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**(S.K.) Wear *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato's Timaeus and Parmenides* . (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 10.) Pp. xiv + 353. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. Cased, €108, US\$153. ISBN: 978-90-04-19290-4.**

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literature, both as something fruitful and enjoyable in itself and as a lens that refracts prior literary tradition.

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## SYRIANUS

WEAR (S.K.) *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato's Timaeus and Parmenides*. (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 10.) Pp. xiv + 353. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. Cased, €108, US\$153. ISBN: 978-90-04-19290-4.

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Following in the steps of her teacher John Dillon, the author of a very influential and pioneering collection of the Neoplatonic reports on Iamblichus' Platonic commentaries (1973, reprinted with corrections 2010), W. is now performing a similar service for another Neoplatonic philosopher, Syrianus (d. c. 437). The successor of Plutarchus, the first *didachos* of the Athenian school of Platonism (c. 350–431/2), he commented on Homer, Orpheus, Plato, Aristotle, the Chaldean oracles and the orator Hermogenes (if the extant commentary really belongs to him), and gave oral instruction in philosophy to young members of the school and, first of all, to his most talented student and future successor, Proclus (412–485), whose voluminous Platonic commentaries provide the bulk of information on his opinions.

The collection is limited in its scope: it is only concerned with Syrianus' teaching on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, extracted, with the exception of a few fragments, from Proclus' commentaries on these dialogues. Having promised to expand the collection in a future study, W. discusses other relevant material, found in such texts as Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, in her commentaries on the selected fragments.

W.'s aim is 'to determine Syrianus' metaphysics based on the writings of Proclus and Damascius' (p. 20). In her introduction W. summarises the biographical data and tries to put Syrianus on the Neoplatonic 'map'. This is continued in her detailed comments on individual fragments. Since we are dealing with a collection of fragments of a relatively unknown author, the book, in my opinion, would have better achieved its goal as a reference work if introduced by a more substantial and less specialised piece of writing.

Technically speaking the texts collected are not 'fragments': the available material consists of a series of reports about Syrianus' teaching found, mostly, in Proclus' Platonic commentaries. We cannot be certain whether Syrianus composed formal commentaries on Platonic dialogues or, as is visible from the notes on the *Phaedrus* (ed. P. Couvreur, 1971<sup>2</sup>) written down *apo phōnēs* by his student Hermias, whether he adopted a more informal method of oral instruction, a combination of lectures and dialogue (cf. *In Ti.* fr. 7, p. 81, where certain 'Orphic seminars' are mentioned). The texts in Proclus could testify to the latter: in various places of his commentaries on *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* he says that this 'is the judgment of our Master' (and the passages W. identifies as 'fragments' often begin or end with similar phrases) and then continues in a more diffusive way so that the subject discussed gradually dissolves into his own thoughts and the extent of the 'fragment' (as W. admits) is virtually impossible to determine.

Still, a close look at the texts allows attentive readers to isolate a good deal of teaching which could, with various degrees of certainty, be specifically ascribed to Syrianus. The

arguments chosen by W. are mostly convincing and the illustrative passages are generally well selected, but sometimes they are less successful.

I have space for just one example. Proclus (*In Ti.* 1.51.13–52.2 = Syrianus, *In Ti.* fr. 2 W.), referring to his teacher, says: ‘One should take into consideration that, even if it is not true that souls are not emitted with sperm, the distribution of bodies is according to merit. For all souls are not established in bodies by chance, but each soul [is placed] into the body that suits it’. Then, after a reference to a symbolic practice in theurgy, he repeats the same idea: ‘It is this that the statesman [cf. *Rep.* 456a] understands correctly, and thus takes great account of dissemination and of the whole question of natural suitability [ἐπιτηδειότης], in order that the best souls may come to be in the best natures’.

The evidence is unique and the most obvious point of departure is Porphyry, but as far as the testimony from Iamblichus (Porphyry, fr. 266F Smith; Iamblichus, *De anima* fr. 31 Finamore–Dillon) is concerned, the translation given by W. is misleading. The text: Κατὰ δ’ Ἱπποκράτην ... ὅταν πλασθῇ τὸ σπέρμα ... κατὰ δὲ Πορφύριον ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἀπογεννήσει τοῦ τικτομένου πρώτως ἢ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ζωοποιία καὶ παρουσία τῆς ψυχῆς φύεται (Stobaeus 1.49.41; 1.381.2–6) plainly states that ‘according to Hippocrates ... life is actually created and the soul becomes present when the sperm is formed into an embryo ... while according to Porphyry it is as soon as the child is born’ (tr. Finamore–Dillon), not ‘according to Hippocrates ... the soul is enformed in the embryo ... according to Porphyry, it is in the first stage of generation rather than at birth that it actually receives life and that the soul might be present’ (p. 49), while in *To Gaurus* 2.2, to which W. refers (p. 49 n. 10), Porphyry simply lists other peoples’ opinions.

