

**Richard Sorabji, ed.** *Aristotle Re-Interpreted: New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators*. Bloomsbury Publishing 2016. 688 pp. \$216.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781472596567).

The ancient commentators on philosophers like Plato and Aristotle helped us in many ways: they disseminated their works all over the world, but they also provided a hermeneutic key for reading and understanding these two milestones of western philosophical thought. The volume presented here, devoted to the commentaries on Aristotle, is edited by an outstanding scholar of ancient philosophy, Richard Sorabji, Honorary Fellow at the Wolfson College of Oxford and Emeritus Professor at King's College, London, who has devoted several efforts to the reconstruction of the ancient commentaries in order to find new fragments or sources on Plato, Aristotle and other ancient philosophers.

The volume opens with an eighty page introduction by Sorabji entitled 'Introduction: Seven Hundred Years of Commentary and the Sixth Century Diffusion to other Cultures,' where Sorabji shows the results achieved through the English translation of the ancient commentators on Aristotle that began in 1985. This started with the first volume which appeared in 1987 and has continued for over a hundred volumes, including *Aristotle Transformed* (which the reader should keep in mind in order to better understand the volume we present here). Sorabji, in his introduction, presents the main commentaries on ancient philosophers such as those of Andronicus, Boethus of Sidon (very famous for his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*), Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Porphyry of Tyre (author of the well-known *Isagôgê*, that is to say an introduction to Aristotle's logic), Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, Ammonius of Alexandria (and his School), Priscian of Lydia, Damascius, Simplicius, Philoponus, Stephanus, Eustratius and Michael of Ephesus.

The philosophical importance of the commentaries is the object of the first essay of this volume, entitled 'The Texts of Plato and Aristotle in the First Century BCE: Andronicus' Canon,' by Myrto Hatzimichali. He says that one of the main 'developments that characterize first century BCE philosophy is that detailed study of texts became an autonomous and often central philosophical activity in its own right' (81). This means that the activity of the commentators was not only a doxography, but also an anticipation of what contemporary philosophers call hermeneutics.

Next is an essay by Marwan Rashed, entitled 'Boethus' Aristotelian Ontology,' which is focused on the importance of Boethus as a philosopher and not only as a commentator. Rashed says that though 'only few testimonies, and no clear fragment, remain, their number and content are sufficient to show how insightful he was in commenting upon Aristotle' (103).

Susanne Bobzien, in her essay entitled 'The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem and the Role of Alexander,' explores the dichotomy between determinism and indeterminism. In the case of Alexander's treatise entitled *On Fate*, according to Bobzien 'we are presented with a kind of stalemate situation between two philosophical positions: the Stoic compatibilist determinist one and Alexander's Peripatetic and—seemingly—libertarian one. These positions are characterized by their stand (i) on causal determinism and (ii) on that which depends on us' (129). Bobzien also takes into account the early commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning the issue of fate, as in the case of both Aspasius and the Middle-Platonists. Another essay which deals with the relationship between Alexander and the Stoics is 'Alexander of Aphrodisias on Particulars and the Stoic Criterion of Identity,' by Marwan Rashed.

In 'Themistius and the Problem of Spontaneous Generation,' Devin Henry analyzes the way Themistius interpreted the issue of spontaneous generation as it was presented by Aristotle in his *Generatione et Corruptione*. According to Themistius, 'the existence of spontaneous generation did not sit well with Aristotle's own attack on Plato's theory of Ideas,' and what Henry aims to do is to

‘explore Themistius’ worry and how Aristotle (unbeknownst to Themistius) had tried to resolve it’ (180). A similar topic can be found in ‘The Neoplatonic Commentators on “Spontaneous” Generation,’ by James Wilberding.

Riccardo Chiaradonna’s essay, ‘A Rediscovered *Categories* Commentary: Porphyry (?) with Fragments of Boethus,’ deals with the recent discovery of new fragments found in the famous Archimedes Palimpsest. Thanks to a new technology based on x-rays, it was possible to read new parts of this Palimpsest, especially ‘fourteen pages of an otherwise unknown commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*’ (231).

