

Christopher Celenza, ed. *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 189. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xi + 272 pp. index. bibl. \$141. ISBN: 978-90-04-18590-6.

The *Lamia* is Angelo Poliziano's *praelectio*, or opening lecture, for a university course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* begun at the University of Florence in early November 1492. It is no dry discussion of Aristotelian syllogizing, however, but instead a clever, fable-filled retort to gossips (characterized in the work as mythical lamias or blood-sucking sorcerers) who had questioned Poliziano's qualifications for lecturing on philosophical books. The *Lamia* exhibits Poliziano's erudition and his facility with Greek and Latin texts, as it is replete with classical allusions. Poliziano answers his accusers by borrowing from Greek and Latin sources (some of which would have been unknown to his accusers), and along the way he presents a novel view of the practice of philosophy.

The present book consists of a Latin text of the *Lamia*, an English translation, and four interpretative essays. Save for some minor changes in punctuation and orthography, the Latin text is the one that was edited by Ari Wesseling and published with a detailed line-by-line commentary by the same publisher in 1986. The translation, the first in English, reads smoothly and is generously annotated with notes. The four essays collectively present details of Poliziano's intellectual circle, identify the sources on which Poliziano drew, and examine the rhetorical devices that are employed throughout the *Lamia*. In the first essay, "Poliziano's *Lamia* in Context," Christopher S. Celenza notes Poliziano's rise within the Florence branch of the *studium florentinum* as Poliziano's pay increased and he was granted the liberty to teach whatever he judged "to be useful for his students" ("studiosis utiles esse," 7). In the year preceding the *Lamia* and the course on the *Prior Analytics*, Poliziano had lectured on three other logical works of Aristotle's *Organon*, which no doubt contributed to the growing hostility of his critics. Celenza identifies Marsilio Ficino, Demetrios Chalcondylus, Bartolomeo Scala, and others as those represented by lamias in Poliziano's *praelectio*. In discussing the setting of Poliziano's work, Celenza notes that Poliziano and others wrote "in a social community whose members were linked by bonds of commonly held assumptions" and that "one must conceive a theory of collective authorship" for works of the period, as works were produced as the outcome of ongoing discussions within an intellectual community (15). The essay also examines Poliziano's view that the philologist (*grammaticus*) is the true philosopher, as philology is broadly conceived to order a culture's knowledge and determine literary canons. The *Lamia*, in Celenza's account, "shows Poliziano demonstrating that alternate ways of doing philosophy (or pursuing wisdom) were possible" (18).

The second essay, by Francesco Caruso, is titled "On the Shoulders of *Grammatica*: John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* and Poliziano's *Lamia*" and presents the *Lamia* as an invective that bears "an intellectual genealogical relationship" to the *Metalogicon* (53). The author highlights elements of Poliziano's *praelectio* that

“seem to resonate” with John of Salisbury’s work (82). In Caruso’s view, the *Lamia* “plays a key role in the redefinition of the idea of philosophy in the second half of the *Quattrocento*” (52). Igor Candido’s “The Role of the Philosopher in Late *Quattrocento* Florence: Poliziano’s *Lamia* and the Legacy of the Pico-Barbaro Epistolary Controversy” is the next contribution to the volume. Candido considers Poliziano as a “third privileged interlocutor” who attempted to reopen the famous controversy between Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro on the relationship of philosophy and eloquence (121). In Candido’s view, Poliziano’s solution to the debate is a Ciceronian *concordia oppositorum*. In the final essay, “Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia*: Neoplatonic Commentaries and the Plotinian Dichotomy between the Philologist and the Philosopher,” Denis J.-J. Robichaud meticulously considers ancient views of philosophy and philology as predecessors to Poliziano’s views.

In the introduction, the editor remarks that the purpose of this book is to render Poliziano’s *Lamia* accessibly, and in the judgment of this reviewer, this standard has easily been met. The inclusion of an English translation and interpretive essays makes it an important complement to Wesseling’s earlier volume, whose detailed line-by-line commentary could conceivably be a cold plunge for some first-time students.

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