

Jodocus Badius Ascensius: Commentary, Commerce and Print in the Renaissance.
Paul White.

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Despite his outstanding career as a printer, editor, grammarian, pedagogue, and author, which earned him high, although not always unanimous praises, the Northern humanist Jodocus Badius Ascensius (1462–1535) is hardly remembered as a leading figure of the early Renaissance. If new interest in his work, inaugurated by Philippe Renouard's landmark three-volume bibliography (1908), has developed in recent years, this has yielded only fragmentary accounts of Badius's multifaceted achievements. The present monograph does not promise to offer a comprehensive view of Badius's contributions to humanist culture, but rather to bring them into "sharper focus" through a thorough examination of his Latin commentaries (ix). This is by no means a less challenging task, considering White's multidisciplinary method, which consists of providing not only in-depth analyses of a large output of commentaries placed in the context of a well-mastered corpus of primary and secondary sources, but also a wealth of ably translated exemplary excerpts (drawn primarily from Renouard's bibliography). Echoing the views of Ann Moss, Anthony Grafton, and Lisa Jardine, among other critics, White convincingly

argues that Badius was a pedagogically and morally scrupulous scholar-printer seeking to integrate “the humanist ideal of versatility” (21) with his own commercial pursuits, a goal that stood, however, in sharp contrast to the intellectual aspirations of mainstream humanism.

The book is organized into eight chapters, the first of which provides a useful account of the societal factors that contributed to the “making of a name” (1, 2). A well-informed discussion of humanist models of authorship centered on Erasmus’s self-promoting rhetoric helps to explain Badius’s deliberate choice to identify himself as an editor, a compiler, and a commentator. While inseparable from the moral standards of the *devotio moderna* movement, which shaped his early education, such humility represented a strategy by which Badius sought to “transfer authority” (36) to his powerful dedicatees in exchange for financial support for his printing press. White’s insightful analyses of Badius’s “familiar” commentaries, framed by a survey of classical, Renaissance, and contemporary definitions of the genre, form the basis of chapter 3. Through “familiarization and domestication of [other] texts” (75), such commentaries aptly illustrate Badius’s pedagogical, moral, and financial interests that were shaped by the needs and means of a diverse readership. Suggestively entitled “Badius and Textual Culture,” chapter 4 discusses a series of classically inspired, agricultural, nautical, and financial metaphors as common denominators of Badius’s editorial and printing activities. White insists that text proliferation through commentary and print, while appreciated by Badius for its pedagogical and lucrative potential, was also a matter of ethical concern to him. An overview of the famous “Ciceronianus’ controversy” (chapter 5), prompted by Erasmus’s praise of Badius as a scholar superior in talent to the celebrated French humanist Guillaume Budé — whose potential was compromised, however, by his business inclinations — provides a useful context to the criticism developing around Badius’s market-driven activities. A stimulating discussion of Badius’s effort to reconcile the monetary and educational value of printed books helps to reevaluate the controversy from a contemporary perspective.

Chapter 6 moves the focus from Badius’s commercial concerns to his poetic and narrative techniques adapted from classical authors to heighten the literary appeal of the *Silvae Morales* (1492), a moral-grammatical treatise intended for young readers. In chapter 7, White interrogates the “rule-based method” (215) relating to grammar, rhetoric, and versification, which shaped Badius’s commentaries to Horace, Juvenal, Mantuan, Persius, and Virgil, including his popular *praenotamenta* to Terence, to show their influence on the development of humanist literary theory. Badius’s use of printing techniques as visual indicators separating the commentary from the text proper, illustrated by his edition of Horace’s *Ars poetica*, merits further attention. Chapter 8 looks at Badius’s attempts at bringing together classical heritage and Christian doctrine from the perspective of his literary, theoretical, and formal choices. By emphasizing the humanist’s belief in the pedagogical utility of poetry, these provide further evidence to the point about the context-oriented character of his commentaries. The conclusion reiterates the main argument that, as a humanist, Badius was both a producer and

a product of the developing print culture, which may indeed explain the shifting values attached to his rich legacy.

A useful appendix listing the first printed editions of Badius's commentaries, an extensive bibliography, and a combined index complete this valuable, well-researched, and elegantly written resource for scholars of early modern book history, material culture, literary history, translation, Latin, and French studies.

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