

BOOK REVIEW

From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance. By N. G. WILSON. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Pp. xii + 245. Paperback, \$35.95. ISBN 978-1-474-25047-4.

When it was first published in 1992 by Johns Hopkins University Press, Wilson's monograph, while modestly presented by the author as no more than a "provisional account," (ix) gained praise for being nothing short of an indispensable reference for any scholar interested in studying the transmission, reception and import of ancient Greek texts in Renaissance Italy. This assessment holds true a quarter of a century later as Bloomsbury Academic has issued the second edition of Wilson's seminal work, with the reservation that no substantial changes have been implemented.

Through the same sequence of fourteen chapters capped by a conclusion, Wilson covers the rich century and a half that begins in the mid-XIV century with Petrarch and Boccaccio's procurement of Leonzio Pilato's Latin translations of the Homeric epics and concludes with the early-XV century editions of classical authors printed in Greek font by Aldus Manutius' Venetian press. Wilson takes care to highlight the paths by which the cultural patrimony of ancient Greece found its way and took root in Italy: the influx of manuscripts in Greek, the flourishing of Latin translations of the same, the teaching of the Greek language at universities, the birth of intellectual circles that took to heart the preservation of the Greek legacy, and the commitment to print of Greek literary masterpieces.

All the momentous stages in the inflow of Greek books into Italy are detailed: the book acquisitions by the chancellor of Florence Francesco Salutati (1391), the return of the Sicilian humanist Giovanni Aurispa from his journeys with 238 volumes (1423), and cardinal Bessarion's donation of his collection of 482 *codices* to Venice (1468). Wilson often goes to great lengths to reconstruct the holdings of private and public libraries charting the changing preferences for particular authors and literary genres over time.

Meticulous attention is dedicated to translations of Greek into Latin from the pedestrian attempts of Pilatus' word-by-word renditions to the more idiomatic versions of the Platonic dialogues by Leonardo Bruni and Marsilio Ficino, both

of which contributed to the resurgence of interest in Plato during Renaissance humanism as opposed to the predominance of Aristotle in the Middle Ages.

Wilson emphasizes the crucial role of the appointment of Greek chairs in Italian universities for the dissemination of language and culture, especially in the *studium florentinum* with the Byzantine émigrés Manuel Chrysoloras, John Argyropoulos, Janus Lascaris, and the Italian Angelo Ambrogini, better known as Politian. Besides Florence, other higher education institutions are given consideration, such as Padua with Demetrius Chalcondyles and Marcus Musurus, and Bologna with Urceo Codro. Wilson is particularly keen on ascertaining whether students were taught through Latin translations (as is likely the case, for instance, of Argyropoulos' pupils in Florence) or accessed the Greek texts directly. To Vittorino da Feltre's secondary school in Mantua is devoted a full chapter since students there worked with Greek texts under the tutelage of Greek teachers.

In addition to official avenues of instruction, Wilson traces the development of the *accademie*, informal circles that clustered scholars around their patrons: Lorenzo Valla was formed in Bessarion's academy in Rome, the likes of Politian and Pico della Mirandola earned first distinction in Lorenzo de' Medici's Neoplatonic Florentine Academy, Musurus started his career in Aldus Manutius' Neakademia.

In his final chapter, Wilson delves into the Aldine publishing house in Venice providing a thorough review of the numerous *editiones principes* that Manutius was able to produce and the enormous impact that Aldus' operation effected in the propagation and transmission of the ancient Greek heritage.

With this study, Wilson shares his impressive erudition and paleographical expertise offering an exemplary model for balancing concision with wealth of examples, for sketching the broader trends and introducing minute, yet relevant details. When assessing the quality of Latin translations from the Greek or the philological acumen of the humanists, however, Wilson's judgmental pronouncements sound scathing and at times even unjustified. For instance, Wilson finds fault with Bruni's rendition of μέγεθος (stature) as *dignitas* for equating the Greek word with a Roman concept (17). If anything, the point proves Bruni's penchant for writing 'domesticating' translations, namely translations that prioritize the immediate comprehension of his readership.

In the new five-line coda appended to the original preface, Wilson explains how "in the text of this edition various adjustments have been made, and a large number of notes have been brought up to date." (x) Yet, the extent of revisions and additions appears marginal. The main body of the text is left practically un-

changed. The endnotes feature recent bibliography that does increase the currency value of Wilson's study, but the updated references are more intended as a suggestion for further reading than incorporated to corroborate the argumentations in the text. Given the provisional nature of the initial project, readers were entitled to expect more substantive modifications or improvements. For example, the influence that the newly discovered Greek legacy exerted on the development of the humanists' literary productions in Latin and vernacular remains unexplored.

Valla, whose philological shortcomings Wilson does not fail to address, wrote two redactions of his *Adnotationes Novi Testamenti*, the first in 1444 and the second some time after 1453. Wilson writes: "Over a long period he made notes on individual passages, revising his remarks as his knowledge increased, so that there is a considerable difference between the two recensions that have been printed." (84) One would have hoped that a scholar of Wilson's caliber had followed in Valla's footsteps.

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