

[BMCR 2022.05.27](#)

Étienne Wolff, *Rutilius Namatianus, aristocrate païen en voyage et poète*. Scripta antiqua 131. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions, 2020. Pp. 380. ISBN: 9782356133441. €25,00.

Review by Martin Devecka, University of California Santa Cruz. mdevecka@ucsc.edu

[The Table of Contents is listed below.]

Is there anything left to say about Rutilius Namatianus and his sole surviving (fragmentary) work, *De Reditu Suo*? Etienne Wolff poses the question in his short introduction to this edited volume, which brings together papers originally delivered at a 2018 conference dedicated to this minor poem and poet. Written in elegiac couplets replete with learned echoes of Ovid and Vergil, *De Reditu* chronicles its author's voyage from Rome to his birthplace in Southern Gaul sometime around 417 CE. The first book is known from a manuscript discovered in the library of Bobbio Abbey, copied multiple times by Italian humanists in the 16th century, and subsequently lost. A few fragments of the second book were found in the same library by Maria Ferrari in 1973. Together these constitute the whole surviving literary output of Rutilius Namatianus, an author whose name and biography are known mainly from *De Reditu* and its paratexts. This paucity of evidence is the main reason why we might be running out of things to say about Rutilius Namatianus. Our increasing caution about inferring biography from poetry might even leave us with less to say than before.

Nevertheless, the essays collected in *Rutilius Namatianus, aristocrate païen en voyage et poète* give us reason to think that the answer to Wolff's opening question is yes. Of course a volume of this size (377 pages, containing 24 essays in French, Italian, Spanish and English) is going to include contributions of varying quality. In what follows, I highlight a few of the best pieces in order to bring them to the attention of scholars whose own work might touch on *De Reditu*.

The essays presented here are organized under four subheadings, the first of which is "Histoire et politique." The contributors writing on this topic have little difficulty finding something new to say about *De Reditu*, perhaps because the task of framing it in

its historical moment gives them a much more capacious “text” with which to work. We encounter a range of stimulating new hypotheses, such as Robert Bedon’s suggestion (“Une hypothèse sur la cause du retour en Gaule de Rutilius Namatianus,” 13-28) that Rutilius’ departure from his beloved Rome may have been the result of an imperial *relegatio* to which the poet, understandably, would not have wished to make any direct reference. Likewise, Maria Squillante (“La storia in Rutilio,” 29-40) offers a compelling argument that the burning of the Sibylline Books, a lynchpin of discussions about “the end of paganism” for which *De Reditu* is the only evidence, may be no more than a literary trope. This striking revisionist claim has important implications for our understanding of cultural transformation in Late Antiquity, though Squillante’s interpretation of the evidence will probably inspire debate.

In fact, the debate plays out within the pages of this volume, since other contributors take it for granted that Rutilius’ information on this point is trustworthy. Bertrand Lançon’s essay (“Un préfet et ses collègues : Rutilius comme acteur de l’anti-stiliconisme en 417/418,” 41-52) supports that claim by noting the absence of post-Rutilian evidence for consultation of the *libri* (46), but how much weight can be put on such an argument *ex silentio*? Nor is that the only disagreement on basic “matters of fact” that turns up in this section. While Lançon, focusing on *De Reditu*’s Roman chauvinism and long diatribe against Stilicho, posits Rutilius as part of an anti-barbarian party in Honorius’ court, Bruno Pottier (“Rutilius Namatianus, le Patrice Constance, et l’*Histoire Auguste*,” 53-74) notes the poem’s praise for Constantius and locates Rutilius (in parallel with the author of the relevant sections of the *Historia Augusta*) as part of an anti-emperor faction aiming to promote the rule of the senate in conjunction with a generalissimo. Both these views conflict with Bedon’s supposition that Rutilius was an incompetent politician, sent into exile because of his excessively overt paganism (24-26). These disagreements are in one sense healthy, but in another they reveal another source of difficulty for those who want to “know” (as opposed to “say”) anything about our mysterious author and poem: the historical period in which *De Reditu* took shape is itself rather poorly evidenced and (consequently) subject to substantial divergence of interpretation in modern scholarship.

The next section, “Géographie et realia,” is short (only two contributions) but will serve as an important point of reference for those wanting to understand the places through and the conditions in which Rutilius Namatianus traveled. Marinella Pasquinucci (“Fra osservazione puntuale e percezione: la fascia costiera nord-Etrusca nel *De reditu*,” 99-124) constructs a more-or-less detailed correlation between Rutilius’ observation of the landscape and what we can reconstruct of how the landscape must have looked; the illustrations here, many in color, will help bring the poem alive for readers and will serve as a resource for anyone brave enough to try to teach this poem. Marie-Adeline Le Guennec (“Hospite conductor durior Antiphate (Rut. Nam. 1.382) : Rutilius Namatianus à l’étape,” 125-140) instead reviews what we can know about the “logistique du voyage” (126) that must have supported Rutilius’ coastal journey North. Le Guennec’s useful reframing of the class connotations of staying in a hotel generates

a new interpretation of the animus behind Rutilius' viciously anti-Semitic diatribe against the landlord of the one hotel at which he stays: Rutilius directs his hostility at hosteling as such, insofar as it falls short of the aristocratic ideal of hosting one's friends for free at one's seaside villa.

