Florus and the poetics of his *Epitome*

The *Epitoma Bellorum Omnium Annorum DCC* of the second-century CE author Florus is often considered an epitome of Livy's work (some MSS entitle it *Epitoma de Tito Livio*). While it is probably fair to say that Livy was Florus' major source, this does not mean that we should consider Florus' work merely as derivative or as a tool to fill the gaps in the surviving parts of Livy. In this paper, I want to shift the focus to the *Epitome* as a work in itself with its own literary characteristics. By situating it in the contemporary writing and reading culture, I will argue that the *Epitome* should first and foremost be seen as appropriating and rewriting—through literary allusion and rhetorical embellishment—a group of Latin texts that had acquired canonical status by Florus' days, rather than simply as a convenient abridgment of Livy (and other authors). Below is a general sketch of how I will work out this argument; the paper will focus on a few passages from Florus' *Epitome*.

Firstly, the production of the text as well as its author should be located in circles of rhetoric teachers. The author of the *Epitome* is nowadays generally equated with the Florus who wrote the fragmentary *Vergilius Orator an Poeta* and who tells us that he was a rhetoric teacher (3.2-3.3). But even if the identity of these two Flori is not accepted, the *Epitome* still displays several features that link it to rhetorical training. Rhetorical education consisted for a considerable part in extensive readings of Greek and Latin literature. Rhetorical textbooks such as Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* point out that a close study of authoritative literary texts counts among the best training available to students, as absorbing and internalizing these texts' good qualities provides them with stocks of expressions and a sense of style (most of all Quint. X.2; also Dion. Hal. *De imit.*, Cic. *De orat.* I.154-155). On a practical level, we indeed find allusions to Vergil (and other writers) at several places in the

declamations of the second-century teacher Calpurnius Flaccus, to mention only one example (e.g. 2.8-10, 4.16, 32). The abundance of textual allusions to Livy and Vergil (and other Latin authors) in Florus' *Epitome* shows this sort of mind-set at work as well.

In the second place, there is evidence to suggest that excerpting and epitomizing had become a wide-spread phenomenon by the second century CE. Thus Fronto in some of his letters advises the later emperor Marcus Aurelius to make his personal excerpt collections as he reads Livy and other authors (see on this Johnson 2010: 153-154). The purpose of this intensive engagement with the texts was once again to acquire mastery of these texts, both linguistically as well as in terms of 'ways of thought, of morals and character, and of identity' (Johnson 2010: 201). In addition, some readers-writers produced epitomes that were actually brought into circulation. In addition to Florus' work, we hear for example about Granius Licinianus' compendium of Roman history, of which only fragments survive.

At the end of the day, I suggest that Florus' *Epitome* should be seen in this context. By epitomizing and as such internalizing great (or canonical) works of Roman literature such as Livy and Vergil, Florus is able to present his work as something bigger than just these works alone. The *Epitome* works not only through the whole of Roman history, but it also works through and welds together Roman literature.

Reference

Johnson, W.A. (2010). *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press