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Étienne Wolff (ed.), *Fulgence. Virgile dévoilé. Mythographes*. Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2009. Pp. 242. ISBN 782757400913. €25.00 (pb).

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A fascinating study, this volume is not to be missed. It roams from the relatively unexplored territory of Fulgentius to the more familiar terrain of Dante and Boccaccio, seeking to analyze the deepest sense(s) of the poetical words and pursuing the nearly impossible goal of both stimulating the specialist and interesting the general reader. The work, a *desideratum* in the discipline, is the first to be published within the *Mythographes* collection, and is presented here as the result of the efforts by *Polymnia*, an international research group directed by Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Françoise Graziani. The principal aim of the series is to bring before a modern public a diverse *corpus* of Greek and Latin texts (mythological-allegorical commentaries, cosmological and genealogical treatises, iconological texts) which, while particularly influential on the history of culture and the history of ideas, has nevertheless been neglected. Each volume in the series will offer a facing translation from the original text into French, accompanied by a set of exegetical notes.

Virgile dévoilé provides a precious anthology of texts in which, in accordance with the general spirit of the series, the most extensive section is devoted to the *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae* (VC in the following) by Fulgentius. The Fulgentian commentary on the *Aeneid* is introduced, translated and annotated by Étienne Wolff. (The original subject and the reputation of its editor should be enough to underline the outstanding value of the volume.) In the second section we find an original selection of works, either unabridged (as with the Pseudo-Fulgentius's *Super Thebaiden*) or extracted (as with Isidorus's *Etymologiae* and the commentary by Bernardus Silvestris to Martianus Capella), edited by Wolff and Graziani who are responsible, respectively, for the translations and the introductions. By contrast, the extracts from Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante* are both edited and translated by Graziani, who also penned the volume's impressive afterword (pp. 189-202), a fascinating and clever essay which weaves together the various threads of entire work. Among the indices, the list of Latin and Greek etymologies (pp. 213-215) is the most remarkable and useful, since it simultaneously reflects and reveals the internal structure (based--as we will see--on the etymological method) that shapes each text, first and foremost that of Fulgentius himself.

Introducing the *VC*, Wolff immediately deals with the complex issue of Fulgentius' identity, a difficult task given the conspicuous lack of any chronological, geographical, or literary evidence about him. According to the *status quaestionis*, Fulgentius is introduced as an author who most likely worked later than Martianus Capella, Orosius and Macrobius (given the quotations from these authors in the Fulgentian *corpus*) but who likely preceded Boethius, who would have remembered his example in writing the *Consolatio Philosophiae* (see p. 8). Wolff then shows himself to be in agreement with the generally accepted proposition that Fulgentius was of North African (and particularly Carthaginian) heritage, a proposition supported by all the circumstantial evidence (such as the origin of the above-quoted authors and the dedication of the *Mythologiae* to Catus from Carthage). With regard to the chronological complexities, Wolff *plus vraisemblablement* connects Fulgentius' activity with the Vandal Thrasamond's kingdom (496-523 A.D.) and establishes him as a representative - together with Dracontius and the poets of the *Anthologia latina* -- of the so-called Vandalic Renaissance (p. 9). An additional paragraph (pp. 11-14) is then dedicated to a detailed discussion of whether there was more than one Fulgentius, in which Wolff attempts to answer the fundamental and long-standing question: is Fulgentius the mythographer the same person as the contemporary Fulgentius bishop of Ruspe? Wolff here recalls some of the most remarkable pieces of evidence which support the separatist case, among which is a line in the prologue of the *Mythologiae*'s (*myth.* 13,9) evidently imitating Coripp. *Ioh.* 8, 279. This connection was actually proposed for the first time in ThLL *Onom.* 2, 1913 [Reisch], s.v. *Cynthia*, col. 793.17-18 and was recently highlighted by Gregory Hays ("Varia Fulgentiana" *ICS* 23, 1998, p. 130 and "The Date and Identity of the Mythographer Fulgentius" *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 13, 2003, p. 243) as definitive proof of the difference between the two Fulgentiuses. In fact, in addition to excluding the identification of the mythographer with the bishop (who was dead by 533, while the *Iohannis* is thought to have been written ca. 548-550 A.D.), this connection also points to Boethius as a possible source for Fulgentius (and not vice versa) and thereby fixes the earliest possible dating as between the "seconde moitié du Ve siècle et premier tiers du VIe"(p. 14).

