

Marco Cursi. *La scrittura e i libri di Giovanni Boccaccio*.

Scritture e libri del medioevo 13. Rome: Viella, 2013. xii + 172 pp. + 32 color pls. €40. ISBN: 978-88-6728-092-6.

Whereas Dante scholars can only fantasize about finding that allusive codex written in Dante's own hand, Boccaccio scholars are blessed with a rich legacy of autograph manuscripts. Given that Boccaccio's library currently includes some seventeen manuscripts (several of which are now dismembered and conserved in separate books), eleven glossed codices, and a private letter, it seems puzzling that we have had to wait so long for a full-length study of Boccaccio's handwriting. This significant gap has now been filled with Cursi's meticulously crafted analysis of the

development of Boccaccio's script across his prolific writing career, from the late 1320s to his death in 1375.

The opening chapter is a history of the identification of autograph manuscripts, which equally and effectively illustrates the vagaries of academic rivalries and hints intriguingly at the adventurous past enjoyed by some of these manuscripts. It reminds us that this is not a dead history of old books and ancient handwriting, but a particularly emotive area of study that continues to promise new discoveries. As recently as 2012, new traces of Boccaccio's hand were found in a copy of Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*, and in a portrait of Homer in one of Boccaccio's Dante anthologies, now only visible with ultraviolet light.

Chapter 2 is the longest and most technical chapter. A series of subsections relating to different types of script reveal the systematic nature of Cursi's analysis: each begins with an explanation of method and a presentation of the data and its analysis, followed by a more discursive treatment of the development of characteristics throughout Boccaccio's life, divided into childhood, youth, maturity, late maturity, and old age. Boccaccio's *scrittura sottile* is defined for the first time as a separate type and refers to a delicate script executed with the reverse of the pen nib, used for marginal and interlinear notes. Boccaccio's use of capitals, arabic numerals, and accents also come under scrutiny. Importantly, Cursi is able to propose significant changes to the dating of works, most notably the *Teseida* and *Bucolicum carmen*.

Chapter 3 provides some historical context, demonstrating the value of underpinning our understanding of Boccaccio's knowledge of literary forms with an understanding of his sensitivity toward the material form, via a treatment of forms of the book in two areas that are likely to be of the widest interest to medievalists: Boccaccio's anthologies of Dante material and the construction of the *Decameron*. Boccaccio's innovations as an editor are contextualized through a survey of the Trecento Dante manuscript tradition, as well as through a fascinating comparison with the autograph of the *Teseida*, which sheds new light on Boccaccio's authorizing strategies. In relation to the *Decameron* autograph, Cursi shows how close attention to Boccaccio's system of initials reflects the author's intentions for the text. This section is also used as a vehicle to discuss the Magliabechiano fragment, presenting new information about its scribe, and to reprise the debate about the relationship between the Capponi manuscript and Hamilton 90. Here Cursi illustrates how an apparently small detail can have significant ramifications, demonstrating that a comparative study of the use of accents proves that the Capponi manuscript must be based on a now-lost autograph.

This is a book that marks a fundamental step change in our understanding, not only of Boccaccio's handwriting, but of his wider practices and habits as an author and copyist supremely attuned to Trecento book culture. While its technical detail makes it unlikely to become standard reading on undergraduate degree programs, it should be required reading for any scholar with an interest in fourteenth-century literary culture. Those who are new to Boccaccio's scribal culture will find that the clarity of Cursi's method and style make this a very accessible introduction. Many

will come to the volume simply for the fantastically generous number of plates (forty-eight in total, sixteen in color), which reproduce both whole pages and selected passages from a wide range of manuscripts. My only quibble is that the captions for plates would be more useful to the more general reader if the manuscript contents were summarized alongside the shelfmark. A sense of ongoing progress underpins the whole volume, signaled via references to technological advances that continue to stimulate new research, as well as through pointers to related studies that *Cursi* has in press, updates to previous studies, and signposts for future work. Rather than marking the end point of a vast body of work, this feels like a taste of further exciting work to come.

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