

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: A WAY AHEAD?

R. R. BOLGAR

Was bedeutet das Nachleben der Antike? What we know about our debt to Greece and Rome would fill a sizeable library, and yet Aby Warburg's question always catches us off balance so that we have to grope for an answer. We have to admit that we are not in a position to assess the full extent or the precise nature of our indebtedness to the ancient world. After centuries of effort—fifteen centuries as a matter of fact—we see ourselves still at the primitive stage of discovery, where the unexplored ground before us is so vast that we can do no more than just probe it at random. Like early travellers in Africa, we are familiar with a stretch of coastline here, a river there, but the overall plan of our continent is hidden from us.

The aim of the King's College Conference, as first conceived, was simply further reconnaissance, further probing in the unsystematic manner that has so long characterised our field of study. We wanted to pinpoint some ready openings for research. We made no arrangements for covering the whole span of existing knowledge, so that speakers were left free to select their own topics with only the proviso that they chose something consistent with our exploratory intentions. All the same, when one comes to examine the papers which were read, one finds that nearly all the major divisions of our subject were represented. Luck, it must be supposed, was on our side; and with its aid, one can glimpse something of the way ahead.

My task is to construct a general picture, showing how the papers printed here dovetail and supplement each other; and in doing this, I shall call upon what I can remember of the talk that went on among the participants. That informal talk was not uninformative. We shall find Professor Billanovich referring in his paper to the *Italia medioevale e umanistica* as his *kibbutz*, a co-operative of scholars. To have been just such a co-operative is a claim which could be made at a more modest level for the King's College Conference. As the days passed, there grew up a feeling that a concerted effort was being mounted to solve problems in which all were interested. What I shall have to say, in so far as it is of value, will derive from this common inspiration. Only the mistakes, the false assessments are my own: instances of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

R. R. BOLGAR

erroneous reporting. It often happens—and has happened here—that a shared enterprise of moment is delivered into the hands of a single fallible scribe.

What comes first of all into clear focus when we read the proceedings of the Conference is an urgent need of a most basic sort. Efficient work is impossible, if one has not ready access to the tools one requires. Our principal tools are the MSS in which the writings of the ancients have been preserved; and the facts about them provide the natural starting point for all our research. We want to know their contents, their location, their age, what has been discovered about the relations between them and the history of each. But as things stand at present our need for this information is hard to satisfy.

Professor Sweeney describes what must be a very common experience:

The classicist or textual critic who desires to know what the evidence for a given text might be immediately finds that there are very few definitive lists of MSS of individual works or authors. If he suspects that the lists which he does find are incomplete and feels compelled to do something about this, he rapidly finds himself involved in the singularly complex and unpleasant field of manuscript cataloguing.

We do not possess a comprehensive list of all available classical MSS; and even lists which would give every example of a particular text or of the works of a particular author are in very short supply. It is significant of the present state of our knowledge that a recent excellent bibliography of the printed editions of Lucretius which was published in 1962 should have relegated the manuscript tradition to an appendix with the remark that a full description would demand a volume to itself,¹ and that now after another seven years the required volume still has not appeared.

Having drawn his gloomy picture of existing conditions, Professor Sweeney puts forward a plan for a comprehensive catalogue which is to cover everything written in Latin before A.D. 600, while its indexes will offer a ready guide to the manuscript tradition of every text and will enable scholars to trace not only the history of particular works, but also which works were in circulation in a given area at a given time. That such a catalogue would transform the study of classical influences goes without question. It would save individual research workers weeks, sometimes months, of labour. With it, the New World

¹ C. A. Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius* (London, 1962), p. 279.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: A WAY AHEAD?

would redress in a most decisive manner the procrastinations of the Old.

