

OLYMPIODORUS

R. JACKSON, K. LYCOS, H. TARRANT: *Olympiodorus. Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*. Pp. x + 349. Leiden, etc.: Brill, 1998. Cased, \$118. ISBN: 90-04-10972-2.

As the main phalanx of scholars who work on ancient Greek philosophy moves slowly but resolutely forward beyond the fourth century B.C.E., an advance party of able classicists is producing increasingly numerous beachheads in the later period, consisting mainly of editions, translations, and commentaries. The monumental project overseen by Richard Sorabji of translating all of the extant Aristotle commentaries surely deserves special note in this regard. Similar work on the late Platonists, rather misleadingly called 'Neoplatonists', lags somewhat behind. The present volume is a welcome addition to the latter group. It consists of a translation with notes and lengthy introduction of one of the attested commentaries on Platonic dialogues (*Alcibiades*, *Gorgias*, and *Phaedo*, the last extant only in fragmentary form). Along with the considerable amount of similar work on Plotinus, Proclus, and, more recently, Damascius, surely the time is near when the study of this material can be brought effectively into the mainstream.

Olympiodorus (c. 500–after 565), pupil of Ammonius, was one of the main figures belonging to the Alexandrian 'school' of Platonism. Olympiodorus lived at a time and in a place where the inheritors of the pagan philosophical tradition were under considerable pressure from ascendant Christian forces, who, it will be recalled, were responsible for the assassination of Hypatia in 415. Indeed, after Olympiodorus' death, the school passed into Christian hands, under the Aristotelian commentators Elias and David. Under their successor Stephanus, the school moved to Constantinople in 610. The Arab conquest of Alexandria in 641 put a permanent end to public pagan philosophizing in that city.

Several features of the extant works of Olympiodorus have been widely noticed and well discussed in the introduction to this book. First, he seems to be particularly circumspect in his presentation of certain features of Platonism, especially the theology, owing, it is thought, to his unwillingness to offend Christian sensibilities. Secondly, he seems to have practised in a rather sophisticated manner a well-established method of commenting on Platonic texts, developed both in Alexandria and in the more speculative Athenian school. The two principal features of this method were (i) that truth is more important than fidelity to Plato, and (ii) that the dialogues must be read as expressive of a unified Platonic philosophy. They cannot be interpreted in isolation from each other. Although the authors do not mention this, the further implication is that on this principle one can also appeal to letters, to Aristotle's testimony about oral doctrine, and, indeed, to the entire tradition of Platonism in support of the interpretation of difficult or obscure passages. Such an approach has obvious defects, but not necessarily more than the opposite, more modern, approach, according to which the unit of analysis is strictly the single dialogue or even the single argument.

Plato's *Gorgias* is one of the truly great works surviving from classical antiquity. Its niches—both philosophical and literary—certainly invite a variety of types of commentary. Those who are tempted to pick up the present work will probably come to it already familiar with two major modern commentaries in English, the splendid edition with commentary of E. R. Dodds and the more narrowly focused translation and commentary of Terence Irwin. Dodds, at least, had a rather low opinion of

Olympiodorus' work, perhaps the more damning in view of Dodds's great knowledge of Neoplatonism generally. Nevertheless, I think Dodds would agree that the work is not without interest. I believe it is especially useful for a reason unknowable to Dodds some forty years ago when his book was published. That is, contemporary Plato scholarship is increasingly focused on methods of interpreting the Platonic corpus, including in Europe the so-called Tübingen school, and in North America the non-doctrinal or literary school. The current state of affairs is that there is tremendous disagreement. A careful reading of this work, dated in so many respects, can nevertheless provide a valuable perspective on some common unquestioned assumptions about how to read Plato.

Olympiodorus' commentary is really a series of fifty lectures on successive sections of the text and a proem. Each lecture discusses the *σκοπός* of the passage and then focuses on phrases or sentences with a view to their illumination within the framework of the overall interpretation. As is the case when one uses virtually any commentary on an ancient text, success in finding the help one happens to need is sporadic. If one comes to this work expecting acute analysis of argument in the fashion of contemporary Anglo-American scholarship, then surely one will be disappointed. Olympiodorus is, however, especially helpful or at least interesting on rhetoric and on the concluding myth. Above all, he is perhaps actually one of the best commentators on this work when it comes to taking the dramatic structure and personae seriously without supposing that this requires emasculating doctrinal content altogether. Indeed, Olympiodorus finds them inseparable. It is, I think, owing to his good sense and not his benighted Neoplatonism that it probably never occurred to him that serious attention to the characters meant trivializing or dismissing Plato's arguments.

The translation is generally excellent and the extensive notes are very useful for those reading this work as a guide to both Plato and later Neoplatonism. This book is a distinguished addition to Brill's series *Philosophia Antiqua*, which now contains some eighty monographs, many of which are serious studies of facets of the later period. The series deserves to be more widely known than I suspect it is. Unfortunately, the steep prices are something of a deterrent.

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THE INNER CITADEL

P. HADOT: *The Inner Citadel: the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Pp. x + 351. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998. Cased, £27.95. ISBN: 0-674-46171-1.

This volume is a translation with minimal changes of *La Citadelle intérieure: introduction aux 'Pensées' de Marc Aurèle* (Paris, 1992). That Hadot, doyen of the study of late antique philosophy, has long been working on the Stoic emperor's *Meditations* has been clear at least since the important studies published in his *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris, 1981), of which a version with some papers added and omitted has been published in English as *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, 1995). He has also recently published the first volume (covering Book 1) of a text and commentary that, if the fullness of coverage is sustained, will be the most substantial treatment of the author since Gataker. The present study is a synthesis, aimed at a wider public: reference to ancient sources is full and frequent, but all are translated, and Greek words are transliterated.

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