HELINAND OF FROIDMONT AND THE A-TEXT OF SENECA'S TRAGEDIES

BY

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In recent years new light has been shed on the textual history of various classical authors¹). These scholarly activities have not been devoted to the relationship of manuscripts solely in order to produce new classical texts. They also aim at reconstructing the fate of classical texts up to the age of the printing-press²): thus the process of textual tradition contributes to a better understanding of European intellectual history³).

1) See e.g. the status quaestionis in La cultura antica nell'Occidente Latino dal VII all'XI secolo I (Spoleto 1975) and the review-article of some recent studies by Jeannine Fohlen, Études récentes sur les manuscrits classiques latins, Scriptorium 34 (1980), 96-106. The abbreviations used are those of the Année Philologique.

2) It is mostly here that studies on textual history break off. It is to be noted however that the conception of the printing-press being a turning-point or a break is nowadays being challenged. Although "difference was that the process of transmission had become, at a stroke, unilineal or 'monogenous'" (E. J. Kenney, The Classical Text: Aspects of Editing in the Age of the Printed Book (Berkeley etc. 1974), 18), it becomes clear that philological activity also occurred in the Middle Ages. "Manuscripts were written by scribes who knew Latin, and read by readers who understood it. Not always were such writers and readers prepared to tolerate obvious error. I hope that one service of my new text may be to demonstrate clearly what the mediaeval emender was capable of, and to put his efforts alongside those of the fifteenth century" (Michael Winterbottom, Problems in Quintilian (London 1970), 4). There are even scholars who do not hesitate to use the term "edition" for the results produced by medieval scholarship, e.g. P. L. Schmidt, Die Überlieferung von Ciceros Schrift "De Legibus" in Mittelalter und Renaissance (München 1974), 121, 215. On the other hand, the history of printed editions is, of course, part of textual history too.

3) What has been said concerning the manuscripts of Gellius applies, of course, to textual history as a whole: "Careful attention to the manuscripts of Gellius—the circumstances of their production, the nature of their use, and the details of their ownership—should continue to inform, not only about the text but also, and perhaps more important, about the substance of medieval intellectual history itself" (P. K. Marshall, Janet Martin and Richard H. Rouse, Clare College MS. 26 and the Circulation of Aulus Gellius I-7 in Medieval England and France, MS 42 (1980), 353-394, here 388).
One of the texts which has received attention of this kind was the corpus of Seneca’s tragedies. Recent studies by Philp, Rouse, MacGregor, Schmidt, Tarrant and Zwierlein \(^4\)) bear witness to the continuing discussions on the manuscript tradition. New discoveries too have been made which provide a more solid base for a new critical edition \(^2\)). In these publications it is possible to discern different approaches. Philp, MacGregor, Tarrant and Zwierlein tend to treat the textual history of Seneca’s tragedies primarily with the establishment of a better text in view. Schmidt however takes his point of departure from the “Rezeptionsgeschichte” \(^6\)) and Rouse from the context of the intellectual climate of the Middle Ages, and the latter treats textual tradition as a phenomenon which deserves study \emph{per se} \(^7\)).

The situation with which an editor of the tragedies is faced, is, at first sight, relatively simple \(^8\)). There are two manuscript traditions, known as E and A. Each branch may offer authentic readings. So, generally speaking, when they differ, the editor has to make his choice between the two of them. The E-branch is represented basically by the so-called \textit{Etruscus} (ms. Florence, Bibliotheca Medicea-Laurenziana plut. lat. 37.13), originating from Pomposa


\(^7\) See footnote 3.

\(^8\) The following sketch is based on Rouse, \textit{The ‘A’ Text and Tarrant}, \textit{o.c.}, 23-87.