Later however we listened to another paper which is bound to cast some doubt on the feasibility of Professor Sweeney's project. This concept of a comprehensive catalogue had been in the mind of Félix Grat when in 1937 he founded the *Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes*; and the communication which bears the names of Mlle d'Alverny and Mme Garand, giving an account of the work of this Institute, tells us that after a third of a century of steady effort its research teams have not yet completed the inventory of the MSS of Latin texts written before A.D. 400, of which Grat had dreamt. Much has been done, but not all. A list of authors and works has been compiled with tables of *incipits* and *explicitis*. The relevant Latin MSS in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* as well as a number located outside France have been rigorously surveyed. A complete inventory of those in French provincial libraries is being prepared, and a similar inventory for the Vatican Library is almost ready for publication. But it is plain that these very considerable achievements still leave ground to be covered.

It is normal for work which demands expertise and a meticulous attention to detail to proceed at a slow pace; and one is bound to ask oneself if Professor Sweeney and his collaborators will be able to make the speedy progress they anticipate. But surely there is a chance that they will. It would be invidious to credit them with more energy or a larger measure of technical inventiveness than their predecessors in the field. But there are, it would seem, some considerations which tell in their favour. First, the labours of the Institute, interrupted anyway by a major war, have not been exclusively directed to the preparation of a Latin catalogue. Secondly, a new enterprise launched today is bound to benefit from what has been already achieved. Thanks in great part to the labours of the Institute, we do not stand where we stood in 1937. Finally—and this is perhaps the most important factor—the catalogue which Professor Sweeney has planned will be more concise in its descriptions than has been the practice in the past. Information about the physical make-up of MSS will be cut to a minimum. This is a case where less may easily mean more.

A *Catalogus Codicum Classicorum Latinorum* may well appear in our lifetime. But one is tempted to ask—what of the rest? We are not concerned in this volume with studies outside the field of classical Latin, but it would be absurd to avoid mentioning that Professor

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

R. R. BOLGAR

Sweeney's project ought to be followed, if not accompanied, by similar projects to cover ancient Greek and patristic texts. Something of the sort was mooted for Greek more than ten years ago by A. Juilier at the eleventh international congress of Byzantine studies;¹ and it is interesting to note that here again, the suggestion was for an inventory of a more summary kind than usual, designed primarily, as Professor Sweeney's will be, to serve the purposes of literary scholarship.

Alongside this question of the cataloguing of MSS, to which these two papers are dedicated, we have to place the putting into order of another important source of information which we find mentioned by Professor Sweeney and Dr Hunt. The study of classical influences has been greatly indebted to surviving accounts of medieval and renaissance libraries, lists of books purchased, lists of *desiderata*, references in letters to what a man read, bought or borrowed. From the time of Gustav Becker, efforts have been made to consolidate this material without definitive success. Paul Lehmann's noble edition of the medieval catalogues of Germany and Switzerland covered substantial ground, but remained unfinished after his death, and its completion is now likely to be on a less elaborate scale. Renaissance catalogues have been individually edited, but no one has tried to bring them together in a single conveniently comprehensive work.

The difficulties which would face an editor of this material are admittedly formidable. To start with, new lists are constantly being discovered. Professor Billanovich mentions the forthcoming publication by T. Foffano of a memorandum which Niccoli composed for Cosimo de' Medici, listing for him MSS which were believed to be available in the libraries of Northern France; and Dr Gargan discusses in this volume an inventory which describes the collection of a fourteenth-century bibliophile, Oliviero Forzetta. Where these two young scholars have harvested, others will no doubt harvest in their turn; and an end to the process is not yet in sight. Moreover the information which inventories and lists provide cannot be dissociated from kindred details which the study of a MS can bring to light. It is by combining facts from a variety of sources that scholars have been able to reconstitute some of the important book collections of the

¹ A. Dain, *Les Manuscrits*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1964), p. 80: 'En 1958, lors de la session à Munich du XIe Congrès international des Etudes Byzantines, A. Juilier, qui ne manque pas de courage, a présenté un système simplifié de catalogage des manuscrits grecs, qui permettrait un inventaire général de tous nos fonds. L'idée est à suivre. Conçu en effet sous forme d'inventaire sommaire, cet travail sera peut-être un jour réalisable.' I owe this reference to Professor Dale Sweeney.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: A WAY AHEAD?

Renaissance; and their hard-won conclusions ought to figure in any general survey, a requirement which raises Heaven knows how many problems of copyright.

