

anti-Gnostic treatise, *Enn.* 2.9[33], and that the latter alludes to the aforementioned treatise but, considering the deep ontological roots of Plotinus' understanding of number and his painstaking elaboration of its intelligible nature, the talk of any Gnostic 'influence' on its formulation is not plausible. But the spark which ignites Plotinus' determination to pose the question exclusively on Aristotelian and Platonic terms, i.e. arithmetical vs ontological number, perhaps?

The book is well executed, with few editorial mishaps, such as the mismatching in fig. 1 of the entries in the left column with the triangles representing the male gender (p. 34) or the conceptual infelicity of conceiving Plotinus' second hypostasis as four metaphysical levels (pp. 155–6). The latter stems from the fact, as K. declares from the beginning (p. 2), that his interest in the concept of number is from the perspective of intellectual history, not philosophy.

Florida State University

SVETLA SLAVEVA-GRIFFIN
sslavevagriffin@fsu.edu

COMMENTARY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

LÖSSL (J.), WATT (J. W.) (edd.) *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity. The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*. Pp. xvi + 343, ills. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-4094-1007-2.
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Interest in literary, religious, philosophical and artistic commentary has blossomed in recent years, preparing the ground for this volume's sustained reflection on the nature of different types of commentary in different linguistic communities and their inter-relationships. Commentary as translation is a unifying theme, and the wide range of texts and authors analysed allows connections to be drawn, for example, between authors as diverse as Origen, Ambrosiaster, Marius Victorinus, Jerome, Julian of Aeclanum, Augustine, Ps.-Dionysius, Sergius of Reshaina, Abū Bishr Mattā and al-Fārābī. L. and W.'s introduction expertly identifies such synergies and helpfully frames the collection.

Commentaries may be translations (or interpretations?), marginalia (or interpolations?), recordings (or elaborations?) apparently *apo phônês* of another commentator, or attempts at original (or traditional?) exegesis. This volume analyses especially the first and last categories. They all, in different ways and degrees, appropriate and reframe the source text, and promote the commentator's views. In Greek commentary on Aristotle, exegesis becomes philosophy as the exegete's philosophical and exegetical commitments generate philosophical innovations. The volume similarly draws attention to how translation can refresh and reshape an intellectual tradition, through individual translation choices and methods, and the translator's attempts to communicate and sometimes sanitise often culturally and intellectually alien ideas through interpolations and paraphrase.

Part 1, 'Alexandria to Rome', explores how Alexandrian commentary was emulated, ignored, re-created and re-integrated into Latin. Fürst's chapter identifies resonances with the Greek rhetorical–philosophical tradition that helped to create Origen's biblical commentary. Origen read contemporary divisions of philosophy onto the bible; the exegetical claim that God the *logos* reveals himself in the bible as he does in nature connects with philosophical standards of rationality. Such analysis may too quickly identify the divine

logos with specifically philosophical rationality. Origen's commentaries were read by some later Latin commentators directly, in Rufinus' (abridged) 'translations', through citations or arguments of earlier Latin commentators, or not at all. Lunn-Rockliffe argues that such diverse reception is exemplified by the contrasting approaches of Jerome and Ambrosiaster – Jerome faithful to Origen's exegetical methods, with a close attention to textual criticism, openness to classical sources and conventions, and intra-textual reading of the Old and New Testaments; Ambrosiaster less interested in textual problems and rhetorically opposed to the 'worldly learning' of Origen and the classical tradition. As Cain argues in his investigation of Jerome's methods and relation to Origen which usefully revises the claim that Jerome's commentaries are mere translations or paraphrases of Origen, we find similar polemic from Jerome against Victorinus' secular learning. Several contributors trace how competition between commentators shapes the tradition. Resonances between such claims and long-standing disputes between philosophers and rhetors, now transmuted into competition between theological–philosophical–rhetorical exegetes, are readily apparent.

Such disputes are partly about social power relations – a topic that might have been more thoroughly explored in the volume, although it informs Watts's imaginative reconstruction of the social and educational context of later Greek and Syriac philosophical commentaries. But they are also about exegetical approach. Bussières analyses Ambrosiaster's method in the light of distinctions between Alexandrian and Antiochian exegesis without, perhaps, adequately questioning the taxonomy. Yet in a detailed exegesis of the *Questions on the New Testament* which is sensitive to how audience shapes commentary, she argues persuasively that Ambrosiaster does not fit the taxonomy, despite his preference for 'typology' over 'allegory'.

