

DICING WITH VIRGIL

G. CARBONE: *Il centone De Alea*. Introduzione, testo, traduzione, note critiche, commento e appendice. (Studi Latini 44.) Pp. 156. Naples: Loffredo Editore, 2002. Paper, €15. ISBN: 88-8096-885-8.

A book on the anonymous *De Alea* is a welcome addition to the bibliography on the Virgilian cento. Carbone's work, however, has its shortcomings.

After an introduction to the Virgilian cento as a whole, C. presents a multifaceted study of the *De Alea*. C. offers a text of the poem; a summary of the Virgilian *sedes* from which the cento's verse units derive; an account of dicing in antiquity; a translation; a commentary; and an analysis of the work's imagery and style.

The mainly theoretical introduction is solid, even if it often hews to earlier scholarship. C.'s text of the *De Alea* (pp. 37–40) is likewise sound; for the most part it follows Riese's 1894 edition of the *Anthologia Latina* (AL 8). I also found useful C.'s survey of where the cento's verses appear in Virgil (pp. 40–64). Though Schenkl provides such information (*CSEL* 16 [Vienna, 1888], pp. 532–3), C.'s list is more convenient, being attached to a text of the *De Alea*, and more comprehensive, since she describes the Virgilian context in which the *membra* appear.

Other aspects of C.'s book are much less satisfying. First, C. tries to defend the *De Alea* poet (pp. 65–71) against critics who consider him inept on the basis of certain facets of the cento. These include the author's many accommodations of Virgil and the text's unfinished lines, upon both of which C. concentrates. Though she makes varied allowances for those features, C. failed to persuade me that they reflect anything other than the centonist's struggles to fit Virgil's poetry to fresh content. More tendentiously, C. downplays the obscurity of the *De Alea*, whose narrative is the least comprehensible of all the centos'. In doing so, C. further understates the centonist's deficiencies.

A graver problem stems from C.'s denial of the cento's obscurity. C. assures us on p. 75 and elsewhere that the *De Alea* tells the story of two brothers playing at dice. No firm evidence within the cento justifies her confidence. For reasons that the limits of space do not permit me to discuss here, I agree that the text is about dicing (though I am not sure about the brothers). Yet one has to take this position cautiously, owing to the vagueness of the cento. C. generally eschews careful argumentation for simple assertion, which lends her analysis a circular quality; she assumes that the cento describes dicing and interprets the work accordingly. C. would have done better to give less scrutiny to how ancients played at dice and other board games—a tangential topic to which she devotes excessive attention (pp. 76–101)—and more to explaining why she reads the *De Alea* as she does. (Some pages in that excursive section of the book [pp. 94–9] forcefully support C.'s position; they are valuable but too few.) C.'s circular approach also affects her translation (pp. 110–12), where the Latin is sometimes made to refer to dicing in implausible ways (an outstanding example appears in l. 61).

Another disappointment is that C. does not explore in greater detail how we are to read the *De Alea* against Virgil. Some suggestive comments appear on pp. 141–2, and some entries in the commentary touch upon this topic. Yet I wanted to learn more about how in C.'s estimation the Virgilian subtext adds a second layer of meaning to the cento, both globally and in the individual verse units comprising the work. The discussion of the allusiveness of the cento form in the introduction (pp. 15–20) fails to address this issue adequately, since it does not account for the specific qualities of the *De Alea* as C. understands it.

A final glaring weakness in C.'s book is the number of typos and errors, which are too many for me to list in this brief review. In sum, C. fills a hole in classical scholarship, but the flaws in her work vitiate her effort.

Rice University

SCOTT MCGILL

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

J. N. ADAMS, M. JANSE, S. SWAIN (edd.): *Bilingualism in Ancient Society. Language Contact and the Written Word*. Pp. x + 483. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Cased, £65. ISBN: 0-19-924506-1.

This volume, with fifteen articles based on papers of a conference in Reading in 1998, is a welcome and excellent contribution to the study of the linguistic situation in antiquity. In contrast to many conference volumes, the contributors were given ample space to develop their arguments, and the result is a book of almost 500 pages, including an introduction by the editors J. N. Adams and Simon Swain, an integrated bibliography (for which we may be grateful), and a very useful index. All articles are in English, with every now and then, as far as this non-English reviewer can judge, a gallicism.

In their introduction Adams and Swain use the words 'miscellaneous group of papers' and 'interesting diversity of material', and this is a good characterization of the book, with respect to both its form and its content. To start with 'form', it is obvious that some authors have tried to write a state-of-the-art report on their field for a wider audience than their fellow specialists (I find Rutherford's article a very successful example), while others have opted for an in-depth study (one such is Adams's contribution, which is very good and well focused). Whereas some authors give translations throughout, even for common Latin or Greek texts, others do not. In some articles more or less elaborate glosses are used, if only for languages like Finnish or Turkish, but this is exceptional. These differences of approach mean the book as a whole is not an evident must for one's private library.

The diversity of the book's content is indeed astonishing. The wealth of data, their linguistic complexity, and the methodological problems involved in assessing their meaning as products of multilingual societies are manifest throughout the volume. Some authors pay more attention to theoretical and methodological issues than others, but it is evident from all contributions that recent studies on bilingualism provide better tools for analysing the data than we had, say, thirty years ago. Whereas older studies of bilingual texts, or texts showing traces of bilingualism, concentrated on the negative side (defects, insufficient knowledge of a second language, etc.) several articles in this volume show that living in a bilingual community creates room for manipulating one's message in order to obtain better communicative results.

The volume starts with two introductory articles of a mainly theoretical orientation. D. R. Langslow, 'Approaching Bilingualism in Corpus Languages', illustrates the usefulness of a number of recent concepts ('code-switching', 'interference', etc.) by applying them to texts in a variety of languages in the ancient world. Kees Versteegh, 'Dead or Alive? The Status of the Standard Language', has a lengthy section on the evidence of written records as a reflection of the real linguistic situation in which they