In ‘The Purpose of Porphyry’s Rational Animals: A Dialectical Attack on the Stoics in *On Abstinence from Animal Food*,’ G. Fay Edwards deals with Porphyry’s claim, in the treatise *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, that philosophers should be vegetarian. In Edwards’ opinion, Book 3 of *On Abstinence* ‘does not reflect Porphyry’s own commitments. Instead, I suggest, it constitutes a dialectical attack on the Stoic position, arguing that the *Stoic* ought to believe that animals are rational, given the theory of rationality; and that, because of this, the *Stoic* ought to believe that it is unjust for humans to eat animals, given their theory of justice’ (263). In ‘Universals Transformed in the Commentators on Aristotle,’ Richard Sorabji explores the problem of universals in Aristotle’s work, and how it was analyzed by his commentators. John M. Dillon, in his contribution ‘Iamblichus’ *Noëta Theôria* of Aristotle’s *Categories*’ deals with the topic of Iamblichus’ intellectual interpretation of Aristotle’s *Categories*. Another interesting essay is ‘Proclus’ Defence of the *Timaeus* against Aristotle: A Reconstruction of a Lost Polemical Treatise,’ by Carlos Steel. In this essay Steel reconstructs the way Proclus defended the Platonic theory presented in *Timaeus* by reconstructing John Philoponus’ refutation of an argument by Proclus about the eternity of the world. In fact Philoponus quotes many of Proclus’ passages in his commentary.

R. M. van den Berg’s contribution, ‘Smoothing the Differences: Proclus and Ammonius on Plato’s *Cratylus* and Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*,’ examines the way Proclus and Ammonius treated the issue of the relationship between names and their objects in their reflections on Plato and Aristotle. It is followed by Richard Sorabji’s essay ‘Dating of Philoponus’s Commentaries on Aristotle and of his Divergence from his Teacher Ammonius’. Other essays concerning Philoponus are ‘John Philoponus’ Commentary on the Third Book of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Wrongly Attributed to Stephanus,’ by Pantelis Golitsis; ‘Mixture in Philoponus: An Encounter with a Third Kind of Potentiality,’ by Frans A. J. De Haas; and ‘Gnôstikôs and/or hulikôs: Philoponus’ Account of the Material Aspects of Sense-Perception,’ by Péter Lautner.

Peter Adamson’s essay, ‘The Last Philosophers of Late Antiquity in the Arabic Tradition,’ explains how the classical texts of Greek philosophy reached the Islamic World. According to Adams it was possible thanks to two filters, the first being ‘the Syriac tradition: Christian authors produced translations of and treatises inspired by Greek works, which formed a partial basis for the later Arabic translation movement’ (453). The second filter ‘was provided by late antique Greek authors immediately preceding, and in some cases contemporaneous with, the scholars who produced a philosophical literature in Syriac’ (453). Next is ‘Alexander of Aphrodisias versus John Philoponus in Arabic: A Case of Mistaken Identity,’ by Ahmad Hasnawi, who shows that the Arabic translations of ten short treatises by Alexander of Aphrodisias made by Abdarraḥmān Badawī are not treatises by Alexander but rather ‘adapted versions of extracts from *On the Eternity of the World Against Proclus*, a work composed by the Christian author John Philoponus in order to refute Proclus’ eighteen arguments for the eternity of the universe’ (476). Another essay on Philoponus, ‘New Arabic Fragments of Philoponus and their Reinterpretation: Does the World Lack a Beginning in Time or Take no Time to Begin?,’ by Marwan Rashed, discusses the new Arabic fragments of the *Contra Proclum*, and concludes that even if the ‘survival of the fragments in Arabic of this work is of minimal interest to the Hellenist *Quellenforscher*,’ it nonetheless ‘does contribute to our understanding of the development of Peripatetic philosophy in ninth century Islam’ (504).

Philippe Hoffman and Pantelis Golitsis, in their contribution ‘Simplicius’ Corollary on Place: Method of Philosophizing and Doctrines,’ explores the fact that Simplicius’ work *Corollarium de loco* ‘is not a doxographic text but a strictly *Neoplatonic* philosophical work, with its own philosophical method’ (531). Mossman Roueché, in his contribution ‘A Philosophical Portrait of Stephanus the Philosopher,’ provides a philosophical account of the poorly studied Stephanus the Philosopher. The last essay in this extensive volume is Pantelis Golitsis’ essay entitled ‘Who Were the Real Authors of the Metaphysics Commentary Ascribed to Alexander and Ps.-Alexander’?

In conclusion, one must say that this volume is very interesting for many reasons: it provides new findings and fragments on ancient philosophy, it contains essays that deal with poorly studied philosophers and commentaries, and it is a great tool for scholars who want to deepen their understanding of the main themes of ancient philosophy and to know how the works of the greatest ancient philosophers circulated around the world. At the end of the volume readers can also find an extensive bibliography, an *Index Locorum*, and an index of names and arguments.

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