Nevertheless it is evident that here too we need a vast project, as bold as Professor Sweeney's, to bring order into chaos. A comprehensive catalogue of classical MSS and an equally comprehensive survey of medieval and renaissance libraries emerge as our most urgent requirements. But they are not the only ones. We have still another set of tools to consider. There is not a paper in this volume which does not rest some part of its argument on writings composed during the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. If we want to establish what the classical heritage meant to later generations, we cannot avoid using the records which these generations left behind them; and we need to have these records readily available, not only to experienced scholars in favoured libraries, but to young research workers everywhere.

This is a *desideratum* which was not stressed in the formal part of the conference except by Professor Bischoff, who mentioned it in connection with twelfth-century commentaries, and by Professor IJsewijn, who called for up-to-date editions of the first Netherlands humanists. But the need is more general and so ought perhaps to be given emphasis here. When we try to familiarise ourselves with the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, we find ourselves well enough served so long as we stick to the vernaculars. Let us turn however to the more important field of Latin writing, and we come across some distressing *lacunae*. The urgency of the problem is to some extent blurred by the existence of Migne's huge collection. But the *Patrologia* is less useful than we generally imagine. Its possession is restricted to a relatively small number of libraries; and huge as it is, it omits a great deal and is often inaccurate. Nor does it contain those aids to learning, the critical apparatus, the historical and philological commentaries, the indispensable cross-references that a modern scholar faced, say, with a classical text regards as his due. Even for the works it covers new critical editions are often needed.

It is time someone edited William of Conches's *Dragmaticon* and *Philosophia Mundi*. Hildegard of Bingen clamours for attention. And what about Walter of Chatillon's *Alexandreis*, Joseph of Exeter's *de Bello Troiano*, Bernard Silvestris's *de Mundi Universitate* and Alan of Lille's *de Planctu Naturae*? The invaluable volumes of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* help us with the Carolingian poets. What Raby

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

R. R. BOLGAR

called sacred Latin poetry is available in extensive, if not always very scholarly, collections of hymns. But post-Carolingian secular verse is in many cases difficult to come by. There are some excellent editions of individual works, but many more are needed, if we want to discover how the poetic art of antiquity came to be absorbed into our poetic tradition.

In no other field of literary study is the apprentice scholar so straitened for good and easily accessible texts on which to work. And if the situation is bad where philosophy and poetry are concerned, we find it even worse when we come to look at educational works. Here the material which has been properly edited is very thin on the ground. Alberic de Monte Cassino's highly influential treatise, the *Rationes Dictandi* or *Breviarium de Dictamine*, which Professor Gerlo regards as the source of the medieval tradition in letter-writing, remains unpublished though an edition of it has been announced.¹ Much of Buoncampagno's work is similarly still in manuscript. But above all we need full critical editions of the medieval commentaries on classical authors. We have reason to be grateful to the scholars working on the *Catalogus Commentariorum*, but it is plain that their labours cannot stand alone. Several of our speakers (Professor Bischoff, Professor Courcelle, Dr Jauneau) have mentioned particular texts which require editing. Even with an author as important as William of Conches, we find several commentaries, on Juvenal, Priscian and Boethius for example, which still await publication; and Petrus Helias's *Summa Prisciani* is another paradoxically neglected work.²

For the humanist period the picture is equally unsatisfactory. Much of the material we need to consult is still in manuscript, or we must hunt for it in rare printed texts. Only fragments have been edited of Bersuire's great moralisation of Ovid. Among the classicising friars whom Dr Smalley brought into prominence was the industrious and for his age curiously original Trevet. His commentaries have still to capture an editor's attention. Professor IJsewijn's paper tells us of the numerous gaps which must be filled before the study of early Netherlands humanism can be placed on a firm footing; and every reader of Professor Weiss's *Humanism in England in the Fifteenth Century* will call to mind a whole series of major texts—Whethamstede's works for example—which he would like to see published.

¹ By H. H. Davis in *Medieval Studies* (1966).

² I am indebted to Mr E. P. M. Dronke for much of the material in the preceding two paragraphs.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: A WAY AHEAD?