The *VC* is one of the four authentic works commonly ascribed to Fulgentius. In addition to the *Mythologiae*, quoted above, this *corpus* also includes the *Expositio sermonum antiquorum* (see the edition and Italian translation by U. Pizzani, *Definizione di parole antiche*, Roma 1969), a glossary of rare words, and the *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* (see M. Manca, *Le et à del mondo e dell'uomo*, Alessandria 2003), which could be defined as a universal history in a lipogrammatic shape (all collected in R. Helm's Teubner text (Lipsiae 1898), the only existing critical edition). Although the chronological sequence of these works has not been established with absolute certainty, it is nevertheless possible to state that the *VC* follows the *Mythologiae* as a pendant, both because a passage in the *VC* itself suggests this relationship (see *VC* 98,23-24) and because they are thematically and formally linked by complementary explications conducted *secundum philosophiam*. The narrative *escamotages* are the same: like Calliope in the *Mythologiae*, Vergil seems to explain to Fulgentius the 'substance' of his own poem, although (as in the *Mythologiae*) the voices of the author and the classical poet grow increasingly confused as they intertwine and overlap. As for the dialogue, many discrepancies can be found in the general contents. Whereas the first part of the *VC* is detailed and thorough, for example, including all the expected 'rhetorical sections' (dedication, explanation of contents, Muses' invocation in hexameters, etc.), the text grows hurried towards its conclusion and finishes *ex abrupto* (p. 18). Here Wolff

touches on a number of incredibly interesting aspects of the work. These include the classroom setting of the dialogue between Vergil and Fulgentius (see also J.W. Jones Jr., "Vergil as Magister in Fulgentius", in *Classical Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, ed. Ch. Henderson Jr., I, Rome 1964, pp. 273-5) and the crucial theme of education (p. 21); the work's ironic tone and the resulting figure of Vergil, so different from traditional representations of the poet; and the issue of his Christianization, "attestée pourtant dès le IVe siècle" but here "nettement refusée" (p. 20). Wolff reaches the conclusion that the central purpose of the 'semi-burlesque' tone is to reveal Fulgentius' awareness of his own limits as a simple grammarian, especially as compared to the poet and 'truth-dealer' Vergil. The new layout of the commentary works to emphasize the same point: for the first time, the line-by-line, literal explication of the text gives way to a comprehensive analysis, which "exclut les remarques grammaticales et propose de l'épopée une interprétation allégorique globale" (p. 21). The originality of Fulgentius' *VC* thus lies in its total view of the Vergilian text, in its attempt to provide an explication that moves away from the compartmentalizing commentary tradition of its predecessors. In other words, Fulgentius seeks to apply a psycho-moral interpretation of Aeneas' story, a story which symbolizes, beyond its allegorical veil, the entire arc and development of human life, from its beginning to its end and through all its various intermediate stages. Moreover, as Wolff makes clear, Fulgentius is the first Christian author writing a commentary on Vergil who aims to show the truth behind the 'lying' poetry: "l'interprétation allégorique a permis de continuer à lire des textes qui étaient jugés inacceptables pour les chrétiens par leur immoralité ou leur futilité [...] et c'est ainsi que Virgile, par exemple, n'a pas été eclipse par les auteurs d'épopées chrétiennes" (see pp. 19-23, quotation from p. 23). The foundation of this moral interpretation of Vergil's poem is etymology: Fulgentius breaks down single words, proper names and expressions to disclose how the etymologies (sometimes false or incorrect, often based only on a phonetic analogy) underlie the general moral meaning of a particular Vergilian passage. This 'etymological decomposition' is by no means a new category of analysis (see e.g. Varro), but its prominence both in *VC* and in *Mythologiae* is impressive in its breadth and detail. Wolff proceeds to give special attention (pp. 27-28) to Fulgentius' language, pointing out some particular features (his pre-medieval flavor, baroque constructions and complexity, asymmetry in sentence structure, rare words and *hapax*) recognized as peculiar to this late Latin author.

Wolff's text is based on Helm's now dated critical edition, the only one available; it is thus adopted here with only rare exceptions, and is kept as the reference for both page and line numbers. The choice is much appreciated since other scholarly attempts to give a new numbering system without a real concordance have yielded quite confusing results (see Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, Columbus Ohio 1971; Agostino-Zanlucchi [edd.], *Fabio Planciade Fulgenzio. Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae*, Padova 1972; Rosa, *Fulgenzio. Commento all'Eneide*, Milano-Trento 1997). Referring to the subsequent *fortuna* of *VC*, Wolff tracks the main stages (Bernardus Silvestris, Johannes of Salisbury, Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio) and explains the reason for its success: "l'interprétation allégorique de Fulgence paraît s'écarter du sens obvie de l'*Énéide*: mais c'est précisément cela qui la faisait apprécier, car ce qui intéressait les lecteurs du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance" (p. 31). One of the most interesting achievements of this volume is to trace precisely this *file rouge*. After a selective bibliography (which refers to the more comprehensive one available on a web site edited by Gregory Hays, [Fulgentius Bibliography](#)), the editor presents the Fulgentian Latin text with a facing translation, the first one into French. Despite the obscurity of the original work--and the resulting

