

Adams (J.N.) *An Anthology of Informal Latin, 200 BC – AD 900. Fifty Texts with Translations and Linguistic Commentary*. Pp. xii + 719. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Cased, £120, US\$200. ISBN: 978-1-107-03977-3.

The last few decades have brought a welcome increase in interest in variation in Latin. Every Latinist is surely conscious, at least at some level, that the surviving literary texts — and many of the non-literary ones too — present Latin predominantly as it was used by a well-educated, and accordingly elite, sector of the population. Moreover, they cannot even be taken to be indicative of the other written usage of these people in any straightforward way, still less of their ordinary everyday speech. To achieve a more balanced picture of Latin in its complex, varying, and changing entirety requires attention not only to the familiar Classical Latin texts but to any Latin that exhibits differences from them.

In the present anthology A., who has long been at the forefront of research in this area, brings together a substantial selection of such material covering a period of more than a millennium. It spans much of the Roman world from the Italian peninsula to North Africa, Gaul, and the British Isles. The material includes letters, jokes, technical treatises, and curses among other genres and text-types; A. also selects some more literary texts able to shed light on the diversity of Latin, ranging from Ennius and Cato to Plautus, Petronius and the Bible. As A. explicitly acknowledges, not too much should be read into the title's designation of its contents as 'informal Latin', and indeed much is included for which this description seems less than satisfactory at first sight. Little hangs by it, for the aim is a display of the evidence for diversity, and this diversity is itself shown to have diverse origins. The well-chosen breadth of material across, time, space, genre, register, etc. means that no single designation such as 'non-classical', 'vulgar', 'non-standard', 'non-literary', 'substandard', 'colloquial',

etc. would be more appropriate, though each might apply well to some subset. Indeed, selecting texts for such a collection is itself no insignificant task: despite the diversity, the result at no point seems eclectic, and it coheres well without seeming unduly focused on any one period, genre, or area. The selection of a number of British sources (*defixiones* and a Vindolanda letter) is pleasing since they have not always received the attention merited by their linguistic significance, but every text in the anthology justifies its inclusion. Texts are ordered approximately chronologically and range in length from a few lines to just under a couple of pages; some, such as graffiti and letters, are complete in themselves while others are extracts from longer works.

An anthology of this kind, with linguistic commentary on numerous diverse texts as its heart, presents a particular challenge to the reviewer because it is scarcely amenable to summary, and indeed its strengths lie above all in the comments, which are particular to their specific texts and lemmata. That said, A's treatment of recurring or overarching themes drawn out from across individual texts or series of texts is no less impressive.

The format is straightforward: each text is presented with a brief introduction, typically identifying the time, place, and circumstances of composition, and any textual difficulties; this is followed by the text itself, English translation, commentary, and brief concluding remarks that draw together what has emerged in the specific comments on the lemmata. Some texts are also accompanied by appendices of relevant comparative material relating to particular points raised in the commentary.

The comments on each text are not exhaustive: A. has judiciously selected as lemmata those features that give rise to observations about the use of Latin, whether its spelling and pronunciation, its word formation, word order, or lexical choices. Comment on the 'content' of the text is generally confined to points that bear on linguistic matters. A. tends to set each

feature under discussion in the context of how similar instances are handled elsewhere in the same text and in other texts of similar (or sometime different) types or periods, using both qualitative and quantitative evidence to do so: lists of parallel or contrasting examples and statistics abound throughout the commentary, as do extensive bibliographic references. A. offers sensitive interpretations of the collected evidence and frequently assesses alternatives to these, helpfully drawing our attention not only to that which is remarkable in a text but often also to that which is less remarkable than it may superficially appear ('striking' and 'banal' are common pointers respectively). The rich detail for each point (together with the assiduous cross-referencing through the volume, thorough index, and thirty-page bibliography) make this another invaluable reference work alongside A.'s other monograph treatments of aspects of variation in Latin (*Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (2003), *The Regional Diversification of Latin 200 BC – AD 600* (2007), and *Social Variation and the Latin Language* (2013)), to which frequent reference is made: readers of those *magna opera* will find many of the sources in this anthology familiar, making it an excellent companion volume. These are typically difficult texts to analyse: the difficult features are often the reason for their choice. Though A. expresses clear views where the evidence justifies them, he is not afraid simply to raise questions or express uncertainty where the evidence or its best interpretation are not clear and a lesser commentator might pass on in silence.

In fact, the wealth of detail in the commentary means that this is not — as A. highlights at the outset — an 'elementary reader' (p. 4). Little is conceded to the non-specialist reader, and those who are not wholly familiar with the field of variation and change within Latin will find this a demanding but stimulating starting point for much further reading; for these, the broader orientation offered by the conclusions and, to a lesser extent, the introductions to each passage may help to make the detail of the commentary more accessible. It is helpful that consistency in treatment of the texts means that it is possible to jump into the texts and

commentary at any chapter, with references to the same or similar phenomena seen in other passages in the collection balanced by treatment of the salient points in the passage and lemma at hand. It is certainly to be hoped that many outside the field of Latin linguistics, not least students of the history of the Romance languages, for whom this volume holds much of interest (especially as regards morphology and syntax), will consider the evidence and issues raised.

Overarching or recurring themes that emerge across these highly diverse texts include questions of the relationship between spelling and pronunciation, and the significance of text-type (especially technical language), as well as more grammatical matters such as the use of adnominal phrases and the use of various demonstratives and pronouns (especially *is*, *se*, *hic*, *iste*, *ille*, *istic* and *illic*). Many topics will also be important for the Romance linguist, such as the discussions of OV vs. VO word order, *ipse* and *ille* used in manners possibly reminiscent of Romance definite articles, *quod* clauses for indirect statement, and the changing use of the cases.

One particular conclusion deserves highlighting here. Though Classical Latin is far from being the focus of this book, its presence is very much felt as a ‘variety’ with which to compare the material and as a possible influence on these texts. What stands out is the nuanced view that A. is led to take of the notion of a Classical Latin standard variety, defined for many, perhaps, by the prose of Cicero (especially his speeches and philosophical works) and Caesar: at numerous points and with convincing evidence, A. argues that the standardisation of Latin — the linguistic features to be attributed to the Classical language, the processes by which it arose, and its status in relation to the wider language in the time of these supposedly definitive authors and in subsequent centuries — needs a full re-

examination. On this general point, as on so many other particular points, this anthology both sums up the state of the art and offers lines for future research.

RICHARD ASHDOWNE

University College, Oxford