
Rosetta

Petorella, F. (2019); 'Francesco Berardi, 2017. La retorica degli esercizi preparatori: Glossario ragionato dei Progymnasmata. Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, Spudasmata 172. Pp. 346. € 58.00. ISBN 978-3-487-15595-1.'

Rosetta **23**: 43-47

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue23/Petorella.pdf>

Francesco Berardi, 2017. *La retorica degli esercizi preparatori: Glossario ragionato dei Progymnasmata*. Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, Spudasmata 172. Pp. 346. € 58.00. ISBN 978-3-487-15595-1.

Reviewed by Fabrizio Petorella.

In the ancient schools of the Hellenistic and Late Antique world, young students completed a series of 'preliminary exercises' before devoting themselves to the practice of rhetorical declamation. This volume offers a complete and reasoned glossary of these *progymnasmata*, thus synthesising teachings drawn from a wide range of sources and organising the material around the most commonly supported technical and lexical categorisations. Within the debate on ancient rhetoric, which in the previous decades has been enriched with seminal studies,¹ such research aims to provide a comprehensive description 'of the numerous types of, and variations on, rhetorical devices, both with regards to the evolution of theory, and thanks to the comparison to the precepts of the *Artes*' (p. 5).

The book opens with a preface by Professor M. S. Celentano, who supervised the postdoctoral research that was the first step in the redaction of the glossary (pp. 7-9). This section explains the genesis of the project based at the University of Chieti-Pescara and ends with a brief reflection on the usefulness of Berardi's study, a precious tool for readers fascinated by ancient rhetorical theory or interested in its influence on famous literary works (p. 9).

These considerations are further developed by Berardi, who, after another short preface concerning the complex path which led to the final version of his study (pp. 11-13), justifies his choices in the main introduction to the work (pp. 15-25). Here, the author analyses the role of *progymnasmata* within the Hellenistic and Late Antique educational system, underlining the importance for the philologist in seeing their objects of study through the lens of rhetorical formation. This point deserves some comment. In the famous and often criticised 'esplosione di tardoantico' (to quote the

¹ E.g. Kennedy 1999 and 2003, Patillon 2008-2014, and Pernot 1993.

provocative expression coined by Andrea Giardina²), the philologist needs to remain firmly anchored to the ancient sources, acquiring as much knowledge as possible of the context in which they were created. A rigorous study of the *progymnasmata* allows the scholar not only to better understand the relationship between school and literary texts, but also to learn more about the audience: since rhetoric was the basis of the education of the upper classes, the cultured readers were perfectly able to recognise all the tools offered by *paideia* and to judge the author's ability to master and reshape them. An accurate reconstruction of the Hellenistic and Late Antique audience's horizon of expectations necessarily begins with the analysis of the 'preliminary exercises' which influenced the tastes of the students from an early age.

As Berardi clarifies, the volume is not intended to be a thesaurus, but rather a reasoned glossary which summarises the contents of progymnasmatic doctrine (p. 20). For this reason, each entry is based on a wide range of sources, which is the major strength of this volume. In addition to the four manuals written in Greek between the first and the fifth century CE (namely those by Theon, Ps.-Hermogenes, Aphthonius and Nicolaus of Myra), Berardi quotes collections of fictitious exercises, papyrus documents and Byzantine commentaries. Particularly laudable is his attention to the Latin world: even though the sources written in this language are 'meagre' (p. 5), the author quotes passages from Priscian, Quintilian, Suetonius and other texts when they provide useful elements to enrich or better define the content of the manuals. This approach establishes a fascinating confrontation between two worlds which, though sharing common educational principles, use rhetoric to describe different cultural and social systems.

In the *Praenotanda*, Berardi describes the structure of each entry of the glossary, emphasising that it has been organised to provide the reader with an accurate and easily consultable database (pp. 27-29). A brief history of the progymnasmatic sources completes the picture (pp. 31-38), preceding the glossary, which is obviously the largest section of the work (pp. 39-295).

² See Giardina 1999.

The thirty-nine entries which compose the glossary concern not only the 'preliminary exercises', but also a large number of technical terms drawn from grammar and non-progymnastic rhetorical theory. This pleasant surprise (actually clearly explained in the introduction (p. 20)) allows the reader to acquire a deep knowledge of ancient school teachings in order to fully contextualise the *progymnasmata*. Furthermore, for the same purpose, the author pays particular attention to the practical application and rhetorical aim of each exercise. Through a meticulous analysis of the sources, Berardi reconstructs complex theories, underlines similarities and differences between the ancient manuals and presents them in useful tables. Far from being a simple collection of technical terms, the volume often considers the views of modern scholars, referring to the studies on specific exercises and concepts which compose the rich final bibliography (pp. 297-319). This continuous and well-documented reflection on the ancient sources gives the reader the impression that the debate on the *progymnasmata* is still in progress and cannot be frozen in a static glossary. Berardi's contribution is indeed part of its development and has all the qualities to become a firm basis for further research aiming to reach a deeper knowledge of ancient culture and society.

As highlighted by the *index locorum* and the *index verborum rhetoricorum* which conclude the volume (respectively pp. 321-333 and 335-343), this book is foremost a consultation work. However, the numerous studies which, in the past decades, have shed new light on Hellenistic and Late Antique rhetorical formation are summarised in an enjoyable book, which can also be a pleasant introduction to the world of ancient rhetoric, allowing the non-specialist reader to easily focus on the most relevant issues in this field.

Ultimately, the question which, as he himself admits in the preface (p. 11), upset Berardi at the beginning of his research – namely whether this work would be necessary – deserves a positive answer. This volume is extremely useful both for the philologist and the historian, and offers a fundamental contribution to the scientific

community. In my conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of publishing such a study in Italian, a language which, even within Italian academia, often faces competition from English (and it is ironic that I, too, write this review in English). I obviously hope that Berardi's volume will soon be translated into other languages, thus finding a larger number of readers. However, this study, honoured with a grant by the International Society for the History of Rhetoric and published by the German Georg Olms Verlag, also has the benefit of demonstrating to Italian scholars that it is possible to do internationally recognised research even when exploiting the rhetorical power of Dante's language.

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