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THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE IN OLD ICELANDIC GRAMMATICAL LITERATURE*

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The study of the relationships between the medieval Scandinavian world and classical antiquity – or, more precisely, of the knowledge and reception of classical culture in medieval Scandinavian literature – has been a favourite subject of research since the very beginning of Old Norse scholarship and has produced a large amount of literature, which certainly escapes, in its entirety, from the observation of a single scholar.¹ On the other hand, this is a multi-faceted subject, of which, as a rule, only one aspect is investigated at a time. This is in fact the case also for the present writer: my point of observation is that of the presence – in a very broad sense – of classical elements in the Old Icelandic grammatical literature. It goes without saying, of course, that my perspective strongly reflects the fact that, given my disciplinary background, I am facing the question from the point of view of the Nordic philologist, not of the classicist.

A few words of explanation will be necessary, by way of introduction, for those readers who are not particularly familiar with the tradition of grammatical studies in medieval Iceland.

As a matter of fact, this northerly outpost of the Western world has handed down to us the only extant collection – I should be tempted to say the only extant

The present study was made possible thanks to funding of the Italian Ministry for the University and Scientific Research ("fondi MURST ex quota 60%") supplied by the University of Siena.

I will just mention here some of the most significant contributions: F. Paasche, "Über Rom und das Nachleben der Antike im norwegischen und isländischen Schrifttum des Hochmittelalters", *Symbolae Osloenses* 13 (1934), 114-45; P. Lehmann, *Skandinaviens Anteil an der lateinischen Literatur und Wissenschaft des Mittelalters* (I-II), München 1936-37 (Sitzungsber. der Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-Hist. Abt., 1936/II + 1937/VII), repr. in *Erforschung des Mittelalters*, Ausgew. Abh. ... von P.L., V, Stuttgart 1962, 275-393; C.-E. Thors, *Det latinska inflytandet på fornsvenskan. En översikt*, Helsingfors 1952; U. Dronke, "Classical influences on early Norse literature", in *Classical Influences on European Culture AD 500-1500*, ed. by R.R. Bolgar, Cambridge 1971, 143-49; E. Walter, "Die lateinische Sprache und Literatur auf Island und in Norwegen bis zum Beginn des 13. Jahrhunderts. Ein Orientierungsversuch", *Nordeuropa – Studien* 4 (1971), 195-230; S. Skard, *Classical Tradition in Norway. An Introduction with Bibliography*, Oslo / Bergen / Tromsø 1980; P. Foote, "Latin rhetoric and Icelandic poetry. Some contacts", *Saga och Sed* 1982, 107-27, repr. with a postscript in P. Foote, *Aurvandilstá. Norse Studies*, ed. by M. Barnes et al., Odense 1984, 249-70; *Cultura classica e cultura germanica settentrionale*, a c. di P. Janni et al., Macerata 1985 [1988] (Quaderni Linguistici e Filologici 3), containing the proceedings of an international conference held in Macerata and S. Severino Marche in May 1985. Specially devoted to the relationships between classical and medieval Scandinavian culture is the Italian periodical *Classiconorroena*, published in Perugia by the society of the same name since 1993. For further references see K. Friis-Jensen, "Latin Language and Literature", in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, New York / London 1993, 380-81.

*anthology*² – of writings concerning the description of a vernacular language of the Middle Ages. The items that make up this collection are known as *the four Icelandic grammatical treatises* ([Icel.] GTs). Yet, in spite of this conventional name, not all of them are concerned with ‘grammar’ in the current meaning of the word: in particular, the fourth (FoTG) and the last part of the third (ThGT) are about the *figurae* of literary rhetoric, whereas the first (FiGT) and the second (SeGT) deal exclusively with Icelandic orthography; only the third treatise contains, in its first section, an elementary treatment of the parts of speech according to the Latin tradition.³

Given the nature of the subjects discussed in the four GTs, it will be no surprise at all to find numerous and frequent clues in these works that imply the existence, on the part of their authors, of a classical background, in the form of both quotations and references to Latin and Greek authors of the classical period, mainly – but not exclusively – to grammarians.

Before going any further into the subject proper of this paper, it may be useful to clarify how the notion of ‘classical antiquity’ (or ‘antiquity’ tout court) is going to be applied in the present context, for this will in some way affect the meaning of the expression ‘classical heritage’ contained in the title of the paper.