There is also sustained reflection on philosophical method in commentary formation. Cooper recalls Origen's adoption of philosophical categories by exploring the *theoria-praxis* distinction in Victorinus. Victorinus' ethical and soteriological focus led him to occlude more metaphysical questions in his Pauline commentaries, in common with contemporary philosophical divisions. L. shows how Aristotelian categories, mediated through Porphyry, were read during the Pelagian controversy and used to structure theological claims. Ebbensen continues the focus on Aristotelian logic which is sustained in Part 2, analysing Boethius' translations and commentaries on the *Organon*. If Platonism was late antiquity's dominant philosophy, Aristotelian logic remained crucial. Ebbensen's chapter pays careful attention to Boethius' formation of a Latin logical vocabulary, building on authors including Cicero, Varro and Apuleius. Boethius' literal translation method contrasts with a freer approach in his commentaries. Translation alone is insufficient, in this model, for commentary, but Boethius' translations helped build an ultimately immensely influential Latin philosophical vocabulary.

Part 2, 'From Alexandria to Baghdad', traces the movement of Greek commentary into Syriac and Arabic. Krausmüller argues that Aristotelian philosophy was influential for developing Chalcedonian Christology. Yet the claim that sixth-century Christians knew philosophy only as Aristotelianism is too strong (p. 152); Philoponus' deployment of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian categories in the anti-Chalcedonian case would provide an interesting contrast. In the final stimulating essay, Vallat explores philosophical speculation in a new religious context by reconstructing al-Fārābī's arguments for the eternity of the world, drawing on Proclus' arguments and Fārābī's wider metaphysics.

Several essays foreground Sergius of Reshaina. McCollum, Fiori and King analyse translation methods. McCollum argues, with reference to the ps.-Aristotelian *De mundo*, that Sergius sits between more free (third–fourth century) and more literal (seventh

century) translation methods. Fiori agrees and identifies more substantial changes in Sergius' translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*: replacing Ps.-Dionysius' Neoplatonic paraphrase with original biblical language, deploying Syriac theological terms, and occasionally developing his theological and philosophical positions. Translation becomes a form of commentary as dialogue. King argues that translation as commentary and commentary as exposition of the commentator's views work together recursively to develop a new lexicon of Syriac logical terminology partly generated by the Syrian educational context. W. then highlights how Sergius' method bridges different worlds. The prologue to his Commentary on the *Categories prima facie* outlines a Neoplatonic epistemological hierarchy, moving from logic, through physics and ethics to metaphysics. But it also binds Aristotelian logic to Evagrius' spiritual exercises and Dionysian/Evagrius' *theoria* and transposes Aristotle into theological and monastic education. W.'s history of Graeco-Syriac and Syro-Arabic philosophy up to the School of Mattā is rich, clearly demonstrating the diverse influence of, and continuing interest in, Aristotle and Ps.-Dionysius.

Reception of Aristotle's logical works, directly and through Porphyry, runs through the collection. Brock's typically illuminating chapter delineates Probus' philosophical terminology and translation method. His tantalising questions about the identity of Probus the commentator and Probus the late sixth-century theologian, and Probus' connection with Stephanos the sophist (= Stephanos the Aristotelian commentator?) are worth pursuing. He offers ample justifications for desired new editions of Probus' Commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. Hugonnard-Roche offers the first analysis of Paul the Persian's *Elucidation of the Peri Hermeneias*, which similarly deserves a modern edition. Significant connections to Ammonius and Boethius identify Paul as an important contributor to late-antique readings of the *Organon*. In Paul's case also, translation and commentary are forms of dialogue which produce distinctive philosophical arguments as Paul constructs his own account of 'material modality' by commenting on Aristotle.

The text is sometimes marred by hasty copy-editing/typesetting but there are few errors. I noted a missing cross reference (p. 236), odd use of different fonts for italics between and within chapters, some odd diacritics (e.g. pp. 50–1), and the occasional poorly formatted list or alignment of 'parallel' texts (pp. 56, 63–4), but the bibliography and indexes of passages, and names and subjects are useful, and these minor points do not significantly detract from the high quality of the essays.

This is a stimulating and rich collection which has the potential to set the agenda for further research, partly by making more explicit connections between the different studies. The emphasis on Aristotle is sometimes over-played but is clearly a productive avenue of inquiry and a useful counterbalance to intellectual histories of the period which foreground pagan Neoplatonism. Placing Latin philosophical commentary in closer dialogue with biblical commentaries in Part 1 and Syriac biblical commentaries against philosophical ones analysed in Part 2 would be fruitful as would further comparative research on how different linguistic communities approach translating – and thereby commenting on – common source texts. This volume should prove of interest both to specialists in the fields it explores and to scholars working on commentaries and periods not covered by it.

The University of Western Australia

MICHAEL W. CHAMPION
michael.champion@uwa.edu.au