

I. RAMELLI: *I romanzi antichi e il Cristianesimo: contesto e contatti* (Graeco-Romanae Religionis Electa Collectio (GREC) 6). Pp. 300. Madrid: Signifer Libros, 2001. Paperback, € 30,00. ISBN 84-931207-9-0.

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Since the period when the ancient novels were written happens to coincide with the time of origin and development of Christianity, it is natural to ask whether there were points of contact between them. Two courses are open to investigate this matter, either to look for novelistic features in Christian texts or to trace Christian elements in the novels. The former approach has been tried in such monographs as Rosa Söder's *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike*, Stuttgart 1932, and Richard Pervo's *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia 1987. For the latter approach, there has been a number of partial studies but thus far no comprehensive treatment. In the volume under review, Ilaria Ramelli tries to fill this gap. The title of her book, 'The Ancient Novels and Christianity: Context and Contacts', expresses her aim: for each of the ancient pagan Greek and Latin novels, to review those subjects and scenes that might recall Christian ideas or practices. I emphasize 'might recall', for the fact is that nowhere in the novels are Christians mentioned in so many words. The book has nine chapters, dealing with Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Iamblichus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, Heliodorus, Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius, respectively. The *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* is left out. The author offers her reasons for omitting it (14 n. 2), but in view of the inclusion of Iamblichus, to whose *Babyloniaca*, or rather its poor remains, she devotes 18 pages, and of Lucian, although he does not belong to the 'canonical' novelists (cf. 20), some discussion of that work might have been expected; even Antonius Diogenes (98–99) and Barlaam and Josaphat (141–142) have excursuses dedicated to them. The chapters are followed by nine pages of Conclusions summarizing the results of each chapter as well as those of the book as a whole. The volume closes with a copious bibliography, including the proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Ancient Novel (ICAN 2000), only in preliminary form at the time (now published as S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, W. Keulen, eds., *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, Mnemosyne, Supplementum 241, Leiden and Boston

2003). Many languages are represented in the bibliography, including Russian, Afrikaans and Esperanto; as is to be expected, Italian titles have not been forgotten.

The chapters always have the same basic structure. First, the author tries to establish for the novel in question when and where it was composed, in order to be able to judge the probability of its contacts with the Christian world. Then she discusses the subjects and scenes that are reminiscent of Christianity: ethical topics such as chastity, fidelity, human life questions (abortion, suicide), liturgical items like the Eucharist, or episodes from Jesus' life, especially his trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Terminological aspects are also dealt with. Finally, she states her conclusion: whether we should assume direct knowledge of Christianity on the part of the author or remain cautious. Her argument may involve detailed discussions of Church history. Thus we are informed about the spread of Christianity in the Roman empire (56–58), the relations between Christians and non-Christians during the time of the Severi (107–112), and the first century history of Christianity in the city of Rome (165–173).

The book has important qualities. First of all, the author offers a very full synthesis of the results of earlier partial studies, including those by herself. A lot of work must have been invested in its preparation, which entailed studying a variety of areas, literary, historical, and theological, and she is hardly to be blamed for occasional questionable statements like the description of the Asiarchs as 'capi della provincia d'Asia' (169 n. 23). Secondly, she always takes a careful stand, and never allows herself to declare certain what is no more than plausible or even most probable; Lucian is the only author about whose direct knowledge of Christianity she is absolutely sure. And finally, the work includes a wealth of bibliographical references, both in the footnotes and in the 68 pages of the Bibliography. All in all, the book is a mine of information, and this is exactly why it is a pity that few steps have been taken to unlock it for its users. What is the point of repeating the name of the author and the title of the book on every page instead of mentioning chapter titles? Why aren't the chapters, on average twenty pages long, provided with subheadings to facilitate quick consultation? Likewise, the author could have spared her readers much time if her cross-references had used page numbers rather than formulas like 'Si veda qui *supra*, cap. II'. And finally, the absence of indexes is a real pity.

These drawbacks, however, do not detract from the favourable overall impression of the book. Nowadays, both the literature of the novels and the early Church as an element of society are in the spotlight of scholarly interest. Those wishing to work on the points of contact between the two are well advised to use Ramelli's synthesis as a guide. They will find there the facts, well-balanced discussions, and an exhaustive bibliography.