Firstly, with regard to the cultural and ideological substance, Christianity is included by full right in the overall frame of the Icel. GTs as part and parcel of the ‘classical’ background of their authors, not least because the knowledge of classical antiquity was inherited by the Icelanders in the wake and through the filter of Christianity (as in fact was the case for all the Germanic nations in the Middle Ages). This means, in particular, that account must be taken of references

² This is, among other things, the impression one gets from a careful reading of the prologue to the four Icelandic grammatical treatises in the ‘Codex Wormianus’ of *Snorri’s Edda* (see n. 3 below), one of the MSS in which they are preserved (cf. Sverrir Tómasson, “Formáli málfræðiritgerðanna fjögurra í Wormsbók”, *Íslenskt Mál og Almenn Málfræði* 15 [1993], 221-40).

³ The four treatises are preserved as a whole in only one MS, the so-called Codex Wormianus of *Snorri’s Edda* (AM 242 fol), which is also the only extant witness for the FiGT and the FoGT. The SeGT is also attested, in a somewhat different version, in the so-called Codex Upsaliensis of *Snorri’s Edda* (DG 11), while two further witnesses of the ThGT are known from the MSS AM 748 I 4to and AM 757a 4to. The following may be regarded as the standard critical editions of the Icel. GTs to date: *The First Grammatical Treatise*, ed. by Hreinn Benediktsson, Reykjavík 1972 (henceforth abbreviated as HB); *The So-Called Second Grammatical Treatise*, ed. by F.D. Raschella, Firenze 1982 (henceforth FDR); *Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda*, udg. af Björn M. Ólsen, København 1884 (henceforth BMÓ III and BMÓ IV). Other useful editions are: *Den første og anden grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda*, udg. af V. Dahlerup og Finnur Jónsson, København 1886; *First Grammatical Treatise. The Earliest Germanic Phonology*, ed. by E. Haugen, London ²1972 (1950); *Il primo trattato grammaticale islandese*, a c. di F. Albano Leoni, Bologna 1975 (henceforth FAL); *Óláfr Þórðarson, Málhljóða- og málskrúðsrit*, Grammatisk-retorisk afhandling, udg. af Finnur Jónsson, København 1927. For basic information concerning the various aspects of the Old Icelandic grammatical literature reference can be made to E. Haugen, “Scandinavian Literature: Grammatical”, in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, XI, 10-13, New York 1988, and to F.D. Raschella, “Grammatical Treatises”, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, New York / London 1993, 235-37.

to the foundations of the Christian faith, especially quotations from and references to the Holy Scriptures (both to the New and the Old Testaments), although these are too frequent and too widespread in our texts to be considered individually here.

Secondly, from a chronological point of view, it will be necessary to overstep, although slightly, the rather cumbersome and in any case slippery limit of the late 5th century set by traditional historiography as the time of transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, in order to include among the classical 'components' of the Icel. GTs at least two sources of primary importance. I intend to refer here to Boethius and Priscian, who, for reasons of both historical and cultural continuity, are better regarded as belonging to late antiquity rather than to the early Middle Ages.

It clearly appears, therefore, that 'classical heritage' is here intended mainly as the presence – explicit or implicit, actual or only 'spiritual' – of classical (particularly Latin) *auctores*, as well as of the most direct continuators of classical thought, including authors deeply rooted in Christian ideology (who are in fact the majority). In a more general perspective the notion of 'classical heritage' might of course be extended to any formal character that can be traced back to classical models, including, for example, the style and structure of the GTs and their technical vocabulary. But, apart from the fact that these are very specialistic subjects of investigation, it is not my intention to include them in this brief survey. Nor will I dwell at length on the purely grammatical and/or rhetorical foundations of the Icel. GTs, which constitute a well-definite and prominent subject of investigation in themselves. For this purpose reference can be made to the copious and flourishing literature on the subject.⁴

