Charles R. Dodwell 2000. *Anglo-Saxon Gestures and the Roman Stage* (Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 28). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [xvii + 171 pages; 99 plates. ISBN Hardback: 0 521 66188 9].

Anglo-Saxon Gestures and the Roman Stage is the posthumous work by Professor Charles Reginald Dodwell (1922-1994), who bequeathed in life an important collection of key books and articles on medieval art: ranging from the general introduction *The Pictorial Arts of the West, 800-1200* (1993), to the more specific texts *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (1985) and *Aspects of Art in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1992). Most Anglo-Saxonists, however, would know him for the facsimile edition, in collaboration with Peter Clemoes, of the *Old English Illustrated Hexateuch* (British Library Cotton Claudius B.iv) (1974). The original notes and some chapters already written by Charles Dodwell have been assembled and given definitive form by one of his disciples, Timothy Graham.

This book explores the Asimilarity [in form and meaning] between gestures portrayed in certain areas of late Anglo-Saxon art and those occurring in the illustrated manuscripts of the plays of Terence (xiii). As such, this piece of research originates in a manuscript containing a cycle of illustrations of Terence=s plays (second century BC) preserved in Rome, at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vat. lat. 3868), and possibly composed at Corvey in France. In dating this manuscript, familiarly known as *Vatican Terence*, Dodwell displayed the faculties of a detective scrutinizing the history of art in late antiquity and the early middle ages. Evidence as miscellaneous as hair-styles, dress and garments of the characters portrayed in the miniatures, and a frontispiece illustration of a bust of the playwright supported by two masked actors suggest that the *Vatican Terence* was probably composed in the first half of the third century AD, and that the model for the miniatures may derive from the North of Africa (1-21).

A large section of the book (*Dramatic gestures in the miniatures*, 34-100) is devoted to interpreting the meaning of the gestures represented in the miniatures of this third-century manuscript. Some of these gestures are straightforward and can easily be interpreted in the light of contemporary

kinesics: shaking hands to denote "friendship", patting someone's back to indicate "approval", placing the forefinger on the lips to request "silence", and brandishing the fist to show "hostility" or "belligerence." Other gestures in the miniatures are interpreted on the basis of external evidence. In this sense, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (late first century AD) becomes an important source for ascertaining the meaning of gestures denoting "insistence", "forcefulness", "refusal" and "agreement" or "acquiescence". Additionally, it suggests that some of the dramatic gestures in the *Vatican Terence* were also part of the rhetorical *actio*, as performed by Roman orators. Most gestures, finally, have to be interpreted in the light of the internal evidence provided by action and plot as they unfold in the different plays by Terence. This is the interpretative procedure for a majority of gestures denoting moods or reflecting how actors responded to diverse dramatic situations, as the plays were being performed on stage: "perplexity", "dissent", "compliance", "restraint", "sadness", "apprehension" or "fear", "supplication", "amazement", "pondering" or "reflecting". In fact, Dodwell concluded that most of these gestures seem to have been peculiar to the Roman stage, and that the original drawings later copied in them may derive from actual performances of the plays on the stage. Indeed, many of the gestures indicating mood are unrelated to contemporary body actions and, in case they are, they have utterly different meanings; for instance, the act of raising two middle fingers of the hand is nowadays understood in parts of the English-speaking world as an insulting way of expressing "derision", while in the Roman stage, and in the particular performance of Terence's plays, it meant "compliance" or "conciliation". Only one of the gestures agrees partially with the meaning it has in contemporary kinesics: this is the expression of "agreement" or "approval" by Ajoining together the thumb and forefinger to form a circle, while the other fingers are outstretched (61). This gesture, which Dodwell traces back to Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, closely resembles the "OK" gesture widespread in some parts of the English-speaking world, and may have been an ancestor of it.

The second part of the book (*Anglo-Saxon gestures*, 101-154) examines a variety of Anglo-Saxon illustrated manuscripts in search of the "English" gestures connected to those portrayed in the miniatures of *Vatican Terence*.

