

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity

Edited by

Harold Tarrant, Danielle A. Layne,
Dirk Baltzly and François Renaud



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Amelius and Theodore of Asine

Dirk Baltzly

I Evidential Prolegomenon

At the opening of his *Platonic Theology*, Proclus locates himself and his teacher in his version of the history of the reception of Plato's thought.

Those interpreters of the vision (*epopteia*) of Plato who have revealed the most sacred guidance concerning divine matters and who were allotted a nature nearly like that of their guide I would identify as Plotinus the Egyptian and those who received the sight (*theôria*) from this man. I mean Amelius and Porphyry and, in the third place, those who seem to us to have come to be from them "like potent statues" – Iamblichus and Theodore, and any others after them who, following this divine chorus, have in their own thought experienced the Bacchic frenzy of Plato's teachings. (*PT* I 1.6.16–7).

Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus are household names – at least for those who take an interest in late antique Platonism. But we know far less about the other two names in Proclus' chorus of Bacchants: Theodore of Asine and Amelius. The problem lies in the nature of our sources: we know the views of these writers only on the basis of testimonia about them and the nature of testimonies involve significant interpretive uncertainties.

In the case of Theodore, the testimonia come overwhelmingly from Proclus. Deuse, who prepared the only edition on Theodore, identifies 46 testimonia, some of which he himself regards as doubtful.¹ Of these 46, 35 come from works of Proclus. Damascius is next in line with four testimonia, but three of these come from his commentaries on the *Phaedo* and the *Philebus* – works that in many ways define themselves in relation to Proclus' commentaries on

1 Deuse (1973). The situation may be even worse than it looks, for it seems entirely possible that Proclus himself is dependent upon Iamblichus' commentaries for his knowledge of Theodore. O'Meara (1974) raises this possibility in his review of Deuse. For a parallel argument for the likelihood that Proclus' knowledge of Numenius is similarly mediated by Iamblichus, see Tarrant (2004).

these dialogues. So it is quite possible – perhaps even likely – that Damascius knows Theodore’s philosophy only through Proclus. The other testimonia for Theodore are mostly of a biographical nature and come from Eunapius, the Emperor Julian, and perhaps Libanius, with a few doxographical snippets from Nemesius, Ammonius and Stobaeus.

The sheer volume of Proclus’ surviving works make him our primary source of information for the views of many Platonists, so there is nothing unusual in his role as primary source for any lost Platonist philosopher. However, there are reasons to treat Proclus’ reports on Theodore with more than the usual caution. Though Proclus lists Theodore as among the Bacchantes who have received the true vision of Plato’s philosophy from its rebirth in Plotinus, when we turn to those occasions when Proclus reports the views of Theodore and responds to them, he and Syrianus are almost always in disagreement with Theodore. Indeed, reading the context of the testimonia on Theodore found in Proclus leads one to wonder exactly why he is numbered among the Bacchantes: there isn’t much that Proclus thinks that he is *right* about. Further, both Theodore and Amelius are linked in Proclus’ mind with the philosophy of a Platonist who is most definitely *not* in the lineage of approved philosophical predecessors: Numenius. Immediately following what is by far the longest and most detailed account of the views of Theodore (*in Tim.* II. 274.10–278.25 = T6, Deuse), Proclus immediately follows this survey with Iamblichus’ criticisms from a work entitled *Refutations of Amelius and his school and of Numenius*. This makes a certain amount of sense when we consider that Proclus introduces the long passage on Theodore by describing him as someone “filled up with the works of Numenius”. Thus Proclus’ relation to the philosophy of Theodore seems to be distinctly ambivalent. Sometimes he is the “great Theodore” (T10 = *in Tim.* III 226.6, ff). He pursues the teachings of Plato in an inspired manner, like Iamblichus (T8 = *PT* IV 68.6, ff). At other points he is just too eccentric (T22 = *in Tim.* II 215.29) or innovative (T 23 = *in Tim.* III 24.30). He is the author of “puffed up” notions (T26 = *in Tim.* III 245.19, ff). We must bear this ambivalent attitude in mind when we turn to assess Proclus’ evidence for Theodore as an interpreter of Plato.

Similar problems attend our evidence for Amelius. Luc Brisson is the only person to have made an attempt to sum up the work of Amelius.² In his introduction he writes:

2 Brisson (1987). In an appendix to the article Brisson identifies 72 passages in which Amelius and his views are discussed. Twenty of these come from Porphyry’s *V.Plot.* and are primarily biographical, but 31 more philosophically meaty passages come from Proclus, with another seven from Syrianus and Damascius.

One can compare the work of Amelius to a vast building long fallen into ruin – a building whose remains have over the years been employed again in the construction of other buildings. Embedded within these alien structures, the fragments that remain of Amelius' thought occur in radically different contexts which distort our view of them and where polemic may make them unrecognizable.³

As with Theodore, Proclus and Syrianus are major sources of our information on the philosophy of Amelius, and Proclus evinces much the same ambivalence toward Amelius too. We have, in addition, the testimony of Porphyry, but here too there are complicating factors. Most of what Porphyry tells us about Amelius comes in the context of his *Life of Plotinus*. This work forms an introduction to Porphyry's edition of the writings of Plotinus. But, as Brisson argues, Amelius held an earlier role as the keeper of the school's edition of the works of Plotinus.⁴ He and Porphyry were thus, in some sense, rivals to the philosophical inheritance of Plotinus.

