

## BOOK REVIEW

*Critics, Compilers, and Commentators: An Introduction to Roman Philology, 200 BCE–800 CE.* JAMES E. G. ZETZEL. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Paperback. Pp. 448. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780195380521.

As the subtitle conveys, James Zetzel has produced a study (far more than an “introduction”) of Rome’s scholarship on its own language and literature—its commentaries, grammars and lexica—from the beginnings of the Latin literary tradition through late antiquity. The work is essential reading for anyone interested in what and how the Romans thought about this aspect of their intellectual history and activity, which should be anyone interested in ancient Latin texts or culture, since philological activity, as Zetzel rightly notes, did not “ever cease to be part of the equipment of the learned élite”: “the correct interpretation (and pronunciation and reading) of texts was part of the mental apparatus and intellectual activity of people of culture and social standing.” The work is divided into two parts: the second, a “bio-bibliographical guide to the surviving texts,” to be consulted and used as a reference work, the first to be read in its entirety for “a history and description of Roman philology and our sources for it.”

The nine chapters that make up Part I quickly move from preliminaries to richly detailed argumentation. Zetzel begins with an expansive definition of philology, delineating what sorts of works fall within the book’s purview and explaining the problems associated with the various types of sources: many are fragmentary, while others, because they were used over centuries, were annotated, revised or otherwise altered—itsself a form of philological activity. Chapter 1 ends with a helpful user’s guide to the present volume. In Chapter 2, Zetzel shows how philology may be found in works not primarily philological, such as Accius’ tragedies or Lucilius’ satires. He also notes the unlikelihood of Suetonius’ origins-story that Latin interest in and scholarship on language began when Crates of Mallos extended his stay in Rome due to a broken leg and lectured on various academic matters heretofore unknown to the Romans—yet another instance of “the enduring belief that no Roman could have had an original idea without a Greek whispering it in his ear.” Zetzel is right to see that Roman interest in, if not exactly editing and

correcting, then certainly marking up texts with *notae* and discussing their meaning pre-dated Crates' visit, and was likely applied first to legal and religious texts, often of great antiquity, that by their very nature could not be altered but nevertheless had to be explained.

In addition to literary and textual exegesis of this nature and more generally, the remains of early Roman scholarship show a concern with orthography, morphology and the meanings of individual words. It is first in Varro, Zetzel suggests, that Latin philology emerges as a distinct blend of Roman antiquarianism and Greek grammatical and philosophical theory. The vast range of Varro's scholarship on language is discussed in Chapter 3, including his opining on the authenticity of Plautine plays and his literary chronology of early Rome. The surviving six books of *De lingua Latina* are naturally given the most attention, and Zetzel rightly notes the difficulty of possessing only a portion of this work and little else that it can be compared to that might allow us to discern what is authentically Varronian and what merely reflects the accepted and established knowledge of the period. Nevertheless, he rightly sees Varro's abiding interests as being in the processes of linguistic development and change, whether organic or deliberate, and in the relationship of language to the real world and the community, especially through public oratory (an interest shared by Cicero), all with a view towards delineating "correct" usage.

Chapter 4 takes the reader from the mid-first century BCE through Pliny the Elder, surveying the contributions of Verrius Flaccus (an antiquarian, author of the lexicon discussed below) and Caecilius Epirota (a modernist, the first to discuss the works of Virgil and other recent poets), as well as Iulius Hyginus and Crassicius Pansa (both authors of commentaries on Cinna), Remmius Palaemon and Valerius Probus and others. Zetzel identifies as a key change in philological focus from the Augustan until at least the Neronian period the "lack of interest in exploring early language and an active interest in discussing modern literature." This is no minor development, for it marks the beginning of "quite simply, close reading." In Chapter 5, Zetzel describes Cornelius Fronto's deep interest in archaic and archaizing texts and his attempts to communicate this interest to his young pupil, Marcus Aurelius. Discussing Fronto and Aulus Gellius, and noting their efforts to identify the boundary separating old from new writers, Zetzel explains that "close exegetical and stylistic commentary began to flourish" in their period. Accordingly, he sees a renewed interest in "Latinity," last vital under Varro and Caesar, in the second and early third centuries CE. Noting the difficulty of delineating the term precisely since we lack a complete work on the topic, Zetzel nevertheless shows it

to encompass a concern with how Latin ought to look in particular as a component of rhetorical style, focusing his discussion on two extracts from Romanus. Zetzel also draws attention to the disconnect between the extant works on grammar that he is discussing and “the traditional work of the *grammaticus*,” that is, the teaching of writing to boys.

