

the aristocratic coup in Florence, in which a group of malcontents, including Boccaccio himself, attempted to overthrow the popular regime. From outside the political arena, Boccaccio starts thinking about politics from a more theoretical, non-partisan perspective, thus resembling his mentor Petrarch. Like him, Boccaccio called for a total reform of the true *materia prima* of politics, that is human nature. In the prologue of his *De casibus*, dedicated to his beloved friend Mainardo Cavalcanti, a Florentine ennobled by his public service, Boccaccio makes it clear that “no republic would ever be sound without morally sound men to govern it” (p. 198). Like Petrarch, and like many other humanist political thinkers that would follow, Boccaccio sees the achievement of virtuous politics not as a question of which particular constitution to choose, but as a question of how to best rebuild the moral character of the ruler. Boccaccio’s views of virtue politics offer a vantage from which to observe the “modernity” of Boccaccio’s political thought – an aspect, as Hankins points out at the beginning of the chapter, which has been traditionally questioned by scholars. This does not mean, of course, that there are no features in his political thought that are “backward looking” – as Hankins puts it (p. 215). These seem to be mainly two: first, the notion that the power of kings is derived from and limited by the express consent of the people; and second, the general pessimism suffusing Boccaccio’s accounts of the exercise of political power, and his way of looking at it as intrinsically dangerous and corrupting to the health of men’s souls.

*Virtue Politics* has a twofold merit: to make new materials available to scholars, and to pose the “old ones” new questions. The author handles a vast and often heterogeneous set of texts and authors, one with which scholars of political thought are hardly at ease. Hankins finds an intelligent thread to unify different kinds of literary works, and to make good sense of what may at first sight appear as an un-systematic cultural movement. More than that, this book gives Renaissance political thought the place it deserves within the history of Western political thought.

Tommaso De Robertis, *University of Pennsylvania*

*The Marriage of Philology and Scepticism: Uncertainty and Conjecture in Early Modern Scholarship and Thought.*

Gian Mario Cao, Anthony Grafton and Jill Kraye, eds.

Warburg Institute Colloquia. London: Warburg Institute, 2019. 256 pp. \$54.50.

---

This set of essays results from a conference at the Warburg Institute, organized to investigate the connections and conflicts in humanist scholarship between the philological tools they used to establish correct texts of their sources on the one hand, and the contents of some of those texts on the other. In this case, the particular content of interest is philosophical scepticism. Sceptical texts and thought generated both interest and controversy among Renaissance and early modern scholars, and

have attracted their share of recent scholarly attention as well. Scepticism would also seem to present conflicts to those scholars who might have wished both to adopt sceptical principles and also to undertake manuscript studies, especially the editing of works recovered in highly imperfect versions or with very complex traditions.

The participants took a variety of approaches in framing their questions. Glenn Most begins with ancient sceptics themselves by examining the writings of Sextus Empiricus and his own treatment of the works of his predecessors. He finds that Sextus Empiricus seems not to have dwelled on the accuracy of the copies of earlier sources at his disposal. His interest in earlier texts was philosophical, that is, in the contents of their arguments as presented.

Jan Ziolkowski raises a number of methodological issues before turning to those that relate especially to the Middle Ages. Philosophy and philology would seem to be two very different approaches to texts in any historical era. And when the focus turns to a particular philosophical school such as scepticism, different ways of framing the question lead to different results. One might seek to identify in a given text some features commonly associated with sceptical attitudes broadly construed. Or one might trace the reception of ancient sceptical texts, which in medieval Latin Europe meant primarily some works of Cicero and Augustine. Ziolkowski cites Lupus of Ferrières and John of Salisbury's writings among the few that treated explicitly philological concerns. His thoughtful essay demonstrates that this topic is most relevant for Renaissance and early modern thinkers.

