an entirely different definition of *ius civile*; moreover, this term is opposed to “private law”.

It is the second approach that corresponds to ancient Roman usage. Here HARRIES leads the readers into the trap against which she warned them in another book, where she commented on the term *ius civile*: “There is clearly potential for confusion here, as the (public) law of the *civitas* was also the law which applied to citizens. [...] So what the jurist interpreted was the *ius civile*, the law as it applied to members of the Roman *civitas*, and many aspects of this were held to be in public domain”. We can judge how common are misunderstandings in this domain if we look at the definition of *ius civile* in LEWIS and SHORT’s dictionary: “The body of Roman law relating to private

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<sup>1</sup> J. HARRIES, *Cicero and the Jurists. From Citizens’ Law to the Lawful State*, London 2006, p. 63. See also A. BERGER, *From “Ius Civile” to “Civil Law”*, in: *Festschrift Guido Kisch. Rechtshistorische Forschungen anlässlich des 60. Geburtstags dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern*, Stuttgart 1955, pp. 125–146. I am grateful to Professors Tomasz GIARO and Jarosław JAKIELASZEK for their valuable advice.

rights, the Civil Law”, evidently disagreeing with the first quotation which is meant to illustrate it (Cic. *Top.* 28: “ut si quis ius civile dicat id esse quod in legibus, senatus consultis, rebus iudicatis, iuris peritorum auctoritate, edictis magistratum, more, aequitate consistat”)<sup>2</sup>. Needless to say, this matter should be treated with special caution in a handbook addressed to wider public.

Now let us pass to the second type, that is, to chapters that show their subject by means of examples, allowing the authors to introduce new ideas. One can start with “Linguistics” by Joshua T. KATZ (in part I): here many problems of etymology and word history are illustrated by two Latin words: *lingua* and *Latina*. Having shown their origins and cognates, the author presents a bold but very attractive hypothesis: he suspects that the names of Odysseus and Circe’s sons, Agrius and Latinus, in a famous passage of *Theogony*<sup>3</sup>, are an echo of the Latin geographical name *ager Latinus*.

Llewelyn MORGAN’S “Metre” (in the same part) shows how choice of metrical form and fitting of words into metre can interplay with the meaning of a poem. Most of his examples are very convincing, but sometimes he seems to go too far. Did really Horace want to allude to scansion of his poems, writing “scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex”<sup>4</sup>? And what does this mean: “the progressive closing-up of the Sapphic stanza is another example of the rules of a metre falling in line with its ethos, in this case one of feminine seclusion”<sup>5</sup>? It should be also pointed out that “servitusque tanti est” in a poem by Statius does not mean “and it is worth such servitude”, but “and I value my servitude so much”<sup>5</sup>.

I looked into that chapter with the hope of learning something about the *status quaestionis* of the Saturnian verse. Though MORGAN concentrates on different topics, my hope was not disappointed: the problem is presented in a very lucid way in the section “Further reading” at the end of the chapter. The general conclusion is pessimistic: though we have a large amount of material at our disposal, we are still far from establishing the nature of the verse. By the way, do not look up “metre and Saturnian” in the subject index: it will lead you to a different passage in the volume, where this metre is mentioned only casually.

“Style” by Alfonso TRAINA, perhaps the most famous of all the authors of the volume, is by far the most unusual chapter in the *Handbook* (opening part II). The author does not talk much about style, concentrating instead on the Roman vision of the world and way of thinking. According to him, one of the characteristic traits of Romans is seeing everything in a bipolar way. This bipolarity is visible, according to TRAINA, in the grammatical structure of Latin: it has two grammatical numbers, and not three, like the Greek language; it has two principal moods: indicative and subjunctive, without optative, two verbal aspects, without aorist, and two voices, without the middle one. Sometimes the author goes too far and, for instance, tries to convince us that the Latin declension is bipolar as well: if one does not count the nominative and the vocative, one obtains “concrete cases with a preposition (the accusative and ablative) and abstract cases without a preposition (the genitive and dative)”. This reminds me of the Greek treatise *De Hebdomadibus*, which, in order to prove the ubiquitous presence of sevens, distinguishes seven seasons of the year and seven corners of the world.