⁴ For brevity's sake, only a restricted selection of existing works on the subject can be listed here. Besides the introductions and commentaries to the editions of the GTs reported in n. 3 above, the following studies may be mentioned by way of orientation: A. Holtsmark, *En islandsk scholasticus fra det 12. århundre*, Oslo 1936 (Skr. utg. av det Norske Vid.s-Akad. i Oslo, II. Hist.-Fil. Kl. 1936, 3), for the FiGT; E. Mogk, "Untersuchungen zur Snorra-Edda. I. Der sogenannte zweite grammatische traktat der Snorra-Edda", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 22/III (1889), 129-67, K. Braunmüller, "Der sog. Zweite Grammatische Traktat: Ein verkanntes Zeugnis altisländischer Sprachanalyse" in *Akten der 5. Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebiets*, St. Augustin 1983, 45-56, and L. Melazzo, "The opening of the so-called Second Grammatical Treatise: in search of the sources", in *Cultura classica e ...*, 399-424, for the SeGT; F. Albano Leoni, "Donato in Thule. *Kenningar e tropi nel terzo trattato grammaticale islandese*", *AION – Filologia Germanica* 28-29 (1985-86), 1-15, V. Micillo, "Classical tradition and Norse tradition in the 'Third Grammatical Treatise'", *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 108 (1993), 68-79, and C. Santini, "'Kenningar Donati': An investigation of the classical models in the Third Icelandic Grammatical Treatise", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 1 (1994), 37-44, for the ThGT; Björn M. Ólsen, *Runerne i den oldislandske litteratur*, København 1883, 44-89, for the 'Prologue' to the four GTs in the Codex Wormianus and its alleged relationship with the section on runic letters in the ThGT (cf. F.D. Raschellà, "Rune e alfabeto latino nel trattato grammaticale di Óláfr Þórðarson", in *Sagnáping helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum*, Reykjavík 1994, 679-90). A general discussion of the theoretical foundations of the Icel. GTs is contained in F.D. Raschellà, "Die altisländische grammatische

In brief, therefore, this paper is an attempt to give an essential survey of the influence exerted (more or less directly) on Old Icelandic grammatical literature by the most disparate authors and works of classical antiquity, with a glance at some concrete examples that seem to be of particular interest to the theme of the present volume.

Two main types of 'sources' – in the broadest meaning of the term – can be distinguished in considering evidence of the knowledge of classical antiquity in the works of the medieval Icelandic grammarians:

1) Technical sources (I shall use this general, and to some extent improper, term to indicate any kind of grammatical and/or rhetorical work expressly written for didactic purposes, no matter which level of learning it was intended for),⁵

2) Other sources (i.e. mainly literary, philosophical, and religious works, but also that kind of knowledge, of a more or less learned nature, that does not necessarily rest upon a written tradition and that is rather part of what we could call 'common lore').

In addition, it is necessary to make further distinctions, within each group, according to whether the classical sources involved are explicit or implicit, direct or indirect (i.e. mediated by other, later sources), actual or just hypothetical. Not always, indeed rather seldom, the authors and works referred to in the Icel. GTs are overtly mentioned or can be easily inferred through the knowledge we have of them as handed down by tradition; on the contrary, they are in most cases concealed, or – more exactly – camouflaged, so their presence behind the text is only to be inferred by indirect evidence or is simply presumable.

Let us now go on to exemplify what has been observed so far.

As stated above, I will only touch very briefly and in general terms on what I have called the technical sources of the Icel. GTs, again leaving it to the reader to refer to the specific literature on this subject for further information.⁶

Apart from the two foremost grammatical authorities of antiquity, Donatus and Priscian, no other grammarian is mentioned by name or directly referred to in any of the four GTs. Donatus and Priscian actually represent the main sources of the ThGT, whose author repeatedly appeals to their authority,⁷ but their doctrine

Literatur. Forschungsstand und Perspektiven zukünftiger Untersuchungen", *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 235 (1983), 271-315, § 7 ff. Other relevant works will be mentioned below.

⁵ This use of 'technical' corresponds, on the other hand, very closely to the etymological meaning of the word, i.e. 'pertaining to τέχνη' (with obvious reference, in the present context, to the 'art' of grammar or of rhetoric).

⁶ See n. 4 above.

