BOOK REVIEW

Marcello Barbato, Incantamenta Latina et Romanica. scongiuri e formule magiche dei secoli V-XV, Testi e Documenti di Letteratura e di Lingua XLI (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2019)

Marcello Barbato's Incantamenta Latina et Romanica. scongiuri e formule magiche dei secoli V-XV breaks new ground by bringing together, editing, and translating into modern Italian charms in manuscript sources from Italy, France, Spain and Anglo-Norman England. It foregrounds materials which are distinct from the long-known and well-studied Germanic tradition. Barbato draws on Eleonora Cianci's 2015 edition of medieval Germanic charms, with translations into Italian for relevant comparisons with his texts. The first half of Barbato's book consists of an introduction; the last half contains individual texts, each edited with a brief, but informative, introduction and commentary. Additionally, he supplies indexes of manuscripts, difficult words, themes and functions, and languages.

Barbato's sources are late Roman and pre-modern manuscript texts in Romance languages, including Italian, Friulian, French, Anglo-Norman, Spanish, Catalan, and Occitan. This editor possesses sophisticated linguistic skills, which he deploys to great advantage to describe and analyze dialectal variations and to situate particular variants in terms of the history of the language and geography. Chronologically, the charms range from the late antique period, beginning with the medical writings of Marcellus Empiricus in the early fifth century CE and the Physici Plinii, ending with two fifteenth-century witch's incantations. He observes (p. CXX) that between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, charms enjoyed "a sort of golden age" under the protection of monasteries. This medieval flowering of the genre in Western Europe, excluding Germanic and Celtic language regions, is represented by 87 texts, grouped under 42 headings, arranged roughly chronologically.

In his substantial Introduction, Barbato addresses the basic questions regarding the genre of charms. What is the relationship between charms and prayers? What is special about the language of charms? What are the functions of charms? Fundamental to his approach is the concept of a language of magic, which underlies the function of a charm. He has read widely in the theories of magic constructed by Mauss and Todorov and others, and has taken into account the contributions of linguistic theorists and anthropologists, such as Austin, Tambiah, and Bourdieu. He moves quickly from the linguistic aspects of semiotics, proxemics, and historical dialects to rhetoric. Here, he defines and provides examples of the poetic forms typical of charms. Within the span of his Latinate texts, Barbato analyzes the details of rhyme, rhythm, metre, repetition, alliteration and other figurative language, which reoccur across different formulas. He often presents these in grids, laying out comparisons very precisely. One can hear as well as read the texts. As with jingles and popular songs, it is often their linguistic appeal that makes charms memorable. Useful cross-references are provided within the commentaries on individual texts. These relate specific rhetorical features to ones in his other edited texts, as well as to the analyses in the Introduction.

In the section of the Introduction on metrics and stylistics, Barbato identifies two opposite trends, corresponding to the two eras covered in his survey. He finds extreme synthesis (estrema sentesi) and an enigmatic character (carattere enigmistico) in his earliest late antique examples and what he calls redundancy (ridondanza) in the later examples. It is among these later, more poetic examples

of the genre that Barbato illuminates the overlap between charms and the literary language of poetry. Here his literary skills and knowledge of the strategies of poetic language are brought to bear on charm texts. Like others interested in this genre, Barbato is attracted to texts that display literary attributes. Yet, he makes the point (p. XLVII) that because charms are grounded in magical language, they do not need to make sense in order to function. One regrets that he did not select for analysis from his manuscript materials any examples of unintelligible formulas, for these are plentiful, at least in late antique sources. Given his linguistic training, apart from his literary inclinations, what might he have made of the nonsensical incantations, that is, those very enigmatic and synthetic texts characteristic of the late Roman period?

After all, he argues that the magical language of charms is foundational and separable from the ebb and flow, births and deaths, durations, disappearances and rediscoveries that affect individual formulas. He begins his enumeration of types by explaining selected forms of charms according to their mode of operation. 1) Impossibility (adynaton) vanquishes an evil by equating it with non-existent circumstances: a mule cannot give birth. 2) The chain sets out the step-by-step removal of an evil out of the body, paralleling the desired reality: from bone to flesh, from flesh to skin, from skin to hair, from hair to earth. 3) Animal analogies compare the sickness or evil with the actions of an animal. Other types discussed by Barbato represent familiar medieval motifs: 4) Mother and son, 5) Three women, 6) Encounters, 7) Longinus and Three Good Brothers. In the last paragraphs of this section, Barbato addresses these subjects: 8) prayers versus charms, 9) narrative charms versus pure conjurations, 10) blood-staunching charms and 11) rarer types.

Barbato establishes the historical contexts for these texts. He offers detailed descriptions of his manuscript sources and often provides information on exactly what surrounds the charm text in a particular manuscript. In one table (pp. XCVI-XCVII), he lists where the charms are recorded within individual manuscripts, that is, whether they are written in blank spaces, on fly-leaves, within the main text or in the margins, and indicates in the last column the type of material contained in the manuscript as a whole. Matters of cultural contexts and reception of the genre are highlighted in a section of the Introduction on metalinguistic witnesses (Testimonianze metalinguistiche), in which we find a list of quotations from high-profile writers, many of whom feared or suspected that users of the genre were vulnerable to demonic influences

or worse, that is, that they were practitioners of witchcraft. The quotations hit the highpoints of statements on the legitimacy of incantations and written amulets from the fifth through the fourteenth century. At the conclusion of his introduction, he sketches changes in the reception of charms toward the end of the medieval period.

This is a valuable book. It fulfils a significant need for a comprehensive introduction to a neglected field of Latin and vernacular texts. Like all good books it will stimulate new work and remind us of connections that are yet to be worked out. How, for example, do the Romanian charms from manuscripts dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, recently edited by Emanuela Timotin, relate to the Romance language traditions represented in Barbato's collection? Also, although a great deal of work has been carried out by scholars such as David Frankfurter on late Latin incantations, the continuities and syntheses between late antique and early Christian vernacular charms remain to be fully explored. Readers of this book, especially charms scholars, will find many ways of making use of Barbato's carefully wrought edition.

Lea T. Olsan

Cambridge, England