This idea of the exceptional bipolarity of Latin grammar and the Roman mind seems to me very dubious. As far as grammar is concerned, let us look at genders: Latin has three, while for instance Hebrew or the Romance languages have two. In the domain of style, Greek would seem more bipolar than Latin because of its well known tendency to contrast statements by means of particles μέν and δέ. As the popular tongue twister has it, “Thucydides thought in antitheses”.

<sup>2</sup> C.T. LEWIS, C. SHORT, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1879, s.v. *civilis* I 2 b.

<sup>3</sup> Hes. *Th.* 1013.

<sup>4</sup> HOR. *Carm.* III 30, 9.

<sup>5</sup> STAT. *Silv.* IV 3, 81.

The author deduces from Latin grammar another purported quality of the Roman mind. Having emphasized the use of subjunctive as a means of expressing subjectivity, he says: “This importance assigned to the linguistic expression of subjectivity suits people [...] whose poets have been regarded as ‘more personal, more subjective, more lyrical’ than the Greeks”<sup>6</sup>. Subjunctive, however, often shows the speaker’s reserve in regard to truthfulness of a statement, and such an attitude would be quite unfitting for a lyricist expressing his sentiments. After all, Catullus says “Odi et amo”<sup>7</sup>, and not “Oderim et amem” or “Odисsem et amarem”.

TRAINA ascribes to the Romans a linear view of history, exemplifying it with the idea of *Roma aeterna*, and contrasts it with the notion of circularity of time, typical of the Greeks, as he tries to show by means of quotations from Plato’s *Timaeus* and Aristotle’s *Physics*. In my opinion, the cyclical nature of the month and the year is obvious in every culture. But the transference of this idea to various cycles in nature and society or to the history of the universe is due to philosophers such as those mentioned above or Empedocles. Latin authors willingly take over concepts of this kind from their Greek predecessors: for instance in *Scipio’s Dream* Cicero presents the idea of the great (or Platonic) year<sup>8</sup>. A linear vision of the history of gods and mankind underlies Hesiod’s *Theogony* and his tale of the five ages<sup>9</sup>. Though Athenian orators do not speak about “eternal Athens”, both Thucydidean Pericles<sup>10</sup> and Isocrates<sup>11</sup> describe the development of the city and its role in Greece, evidently not admitting the possibility that its existence would be limited in time.

More convincing is TRAINA’s observation concerning the Roman tendency to present ordered series of events in works of art, both those real (as Trajan’s Column) and those appearing in literature (as the temple door in Carthage and the shield of Achilles in the *Aeneid*<sup>12</sup>).

Andrew LAIRD’s chapter *Reception* (part II), after an interesting introduction, showing that reception of Roman ideas does not limit itself to law, literature and arts, but is also visible in politics and even religion, concentrates on a series of interrelated examples. Unfortunately one of them, important for his argument, is marred by a mistranslation.

In his commentary to Statius’ *Silvae*, Angelo Poliziano tries to elucidate the passage in which the poet, mourning the death of a slave, says that even some favourite animals had funerals, and among them – so he seems to say in the version accepted by Poliziano – the deer mentioned in the *Aeneid*: “et volucres habuere rogam cervusque Maronis”<sup>13</sup>. Today the editors accept PEERLKAMP’s conjecture *Maronem*, based upon the reading of the codex *C Marone*. Poliziano writes: “Quamvis apud Virgilium non legatur habuisse hunc cervum rogam, sed verisimile, quippe in quo tantum fuerit momenti ut bellum illud inter Troianos et Latinos concitaret”. LAIRD translates this: “Although it may not be read in Virgil that this deer had a funeral pyre, this is effectively true, in that the matter was of so much consequence that it incited the actual war between the Latins and the Trojans”, and explains: “The conflict triggered by the Trojan Ascanius’ inadvertent killing of a pet cherished by the Rutulian princess, Silvia, dominates the latter part of the *Aeneid* and leads to funeral fires aplenty”.