Italy, the family seat of humanism, does no better. If you want a copy of Petrarch's complete works—to take the most telling example—you have to go back to the Basel printing of 1581, and this in spite of half a century of ardent labour by the scholars in charge of the *Edizione Nazionale*. It is true that this famous enterprise has covered a good deal of ground, and that several of Petrarch's major works have been independently edited during the last twenty years. But even so, the *de Remediis* has still to see its final ordering; and it is in Fracasetti's Italian translation that the *Semiles* are easiest to procure.¹ The Latin Petrarch remains difficult of access where a vernacular writer of equal stature, a Machiavelli or a Rabelais, can be bought without trouble by every student. And the handicaps which thwart us in the case of Petrarch thwart us (as might be expected) even more oppressively in the case of the lesser humanists: Boccaccio, Filelfo, Traversari, and a host of others.

We have been altogether too slow to recognise that our study of classical influences (and therefore our understanding of what antiquity means to us) is directly dependent on our knowledge of later Latin literature; and as a result, medieval and renaissance writers of Latin have for the most part been shockingly neglected. Place the work done on them alongside that which has been done on their vernacular contemporaries or on the classical authors, and its insufficiency will become obvious. Their further exploration and critical analysis must be the modern Latinist's first task.

Catalogues and editions, the infrastructure of scholarship, have to be provided, but the business of providing them is not easy to talk about, so that most of the speakers at the conference preferred to discuss the more colourful achievements and possibilities of research, and it is to this field we must now turn. The papers we are to consider can be divided for convenience into two categories. We have, on the one hand, those which deal with the problem of *what* classical texts or classical remains were studied, when, where and by whom; and on the other hand, we have those which deal with the allied problem of *how* these studies were conducted, how the influence of antiquity made itself felt.

The first of these categories is represented by the contributions from Professor Bieler, Dr Hunt, Professor Billanovich, the late Professor Weiss and Dr Gargan, by parts of Professor Courcelle's many-sided account of Augustine and Boethius and parts of the two

¹ I am indebted to Dr C. N. J. Mann for this material on Petrarch.

R. R. BOLGAR

architectural surveys by Professor Buddensieg and Mr Burns. As we can see from the last three papers mentioned, the categories we have postulated—*what?* and *how?*—are not mutually exclusive. Every analysis of how a classical text or monument was used presupposes the assumption that it was known to the user. The distinction between the two approaches is one of emphasis.

Our attempt to discover openings for research had the incidental effect of throwing light on problems of method; and one can see in retrospect that it was bound to do just this. Facts derive their significance from the way they are selected and analysed. The quest for facts presupposes a survey of the techniques we use to learn about them. Read in conjunction, the papers we have listed above illustrate most of the techniques employed in tracing what was known about ancient literature at different times and places. Until recently, scholars were generally content to note obvious mentions of a classical work or obvious quotations and to treat these as proof that the work in question was familiar to a medieval or renaissance author. This naïve procedure dominates the argument not only in Sandys's *History of Classical Scholarship*, a product of the first decade of our century, but also in Max Manitius's monumental survey of medieval Latin literature, which belongs to its next twenty years. But since then we have seen the development of more sophisticated methods. These are characterised by a readiness to bring together information drawn from a number of different sources and by a much higher degree of critical rigour. Professor Bieler and Dr Hunt both direct our attention to the fact that quotations cannot be accepted at their face value as proofs of a direct acquaintance with a classical text. Such quotations often come from secondary sources—grammars or *florilegia*—whose possible use requires to be carefully checked. Dr Hunt also stresses the need to match quotations—and with even greater reason, apparent echoes—against our knowledge of which MSS were currently in circulation. If there was a *lacuna* in the only MS of a classical work known to have been around at a particular time, then a contemporary quotation derived, as it would seem, from the missing part would have to be scrutinised with unusual suspicion.

