



MANUSCRIPTS AND TEXT OF THE VITA S. VALENTINI: A REVIEW OF THE ARTICLE BY D'ANGELO

I've started to look at the photocopies that I obtained three days ago of articles in the Bassetti volume of papers about St Valentine.^[1] Naturally my first interest is the paper by Edoardo D'Angelo, "La Passio sancti Valentini martyris (BHL 8460-8460b): Un 'martirio occulto' d'età postcostantiniana?" (p.179-222), as it contains a discussion of the manuscripts and a new critical edition.

The first thing that struck me about the paper was its position. If I were doing a volume of papers centred around a single literary text, and one of those papers was a critical edition of the text, then I would most certainly place it at the front. I would also insist on a translation. Doing so would be the natural way to begin such a volume and present it to the public. Instead it is the seventh paper in the volume, and relatively one of the shortest.

The paper starts with a list of manuscripts containing the work, which is really very useful considering the small space in which it has to appear. There are 118 manuscripts in all, and two of a slightly modified version of the text identified as BHL 8460b. Seven of these date from before 1000 AD, two before 900; and a further thirty-seven from before 1200. These are all given. The remainder sadly are not; but of course there is no space.

The origins of each manuscript are not given, but we learn that nearly all of these are Italian, and all of the early ones. D'Angelo infers from this that the text has an Italian origin. It is always risky to argue from survivals, but it is not improbable in any way that the *Life* of St Valentine of Terni should originate close by, in Lazio. The other content of the manuscripts likewise relates to Umbrian saints.

The 37 manuscripts include a manuscript from South Africa, from the "Grey collection". I don't think that I have ever before seen reference to a medieval manuscript held in South Africa. I would hope that the remaining South Africans are photographing the manuscripts as fast as they can before the barbarian rulers of that unhappy land destroy them.

The wide diffusion of the text and the Carolingian date of some of the copies tends to suggest an early date. The quotation of two sentences verbatim by Bede in his *Martyrology* (CPL 2032) in the early 8th century provides a *terminus antequam*. The text is most likely therefore of the 6-7th century.

The standard reference edition of the text is still that of the Bollandists in the *Acta Sanctorum* (AASS), under February 14. This was printed in 1658, yet D'Angelo tells us that "Tale edizione seicentesca, fondata su una base decente di codici, ha retto tutto sommato all'urto del tempo e dell'avanzamento della ricerca." ("This seventeenth century edition, founded on a decent base of manuscripts, has all in all survived the impact of time and the progress of research"), which is fair comment. The AASS introduction states that it was based on five mss plus the Mombricitus edition; but the footnotes to the text come from three manuscripts; "S. Maxim.", "Regium." and "Gladbas.", six breviaries, and two printed editions, the Mombricitus and Surius. D'Angelo has clearly not had the chance to pursue this very far, but suggests that the "Regium" must be one of the 8 mss in the Royal Library in

Brussels – reasonable, considering that the Bollandists were working in that area – and the “Gladbas” is probably ms. 72 in the library of the Bollandists, previously from the monastery of St Vitus Martyr in Gladbach.

The editor has produced his new edition based on the earliest manuscripts, plus a handful from the next 37, which he believes to be from the same geographical area. This is reasonable up to a point; but what we do not see is proper stemmatics. We all know that late manuscripts can contain truth which is not found in surviving earlier manuscripts. There is also the problem that this is not a literary text, but a hagiographical one, where the copyist may feel free to alter the text. The article is not nearly long enough to explore these questions properly, and so the new edition is not really as critical as it could be. All the same it involves various small changes to the text printed by the Bollandists.

One decision made by the editor seems to me to be absolutely mistaken. He has not normalised the spelling: we have “michi” rather than “mihi”, for instance. The logic here seems to be faulty: we are told that the mss vary wildly, that we have no idea what spelling the author might have used (although I do not see why we care), and so he has compromised between the spellings of the manuscripts, in order to avoid “alle periculosissime tentazioni di classicizzazione forzata” (the most perilous temptations of forced classicization”). But we do not do this in our literary editions. The variable spelling of Shakespeare, or even Jane Austen, are not respected in modern editions. Spelling was not standardised in the past. This was an evil, not a good, and it was a barrier to communication. The editor should have used the standard spellings, and noted anything he felt was significant in the apparatus.

Short though the paper is, the author has also been obliged to discuss whether the content of the *Life* of St Valentine is in some way historical. The attempt is made to show that it might be.

We learn that many people suppose the events in the story to belong to the reign of Claudius II Gothicus (268-270), because that is the setting for the martyrdom of Valentine the Roman in the *Passio Maris et Martha*, which may or may not be the same saint as our St Valentine of Terni. The logic of this is poor: there may be two separate St Valentines, or they may be the same one.

The Prefect of the City of Rome in the *Life* is given as “furius Placidus”, “the furious Placidus”. The Bollandists treated this as a joke by the author, but D’A. identifies him as a certain absurdly named Marcus Mecius Memmius Furius Baburius Cecilianus Placidus, praetorian prefect from 342-4 and prefect of the city from 346-7. Other not very distinctive names are adduced to suggest that the story should be set in the same period. None of this seems much more than speculation. Nothing compels us to believe that these are anything but coincidences.

1. ^[1]M. Bassetti &c, *San Valentino e il suo culto tra medioevo ed età contemporanea. Uno status quaestionis*, Terni, 2012. ISBN-13: 978-8879885713. [↩](#)