difficulty and occasional ambiguity of the translation, as Wolff himself warns--this this is undoubtedly a landmark contribution to the current scholarship. The editor's approach to the Latin text is conservative (e.g. Wolff has preserved Helm's questionable orthography), but, in order to clarify the sense, he has sometimes modified the original punctuation: yet another proof, if any more were necessary, of the urgent need critically to review the late nineteenth-century text. The textual commentary, "réduit à l'indispensable" (p. 33), as Wolff himself tells us, shows many elements of particular interest: the thorough punctuation of some literal references to the *Aeneid* never before underlined in such a systematic way (see e.g. n. 45, p. 171; n. 61, p. 172); observations about the relationship between the *VC* and passages of the *Mythologiae* (with some possible additions: see n. 13, p. 168 to be compared with *Myth.* 15, 4-19, or n. 55, p. 172 with *Myth.* 8, 19-20), as well as between the *VC* and the *De Nuptiis* by Martianus (see n. 18, p. 169; n. 53, p. 171). By contrast, annotations are relegated to the back of the volume, a somewhat frustrating and inconvenient way of organizing the material.

The *Super Thebaiden*, included in the Helm edition but critically re-edited by R.D. Sweeney in 1997 (here adopted as the reference), is commonly recognized as a spurious, later work. It is not by Fulgentius at all but is rather an *imitation* of the etymological Fulgentian method in a commentary on Statius compiled by a cleric around the twelfth century in the cultural context of the School of Chartres. Inauthentic as it is, Graziani underlines the relevance of this commentary in her introduction to the text, using it as proof of the *VC*'s influence (p. 72). As with the *VC*, the fundamental achievement here is the French translation, not the first into a modern language (see Whitbread 1971, pp. 239-243), but surely the most reliable one.

The selection from Isidorus's *Etymologiae* (I,29; VIII,7; VIII,11) is certainly appreciated as well, since it manages in a few short pages to make the reader aware of the deep and crucial relevance of the philosophical relationship between words and things. These passages, about gods, etymology and poetry respectively, give "compte à la fois de la méthode analogique et inductive d'Isidore et de son souci de démultiplier le sens plutôt que de fixer des définitions univoques" (p. 86). Lindsay's edition (Oxford 1957 [1911]) has been adopted as the edition of reference: just two corrections are proposed: I,29, *Agraculus* instead of *garrulus* (but without much explanation: "nous corrigeons avec Arevalo" [p. 178, n. 4]) and VIII,11,3 *cultum* instead of *cultu* (simply "nous corrigeons" [p. 178, n. 18]). It must be said, however, that the bibliography for this section (p. 87) leaves something to be desired. Although it includes four very different and interesting titles, from Platon's *Cratylus* to Rabanus Maurus's *De universo*, it nonetheless misses, for example, the general contribution to the study of Isidorus by J. Fontaine (*Isidore de Séville: genèse et originalité de la culture hispanique au temps des Wisigoths*, Turnhout, 2000).

The next section is dedicated to Bernardus Silvestris, who lived and worked at Tours around the middle of the twelfth century and was connected with the most important representatives of the School of Chartres. He is the author of a commentary on the *Aeneid*, which he develops using the model of the Fulgentian *VC* as well as Martianus Capella's later *De Nuptiis*. The decision to present the *Proemium* of the latter commentary instead of a passage from the former (which might have been the more obvious choice), makes it possible to judge the relevance of the work of Martianus in this context and to connect him more clearly with the Fulgentian *Mythologiae* (p. 117). Furthermore, it shows the deep and pervasive fascination of medieval thinkers with the theoretical idea

that poetry could contain hidden philosophical meanings. The very short extract from the *Proemium* (pp. 120-123) sheds light on precisely this concept and represents a good introduction to the theory of *Integumentum* (see also the explanatory note 4, p. 180).

Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante* is the culminating point of the volume. In her annotations (which are sometimes not so specific as one might wish : e.g. p. 182 n. 30 where we would like know something more about the Philippe Dain translation of Fulgentius' *Mythologiae*, here only quoted but not further described), Graziani argues that Boccaccio's modern method of allegorical interpretation, applied as it is to a modern poetic text, still follows the same ancient and medieval tradition associated with Fulgentius and Isidorus. By making this point, Graziani uses Boccaccio, that seminal figure in the early Italian Renaissance, to conclude her discussion of the "lecture 'polysémique'" and the "voile poétique" (p. 128). The translation is the first into French and follows the text edited by Padoan (Milan 1994).

"Le mythe est le langage propre à la poésie" (p. 195). With this concise, elegant conclusion, the editors make it clear that it is necessary to understand the manifold ways in which allegorical readings have been applied to poetical texts. What is more, the statement hints at a deeper, more general message that seems to underlie the methodological approach of this remarkable and precious book: the poetical text *always* needs to be 'disclosed', *dévoilé*, to reveal the value and the truth of the philosophical wisdom it is delivering.