



## Notes on the Transmission of the Text

It is possible to view Juvenal as something of a literary loner in his own time. Unlike writers such as Virgil who quickly became widely read and widely admired, Juvenal went largely unnoticed amongst his contemporaries and only the roughly contemporary poet Martial mentions him by name. This obscurity changed in the latter half of the fourth century, when an edition of his poetry was produced, and he is mentioned and quoted by Servius (the great commentator on Virgil) and the Christian apologist Lactantius (240-320) who cites 10.365-6 approvingly. It is not surprising that the more sententious and censorious lines of Juvenal were music to the ears of anti-pagan Christians. More impressive still, he began to be admired and imitated by poets such as Ausonius (AD310-94) and later on Paulinus and Prudentius who all saw the poetic worth as well as the proto-Christian potential of the poems and who borrowed and adapted some of Juvenal's best phrases. Christian apologists such as Jerome and Augustine used his satirical venom as ammunition against pagan immorality, while the historian Ammianus tells us (28.4.14) that he was the poet read by people who do not read poetry—a sentiment which rings true when one reads the opening of *Satire* 1 with its condemnation of (other) poets' pretentious poetry. The earliest commentary on a text of the poet was produced sometime between AD 350 and 420, and after that time the survival of Juvenal was never in doubt.

The transmission of ancient literature was done by laborious and highly fallible copying out by scribes. Errors and variant readings crept into the system and by the time of our earliest manuscript (P) from the ninth century many lines had been corrupted, emended, interpolated or omitted. Interestingly, all the manuscripts of Juvenal break off suddenly at 16.60 and this suggests either that the poet died with his last poem incomplete or else all the surviving manuscripts rely on one single version of the text which lacked its final pages. There are over 500 extant manuscripts of the poet—a number which shows how much he was read—and they are usually grouped into these categories:

Pithoeanus (P) named after the 16th century scholar Pithou (who wrote his name on it) and housed in the Medical School at Montpellier. This is regarded as the most reliable (that is, least prone to error) of the manuscripts.



A large number of manuscripts of lesser reliability derive from a different source and are usually referred to as  $\Phi$ .

The central dilemma for any editor of this text is to decide whether to follow P over  $\Phi$  (as at 6.28, 6.274, 14.11, 14.51, 15.61) or  $\Phi$  over P (as at 6.365, 14.86, 15.77): or sometimes whether they are both wrong and one should adopt a newer reading (e.g. 6.44, 6.84, 6.107, 14.16-17, 15.64). Interpolations are also common in ancient poetry: sometimes marginal notes in a text were inserted into the text by the scribe copying it and then found themselves part of the text: this is plausible in the case of lines such as 6.65, 14.117. The discovery in 1899 of the 'Oxford fragment' of 34 hitherto undiscovered lines from *Satire 6* is still argued over: was this a page of real Juvenal which had fallen out of the archetype or was it the work of a skilled forger?