⁷ Donatus is mentioned three times: BMÓ III 10:1 (59), 11:31 (72), and 16:4 (101) (references are to chapter and paragraph in B.M. Ólsen's edition; for easier reference to the passages in question, page numbers are indicated in parentheses); Priscian's name appears six times (all in the first part of the treatise): BMÓ III 1:13 (35), 3:3 (40), 3:19 (44), 4:4 (45), 6:1 (52), and 9:3 (56) (in the last instance he is called *meistari Priscianus* 'master P.' and is opposed to *Aristóteles hinn spaki* 'A. the wise' in classifying the parts of speech). An accurate – albeit not exhaustive –

has also influenced to some extent the theoretical bases of the other treatises, especially of the FiGT. However, in the majority of cases, their teachings appear to be mediated by one or the other of the countless commentaries and abstracts of their works that were written during the Middle Ages.⁸ On the other hand, it is not always an easy task to single out close parallels between the text of the GTs and the works of these two authors or of their commentators, even where the traces of their presence are more than a mere impression.

So much more arduous, as can be easily inferred, is the search for parallels or even just analogies between the Icel. GTs and other Latin grammarians of the classical period. Firstly, because they were much less known – if they were it at all – to medieval scholars than Donatus and Priscian; secondly, because they tended to be gradually absorbed by and assimilated to the latter as time passed, especially through the works of the many medieval commentators, who, as is well known, were prone to mixing texts and doctrines of different origin. Among the names of ancient grammarians that most frequently occur in works dealing with the theoretical sources of the Icel. GTs are those of Quintilian (for the FiGT)⁹, (Pseudo-)Probus (for the SeGT and ThGT)¹⁰, and Diomedes (for the FiGT, SeGT, and ThGT)¹¹. Others appear only sporadically (e.g. Pompeius¹² and Audax¹³) or indirectly, i.e. in quotations from other grammarians (e.g. Scaurus¹⁴). Greek grammarians are not mentioned in any of the Icel. GTs. This does not mean, of course, that they were not known to their authors; on the other hand, the grammatical theories of ancient Greece, especially those of the so-called School of Alexandria, had been completely absorbed and elaborated into the overall framework of Latin grammar, of which they constituted the very foundation.¹⁵

analysis of the relationship between the ThGT and Donatus's third book of *Ars maior* is to be found in Albano Leoni, "Donato in Thule. ...".

⁸ Among these, Remigius of Auxerre's commentary *In artem Donati minorem* and the so-called *Commentum Einsidlense in artem Donati maiorem* (also attributed to Remigius), as well as Peter Helias's *Summa super Priscianum*, seem to have exerted their influence on the FiGT and/or the SeGT, whilst Murethach's *Commentum in Donati artem maiorem*, and Sedulius Scottus's works *Commentum in maiorem Donatum grammaticum* and *In Priscianum* seem to be relevant when compared with the text of the ThGT. No point of contact with either Donatus or Priscian seems to emerge from the FoGT, whose author, according to BMÓ (xlii) picks up his material from Alexander of Villedieu's *Doctrinale* and Everard of Béthune's *Graecismus*. For references, see Raschellà, "Die altisl. gramm. Lit. ..." and, most recently, the works of Melazzo, Micillo, and Santini mentioned in n. 4 above.

⁹ HB 79.

¹⁰ FDR 78; Melazzo, "The opening of ...", 410-12; Micillo, "Classical tradition and ...", 73-74. (Pseudo-)Probus is a conventional name denoting a 4th-century *Instituta artium* improperly attributed to Marcus Valerius Probus, actually a grammarian of the 1st century.

¹¹ HB 56; FDR 109; Melazzo, "The opening of ...", 414; BMÓ III 12:2 n. (73).

¹² Melazzo, "The opening of ...", 405.

¹³ Micillo, "Classical tradition and ...", 71.

¹⁴ Cited in Diomedes's *Ars grammatica* in connection with the definitions of *littera* and *elementum* (HB 56).

¹⁵ Cf. n. 22 below.

Quite another question is that concerning the Icelandic grammarians' knowledge of the Greek language; to this point we will return in a moment.

References to the three peoples which to the largest extent characterize the civilization of the ancient world – i.e. the Greeks, the Romans, and the Hebrews – are quite frequent in the Old Icel. GTs. We find them mentioned in various contexts, yet mostly in connection with their languages and alphabets. As far as the Romans are concerned, this appears quite natural, since the alphabet that the Icelanders used to compose their literary works in the vernacular was the Latin one. The knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, on the other hand, derived to the Icelanders just from their study of Latin grammatical works and was in practice confined to the essentials of the alphabets. I have unfortunately insufficient space here to treat this subject as extensively as it would deserve, so I must limit myself to a couple of items that I deem particularly relevant to the purpose of this paper.