Having closed Chapter 5 by reflecting on the distinct landscape between the period up to the third century and that of the fourth and fifth—in the former, narratives must be constructed from fragments; in the latter, the explosion of texts and the uncertainty as to their relative chronology renders a narrative “nearly impossible”—Zetzel accordingly arranges Chapters 6–9 by material rather than chronology. Beginning with “Dictionaries, Glossaries, Encyclopedias” (Chapter 6), Zetzel surveys Verrius Flaccus’ *De verborum significatu* and the changes it underwent in the hands of Pompeius Festus and Paulus (Paul the Deacon) and Nonius Marcellus’ *De compendiosa doctrina*, both works being lists of words, *glossae*—an “omnipresent” type of text that could take a variety of forms such as might now be termed dictionaries (including Latin-Greek), thesauruses, etc. The chapter closes with Isidore of Seville, often seen as the node between “ancient (secular)” and medieval Christian scholarship, whose *Etymologiae* alongside his other works go beyond the dictionary form to the encyclopedic, while still retaining a deep interest in language.

“Commentary and exegesis” occupies Chapter 7, as Zetzel notes that Quintilian’s definition of the grammarian’s task as *recte loquendi scientia* and *enarratio poetarum* remains valid centuries later: not only were ancient authors in need of explication (e.g., Servius on the *Aeneid*), but so were texts by Christian authors (far beyond biblical exegesis) and, importantly, legal documents. Through discussions of commentaries on Virgil, Cicero and Horace, Zetzel shows how difficult it is to locate the original time, place and form of the information contained within them, since the information was being continually repeated and improved upon as the commentaries were continually revised, and since texts of different types and times needed to offer different forms of help to the reader. In Chapter 8, Zetzel shows the “flexibility” of the concept of a “grammar” (*ars grammatica*), alongside its grammarian (*grammaticus*), considering the origins of the Roman *ars* and its varieties and scope (yet “fundamental uniformity” as represented by Charisius, Diomedes, and other fourth and fifth century texts), and exploring “issues of form and authenticity.” Part I closes with Chapter 9 on “Author, Audience, Text”: Zetzel explains how ordinary late antique readers (learned men) might correct or annotate their

copies of classical texts as they collected them, and broaches the vast topic of the “uneasy relationship” of classical and Christian in this period. He ends by reflecting on the “transformation” undergone by the classical tradition of Roman grammar by the ninth century as it was adapted to “a different world, with different beliefs and goals.”

Part II of the volume, “A Bibliographic Guide,” meant for consulting as needed, is well introduced on page 229: Chapters 10 and 11, on “dictionaries and similar lists” and commentaries, respectively, are arranged chronologically (the former by author, the latter by author being explained); Chapters 12 and 13, on the other hand, are arranged alphabetically, 12 being on ancient grammatical writings and 13 on early medieval grammars. The entries in these chapters follow a set format, where possible: texts and translations; indices, lexica and concordances; bibliographies; reference works and brief accounts or introductions; collective volumes; secondary scholarship. Zetzel’s stated aim is “to make unfamiliar texts and authors accessible” while providing bibliographical references, especially recent ones, to facilitate further study.

*Critics, Compilers, and Commentators* is, in short, a repository of erudition about language and the study of it over a period of a thousand years, by a scholar who is himself widely recognized for his erudition about the Latin language. There is nothing else quite like it, and now that we have it, scholars interested in these matters will wonder how they managed without it for so long.

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