The manuscripts where instances of the Roman gestures are found are all devoted to Christian issues: among others, the *Tiberius Psalter* (British Library, Cotton Tiberius C.vi), the *Harley Psalter* (British Library, Harley 603), the *Bury Psalter* (Vatican'Library, Reg. lat. 12), the well-known *Junius Manuscript* (Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 11), containing the poems *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel* and *Christ and Satan*, and, finally, the *Illustrated Hexateuch* (British Library, Cotton Claudius B. iv), edited by Dodwell himself in collaboration with Peter Clemoes (1974). All of them were probably composed in Canterbury during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

Six of the gestures displayed in the *Vatican Terence* appear repeatedly in the illustrations of the late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts under scrutiny: the gestures for "perplexity" or "puzzlement", "sadness", "fear" or "apprehension", "supplication" and "pondering" or "reflection" are systematically reproduced in Anglo-Saxon illustrations. Similarly, the gesture for "approval" or "acquiescence" is also reproduced with slight variations, like replacing the forefinger with the second finger when touching the thumb to form a circle, or even leaving a gap between the relevant finger and the thumb. It is surprising that these six gestures are exclusive to late Anglo-Saxon England, and that there is no trace of them either in contemporary continental sources, or in English manuscripts after the Norman conquest. This implies that the interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon gestures is only based on the internal evidence provided by the illuminated texts in the different manuscripts. For instance, a gesture like *laying a hand to the side of the face*, which recurs in the context of death and funeral throughout the *Illustrated Hexateuch*, can only be interpreted as the expression of "sadness" (111).

A most exciting part within this detective-like research in the history of early medieval art is the attempt to establish the possible link between the gestures that had been actually used in the performance of Terence's plays on the Roman stage, the inclusion of miniatures reflecting them in the later Vatican manuscript of this playwright's production, and, finally, their adoption by the Benedictine monks who were copying and illustrating Anglo-Saxon manuscripts more than eleven centuries after Terence's death, and seven centuries after the *Vatican Terence* had been copied. This

connection cannot be established by way of the sign language used by Benedictine monks on certain occasions and in certain dependencies of the monastery to keep with the precept of silence imposed by the Rule of St Benedict and his numerous local adaptations. One Anglo-Saxon exhaustive list and description of Benedictine sign language survives in British Library, Cotton Tiberius Aiii, ff. 97v-101v (Banham ed. 1991). It suggests that the function of gestures within sign language systems was basically "deictic" or "indexical": they were used to identify objects and persons in the context of the monastery, so that the day-to-day life of the community was made easier when the *summum silentium* was required by the Rule. On the contrary, the six gestures analysed in this section -like their sources in the *Vatican Terence*- do not have this communicative function, but aim at *represent[ing] moods artistically* (147).

The gap between the monastic school at Corvey, where the *Vatican Terence* seems to have been copied, and late Anglo-Saxon Canterbury, where most of the medieval manuscripts showing some of the Roman theatrical gestures were written and illuminated, can only be bridged after a thorough (re)search in the Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian manuscript contexts of the Benedictine reform. The immense popularity of Terence in the Middle Ages is attested, for instance, in the survival of more than one hundred fragments or complete copies of his works before the year 1200. This reputation makes it highly plausible that an illustrated copy of his plays, based on the *Vatican Terence* or related to it, was available at Canterbury in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries. Even though this "missing link" has not been unearthed, Dodwell puts forward some conclusive hypotheses on the cross-currents of art and manuscript illumination between England and Northern France. For instance, Dodwell explores the connections between Corvey and late Anglo-Saxon England and refers particularly to the invitation by Æthelwold of monks from this community to instruct members of Abingdon monastery. Any of these monks, or those coming from Fleury on diverse errands, could have brought to England an illustrated copy of Terence's plays with him. Similarly, the existence of a twelfth century illustrated copy of his plays (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F 2.13), possibly based on a source from Reims, together with the survival of another Carolingian manuscript of Terence (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, SP.4bis)

