



15.04.01, Hood, trans., Book in Honor of Augustus

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Hood, Gwyneth, trans.. *Book in Honor of Augustus (Liber ad Honorem Augusti)* by Pietro da Eboli. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 398. Tempe: ACMRS, 2012. Pp. vi, 560. ISBN: 9780866984461 (hardback).

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The twelfth-century poem *Liber ad honorem Augusti (Book in Honor of Augustus)* by Pietro da Eboli survives in only one manuscript (of the same period), which was first edited and published in 1746. Although the work might not have reached a wide audience, its value as a historical and literary text is indisputable. Piero's poem, though extraordinarily biased, remedies the dearth of documents on the invasion of Sicily by Henry VI Hohenstaufen. We know woefully little of those years. Moreover, Piero's biases and style reveal a contemporary perspective on a contentious political situation.

The book's popularity appears to be a more modern development as several editions followed the 1746 publication, including an 1845 translation in Italian. [1] Piero's text appears for the first time in English thanks to a new translation by Gwyneth Hood, based on the 1906 Latin edition by G.B. Siragusa. [2] Students and researchers alike will benefit from Hood's elegant rendition of Eboli's story, which recounts the conquest of Norman Sicily by Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI in the late twelfth century. One might wonder why Pietro da Eboli chose Henry as a subject. The poem covers only a few years, but the actions of Henry and his widow, Constance, had considerable consequences, not least of all for their son, the future Frederick II. The poem captured the attention of editors due also to its literary importance. Eboli's Latin text, beautifully expressed in English by Hood, creates lively scenes complemented by images from the manuscript reproduced in this edition.

Book in Honor of Augustus begins with the death of William II, Norman king of Sicily, and the ensuing crisis of succession between Tancred, count of Lecce, and Emperor Henry VI. William's death was no localized calamity; the succession drew the attention of the eastern and western emperors and the papacy, as well as many important bishops and magnates. Ultimately, the struggle for Sicily represented a wider claim to Constantine's Empire. Seeking to emphasize the legitimacy of Henry's claim, Piero deliberately wrote his account of these events in Latin to "glorify an emperor, his family, and his government, and to solidify popular support for him and for the Holy Roman Empire" (5). Hood also suggests that Piero's poem expressed a common mentality that linked the Roman Empire to the notion of crusade and the recovery of Jerusalem (5).

The book includes an introduction in five parts ("The Author and His Background"; "History of the Completed Manuscript"; "Historical Background and Aftermath"; "Form and Literary Value"; "Format of Translation, and Textual Notes"), followed by the translation with notes and commentary, additional notes, brief biographies of the central figures in the poem, genealogical tables, and a bibliography full of material for further reading on Piero's poem and his world. The poem is divided into three books in which the first two are narrative and the final book records an "allegorical panegyric" to Emperor Henry VI (16). Hood preserves Piero's original divisions of *particulae* ("sections") throughout all the three books.

The history of the book's reception indicates that its author overestimated its immediate potential. Interest in Eboli's text would likely have faded after the death of Henry VI in 1197, not least because of the emperor's alleged cruelty in the Kingdom of Sicily. Henry remains best known even today for his swift and violent reactions to plots and rebellions against his rule. Furthermore his son's clan nominated Frederick's uncle, Philip of Swabia, as their imperial candidate, so Henry's legacy

hardly seemed enduring at the end of the twelfth century. Hood speculates that perhaps Henry's widow cherished the book and even passed it on to her son, but there remains no evidence that Frederick ever touched its ornate pages. Hood's introduction examines the history of the manuscript and locates a connection between Piero's text and William of Brittany's poem *Philipis*. If the manuscript found its way into the hands of William of Brittany, chaplain to Philip Augustus, that might explain its provenance--the text spent time in French monastery before joining a codex with multiple works housed in the Bürgerbibliothek Bern.

Piero da Eboli speaks about himself only in a colophon, which tells us that the author of the poem was a *magister* and a faithful servant of the emperor. Hood's translation of the colophon is a good representation of her approach to the text:

Ego magister Petrus de Ebulo, servus imperatoris et fidelis.

Hood translates the above line as follows:

"I, Master Peter of Eboli, servant of the emperor and faithful" (5).