The third section, "Aspects culturels et religieux," begins with two attempts to address the problem of *De Reditu's* attitude toward Christianity, a question that inevitably ends up entailing the "religious identity" of its author. Chiara Ombretta Tommasi's contribution ("Aspetti e problemi del paganesimo in Rutilio Namaziano," 145-162) argues for the old view of Rutilius as aggressively pagan that Alan Cameron overthrew in a chapter of *The Last Pagans of Rome*.^[1] This reader at least was unconvinced by Tommasi's arguments, many of which are not new, but the essay is indicative of a tendency in many of the pieces here collected to frame the fourth and fifth centuries CE in terms of Pagan-Christian conflict for which *De Reditu's* apparent hostility toward Christian monks has always stood as an important piece of evidence. The circularity of this interpretive approach makes it generally unfruitful, but Joelle Soler's essay in this volume ("Lieux de mémoire, lieux sacrés chez Rutilius Namatianus : un paganisme "utopien" ?", 163-174) marks an exception to the rule. Soler uses the poem to stage a more nuanced inquiry into what kind of "pagan" identity could be entailed by a late antique poet's interest in representing Roman history through a landscape of mostly pagan monuments.

The strongest essays in "Études littéraires," the volume's fourth and largest section, are those addressing *De Reditu's* oratorical style, a feature of the poem that has been noted in commentaries (e.g. those of Ernst Doblhofer, Alessandro Fo, and Etienne Wolff himself^[2]) but not explored to the same degree as, say, the poem's use of classical allusion. Andrea Balbo ("terminologia oratoria e retorica nel *De Reditu* de Rutilio Namaziano," 203-214) details the role of the meta-language of rhetoric in *De Reditu* by way of showing that Rutilius has a good command of that argot and that it plays a surprisingly large role in the poet's praise of his friends and hosts; the opening pages of Balbo's essay also offer a helpful birds-eye view of the rhetorical structures (diatribe, panegyric, etc.) that Rutilius uses to organize the poem. Tiziana Privitera's contribution ("Rutilio e le *sententiae*," 229-240), my favorite piece in this collection, leverages a careful typology of rhetorical "sentences" in *De Reditu* to show that these are not merely ornamental but part of the deep structure of Rutilius' poetics that serves to "sottolineare...concetti o circostanze di particolare peso ideologico-morale" (237). In a wider application, Privitera's approach offers another tool for us to reinterpret the self-consciously learned, "derivative" surface of Late Antique Latin poetry as a kind of depth.

The collection concludes with a section on reception, "*Fortleben* et éditions," with a heavy focus on the manuscript history of *De Reditu*. Here again, the methodology adopted allows contributors to muster extra-textual evidence in order to say more, and newer, things about the poem. Luciana Furbetta ("Premiers sondages et quelques

reflexions pour tracer la survie de l'ouvrage de RUTILIUS NAMATI(AN)US," 321-346) offers a list of Late Antique and early Medieval literature that appears to borrow from *De Reditu*; Furbetta's list suggests that the poem enjoyed a "local" reception in Gaul before becoming current in Northern Italy as well from the sixth century onward (343). Jean-Louis Charlet ("Les interventions philologiques d'Achilles Statius sur le *De Reditu* suo de Rutilius Namati(an)us," 347-352) and Marc Mayer ("El incipit del itinerario de RN y la *editio princeps* bononiense de G.B. Pio," 353-364) each investigate an aspect of *De Reditu*'s early modern manuscript history to support narrow conclusions that should, nonetheless, draw the attention of any future editors of the poem.

Finally, Giampiero Scafoglio ("Rutilius Namatianus après l'unification de l'Italie. Actualisation et interprétations idéologiques de l' "hymne à Rome" (*De reditu*, 47-66)," 365-378) reads works by Carducci and Pascoli to show the importance of the opening verses of *De Reditu* for poets involved in the project of Italian reunification. That these writers should have shown an interest in Rutilius' rhetoric of moral renewal and recovery is only to be expected, but their redeployment of his praise for Roman imperial integration as support for the cultural unification of Italy comes as more of a surprise (374). But perhaps the biggest surprise of all is that *De Reditu*, "en dépit de sa portée limitée et de son appartenance à une période souvent sous-évaluée du point de vue culturel" (365), should have been able to excite the imaginations of writers involved in a national-cultural project with aspirations to modernity.

