Reviews


Tertullian’s *De Pallio* is a curious, short Latin speech on the speaker’s conscious change from the normal Roman *toga* to the philosopher’s *pallium*. After many years of neglect, this notoriously complex text, often considered to be one of the most difficult pieces of Latin ever written, appears to have regained some scholarly attention. After the publication in 2005 of a full English translation and commentary of 332 pages by the author of this review,¹ the text has now finally also found its deserved place in the *Sources Chrétiennes*. The original text poses so many problems of idiom, syntax, style and content, that many additional comments are needed. This explains why in the SC, too, an entire volume is devoted to this relatively short text (counting only some 3300 words in Latin).

Marie Turcan, a well known specialist of Tertullian, who has already edited two other SC volumes on Tertullian (SC 173, *La toilette des femmes* and SC 332, *Les spectacles*), is a trustworthy guide to Tertullian’s work. Expectations were accordingly high as soon as the volume was announced and particularly since a first draft of the introduction was put online at www.tertullian.org. Now the printed book has come to fulfil the promise. Mme Turcan offers readers a fine edition with facing French translation, accompanied by ample notes conveniently printed entirely below the text and translation, and mostly filling up more than half of every page. This body of material is preceded by a fairly brief introduction (66 pages) and followed by a helpful 24 p. index of unique or rare Latin words.

The introduction opens with an instructive survey of manuscripts and editions of *De Pallio*. It is clear from the start that Turcan wishes to present a new text that is different from the earlier leading critical editions, notably the text by A. Gerlo published in the *Corpus Christianorum* in 1954. Turcan has studied five manuscripts (NXF, V and L) and collated some of the earliest editions. The text she presents has discarded a number of emendations which had been adopted by several 20th century editors. Specific choices involving the constitution of the text are discussed in the footnotes below the text and translation.

A second main section of the introduction deals with the vexed problem of the date of *De Pallio*. The text itself offers little factual help and, accordingly, scholarly disagreement is vast, with datings ranging from 193 to 222. The main point of controversy is the reference by Tertullian to ‘three Augusti’ (2,7). According to Turcan this can only be taken as a reference to the reign of Septimius Severus and his two sons, that is to the years 209-211. Mme Turcan seems rather optimistic in her assessment of ‘historical’ data in this rhetorical text, but some readers will remain more sceptical.

After a helpful survey of the main line of Tertullian’s argumentation, it is argued that the text is stylistically closest to *De anima* (which would confirm a date in 209). Next, it is suggested that the historical person Tertullian actually did adopt a *pallium*, not as a properly religious dress, but, as the speech argues, simply as a convenient, light garment, which allows a man more freedom to distance himself from public life and to criticize depravity, and as a symbol of philosophy and science.

Most of this information about the *pallium* is actually given by the personified Pallium at the end of the speech, as Turcan duly observes (p. 39). In further explaining Tertullian’s choice for the *pallium*, Turcan stresses his strong conviction as a Christian, or more specifically, his ‘ardeur nouvelle’ (p. 43) as a follower of Montanism. This religious zeal is even reflected, so the French scholar argues, in the style of the personified speech by the Pallium, with use of rhyme and rhythm, pairing of synonymous or contrasting words and other stylistical means.

This is, indeed, possible, but other approaches would seem valid as well. Particularly the flowery rhetorical style points in quite another direction. In my 2005 commentary I have tried to show that the speech can perfectly be analysed as a stylistic *tour de force* and a largely playful literary performance in the style of Second Sophistic orators such as Apuleius. In my view, here we see Tertullian delivering a rhetorical show before an attentive live