Not those pyres, however, were meant by Politian, and his sentence should be translated: “Although one does not read in Virgil that this deer had a funeral pyre, nevertheless it is probable

<sup>6</sup> TRAINA quotes here A. ROSTAGNI, *Classicità e spirito moderno*, Torino 1939, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> Catull. 85, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cic. *Rep.* VI 24.

<sup>9</sup> Hes. *Op.* 109–201.

<sup>10</sup> Thuc. II 36–41.

<sup>11</sup> Isoc. 4 (*Paneg.*), 23–128.

<sup>12</sup> Verg. *Aen.* I 456–493 and VIII 626–728.

<sup>13</sup> Stat. *Silv.* II 6, 20; cf. Verg. *Aen.* VII 479–504.

since he was so important the he caused that war between the Trojans and the Latins". The Italian humanist assumes – perhaps a bit naively – that according to Statius, the deer must have had a funeral since he was of such an importance for Silvia and the Latins that they waged a war to avenge his death.

The chapter "Hellenism" by Tim WHITMARSH (part V) contains many interesting thoughts defying the conventional wisdom on Greek-Roman cultural relations. For instance, he warns us against taking an oversimplified view of Rome in the times of Livius Andronicus: "The idea that third-century Rome, a prosperous and expanding state with a high level of technical accomplishment, needed 'civilizing' is misleading. It is, moreover, highly unlikely that anyone of the third-century Hellenizers thought of their peers as a coarse, rustic population. If Rome had ever been 'uncivilized', the memory of that time was irrevocably lost among the legendary thickets of suckling she-wolves and hilltop asyla". On the other hand, he shows that the topos of severe Roman virtue weakened under the influence of the effeminate *Graeculi* is really Greek in origin: it earlier served to describe the moral damages suffered by Greeks after Alexander's conquests brought them into contact with the peoples of the East.

WHITMARSH's reader can be confused by his strange usage of the term "neoterics". He includes in this group not only Catullus and his circle, but also (as "later neoterics") Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid. The author commits an amusing blunder claiming that the *Tusculan Disputations* take place in Cicero's villa in Tuscany. Tusculum was, of course, in Latium, quite close to Rome.

Till now I was trying to divide the chapters of the *Handbook* into two types: those that give an exhaustive outline of their topic and those that present new ideas and interesting examples. There is at least one chapter that combines the characteristics of the both types. I mean Werner ECK's "Prosopography" (in part I). ECK methodically expounds the history and methods of Roman prosopography, but he concentrates on a very interesting case: on the basis of sudden advancements of certain Roman officials he proves that they must have played a crucial role in Trajan's adoption by Nerva.

The editors of the *Handbook* were not too meticulous about eliminating minor mistakes. In the chapter "Linguistics", Cicero is placed in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. The author of the chapter "Anthropology" refers us to KLÜCKHOHN 1987, but in the bibliography we find only KLÜCKHOHN 1949. The chapter "Early Rome" mentions *querelle des anciennes et des modernes*, which looks like an overestimation of the engagement of such learned ladies as Mme Dacier in the cause of the *anciens*. The well known quotation from Terence, adduced in the chapter "Hellenism", should not have the form "Tot homines, quot sententiae". The Augustine's phrase "amicus Dei", quoted in the chapter "Christianity" occurs not in *Conf.* 6, 15, but in *Conf.* VIII 6, 15.

On the whole, *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* is a very important collective work. Presenting various facets of the Roman world, it presents at the same time various types of scholars: some of them methodically surveying their field, and some teeming with new – sometimes too bold – ideas. The volume is much more than a reference book: it can be read for its own sake with much profit and interest.

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