

## Julieta Cardigni

*El comentario como género tardoantiguo: Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis de Macrobio* [Commentary as a late antique genre: Macrobius' Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis], Buenos Aires, Editorial de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2013. 473 pp. ISBN: 978-987-1785-95-7. AR\$ 180.

This book, which originated as a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Buenos Aires, is an exhaustive investigation on Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* within the context of Late Antiquity. The author proposes that Macrobius, re-signifying the possibilities of this particular genre, develops an original exploration of Roman identity in his own world. Throughout the chapters we find a solid explanation of this hypothesis, which takes into account political and cultural context and incorporates philosophical elements, rhetorical and linguistic analysis as well as subtle literary considerations.

The Introduction immerses the reader in the world of Macrobius, Roman philosopher, antiquarian and grammarian from the fifth century AD. Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* combines not only philosophy, history, grammar and rhetoric, but also fiction. Cardigni maintains that Macrobius takes advantage of the plasticity of this genre in order to open new paths to investigate the concept of identity in Late Antiquity. Taking this into account, functional grammar (based upon Halliday's linguistic proposal) provides the author with an ideal framework to understand the possibilities of Macrobius' work since this theory emphasizes the way language operates at different social or cultural levels. Macrobius uses language to talk about his own experience of the world, like everyone else, but he chooses a particular way to do this, the *commentarium*. As a result, Cardigni focuses on the cohesive relations within the text and its *metafunctions* (in Halliday's terminology) to trace Macrobius' insights. She acknowledges the methodological difficulties of using functional linguistic perspective in Latin language, but points out the advances on this field in the last few years.

The first chapter describes Macrobius' intellectual milieu. Grammarians, scholars, commentators affected by a world in crisis, influenced by Neoplatonism and Christianity, interested in the models of Classical Antiquity, considered as *auctoritates*.

Chapter 2, subtitled "*Commentarii* and the genre 'commentarium'", begins with an introduction to late antique literature and its genres, but immediately directs attention to the *Commentarii*. The author defines 'commentary' as a didactic text, half way between doctrinal gloss and treatise, treatise and essay. Commentaries depend closely on their 'primary' or 'original' text, but the commentator has an independent voice, that can itself be investigated. Here we

find an analysis of the concepts of *imitatio*, *auctoritas*, *grammatica*, *exegesis* and *didacticism*, as applied to this genre, and the reconstruction of its tradition. Thanks to this introduction we can understand much better Macrobius' intellectual activity. Cardigni then offers a very useful overview of *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, its general structure and contents, didactic elements and intertextual allusions. Indeed, Macrobius uses textual resources like connectors, reformulations, questions, appeals and exhortations to the reader (the so called *deontic statements*) in pursuit of a clarification of Cicero's texts and Platonic theories. Macrobius expresses also his moral opinion over epistemic modality indicators: connectors, parenthetical nouns, adverbs and phrases. Intertextuality includes quotes, mention of authors, and allusions, by means of which the past bursts in the present and constructs new meanings.

Chapter 3 is a further inquiry on the *Commentarii*, with the objective of defining, first, their specific features and peculiarities; secondly, their transgression to the rules of the genre. Cardigni provides an accurate analysis of the text, using functional grammar framework. We find exhaustive tables indicating cohesive ties across the clauses (grammatical and lexical cohesion) and their function. In the light of this analysis, lexical chains exhibit the prominence of the character of Scipio and, even more, of Rome: Macrobius uses Cicero's Scipio as a symbol for the re-foundation of a Roman identity. In this way, he contrives a particular approach to the original text, different from that of the other commentators (philosophical and theoretical). Comparisons with Servius and Calcidius are helpful to understand Macrobius' peculiarities.

In the fourth chapter, the author discusses the concept of fiction in connection with commentary. She argues that Macrobius appreciates the use of fiction as a legitimate access to the truth. *Fabulae* are the key to understand this view since they require a particular exegesis, which uses fiction as a valid interpretation. The main *fabula* is, of course, Scipios' *fabula*, a symbol of *romanitas*, but also a symbol of reading, because Scipio is also a *lector* and an *interpreter*. Here we find a new difference with other commentators: Macrobius' intention is not philosophical education (at least not only), but the proposal of a model of *romanitas* through Scipios' figure and narration. The genre, then, moves from philosophical considerations to social concerns.

In the last chapter of this book the author presents her conclusions. Scipio is a fictional hero, symbol of *romanitas*, but also a good *lector* of his own past. Late Antiquity men would read Scipios' *fabula* and, like him, learn how to decipher the models of the past in order to understand the present. In this social interpretation, an anomaly in the philosophical genre, lies the novelty of Macrobius' work.