To some extent with Professor Bieler, and more decisively with Dr Hunt, we are introduced to the modern study of the interrelations, wanderings and ownership of MSS. This line of research had its roots in nineteenth-century textual criticism and in the problems created by the formula *recentiores non deteriores*. Its first foundations were laid

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: A WAY AHEAD?

by Sabbadini, but Professor Billanovich is the man who has made it so very much his own. It would be pointless for me to summarise his lucid account of forthcoming publications in his *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, which readers can turn to on a later page. The section on the Querinian *ad Lucilium* is the most interesting from the point of view of method, showing how palaeographical evidence, data from inventories and letters and the identification of particular annotators are woven into a conclusive argument. Close analysis of annotations is the main feature of this line of study and justifies the efforts made by the *Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* to assemble samples of the handwriting of the best-known humanists. Reading Professor Billanovich's paper, we come to see why that collection fills a manifest need and could be usefully reproduced elsewhere.

Professor Weiss and Dr Gargan give us further examples of how the method which we have been discussing operates when applied to particular problems. Like proconsuls on the march they conquer fresh provinces for a growing empire. It is important to note that they do not claim the same degree of validity for all their findings. The name of a grammarian, a list of students, identifiable as belonging to Treviso, establish a Horace MS as present in that city during the thirteenth century. A marginal note by a fourteenth-century Veronese humanist shows him to have known the titles of many of Ausonius's works. What he says about the poet shows that he had read at least some of them. These are certainties; and they help us to form a new picture of the beginnings of humanism. But there are arguments alongside these findings which range from the almost certain to the probable, from the probable to the possible. That the Veronese humanist who listed the works of Ausonius had access to a MS containing them must be regarded as almost certain. That this MS should have been the one which Benzo d'Alessandria had seen in the Verona chapter library a few years before is only a little less probable. But the possibility that an Ausonius fragment sent to Politian in 1493 was part of the MS which Benzo saw is, let us face it, no more than a possibility. It has not the same likelihood as the instances mentioned earlier. The evidence is clearly stated; and to see a web of persuasion woven out of such varying elements is one of the seductions of this form of scholarship; but it is a scholarship that calls for attentive readers, if they are to avoid confusing conjecture and fact.

All these papers have however in addition that other interest which is more directly connected with the advertised aims of the Conference.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11813-2 - Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500-1500

Edited by R. R. Bolgar

Excerpt

[More information](#)

R. R. BOLGAR

They call attention to possibilities which research could exploit straightaway. The motifs that Irish vernacular literature shares with the authors of antiquity may have something to tell us about the classical studies of the early Irish schools. The work of B. L. Ullman on the medieval *florilegia* ought to be continued.¹ The teaching of rhetoric in Ducento and Trecento Italy needs to be scrutinised centre by centre. The notebooks of renaissance architects—a mine of information about their attitude to Roman buildings—deserve meticulous examination. And it is worth noting that all these suggestions for research have an element in common. We have here fields of study which have already been probed to good effect; and the next step forward involves a systematic filling in of gaps. As with the cataloguing of MSS, we have reached a point where consolidation is the prime essential.

Studies of the ‘*what?*’ type seem often to take it for granted that any information we acquire about the fortunes of the classical heritage is intrinsically worth having. That is an assumption which we all readily make; but in our more guarded moments we are all aware that it cannot stand. Our interest is not—and should not appear to be—an arbitrary enthusiasm. The truth is that the Greco-Roman past fascinates us because it has shaped our culture and therefore our lives; and a rational desire to know the manner of that shaping is what finally justifies our work.

It is not surprising therefore that the majority of the papers read at the Conference should have been concerned with the use which has been made of the classical inheritance, with cultural rather than purely historical or antiquarian issues.

How Roman civilisation transformed the thinking of later ages is such an enormous subject that we must divide it up somehow, if we are to keep control of our material even within the narrow range of topics that a single conference could cover. The most convenient divisions will be those which we normally establish between the different products of man’s cultural activity. Language, creative literature, scientific knowledge and thought, architecture and the fine arts provide four obvious headings. To these four we must however add a fifth which will be of a rather different kind. In sculpture or architecture a classical work could make a direct impact on a medieval or renaissance imitator. But in language, literature and to some

¹ B. L. Ullman, ‘Classical Authors in Medieval Florilegia’, *Classical Philology*, xxiii (1928)–xxvii (1932).