The first one concerns the alleged common Asian origin of Greek, Latin, and Old Scandinavian poetry. This statement, contained in a passage of the ThGT,¹⁶ represents a quite traditional view, deeply rooted in Old Norse culture, and has a close parallel in the prologue to the *Prose Edda*, the famous work of Snorri Sturluson, where the mythical rulers (then pagan gods) of ancient Scandinavia are said to come from Asia, according to the equation *Æsir* (the gods' proper name) = *Asíamenn* 'men of Asia'.¹⁷ The passage in the ThGT reads as follows:

“In this book¹⁸ it may be clearly seen that it is all one art, the poetry which sages of Rome learnt in Athens in Greece, and later put into Latin, and that mode of verse-making or poetry which Óðinn and other men from Asia brought here into the northern part of the world, ...”¹⁹

The second item I should like to mention regards the special attention paid by the authors of the Icel. GTs not only to the explanation (and Icelandic translation) of the technical terms occurring in their writings, but also, occasionally, to their etymology. This is mainly the case of the ThGT and FoGT, which, as hinted above, are more dependent than the other treatises upon Latin (and, indirectly, Greek) grammatical-rhetorical tradition. There we find, for example, the etymology of Greco-Latin words like *diphthongus*, *barbarismus*, *soloecismus*,

¹⁶ BMÓ III 10:4 (60).

¹⁷ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by A. Faulkes, Oxford 1982, 4-6 (cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, transl. and intr. by A. Faulkes, London / Melbourne 1987, 2-5).

¹⁸ Reference is made to the third book of Donatus's *Ars maior*, the main source of the second part of the ThGT.

¹⁹ The English translation is from P. Foote, “Latin rhetoric and ...” (repr. 1984), 255. For a brief discussion of this subject, see V. Micillo, “Motivi letterari medievali nel prologo del *Terzo Trattato Grammaticale Islandese*”, *AION – Sezione Germanica (NS)* 5 (1995), 65-81 (here: 71-74).

anthropopathos (MS: *antropuspatos*) and the like;²⁰ these words are analyzed into their components and, in some cases, their origin is (more or less extensively) explained according to tradition.²¹

Another kind of authorities to which the Icelandic grammarians willingly resorted in composing their works were the philosophers. This was certainly no novelty in itself; on the contrary, it already was a well-established habit among Latin grammarians and, still earlier, among Greek grammarians – a habit dating back to the times in which philosophy and grammar still belonged under one and the same branch of human knowledge. So, it is not uncommon to find in the writings of classical grammarians – and in our treatises as well – references to the masters of ancient thought, either individually or through the collective term *philosophi*, by which chiefly the Stoics were meant, whose teachings were at the basis of the grammatical theories set up by the School of Alexandria, which, in turn, was the model of the earliest grammarians of ancient Rome.²²

Restricting our perspective to what is relevant to the Icel. GTs, we may observe that the general label *philosophi* occurs two times – untranslated – in the ThGT: once in connection with the classification of sounds and once in the discussion on the nature of the ‘letter’.²³ Aristotle – the *Philosophus* par excellence to the mind of the medieval man – is quoted by name, with the appellative ‘the wise’ (*Aristotiles hinn spaki*), in the chapter on the ‘word’ (Icel. *sögn*, translating the Lat. *dictio*) in the ThGT, where his essential doctrine of the parts of speech is contrasted with the more elaborated one of ‘master Priscian’ (*meistari Priscianus*).²⁴ Plato is also mentioned in the ThGT, in connection with the classification of sounds, as asserting that the heavenly bodies are living, intelligent, and immortal creatures.²⁵

What definitely distinguishes the Icel. GTs from their Latin sources in this respect is the influence exerted on their authors by the knowledge of the later philosophers of antiquity, who, for obvious chronological reasons, were not known – or, at any rate, were not taken into consideration – by the ancient Latin

²⁰ The first three appear in the ThGT: BMÓ III 4:9 (47), 11:2-3 (61-62), and 12:2 (72-73) respectively; the fourth one is in the FoGT: BMÓ IV 25 (149).

