

SENG, HELMUT, SOARES SANTOPRETE, LUCIANA GABRIELA, TOMMASI, CHRIARA O. (eds). *Formen und Nebenformen des Platonismus im der Spätantike* «Bibliotheca Chaldaica» Band 6; (Heidelberg: Universitäts Verlag, 2016), 424 pp.

This book offers a collection of fifteen articles dealing with the interactions among and intellectual transmission lines between the major figures of late antique Neoplatonism (most prominently Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Ammonius, Proclus, and Damascius) as well as their individual and collective reception of pagan religious-philosophical texts such as the Hermetica, the Chaldaean Oracles, and Orphic texts. The volume is the outcome of a series of workshops held in 2013-15 at the Villa Vigoni - German-Italian Centre for European Excellence, and most of the articles reflect additional research published up to 2016. It is intended as a sequel volume to the collection of articles edited by Helmut Seng in 2013 entitled *Platonismus und Esoterik in byzantinischem Mittelalter und italienischer Renaissance*.

The intended audience for this book is clearly a specialist one: the range of languages needed to fully benefit from the contents is wide - five articles are in Italian, four in German, three in French, two in English and one in Spanish. Moreover, most of the articles feature either detailed philological and terminological analyses and/or extensive quotations from ancient Greek (always translated), such that readers having a familiarity with that language will gain more from this book than those who do not.

Thematically, the most of the material lies at the intersection of philosophical concepts such as the relationships between levels of beings at the apex of the Neoplatonic hierarchy (the One, the Demiurge, etc.), and the polemical writings that the ancient authors directed at each other, at their predecessors, and at representatives of other schools of philosophical thought (principally Epicureanism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism). Polemics also lie at the centre of the pathways of transmission of these pagan authors, most of whose work reaches our awareness via extensive quotations in the works of Christian authors such as Eusebius,

Augustine, and Theodoret of Cyrrihus, whose mission was to demolish the intellectual structure of the main rival to Christianity at the time, namely Neoplatonism. That being said, there are instances in articles by Longo and Monaca where Greenblatt's thesis in his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2011 book *The Swerve* - arguing that it was in fact Epicureanism that represented the greater challenge to both the Christian and the Neoplatonic intellectual edifices - is confirmed in passing.¹

Although the themes addressed in this collected volume are consonant and complimentary in general terms, there is no separate introduction by the editors that clearly ties together all of the disparate articles contained therein. Nevertheless, there are three articles (by Taormina, Seng, and Tanaseanu-Döbler) that, either by accident or intent, do function as linking elements between most of the others, and thus represent the core of the book.

In terms of production and editorial value, I have noted twenty-seven typographical errors, most of which involve punctuation, and none of which impede understanding significantly. The book includes a helpful onomastic index (excluding modern scholars), but not a general bibliography, since each article has its own. Some of the articles manifest an unfortunate trend in modern scholarship whereby important scholarly work done on one side of the Atlantic does not seem to reach the awareness of those working on the other. Normally, it is linguistic and distribution barriers that keep European scholarship out of range for generally Anglo-centric North American students and researchers (e.g., this volume is only owned by one university library in Canada), yet here we have an example of the opposite occurring, where Copenhaver's 1992 English translation and commentary on the *Hermetica* is never mentioned in the contribution by Van den Kerchove, despite the article's use of detailed interpretations of several passages from the *Corpus*

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

Hermeticum by previous editors and translators.² This article nevertheless provides a good analysis of the concept of mysticism in the Corpus Hermeticum, including drawing an important distinction between what the characters in the Hermetic dialogues experience, and what the reader is meant to draw from the texts.

Despite its heavy focus on European scholarship on esotericism in Late Antiquity at the expense of (e.g.) the relevant volumes in The Pennsylvania State University Press' *Magic in History* series, the historiographical survey by Tommasi offers a useful summary of the recent theoretical debates on this topic.

The title of article by Longo - *La maschera di Epicuro sul volto dell'avversario* ("The Mask of Epicurus on the Face of the Adversary") - on the rhetorical use of Epicurus in the philosophical debates of Late Antiquity does not reflect the article's actual specific focus on the question of providence. Although broad in its coverage of philosophical schools and provision of examples, the topical focus is quite narrow. Another article's title - *Die Transformation der Theurgie im christlichen Alexandria des 6. Jahrhunderts nach Christus* ("The Transformation of Theurgy in Christian Alexandria in the 6th Century after Christ") - does not reflect the topical focus on the degrees of virtue and their role in theurgy according to Alexandrian philosophers such as Marinus, Ammonius, and Olympiodorus.

Soares Santoprete's contribution does a good job of summarizing Plotinus' arguments against Gnosticism while offering arguments in favour of the programmatic unicity of said arguments.

Both Dubois' and Sfameni Gasparro's articles address the question of soteriology, with the former examining Valentinian Gnosticism, and the latter offering a cautious attempt to tease out Porphyry's pagan philosophical theory of salvation through the fragmentary testimony of

² Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: the Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Christian polemicists. In addition to philosophical and religious polemics, concerns over the role of theurgy in late antique Neoplatonisms also permeate the book (e.g., contributions by Agnosini, Monaca, and Thiel), while Timotin offers a related and thorough examination of the role of prayer in Porphyry and Iamblichus' beliefs and practices. Molina Alaya provides textual comparisons to demonstrate the conceptual links between Damascius' discussions on the soul and those of Iamblichus, pointing out that the two are convergent in trends of thought without there being much direct textual borrowing. Schelske's article places a much-needed emphasis on the 5th-6th century Greek epic poem *Argonautica Orphica* as a source for insight into a sense of psychological identity among the final generations of pagan Platonists.

In sum, the book offers a healthy range of approaches and analyses on Platonism as it evolved from being a prominent and influential force in the early centuries CE to being a tiny niche movement of elite intellectuals by the time Justinian closed the Athenian Platonic Academy in 529.

DAVID PORRECA
University of Waterloo