Then W. says that ‘in *ad Gaurum* ... two somewhat differing views on the subject are accredited to Porphyry’ (pp. 48–9) and later: ‘... this accords with a better known fragment Kalbfleisch identifies as Porphyry’s ...’ (p. 50). This is equally misleading. The *To Gaurus*, *On How Embryos are Ensouled* is a small treatise by Porphyry, not fragments, and the views he expresses are quite consistent. The text, wrongly ascribed in a single and badly damaged manuscript to Galen, but long ago identified as Porphyrian and edited by K. Kalbfleisch (1895), was first translated into French by A.-J. Festugière (1953) and more recently by L. Brisson, T. Dorandi, et al. (2012) and, independently, translated into English by J. Wilberding (2011). Here Porphyry advocates a view, somewhat exceptional among the ancients, according to which the foetus lives only potentially and becomes a living being only after its birth and, building upon Alexander (cf. his commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* 36.19ff., and other places), distinguishes between two senses of potentiality (first, a thing is capable of receiving quality, although it has not yet received it, and second, a thing, which has received a quality, does not act according to it) and formulates this distinction as a starting point of his argumentation, reserving for these two types of potentiality the terms ἐπιτηδειότης and ἔξις, respectively. Following Proclus, W. rightly notes that the technical term ἐπιτηδειότης is ‘often used to refer to a theurgic object’s ability to receive divine power’ (p. 51 n. 18, with references to Iamblichus), but it is equally clear that both conceptually and terminologically the report ultimately depends on Porphyry’s argumentation, possibly through Iamblichus. Everywhere in his treatise Porphyry insists that each individual soul has been naturally attuned (or made suitable) to a specific body before it enters it at birth (most clearly at *To Gaurus* 11.2, 13.7, 16.6–8). Proclus closely mirrors the Porphyrian argumentation, which should have been noticed.

Minor mistakes are few but visible throughout the book. So we see misprints at pp. 2, 21, 63, 64, 83, 342, etc.; ‘*Plato’s Commentary on the Parmenides*’ for ‘*Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides*’ (p. 217 n. 6), very irregular references to the sources

and use of commas in the bibliography (*passim*). Iamblichus' *De vita Pythagorica* is better rendered *On the Pythagorean Life*, or *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, not just the *Life of Pythagoras* (p. 42); finally, it is odd that W. omits the subdivisions introduced by the editors into the texts and translations of Proclus' and Damascius' commentaries, which is very inconvenient for such long passages as *In Parm.* fr. 5 (pp. 252–61).

This is a very useful book, which expands our knowledge of the Platonic tradition and, along with the recent translation of Syrianus' *On Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Books B, Γ, M and N) by J. Dillon and D. O'Meara (2006 and 2008), and the substantial collection of studies edited by A. Lango (*Syrianus et la métaphysique de l'antiquité tardive* [2009]), should stimulate further research in the field.

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## AENEAS OF GAZA AND ZACHARIAS OF MYTILENE

GERTZ (S.), DILLON (J.), RUSSELL (D.) (trans.) *Aeneas of Gaza, Theophrastus, with Zacharias of Mytilene*, Ammonius. Pp. xxx + 181. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-78093-209-5.

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This excellent volume is a most welcome addition to the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle series. As most scholars familiar with late ancient philosophy are certainly aware, the Ancient Commentators series has produced translations of the vast and, until relatively recently, vastly under-appreciated late ancient commentary tradition that showcase the intellectual dexterity and creativity contained within works once thought to be merely derivative. It has also allowed historians, philosophers and scholars of religion to access and appreciate the debates driving late fifth- and early sixth-century Neoplatonic thought in ways that would have been inconceivable even 30 years ago.

This translation moves the series in an exciting new direction. The two authors it treats, Aeneas of Gaza and Zacharias of Mytilene (also known as Zacharias Scholasticus), are not commentators and the works it translates are dialogues, not commentaries. The *Theophrastus* discusses the human soul, its condition before birth and its fate after death (including questions about the nature of the Christian Resurrection). The *Ammonius* speaks primarily about the eternity of the world. Their arguments are medleys with neither author focusing on specific philosophical texts or passages. And, though Zacharias does once say that Aeneas had some expertise in Plotinus, it is debatable how seriously Aeneas and Zacharias are to be taken as philosophers. While both men claim to have had some basic philosophical training in Alexandria, Aeneas served as a teacher of rhetoric in Gaza and Zacharias worked as a lawyer in Constantinople. Furthermore, each wrote their works for non-philosophical audiences and framed their arguments in ways that better reflected the interests of a literary salon or a Christian study circle than the rigour of a philosophical classroom. Theirs is a feral Platonism that escaped from the lecture halls of Alexandria while still quite immature and grew up in the intellectual and religious byways of the later Roman world.

In spite of this, the ideas of Aeneas and Zacharias should matter a great deal to anyone with an interest in sixth-century Neoplatonism. Aeneas' *Theophrastus* and Zacharias' *Ammonius* anticipate debates about the eternity of the world and the resurrection of bodies