

GIUSEPPE LA BUA, *L'inno nella letteratura poetica latina*. San Severo, Gerni editori, 1999. XVI, 536 pp. Pr. L. 90.000.

Latin hymns are by no means exclusively Christian in nature. This clearly shows in the new Italian study by La Bua (LB), that counts well over 500 pages without dealing with any Christian texts at all. LB discusses pagan Latin hymnographic texts from the earliest, archaic authors until Martianus Capella, Boethius and the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*. It is an impressive, learned book (some 1900 footnotes, 100 pages of bibliography and an index locorum), that covers just about all relevant texts in the field.

The study opens with a theoretical section (1-89) that deals with the history and definition of the term both in Greek and Latin (where it is first attested in a fragment of Seneca), the *laus deorum* in epideictic rhetoric, the codification of the genre in Greek literature, and the specific form it receives in Latin literature. More than in Greek literature, Latin hymns appear to be integrated into other genres (e.g. lyric or epic; see also F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972), 91-2). Meanwhile, hymnic texts are characterized by typical, well-known elements, such as the invocation and address of a person or power ("Du"-stil), the reference to earlier benefits and the request for further favours.

The rest of the book (91-436) consists of a more or less full inventory of Latin poetic texts that qualify as hymns, arranged in chronological order. In each case, LB briefly describes the text, analyzes its structure, and discusses its relations to other hymnic texts, giving some additional remarks on specific topics and relevant bibliographical information in the notes. To his credit, LB has not hesitated to include virtually unknown or scarcely read authors like Caesius Bassus, Optatianus Porphyrius, or Tiberianus. His main interest, however, is doubtless the Augustan era, which is given as many pages as the entire rest of the Imperial Period. So it is Virgil, Ovid, and above all Horace, who, once again, receive the prominent places in the book.

In such an enormous volume, there are, inevitably, things one disagrees with or which seem missing. I will limit myself to just one or two examples, and focus on some issues of wider importance. To start with the former, it may be regarded a pity that no discussion has been included of the archaic prayers in Cato's *De agricultura*. Even if these can be ruled out on formal grounds as 'prose' texts (although the matter seems rather debatable), the wealth of details that link these texts to the hymnic (sub)genre, as well as their sheer antiquity and importance as specimens of Roman prayer, would surely have merited an exception. On an editorial note, one would have welcomed the use of summaries or clear subdivisions, especially in the longer discussions of Augustan poets.

As a matter of principle, I do not feel quite happy with the strict dividing line that is drawn between Christian and non-Christian texts. In present day studies of ancient history and history of art, this dividing line, that once seemed to be so clear-cut, tends to become blurred and vague, and it is often shown to be far less sharp than used to be taken for granted. Literary studies, however, mostly continue along the old line of thought, although there are many reasons to discuss the division between pagan and Christian here too. The (sub)genre of hymnography, with its dominant religious overtones, would even have provided a splendid test-case here, since there seem to be so many structural parallels between pagan and Christian hymns. One would, therefore, have liked to see some discussion of the continuity of the motifs and *topoi*, rather than find the traditional watershed. This line of enquiry would, indeed, have brought something new in the study, for theoretically it hardly moves beyond Cairns' 1972 study. In practical terms, it can easily be defended that LB has limited the field to non-Christian texts, so as to prevent the book from acquiring excessive dimensions. On the other hand, it could also be said that an 'inter-cultural' approach would have required a sensible restriction of the material to be analyzed in detail. With all due respect for either Horace or Optatianus Porphyrius, one may argue that some curbing would indeed have seemed possible.

On a more practical note, given the often detailed readings of texts, I regularly wondered why LB chose to write a full, descriptive inventory, rather than e.g. a lavish anthology of Latin texts with a generic commentary. Surely, the commentary form would have made the material more accessible to readers, and would have formed a stronger invitation to actually read and compare some of the texts in question.

These critical remarks refer to what the study could have done or what it might have been. Being as it is, it may still be said to be of considerable value, in that it discusses many famous and lesser-known texts. LB provides scholars with much relevant material concerning

pagan hymns in Latin, and allows them to follow the development of the subgenre in Latin literature, where it seems to have become ever more present and conspicuous, given the late Latin examples. One cannot help thinking that this is not an autonomous evolution within pagan literature, but rather a sign of its interaction with Christian literature, that had gradually become dominant.

University Nijmegen
v.hunink@let.kun.nl

VINCENT HUNINK