The obligatory talk about a "recent revival" of interest in this or that minor ancient poet would be out of place with regards to Rutilius Namatianus and *De Reditu*, which has been the subject of several critical editions and translations over the last decade but not (to the best of my knowledge) a single monograph since Squillante's 2005 *Il viaggio, la memoria, il ritorno: Rutilio Namaziano e le trasformazioni del tema odeporico*. The problem is not just that the poem itself is short and fragmentary; there are also the various difficulties involved in saying very much about it that I have been pointing out since the beginning of this review. So the format of *Rutilius Namatianus, aristocrate païen en voyage et poète*, with its many but generally brief contributions, is perfect for talking about this persistently minor work. Since many of the contributions are excellent and some will be essential for future study of the poem, one hopes that Wolff's collection will find its way into American university libraries.

The volume is well-produced and contains many fewer errors than are usual for a collection of this kind. There is unfortunately no general index, index locorum, or general bibliography.

Table of Contents

Avertissement : p. 9

I. Histoire et Politique : p. 11

Robert Redon

-
- Une hypothèse sur la cause du retour en Gaule de Rutilius Namatianus: p. 13
Marisa Squillante,
- La storia in Rutilio : p. 29
Bertrand Lançon,
- Un préfet et ses collègues : Rutilius comme acteur de l'anti-stiliconisme en 417/418 : p. 41
Bruno Pottier,
- Rutilius Namatianus, le patrice Constance et l'Histoire Auguste : p. 53
Maijastina Kahlos,
- Rutilius Namatianus: Between Desperate Escapism and Confident Universalism : p. 75
Sara Fascione,
- Ritorno e rinascita: Rutilio, Esuperanzio e il postliminium pacis : p. 85
- II. Géographie et realia : p. 97
Marinella Pasquinucci,
- Fra osservazione puntuale e percezione: la fascia costiera nord-etrusca nel De reditu : p. 99
Marie-Adeline Le Guennec,
- Hospite conductor durior Antiphate (Rut. Nam. 1.382) : Rutilius Namatianus à l'étape: p. 125
- III. Aspects culturels et religieux : p. 143
Chiara Ombretta Tommasi,
- Aspetti e problemi del paganesimo in Rutilio Namaziano : p. 145
Joëlle Soler,
- Lieux de mémoire, lieux sacrés chez Rutilius Namatianus : un paganisme "utopien" ? : p. 163
Ludovica Radif,
- Il ritorno alla grecità nel De reditu suo : p. 175
Florence Garambois-Vasquez,
- Le De Reditu de Rutilius Namatianus : un iter de la romanité : p. 189
- IV. Études littéraires: p. 201
Andrea Balbo,
- Terminologia oratoria e retorica nel De Reditu di Rutilio Namaziano : p. 203
Joop van Waarden,
- Rutilius Namatianus' Vividness: Cognition and Intertextuality : p. 215
Tiziana Privitera,
- Rutilio e le sententiae : p. 229
Ramona Malita,
- Pour une lecture plurielle de l'incipit du poème De Reditu suo : p. 241
Francesca Romana Nocchi,
- L'aition des Aquae Tauri entre mythe et poésie : p. 253
Silvia Mattiacci,

Le fer de l'île d'Elbe et la deprecatio auri : la réécriture d'un topos dans la géographie de Rutilius Namatianus : p. 271

Paola Paolucci,

Metapoesia del prefisso "re-" in Rutilio Namaziano : p. 289

Concetta Longobardi,

Quosdam refugit regula dura pedes. Tradizionalismo e sperimentalismo metrico nel De reditu suo : p. 307

V. Fortleben et éditions : p. 319

Luciana Furbetta,

Premiers sondages et quelques réflexions pour tracer la survie de l'ouvrage de Rutilius Namatianus : p. 321

Jean-Louis Charlet,

Les interventions philologiques d'Achilles Staius sur le De Reditu suo de Rutilius Namati(an)us : p. 347

Marc Mayer,

El incipit del Itinerario de Rutilio Namaciano y la editio princeps bononiense de G.B. Pio : p. 353

Giampiero Scafoglio,

Rutilius Namatianus après l'unification de l'Italie. Actualisation et interprétations idéologiques de l' "hymne à Rome" (De reditu, 47-66) : p. 365

[1] Cameron, A. (2011) *The Last Pagans of Rome*. Oxford: OUP, 207ff.

[2] All three commentators, for instance, note the rhetorical character of the so-called "Hymn to Rome" (1.47-164), a passage that some of the contributors to this volume discuss under the same rubric: Doblhofer, E. (1972). *De reditu suo sive Iter Gallicum*. C. Winter; Fo, A. (1994). *Il ritorno*. Einaudi; Wolff, E and Soler, J.. (2007). Sur son retour. France: Belles lettres.