²¹ Another well-known instance of etymological explanation is that reported in the FiGT (and in one of the two versions of the SeGT) for the term *títull* ‘abbreviation mark’: this word is said to derive from Lat. *titulus* ‘title’, which, in turn, is explained as a diminutive of *Titan*, a name for the sun (HB 240-42 [89:24-26]) – an etymology tracing back to Remigius of Auxerre’s commentary *In artem Donati minorem* (cf. HB 190-91 and 198, and FAL 59-60, both with reference to A. Holtmark, *En islandsk scholasticus ...*, 78-80).

²² For a general survey, see the chapters ‘Greece’ and ‘Rome’ in R.H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, London 1967, esp. pp.15-48.

²³ BMÓ III 1:8 (34) and 2:7 (38) respectively.

²⁴ BMÓ III 9:2 (56); cf. n. 7 above.

²⁵ BMÓ III 1:8 (34) (*Þessar stjörnur sagði Plató hafa líf ok skyn ok vera ódauðligar*); cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 38 C / 39 E.

grammarians. Among these later philosophers, who were active between the 4th and the 6th century, the one who seems to have had the greatest impact upon the intellectual grounding of the Icelandic grammarians (or at least of some of them) is no doubt Boethius. True, his name appears only in a passage of the FoGT, where, in the discussion of epexegetis (MS: *exflexigesis*), reference is made to a "book of Boethius" (*bók Boetii*),²⁶ by which term in all likelihood his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (*Περὶ ἑρμηνείας*) is meant.²⁷ Yet Boethius's ascendancy is perceivable also in the SeGT and ThGT, especially in the introductory sections, where the nature and the classification of sounds are at issue: here his 'spiritual' presence seeps through the text both as an exegete of Aristotle's works and as a source of some late medieval treatises on logic and dialectic, as e.g. Roger Bacon's *Summa gramatica*, Peter Hispanus's *Summulae logicales*, and Robert Kilwardby's commentary on *Priscianus minor*, with which the SeGT and the ThGT seem to show some significant parallels.²⁸

Alongside the influence exerted on the Icel. GTs by philosophers, we may consider that of theologians. In this connection, only two figures come into the picture: St. Augustine and Pope Leo I (the Great). Both are mentioned in a passage of the FoGT dealing with the rhetorical figure of homophasis (MS: *emophasis*)²⁹ and their thought is reported in order to explain a very complicated scaldic stanza allegedly inspired to a passage in *Habakkuk*. However, the author of the treatise does not specify the texts from which he takes the quotations, nor have they, to my knowledge, been identified so far.

Finally, a quick glance at the eminently literary sources will serve to complete the picture. Two classical Latin poets are quoted in the Icel. GTs: Ovid and the so-called Pseudo-Cato (*Disticha Catonis*). As far as the former is concerned, a verse from *Ars amandi* (I, 8: *Tiphys et Automedon dicar Amoris ego*) is employed by the author of the ThGT as an example of Latin metaphor as opposed to the Old Norse *kenning*.³⁰ It is interesting to note, among other things, that this is the first known quotation from Ovid in an Icelandic writing.³¹ The reference to the *Disticha Catonis* occurs in the FiGT. In replying to a hypothetical opponent unwilling to accept an uncommon spelling (and pronunciation) of the Icelandic word for 'iron' (i.e. *earn* instead of the more usual *iarn*) although this is supported by authoritative poets, the author of the treatise addresses himself to his interlocutor with the famous couplet: *Contra verbosos noli contendere verbis*:

²⁶ BMÓ IV 10 (133).

²⁷ Cf. BMÓ IV 10 n. (132).

²⁸ See FDR 108-13 and Micillo, "Classical tradition and ...", 76 ff.

²⁹ BMÓ IV 22 (145-46).

³⁰ BMÓ III 16:17 (103). On this point, see Albano Leoni "Donato in Thule. ...", 10-12.

³¹ Cf. Sigurður Pétursson, "Ovid in Iceland", in *Cultura classica e ...*, 53-63 (here: 56).