copied at Reims and known to have been closely related to the Canterbury *Eadui Psalter* (British Library, Arundel 155), lead Dodwell to explore the connections between Reims and Canterbury in the late Anglo-Saxon period as a possible bridge for the mutual influence of both texts: an illustrated copy of Terence may have followed the route from Reims to Canterbury that the famous *Utretcht Psalter* took around the year 1000. Such connections, initially based on a common interest in monastic reform, eventually developed into artistic links and exchanges, not only involving texts and illuminated manuscripts, but also individual artists. In this sense, Dodwell draws attention to the possibility that any of the three Anglo-Saxon scribes who were working in the continent during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries (two Anglo-Saxon miniaturists were working at Fleury and one at Saint Bertin at that time) may have returned to England with the relevant manuscript.

Two final puzzles remain to be resolved. Firstly, it remains to be explained why some Benedictine monks Awho had taken vows of poverty and chastity and [...] were primarily interested in depicting the Christian story, should turn to this pagan source for gestures that had originally been used to support the acting out of the plays of Terence with their *earthly scenes* (154). A possible solution –only indirectly suggested by Dodwell- turns up when these six gestures are seen in the changeable context of the ecclesiastical views on gestures and gesticulation in the Middle Ages. After a period when all gestures were utterly rejected by the Church as sinful expressions of the body, a separation between gestures and gesticulation was established. The former were accepted as a means to achieve salvation, particularly when they expressed feelings and moral values: the inner movements of the soul, like charity, penance and piety (Schmitt 1990; 1991: 64-65; Le Goff 1994: 40-64). The six gestures adopted by Benedictine monks –"perplexity", "sadness", "fear" / "apprehension=, "supplication", "pondering" / "reflecting", "approval" / "acquiescence"- were not body movements consciously or unconsciously associated with the performance of everyday activities (gesticulation), but adequate kinesic responses to moods and feelings. It is this indissoluble relationship of gestures with moods that may have favoured the unexpected association of the original Roman, dramatic,

secular contexts of Terence=s plays with situations common for the Benedictine monk who was representing biblical and liturgical events. An interesting example is suggested by the Anglo-Saxon manuscript context of the gesture for "agreement" or "acquiescence". The *Eadui Psalter* (British Library, Arundel 155) contains an illustration of St Benedict (f. 133r) venerated by a group of Canterbury monks who are offering him a copy of his own Rule. Inscriptions in this miniature point to the importance the founder of the order conferred on obedience and humility as the greatest of monastic virtues, to the extent that this picture may depict the practice of these qualities by members of the community. The representation of the saint in the process of approaching the third finger to the thumb in order to form the circle indicating that he approved the attitude and behaviour of these monks, as in the miniatures in the *Vatican Terence*, would agree with the context of the Rule where a whole chapter (VII) is devoted to the twelve stages leading to the exaltation deserved by the person *who humbleth himself* (pp. 123-126).

Eventually, this piece of research also questions the breach between classical and medieval theatre which the history of western drama has traditionally assumed. From the perspective of a profane person on the subject (like myself) the presence of dramatic Roman gestures in late Anglo-Saxon Christian manuscripts suggests that classical drama was known by these monks. The Church may have forbidden its representation, but Benedictine monks were not only making use of dramatic gestures from the Roman stage in their own illustrations, but also knew their original meaning, or elicited it from a close reading of the Latin texts of Terence=s plays, whose moral stance contributed to make him popular among the literate medieval community.

All in all, this is a remarkable piece of research, covering a time span of more than twelve centuries in realms of Western Europe as diverse as the Roman world and late Anglo-Saxon England. As Professor Dodwell's last lesson, it shows his capacity for intuition and his deep knowledge of medieval culture and of the history of art.

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