

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Gemma Donati, *L'Orthographia di Giovanni Tortelli. Percorsi dei classici*, 11. Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2006. Pp. xix, 407; pls. 24. ISBN 88-87541-31-0. €60.00 (pb).**

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It is only in the last few decades that scholars have paid much attention to the biography and the works of the humanist Giovanni Tortelli (Arezzo 1400-1466). Tortelli studied in Florence, where he befriended Leonardo Bruni and had the opportunity to study Greek with Filelfo and Carlo Marsuppini. From 1423 to 1433 Tortelli lived in Mantua, where he attended the classes of master Vittorino da Feltre, then the most eminent teacher in classics. In order to improve his knowledge of the Greek language and to complete his humanistic training, Tortelli left Italy for Greece around 1433 and remained there until 1438.

After a period spent in Bologna, in 1447 Tortelli moved to Rome where he developed close relations with pope Niccolò V. (Tommaso Parentucelli, 1447-1455). It was this pope who commissioned Tortelli to found the Vatican Library by gathering manuscripts from far and wide, as well as providing the new library with numerous translations from Greek into Latin, commissioned for that purpose from the most illustrious Italian humanists of the time (e.g., Guarinus of Verona, Leonardus Iustiniani, Antonius Loschi, Laurentius Valla, Giannozzo Manetti, and the young Niccolò Perotti).

Although the foundation of the Vatican Library can doubtless be regarded as Tortelli's most important contribution, he nevertheless deserves to be studied also for his major literary work, entitled *De orthographia*. *De orthographia* is a sort of alphabetical lexicon, which gives the correct Latin orthography of c. 3440 Greek terms and--by means of quotations from ancient authors -- provides information on their etymology and meaning.[1](#)

Tortelli's *De orthographia* may be considered the first in a long line of important Humanistic Latin lexicographies such as Laurentius Valla's *Elegantiarum libri*, Iulianus Maius' *De priscorum proprietate verborum*, and most of all Niccolò Perotti's *Cornu copiae*. These works show a linguistically modern approach towards Latin, which completely supplanted the Medieval tradition of Latin lexica (e.g. Papias, Hugutio, and John Balbi). Humanist activity in the field of Latin Lexicography culminated in Ambrosius Calepinus' vocabulary of 1502, which may be considered the first to employ a modern approach towards Latin lexicography. In this sense we may

see *De orthographia* as the first in a series of steps towards a modernization of Latin lexicography.

If we thus consider Tortelli's importance on the intellectual stage of his time as well as his work's immediate success, it is more than surprising that scientific research on this humanist has so far been scarce and what has been produced is hardly comparable to the much more substantial works on other--often far inferior--works of the 15th century. So far the only works on Tortelli are an older biographical study 1920<sup>2</sup> and a number of articles, while a reliable edition of *De orthographia* is still sadly missing. Only a sound edition however would allow scholars to see more clearly what sources Tortelli knew and employed in his writings.

Donati's book is therefore the first monograph on this author and his work. Her main concern is to trace the various phases of its creation. In her first chapter, "Genesi e struttura" (pp. 1-85), the author outlines the most essential episodes of Tortelli's biography and points to his time in Bologna (1441-1445) as the moment when he began working on *De orthographia*. She connects this period of intellectual activity with Tortelli's friendship with Niccolò Volpi, a humanist from Vicenza but resident in Bologna, who spurred him on to embark and continue on his lexicographical enterprise.

Donati's second chapter, "Le lettere di Niccolò Volpe" (pp. 87-186), contains an edition of the 26 letters which N. Volpi wrote to Tortelli. The inclusion of the letters as part of the book is justified by certain passages in which the two humanists discuss lexicographical problems which would later arise also in *De orthographia*. Although the letters' contents are not necessarily concerned with the first stages of Tortelli's work as a whole, they are still important for the understanding of numerous of its lemmata of which they provide something like a 'first redaction'.

In the third chapter, "La tradizione" (pp. 187-251), Donati deals with *De orthographia*'s extant witnesses divided into three groups. The work enjoyed an immediate success first in Italy and subsequently also in the rest of Europe. Donati lists 23 manuscripts containing the full text of *De orthographia* and 12 more containing 'only' *excerpta*. In addition Donati chooses four incunables which likewise contain the full text (Lucca, U. Han, 1471, HC 15563, Venezia, N. Jenson, 1471, HC 15564, Treviso, H. Liechtenstein, 1477, HC 15565, Venezia, F. Pincio, 1493, HC 15572). Her selection of these four editions is justified by her research on the relations and dependencies both among those four and between them and other contemporary and subsequent ones.

In the fourth and last chapter, "I rapporti tra i testimoni" (pp. 253-342), Donati presents her results drawn from a partial collation (for a significant section) of the work's principal witnesses and attempts to delineate certain relations between them. She also revises the role played up to now by the manuscript Vat. Lat. 1478 (A) which has so far been considered a sort of *codex unicus*. In fact it was even believed that Tortelli himself had written it in order to present it to pope Niccolò V. as a gift. Instead, Donati persuasively argues that the main handwriting is not Tortelli's, although she attributes to him the marginal notes. She likewise doubts the text's authority over all others since it lacks 16 lemmata present in other witnesses (see Donati p. 254). Nevertheless A remains an invaluable document not least because it still constitutes a partial autograph

- even if the spell of the *codex unicus* has been broken.

