

Review

MICHAEL D. REEVE, *THE TRANSMISSION OF PLINY'S NATURAL HISTORY* (Sussidi eruditi 101). Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2021. Pp. xiii + 409. ISBN 9788893595582. €65.00.

The volume under review offers the most extensive analysis of the transmission of Pliny's thirty-seven-book *Natural History* to date. It is based on research on several manuscripts — portions of which Reeve collated — conducted over nearly twenty years, and it provides current and future editors of Pliny (more on this below) with a solid basis for understanding the authority of the witnesses of the *Natural History*.

As explained in the preface, R. does not aim to produce a new edition of Pliny, whose style he openly dislikes. Had that not been the case, it would still have been impossible to find fault with his refusal to embark on such a monumental task, which is more suited to a whole team of editors. After the preface, the first chapter offers a survey of the editorial work and interest in Pliny's manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries onwards, paying particular attention to the activity of nineteenth-century German scholars, which led to the Teubner edition. From ch. 2 the book meticulously explores the relationships between the earliest manuscripts that transmit most of the *Natural History* (they date to the eighth and ninth centuries), before considering their descendants. To these known early witnesses, R. adds a set of ninth-century fragments — possibly from a lost codex — which transmit portions of *HN* 21–22 and 25, now Düsseldorf, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, fr. K 06 009. Earlier fragments in uncial that had no influence on the medieval transmission of Pliny are examined at the end, in ch. 16. Ch. 6 gives a new edition of the *Vita Plinii*, preceded by a translation into English, which is transmitted at the start of several manuscripts of the *Natural History* and is believed to be taken from Suetonius. Chs 8 and 13 are devoted to excerpts of the *Natural History*, including specific discussion of the *scholia Stroziana*, extracts from Book 18. Here attention could have been paid to a fourteenth-century Italian manuscript, now Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS latin 7418. This miscellany was the probable exemplar of Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Strozzii 46; see P. Meyvaert, *AB* 84 (1966), 354 n. 2, and E.S. Lott, *RHT* 11 (1981), 147–58, both cited by R. Some quires are lost and the aforementioned studies primarily pay attention to the lost portion with Germanicus' translation of Aratus. However, in the table of contents at the end of the Paris manuscript, Germanicus is followed by *item quaedam capitula ex Plinio Secundo de signis tempestatum*. If this information is reliable, these were probably passages from Book 18.

The volume ends with four appendices, followed by an index of the manuscripts, an index of the passages of the *Natural History* discussed for non-stemmatic purposes, and a detailed general index. Given the wealth of information in the book, from Late Antiquity well into the early modern period, this last index will be helpful to scholars whose interests lie outside the *Natural History*. Indeed, this book will only be accessible to a scholarly readership (a few Latin passages and citations in other languages are translated into English, but most of them are not). In the epilogue, R. hopes that others may continue to study the transmission of the *Natural History*. Undoubtedly for such scholars this book will be a treasure trove. In a paper published almost twenty-five years ago (*JRS* 90 (2000), 196–206, reprinted in M.D. Reeve, *Manuscripts and Methods* (2011), 339–59), R. considered the state of textual criticism for Latin and suggested that 'arms need twisting' to prod scholars, if the situation was as worrying as M. Winterbottom sketched it, when he said that these 'may be the last decades of the systematic editing of classical texts' (*CR* 43 (1993), 431). Whether arm-twisting is indeed a productive approach, it proved to be unnecessary in this case. R. could not have known that a critical edition of the *Natural History* — with introduction, translation and commentary — was being prepared by a team of Russian scholars. M. Shumilin, who is a member of the editorial team, kindly informed me (*per litteras*) that they had not been able to make use of R.'s book for their first volume (on *HN* 1–2), which was also published in 2021, but have done so since then for their second volume and especially the third one, which came out in 2023 and cover Books 3–4 and 5–6, respectively.

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