Concludendo, il lavoro di I. B. sostiene con rigore e vigore una tesi che merita grande attenzione: l’ermeneutica di Agostino non è un aspetto tra gli altri del suo pensiero, ma è la matrice della sua opera.

Franco Gori


The Expositio Psalmorum, Cassiodorus’ commentary on the Psalms, was his first theological work after his withdrawal from secular administration to spiritual life. It is thus not only a biblical commentary, but is also an indicator of the ideals and aims that Cassiodorus set for a Christian education. Following the tradition that began with Philo of Alexandria and with reference to Augustine’s De doctrina Christiana, Cassiodorus underlined the connection between secular learning and Christian doctrine: the bible was the source of all intellectual activity, and what was found in secular learning had its roots in the Scriptures. The commentary thus represented the ideal which Cassiodorus saw as the basis for monastic education.

The present study, which is a revised and enlarged version of a Tesi di Laurea in early Christian literature from the university Federico II in Naples, focuses on one particular point of secular learning in the Exp. Psalm.: Cassiodorus’ analysis of rhetorical tropes and figures in the psalms. Much as the interest in Cassiodorus’ works has increased with the growth of scholarly interest in Late Antiquity as a whole, there still remains much to be done in the field of investigations of language and style, not least considering Cassiodorus’ role in the transition from pagan intellectual understanding to a Christian literate context. This investigation is to my knowledge the first comprehensive study of Cassiodorus’ use of rhetorical figures, which has so far only been studied in part in a few articles by J. M. Courtès and A. Quacquarelli, mainly in the nineteen sixties.

The book consists of two parts. The first part sketches the background for the work: a brief account of the historical setting, focussing mainly on the development of an educational system with a schola Romana for the education of the new Christian citizen, followed by a description of the Exp. Psalm. and its role within this system. Agosto (A.) rightly follows M. Simonetti in defining Cassiodorus’ work as «un’opera dottrinale, scientifica, soprattutto grammaticale e retorica, di carattere enciclopedico, di metodo esegetico, composta soprattutto per

---


2 The interest in the literary achievements of Late Antiquity is evident not least from the periodical which bears Cassiodorus’ name.
The third chapter is a short summary of Cassiodorus’ use of sources for the rhetorical definitions, based on the results of the second part. Part two, the main bulk of the work both in terms of quantity and of scientific contribution, is called ‘Tassonomia’ and is a systematic organization of all the rhetorical tropes and figures that Cassiodorus defines under the name of schema in the *Exp. Psalm*. In this part, each figure is first presented with the definition given by Cassiodorus. After that, A. discusses the possible sources for Cassiodorus’ choice of definition, a discussion which in a few cases also gives rise to some comments on textual criticism (e.g. in § 214 b, on the form *iner gia* in *Schemata dia troeae*). Finally, Cassiodorus’ examples (sometimes all of them, sometimes a representative choice) are presented and analysed.

A fascinating thing about the *Exp. Psalm*. is that the earliest manuscripts have preserved Cassiodorus’ symbols for different kinds of comments in his text. A reader of Adriaen’s edition in the CChL could thus easily find out where and when Cassiodorus comments on etymology, syllogisms, schemata, arithmetic and other elements. Needless to say, these symbols are not altogether trustworthy, and it is a token of A.’s thorough reading of the text that he also discusses examples that are not marked as schemata in the manuscript tradition. Cassiodorus’ systematic use of markers for different kinds of comments makes it obvious that his commentary is the result of a conscious plan for the education of his audience, and thus confirms the opinion that this work is basically a book for study purposes, combining traditional intellectual training with a new Christian education. The latter point is important for the structure of the work: the text of the Psalms is the main focus, and the marking out of schemata, as well as of other elements of erudition, appears when appropriate. In other words, this is not primarily a manual of rhetoric or of other elements of learning; it is first and foremost an exegetic work. That Cassiodorus considers rhetorical embellishment a given feature of biblical texts is made explicit in ch. 15 of the *Praefatio*, but with the important addition that it is not the external features that lend glory to the text, but the text that confers its dignity to the rhetorical devices.

When introducing a schema, Cassiodorus first presents the definition of the schema in question (in the case of several schemata the definition recurs more than once) and usually indicates both the Greek and the Latin name for it before analysing the passage according to the definition. With altogether 98 schemata, it stands to reason that more or less every line in the psalms could be submitted to a schematic definition. This is not the case, and in ch. 15 of his *Praefatio* Cassiodorus gives the answer to when he has chosen to present a rhetorical analysis: the definition is only given in highly suitable passages, where they help to explain the passage so that its meaning becomes fully evident. This is in accordance with the aim of the work as described above: this is not a rhetorical manual based on a religious text, but an exegetic work which makes use of analyses from traditional education, in order both to make the student familiar with these matters and to

---

2. *Praef*. 15, *Haec multis modis genera sue locutionis exercet, definitionibus succincta, schematibus decora, verborum proprietate signata, syllogismorum complexionibus expedita, disciplinis irritulans; non tamen ab eis accipiens extraneum decorem, sed potius illis propriam conferens dignitatem*.
enhance the understanding of the religious text. It would be futile to expect a systematic presentation of the tropes and figures.

