

Matthias dall'Asta. *Philosoph, Magier, Scharlatan und Antichrist: Zur Rezeption von Philostrats Vita Apollonii in der Renaissance.*

Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2008. 403 pp. index. append. illus. tbls. bibl. €66. ISBN: 978-3-8253-5412-1.

Matthias dall'Asta wrote his doctoral thesis on the reception of Philostratus's *Vita Apollonii* in the Renaissance at the department of classical philology of the University of Göttingen. In Germany, the study of classical philology does not necessarily involve dealing with Neo-Latin texts of Renaissance humanism, but dall'Asta proves his Neo-Latin skills impressively, particularly by comparing translations of

the *Vita Apollonii* in the Renaissance, such as Alamanno Rinuccini's edition from 1473 and Aldo Manuzio's Greek-Latin edition princeps that was edited from 1501 to 1504. Additionally, dall'Asta provides us with critical editions of selected texts in the appendix of his study. Among the texts are passages from Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *De rerum praenotione libri novem*, a synopsis of documents relating to Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio's entry in Lyon in 1501, and two letters written by Johannes Trithemius to Dietrich of Bülow, Bishop of Lebus. All of these untranslated but instructively annotated texts correspond with the illuminating interpretation of them that dall'Asta delivers in the main part of his book.

As the title indicates, the study itself focuses on the role played by the charismatic pagan figure of the Neopythagorean Apollonius of Tyana in the Renaissance discourse on magic and *prisca sapientia*. The first of nine chapters briefly recounts the relevant ancient and medieval traditions concerning Apollonius. Dall'Asta convincingly points out that the different attitudes of Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine to this famous Neopythagorean figure of late antiquity were most important in the Renaissance. Chapter two compares the above-mentioned two translations of Rinuccini and Manuzio, while chapter three to chapter seven relate to the Renaissance theory of *prisca sapientia* from Marsilio Ficino to Agrippa of Nettesheim. Here, surprisingly enough, dall'Asta does not mention Christopher Celenza's studies on Renaissance Pythagoreanism (*Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino* [1999]; *Piety and Pythagoras in the Renaissance* [2001]), which are obviously relevant to the subject. As far as I can see this is the only deficit of this otherwise very well-researched and learned book. Chapter eight deals with three further mid-sixteenth-century translations of the *Vita Apollonii*, which in some respects demonstrate the increasing popularity that Apollonius of Tyana gained during the Renaissance. Finally, the last chapter refers to the exemplary reception of the Apollonian tradition in the late Renaissance by Bartolomeo Tortoletti, who published his *Academia Tyanaea* in 1646.

While in late antiquity Apollonius had been a striking highly competitive pagan reacting to the "magician" Jesus Christ and the Christian faith (cf. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* [1981]), Apollonius in the Renaissance seemed to become a threat to the Christian faith from within Christianity itself. This, at least, was one of the main arguments, if not the deep-seated fear, of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola against Ficino and other adherents to the *prisca theologia* who, like Agrippa of Nettesheim and Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio, regarded Apollonius's lifestyle as an appealing model that fit very well the Christian ideal of the imitation of Christ and the contemporary need for a Christian way of magic and natural knowledge. But as long as the Christianized Apollonius still maintained his pagan roots, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola reminded his contemporaries of the risks of transforming and thereby deforming the Christian faith as well as the Christian society from within by adopting originally non-Christian doctrines.

Dall'Asta's study gives a very detailed and learned insight into the theological risks that Renaissance adherents to the *prisca sapientia* had to struggle with when they tried to bring together pagan traditions of magic and astrology with the

principles of the Christian faith. He provides us with an accurate survey of the two above-mentioned positions and their development from the Quattrocento to the seventeenth century. And he does well by confining himself to analyzing only the specific reception of Apollonius of Tyana in the Renaissance. In addition, dall'Asta's very well-written book is also a pleasure to read.

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