The picture shifts to legal scholars and theologians of the sixteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant, in Ian Maclean's contribution. He discusses how these university-trained professionals sought to determine the meaning of texts, including those points in which faith played a role, and how they wrote about the process and its importance. Both lawyers and theologians saw doubt as a problem to be resolved, not as a desirable or necessary philosophical state. Anthony Grafton turns directly to the problems humanists faced as they sought to edit and to understand the texts of classical authors, in particular how to resolve manuscript errors and related issues in dealing with problematic passages. He focuses on *divinatio*, a term that developed with both positive and negative connotations for conjectural emendations, and includes a valuable digression on the more literal uses of the term for making determinations with superhuman assistance. Here too, sceptical philosophy played only a limited role, though use of the term *divinatio* itself recognized the limits of fully evidence-based certainty in the actual production of printed editions from imperfect manuscripts.

Jill Kraye examines the editors of Seneca, a Latin author who engaged with sceptical philosophy. A series of scholars, including Erasmus, Matteus Fortunatus, Pincianus, Marc-Antoine Muret, and others, not only edited Senecan texts but also produced remarks and comments on their varying levels of confidence, certainty, or doubt about variant readings and their own best determinations. David Butterfield takes on the Lambinus edition of Lucretius, whose Epicurean text found controversy as well as eager readers. Lambinus strove to distinguish what was and was not genuinely Lucretian by identifying textual interpolation. Given the limited number of surviving Lucretian manuscripts, Butterfield is able to examine in detail Lambinus's use of manuscripts as well as previous editions.

The editing of Biblical texts brought high stakes in the desire for accuracy and certainty in establishing a text. Scott Mandelbrote examines editions of the Septuagint. His winding narrative begins with the Roman edition of 1588 and continues with the appearance in 1628 of a new manuscript, referred to as the Codex Alexandrinus. Its variants held political implications for English scholars in the century's middle decades, and it contributed to ongoing, confessionally laden controversies across Europe about the relationship between the Septuagint and the Vulgate. The possibility that the Vulgate was a witness to a lost Hebrew version offered support to its high esteem among Catholics. He concludes with Philadelphian James Logan and his library, which included the Aldine Septuagint and the London Polyglot. The implications of biblical textual scholarship thus ran wide through early modern thought.

Gian Mario Cao brings the volume up to the era of the Enlightenment and the links between biblical scholarship and freethinking. He discusses Anthony Collins's work on freethinking (1712) and responses by Richard Bentley and by Girolamo Maria Allegri. The latter related to the book's inclusion on the Index of Forbidden Books. This lengthy controversy genuinely did involve questions of philology and doubt; Bentley argued, against Collins, that the existence of so many variant biblical manuscript readings does not destroy trust in the text; it is merely a condition of all manuscript transmission.

Not surprisingly given the topic, the authors have avoided drawing broad conclusions. They have nonetheless produced a set of valuable insights about the points of connection and intersection as well as points of divergence between the recovery of ancient texts on the one hand, and the philosophical contents of those texts on the other.

Ann E. Moyer, *University of Pennsylvania*

Alberto Casadei.

*Dante. Storia avventurosa della Divina Commedia dalla selva oscura alla realtà aumentata.*

Milan: il Saggiatore, 2020. 195 pp. €18.

---

Alberto Casadei's latest book, published by Il Saggiatore in August 2020, arrives at a particularly poignant moment: in fact, this contribution is surely one of the first volumes about Dante that will be written and published in light of the upcoming Dantean centenary (2021); in addition, it was also completed during Italy's first lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic. This double peculiarity makes *Dante. Storia avventurosa della Divina Commedia dalla selva oscura alla realtà aumentata* a rather compelling and interesting read. Casadei, Professor in Italian Philology at the University of Pisa, is by no means new to Dante studies; as a matter of fact, some of his previous books (*Dante oltre la Commedia* (2013), *Dante: altri accertamenti e punti critici* (2019), to cite the most recent ones) deal precisely with the *Sommo poeta*