

BOOK REVIEW

The Vulgate of Mark with the Synoptic Parallels. By DALE A. GROTE. Mundelein: Bolchazy-Carducci publishers, Inc., 2016. Pp. xxii + 442. Paper, \$29.00. ISBN 978-0-86516-835-0.

Some time ago Grote realized that his third semester students had “had it up to here” with grammar and syntax, and most had no intention of continuing their Latin studies. After cursing modernity for “making the world unsafe for ancient Greek and Latin” (vi), Grote hatched the idea of getting students to read the Latin prose of the Vulgate translation of the gospel according to Mark in the New Testament. Since there was nothing on Mark for classroom use, he at first resorted to handouts and printouts. The body of material grew and eventually stabilized into a book-length manuscript that editors at Bolchazy-Carducci helped transform into the attractive volume that holds the potential, I believe, of hooking intermediate students and getting them to think of themselves as Latin majors and minors.

Key to the mastery of any language is the opportunity to read lots of easy, repetitive prose, supplemented frequently by brief helps that keep students engaged. Just this *The Vulgate of Mark* does quite well: there are sixteen chapters (corresponding to the sixteen chapters of canonical Mark) with the text of Mark and Matthew/Luke parallels on the left page, and Vocabulary and Historical and Grammatical Notes on the facing page. Each chapter and pericope are prefaced by annotations that orient students to what the next section brings. An Introduction contains what can be known about Mark’s gospel, the so-called Synoptic Problem, a comparison between grammatical constructions used in Classical Latin and the Vulgate, how such religious terms as “Lord,” “Holy Spirit,” “God,” and “Christ” are handled, and some practical suggestions to students about how to use the book. Near the end are placed a map of sites mentioned in the synoptic gospels, Suggestions for Further Inquiry, and a Complete Latin-to-English Glossary.

Grote’s *The Vulgate of Mark* is intended for relatively inexperienced Latinists coming to terms with extended passages for the first time. Hence, while the book does everything necessary, and adequately, it cannot satisfy everyone. Take the

extremely limited comparison between the Vulgate and Classical Latin (xviii-xix); Grote takes up, and provides clear examples for the following: first, the classical accusative-infinitive construction for indirect statement gives way to a subordinate clause in the Vulgate introduced by *quia/quod/quoniam* with the indicative or subjunctive mood (for example, *Scitote quia appropinquavit desolatio eius* = “Know that its desolation has grown near”); second, the use of compound progressive tenses in the Vulgate, mostly in the imperfect tense (for example, *erat praedicans* = “he was preaching,” for *praedicabat*); third, the increased use in the Vulgate of prolate infinitives after a verb of motion in place of the classical supine in *-um* and *ut/ne* + subjunctive (for example, *Venisti perdere nos?* = “Have you come to destroy us?”); and finally, words that are emphatic or indefinite in classical Latin become less so in the Vulgate (for example, *colloquebantur ad invicem quidnam facerent Iesu* = “they were talking with one another about what [not ‘what in the world’] they would do to Jesus”).

Grote’s limited comparison can be forgiven because he needs a few clear examples to stimulate student interest, not exhaustive detail. Nevertheless, one construction I wish he had taken up is the informally referenced “*qui* connective”—namely, the use of the relative pronoun *qui, quae, quod* at the beginning of an independent sentence or clause to connect it to a preceding sentence or clause. For example, *Caesar statuit expectandam classem; quae ubi convenit...* = “Caesar decided that he must wait for the fleet; and when this had come together ...” (*Bellum Gallicum* 3.14; added emphasis).¹ It would be helpful for intermediate students to know that the emphasized *quae* in the preceding sentence stands in for an assumed *et ea* (“and when *this* had come together ...”), a prolixity that ordinarily does not occur in authentic Latin. I notice that quite a few good Latinists either do not know the construction—or, if they do, fail to inform their students. My point is that although the “*qui* connective” occurs often in the Vulgate Latin of the NT (cf. Mt 3:11; 28:11; Mk 16:6; Lk 4:43; 5:8; 24:19, etc), Grote does not alert students to it.

Something else that can only be touched on here is Grote’s preference for Marcan priority (xiii–xvii), with the resulting assumption that Mark’s original Greek (followed, apparently, by the Latin) is more primitive than parallels in Matthew and Luke (see “Mark’s rough style,” xv). I cannot do justice to the

¹ For the translation and several more examples see Ann Mahoney, *Allen and Greenough’s New Latin Grammar* (Newburyport, MA: R. Pullins Company, 2001) §308.f, page 181.

problem—save only to point out that some of us assume Matthean priority (Matthew was written as a capstone to the Septuagint, was read in many Pauline assemblies, etc). Thus, Mark is not “rough” but in fact quite astute, likely providing theological comment upon the slightly earlier gospels of Matthew and Luke and reflecting a context of persecution for catechumens in Rome during Nero’s pogroms (early 60s CE). This could account for the many Latinisms in Mark, the gospel’s vividness, heightened demonology, and other urban touches. So Mark’s Jesus is not theologically inept—but, to be sure, more “edgy” and insistent than the picture presented in Matthew and Luke (although Jesus can be quite “edgy” there also!). It would be wonderful if classicists could make more of an impact on New Testament scholars who typically do not read Latin at all and so do not know very much about Martial, Juvenal, Tacitus, and other near contemporaries of the New Testament authors. The resources Grote cites nearly all assume Marcan priority (405–406); for an older approach that takes more seriously the Roman context behind Mark’s gospel see Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel according to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1913) xiii–xxviii.

Grote’s new book does everything it sets out to do. To my knowledge, there is nothing comparable to it in course catalogues so Latin teachers may now add these splendid readings from Mark’s gospel to Catullus, Caesar, and other intermediate authors.

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