What A. has done is to collect and systematize all the different schemata that Cassiodorus introduces in his work. He follows, basically, traditional categories, in distinguishing between tropes, figures of speech and figures of thought, with subcategories. He starts out with a short definition of *elocutio*, *ornatus* and tropes. There follows a relatively lengthy discussion of *catachresis*, followed by different categories of tropes and different categories of figures.

Here, however, we encounter what I see as the problem in A.’s presentation: it never becomes clear what the relation is between A.’s categories and the manner in which they are used in the *Exp. Psalm*. If there is no relation, why this at least in part very detailed categorization? It would have helped if the taxonomy part had started with a few lines on the choice of categories, of relevance and of problems arising in the process of drawing lines between the categories. As it is, the system is just there without explanations.

It is possible that A. has meant his book as a kind of rhetorical grammar: anyone interested in e.g. Cassiodorus’ use of *paronomasia* will have to find his way through ‘Figure retoriche di parola’ – ‘A) Figurae per adiectionem’ – ‘A.a. Figure per ripetizione’ – ‘A.a.2. Limitazione dell’uguaglianza nella ripetizione’ – ‘a) Limitazione di uguaglianza nel significante’ – ‘paronomasia’. This is certainly not the easiest way to find the requested figure; a general index (which does not exist) would have served that purpose much more efficiently. Perhaps the intention is to show within what categories Cassiodorus’ schemata are found, but that would have called for an analysis linked to the categories that are represented.

The problem becomes especially evident in the case of figures of thought. Precisely because of their abstract character, these are not unambiguously categorized by different theorists, neither in antiquity nor in modern time.¹ A. chooses a definition of figures of thought as figures that need a confrontation with the situation in which the discourse is produced (215). As subgroups he introduces ‘Figure della similitudine’, ‘Figure della composizione’ and ‘Figure del pathos’. For one thing, the layout of the book causes misunderstanding here.² From the layout and from the table of contents, the reader gets the impression that ‘Figure della relazione alla sintassi’ and ‘Figure della relazione al contenuto’ are separate categories on the same line as the three first mentioned; only through careful reading do we find out that the two latter categories are in fact part of ‘Figure del Pathos’ (280). Another problem is the lack of coherence between the three main categories. *Similitudo* is a mental image, which seems to make it appropriate as a basis for figures of thought. Pathos is a well established tool for persuasion, and likewise comes easily under figures of thought.³ But does A. really mean that these two categories should be seen as mutually exclusive? *Similitudo* is, for one

---


² A similar problem is created in the chapter on tropes, where the layout makes it unclear on what level A. places *catachresis* in relation to the ‘Divisione dei tropi’ that follows next; nor does the text offer any enlightenment.

³ Cf. e.g. Quint. 9.2.26.
thing, a possible tool precisely for evoking emotions in the audience.\(^1\) It is, however, also an active element in different figures of speech, and it would have been more rewarding at this point to have a discussion of the borders of metaphor, metonymy or synecdoche as elements of figures of speech and elements of figures of thought, rather than this quite mechanic definition of *similitudo*. As for *compositio*, A. starts with the correct observation that the figures of thought are part of the processes involved in *inventio* and *dispositio* and serve the purpose of persuading the audience (§ 187). Such is certainly the aim of most figures, but I fail to see that the figures listed under this heading make up a category that functions as a complement in kind to the other two.

As A. himself points out (48), Cassiodorus does not make any distinction between figures of thought and figures of speech. A.’s hypothesis that the explanation lies in Cassiodorus’ view of the character of the text, in accordance with Jerome’s word that *et verborum ordo mysterium est,\(^2\) is convincing, and it is thus all the more surprising that he has gone to such efforts to organize a system that has no bearing on the text he is studying. It would perhaps have been a better solution to just enlist the figures of thought without any attempts at categorizing them. It is also a disappointment that no attempt is made at summarizing the use of tropes and figures in *Exp. Psalm*. The need for that is especially evident in the chapter on *catachresis*, which is used by Cassiodorus to explain the usage of ascribing human qualities to God. He does also, however, make use of generic expressions for the same purpose, with the result that e.g. the *ira* of God is sometimes described as a *tropologia*, sometimes as a *tropica locutio* and sometimes as a *catachresis/abusio*. It would have been interesting to have more than just an enlisting of the fact.

These remarks do not detract from other qualities of the work. A. has made a thorough study (although somewhat tainted by inaccurate proofreading) of an important text within both the history of religion and the history of education in Late Antiquity, and contributed to the understanding of Cassiodorus’ language and style. An important result is his inventory of Cassiodorus’ use of sources for the rhetorical categories, where he makes very thorough analyses when necessary, and consequently comes up with convincing results. His analyses of text passages that exemplify the different schemata often make interesting reading. This book serves its place as a tool for further studies of language and style, not only in Cassiodorus but in the whole cross section between the classical Greco-Roman tradition and the rising of Christian education of which he is a representative.

Trondheim

*Gunhild Vidén*

---

\(^1\) Cf. also Lausberg § 843.

\(^2\) Hier. Ep. 57,5.