Donati's fourth chapter is followed by an appendix called "Architettura e indice dei lemmi" (pp. 345-383), in which the author provides a list of lemmata as contained in *De orthographia*. Previously anyone intending to consult *De orthographia*--a lexicon not organized according to the alphabetic principle -- needed above all two things: time and patience. From 1994 onwards it was possible to consult the index published by J.-L. Charlet and M. Furno on the basis of two incunables from 1471.<sup>3</sup> Donati's index surpasses the older one by far and will doubtless be of great help to anyone who wishes to consult *De orthographia*. The appendix is followed by a rich section of indices (of reproductions, of manuscripts, of key words, and of names).

Donati's monograph is highly specialized and addresses an audience of philologists specializing in humanistic texts. The first chapter, especially, proves at times to be tough reading due to the author's attempt to insert numerous biographical notes into a chapter generally concerned with the first stages of the work's creation. Here it might have been advisable to separate the two spheres and help the reader gain a first impression by dedicating an introductory chapter exclusively to Tortelli's life, reserving the information on the work's creation for a separate chapter.

Donati's principal achievement consists in her recension and study of *De orthographia*'s transmission and the important conclusions she draws regarding the manuscripts' interrelations and interdependencies. Any future editor will have to keep them in mind. Nevertheless, as the recent critical edition of the *Cornu copia* has shown, a simple collation of a work's extant witnesses is not always enough to establish precise readings, especially when it comes to quotations from ancient authors. Here it is necessary to attempt a theoretical reconstruction of the author's personal library, i.e. the works of ancient authors at the humanist's disposal. In Tortelli's case, e.g., Donati has proved convincingly that the Virgilian and Statian quotations were inserted only in a second phase and drawn from the comments of Servius and Lactantius Placidus (p. 269). On the other hand, it remains unclear what redaction of those highly complex works Tortelli had at his disposal. In general however it may be observed that Donati's analysis of the individual lemmata focuses primarily on their critical/textual aspects (i.e., readings and relationships among the manuscripts) and less on the intricate questions of their sources.

Tortelli's work enjoyed great success, due in particular to its printed editions which allowed for widespread circulation and use. Nevertheless, as Charlet was already able to demonstrate, significant differences exist between the two editions from 1471 (Rome and Venice). The Venetian edition omits certain parts of the text and presents the lemmata in a different sequence. The Roman edition however contains a greater number of mistakes.<sup>4</sup> To assess how widely those first printed editions circulated and what role they played in making the work known all over Italy and eventually Europe, it will be necessary to study their textual variants. Any future critical edition should thus include their readings in its apparatus.

In conclusion, if we consider the pivotal role Tortelli played both in the history of modern Latin lexicography and in the foundation of the Vatican Library and consider likewise the scarcity of scholarly studies dedicated to him, we can only welcome Donati's book on Tortelli. It constitutes a milestone on the road towards the true end of

scholarship on Tortelli--a critical edition of *De orthographia*--by giving us precious insights on the work's 'genesis' and its transmission, which must be regarded as extremely complex.

Establishing a correct text of Tortelli's vocabulary will by no means be as easy as it was, for instance, in the case of the *Cornu copiae* (where scholars were able to draw on the manuscript Vaticanus Urbinas Latinus 301, written by Perotti's nephew and corrected by Perotti himself).<sup>5</sup> If one considers that seven scholars worked for more than 12 years on Perotti's critical edition it becomes exceedingly clear that a critical edition of Tortelli's *De orthographia* cannot be tackled by a single scholar alone. On the basis of my experience as co-editor of Perotti's *Cornu copiae*, I would suggest assembling a team of scholars who may together tackle this huge task (i.e. studying the transmission and the work's sources). Certainly Donati would be destined to play a prominent role in such a difficult but highly desirable enterprise.

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#### Notes:

<sup>1.</sup> See e.g. the entry *Myrmidon* in Donati p. 267, which provides an example of a lemma in *De orthographia*: *Myrmidones cum y graeco, sequens i latino scribitur. Populi fuerunt Thessalia a Myrmidone Iovis filio et eorum duce cognominati, ut scripsit Heratosthenes. Servius vero super Ilo Aeneidos librum dixit fuisse in Attica regione puellam Myrmione nomine ob solertiam et castimoniam Minervae gratam, quae cum aratrum in odium Cereris a Minerva conditum hominibus demonstraret, a turbata Minerva in formicam versa fuit, quae graeca lingua myrmix dicitur, quam damnavit ut nunquam desisteret a congregandis granis. Sed quia adveniente peste in Aegina insula ex formicis deinde populi restituti sunt, ut late narravit Ovidius libro Metamorphoseon, populi illi dicti sunt Myrmidones.*

<sup>2.</sup> See G. Mancini, Giovanni Tortelli cooperatore di Niccolò V nel fondare la Biblioteca Vaticana, in "Arch. Storico Italiano" 78, 1920, pp. 1-108.

<sup>3.</sup> See J.-L. Charlet-M. Furno, *Index des lemmes du De orthographia de Giovanni Tortelli*, Aix-en-Provence 1994.

<sup>4.</sup> See e.g. at the beginning of the letter V, the Roman edition prints as follows: *Dictionum Graecarum quae Latine scribuntur et a T littera initium sumunt orthographia finit. Incipit earum quae ab V littera initium habent.* Venetian edition omits this introduction.

<sup>5.</sup> The critical edition of Perotti's *Cornu copiae* is not only based on the ms. Vaticanus Urbinas Latinus 301, but also on three printed editions, which were very successful after the death of Perotti: namely, the *editio princeps* (Venice, Ludovico Odasi, 1489), the Venetian second printed text edited by Polidoro Virgilio (1496), and finally the edition printed by Aldus Manutius (Venice 1526), which is the first to provide the readership with an accurate index of words occurring as lemmas in Perotti's *Cornu copiae*.

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