Hood's translation is not inaccurate but why not put *fidelis* and *servus* together, as it memorably appears in Matthew 25:23? The likely answer is Hood's desire to preserve the Eboli's syntax. Of course, Latin being an inflected language, its syntax often does not survive translation into English. But Hood's translation of Siragusa's edition holds true to the original Latin, while remaining highly readable.

In a far better example, Hood captures the tense words of Empress Constance as she speaks to an angry crowd of Salernitans threatening to overrun her palace:

Illa tamen constans, ut erat de nomine Constans

Et quia famosi Caesaris uxor erat,

Hostes alloquitur audacter ab ore fenestra.

Sic ait: 'Audite quid mea verba velint.

'Saltim dum loquimur, compescite tela manusque.'

"She, however, constant, since her name meant constancy,

And because she was the wife of the famous Caesar,

Addresses her enemies boldly from the open window.

Thus she speaks: 'Hear what my words intend.

'At least while we speak, hold back your missiles and your hands.'" [3]

The phrase *ab ore fenestra* is a bit odd but Hood manages to smooth out the awkwardness in English. Although Hood makes no mention of the allusion, I would argue that Piero was inspired by Virgil here, who wrote *et ingentem lato dedit ore fenestram* in *Aeneid* 2:482, a passage that also describes a palace siege. Students might well be interested in this nod to Virgil.

Piero was no Cicero, but his words convey the emotion of charged scenes. The passage quoted below in which Constance addresses Tancred shows Hood's translation to be accurate while suffering no infelicities of style:

An tu Rogerii filius? Absit

Heres regis, ego matris iustissima proles

Lex patris et matris dat michi quicquid habes.

"Are you Roger's son? Perish the thought.

I am the heir of the king, very rightful offspring of my mother

The law of my father and my mother gives me everything you have." [4]

These passages rather nicely exemplify the whole. Hood's translation never tries to be artificially clever, though she cleverly renders Latinate expressions into English (see "Perish the thought" for *absit*, above).

The real strength of this book is the substantial commentary on the poem. The translation deliberately lacks thorough textual criticism, which renders the book more approachable. Without the esoteric language and apparatus of a full critical edition Hood is free to focus on the content of the poem. To that end, the (relatively sparse and brief) footnotes address inconsistencies and anomalies in the manuscript (mainly issues with morphology, spelling, and lacunae) and discuss when Hood departs from Siragusa's Latin edition, or if she adopts the transcription of another edition. In the commentary she addresses variations in transcriptions, primarily when they could affect the translation substantially, and she provides information on other scholarly translations. Hood reviews Piero's sources, examines his allusions to classical texts and Scripture, and most importantly, offers her own erudite interpretations of the poem. The section of "Additional Notes" more thoroughly treats certain passages in terms of grammar, meaning, and variant translations. Hood allows Piero's text to be read

unimpeded by a complex commentary, while at the same time offering further information should the reader desire.

This book would not be ideal in a Latin course due to the absence of grammar notes designed to guide student reading. To be fair, I doubt that Hood intended the book for that purpose. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning. But I can confidently say that for a course in medieval literature or history this book would have enormous success. Perhaps art history courses might also benefit. Hood chose to print the many miniatures in the manuscript so that readers can see the original images alongside the text they depict, as Piero intended. The value of *Book in Honor of Augustus* to scholars is evident, but its readability could make it appealing to the general public as well.

Notes:

1. Giuseppe Del Re, *De tumulti avvenuti in Sicilia e de' fatti operati nel XII secolo tra Arrigo VI, imperatore de' Romani e Tancredi: Carme di Pietro d'Eboli*, in *Cronisti e scrittori sincroni della dominazione Normanna nel regno di Puglia e Sicilia*, vol. I (Naples: Giannini, 1845), 401-53.
2. G. B. Siragusa, *Liber ad honorem Augusti di Pietro da Eboli, secondo il Cod. 120 della Biblioteca Civica di Berna: Testo con una tavola illustrativa* (Rome: Istituto storico Italiana, 1906).
3. *Particula XXI*, 583-7, pp. 178-9.
4. *Particula XXV*, 734-6, pp. 198-9.

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