*/ sermo datur cunctis, animi sapientia paucis.*³² The *Disticha Catonis* seem to have been a fairly popular work in medieval Iceland, to judge from the fact they were translated into Icelandic – with the title *Hugsvinnsmál* ‘The Sayings of the Wise One’ – probably as early as in the 13th century.³³ Closely related to the *Disticha Catonis* seems to be another Latin quotation occurring in the ThGT. In introducing the source of the second part of his work, i.e. the third book of Donatus’s *Ars maior*, the author states that only one who knows what is permissible and what is wrong in language is able to speak or to write elegantly, and adds the following Latin saying: *Malum non vitatur nisi cognitum*, without specifying the source. The aphorism, which is known in slightly different variants from both Latin and Scandinavian texts of the Middle Ages,³⁴ is not found in either the *Disticha Catonis* or the Icelandic *Hugsvinnsmál*; however, as far as style and contents are concerned, it is very near to the sayings of the pseudo-Catonian collection.³⁵

Which conclusions may be drawn from these summary and quick notes on the ‘classical heritage’ of the Old Icelandic grammatical literature?

The picture that has been outlined clearly shows that the intellectual background of the medieval Icelandic grammarians – and of medieval Icelandic scholars in general – was basically the same as that of their colleagues on the European continent, that the same books circulated, and that the same authors were read; in brief, that the *curriculum* in the medieval Icelandic schools corresponded very closely to that of all the other schools in the Western world. On the other hand, we must not forget that many Icelanders carried out or at least completed their studies abroad, especially in England, France, and Germany. It is therefore quite comprehensible that the authors of the Icel. GTs resorted to this common scholarly apparatus in their works. This naturally applies also to their knowledge of the classical authors. What perhaps distinguishes them from their European colleagues is a looser attitude towards the classical texts as such and, therefore, a greater indeterminacy in referring to them. This is mainly a consequence of the fact that the classical texts – the most popular at least – were very soon translated into the vernacular and, once they had been translated, they were practically neglected in their

³² HB 228 (87:13-14); *Dist. Cat.*: I, 10 (*Disticha Catonis*, recensuit ... M. Boas, ... edendum curavit H.J. Botschuyver, Amstelodami 1952, 42).

³³ *Hugsvinnsmál*, Handskrifter och kritisk text, [utg. av] B. Tuvestrand, Lund 1977 (with an English summary). For a survey of the reception of the Pseudo-Cato in Old Icelandic literature, see M.E. Ruggerini, “La ricezione dei *Disticha Catonis* nell’Islanda medievale”, in *Cultura classica e ...*, 221-77, with further references.

³⁴ See Hermann Pálsson, “Malum non vitatur, nisi cognitum”, *Gripla* 5 (1982), 115-26, and Micillo, “Motivi letterari medievali ...”, 74-77.

³⁵ In particular, it can be easily compared with the second part of distich II, 24: *Prospice qui veniant casus: hos esse ferendos; / nam levius laedit quidquid praevidimus ante* (*Disticha Catonis*, rec. M. Boas ..., 130; cf. Ruggerini, “La ricezione dei ...”, 226 ff.).

original form. Besides, the material drawn from classical sources appears, almost without exception, to be manipulated (sometimes enlarged, sometimes reduced or simplified), adapted to the requirements of the Icelandic cultural environment, sometimes misunderstood. It is therefore extremely difficult, as a rule, to single out from Icelandic texts like the GTs precise references to one or the other classical author or work. Thus, when dealing with the question of the classical heritage in Old Icelandic grammatical literature, we must acknowledge that we have more often to do with *echoes* than with 'sources'. That suggests to me a similitude that seems consonant with our subject-matter: we are here in the presence of that contraposition between *vox corporalis* (the concrete, actual, identifiable one) and *vox incorporalis* (the ethereal, deceptive, indistinct, sometimes distorted one)³⁶ that challenged and fascinated generations of scholars from antiquity all through the Middle Ages.

³⁶

As for example in the opening of the ThGT (*líkamligt hljóð* 'corporeal sound' vs. *hljóðsgrein ... sú, er heilög ritning segir andliga hluti hljóða* 'that kind of sound, which, according to the Holy Scripture, is produced by spiritual things'), BMÓ III 1:2-3 (33); cf. Micillo, "Classical tradition and ...", 70 ff.