With these caveats about our evidence, let us proceed to examine that evidence with the following questions in mind: What specific works of Plato did Amelius and Theodore engage with and what form did that engagement take? Are there specific reading strategies that they utilised to interpret Plato's works? Finally, let us ask: How did they situate Plato in relation to other authoritative texts?

II Platonic Commentators?

We are somewhat better informed about the works of Amelius than those of Theodore, largely thanks to the biographical details offered by Porphyry. We know from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* that he was present in Rome with Plotinus from 246 CE until he left in 269 (*V.Plot.* 3.38–42). We also know from Porphyry that Amelius' first philosophical allegiance was to Stoicism (*V.Plot.* 3.42–3).⁵ In addition, we know that at some point he developed a deep interest in the works of Numenius, and this is important for it confirms what Proclus tells us. In the year 270, Porphyry reports him in Apamea – the city of

3 Brisson (1987), 795.

4 Brisson (1987), 809.

5 Brisson (1987), 800 detects a continuing legacy of Stoic influence in Amelius' remarks on *logos* and Fate.

Numenius – having stopped en route in Tyre to provide Longinus with some of the works of Plotinus (*V.Plot.* 19.23). There is some reason to believe that he remained in Apamea for some time since this would explain the entry in the *Suida* that seems to make him a citizen or resident of that city. We can posit a date of birth for him around 216–226 on the assumption that he joined the school of Plotinus as a young man of twenty to thirty years old and speculate that he might have lived to 290–300.

Porphry reports only on the writings that Amelius undertook while Porphyry knew him. These include very extensive *scholia* on the lectures of Plotinus and copies of all the works of Numenius, which Porphyry tells us Amelius knew nearly by heart (*V.Plot.* 3.43–49). These works ended up in Apamea with Amelius' adopted son, Hostilianus Hesychius. Porphyry also tells us that he and Amelius wrote works to mop up any loose ends from Plotinus' attack on the Gnostics. Amelius' contribution was 40 books against the "Book of Zostrianus", while Porphyry took as his mission to expose the "Book of Zoroaster" as a modern forgery (*V.Plot.* 16.13–14). We can see some of the content of Amelius' work in Eusebius, who preserves from it an interpretation of the opening lines of the Gospel of John (*PE* 11 18.26–29.1). Porphyry tells us that he also wrote a work entitled "On the Differences between the Doctrines of Plotinus and Numenius" and includes the letter dedicating that work to him (*V.Plot.* 17). This work sought to state Plotinus' views more clearly than perhaps Plotinus himself had. Porphyry goes on to explain that Plotinus had given to Amelius the task of refuting Porphyry's initial view that the intelligibles are outside the intellect. This seems to have produced an essay by Amelius "On the aporias of Porphyry", which prompted a written response on Porphyry's part, which in turn elicited a "Rejoinder to Porphyry" from Amelius. This last work permitted Porphyry to finally grasp with difficulty what Plotinus thought and he came to accept it. Letters from Longinus quoted in Porphyry testify to the existence of other works as well. We find some writing on the justice according to Plato (*V.Plot.* 21.89) as well as letter to Longinus "On the Method of the Philosophy of Plotinus". So much then for what we know about Amelius' writing on the basis of Porphyry.

With the exception of something that Amelius had written about Plato's view on justice, all the works described by Porphyry centre around other Platonists, such as Numenius or Plotinus, rather than the dialogues of Plato himself. Did Amelius write commentaries – or at least notes – on Plato's dialogues? Did he lecture in the school of Plotinus on Plato?

Some of the testimony from Proclus suggests that Porphyry's list of works may not exhaust Amelius' writings. Thus, for instance, *in Tim.* II 300.23–301.25 reports Porphyry's account of Amelius' puzzlement about the correct

textual reading at *Tim.* 37a6.⁶ Certainly Proclus frequently adverts to Amelius' views on the various Demiurges that Amelius supposed to be implied by what Plato says in the *Timaeus*. But again, we cannot be certain whether these views derive from an essay on the subject or a commentary on the whole of Plato's dialogue. Similarly, we have evidence from Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* (1052.31, ff) that Amelius had views about the number and subject matter of the hypotheses that make up the latter part of Plato's dialogue. But it is unclear that these views were expressed in the form of a commentary on that dialogue. Some of the reports on Amelius from Proclus' *Republic Commentary* seem likely to have come from the essay that Porphyry mentions on "Justice in Plato's *Republic*" (*in Remp.* I 24,7, ff). Other testimonia from Proclus, however, seem less likely to have been drawn from this essay. Thus the reports of Amelius' views that appear between *in Remp.* II 29.5 and II 32.17 seem to be prompted by concerns about the meaning of specific phrases in *Rep.* 546a–b. Similarly, the report at *in Remp.* II 275.30 is one that Proclus relates directly to the interpretation of *Rep.* 617e3: "virtue has no master".

An author can, of course, offer readings of specific words and phrases in a Platonic dialogue without writing commentary on that dialogue in the style of Syrianus, Proclus and company. It could be offered in the course of an essay that takes off from an interpretive problem in Plato, as many of Plotinus' *Enneads* do. The evidence available to us is *consistent with* the hypothesis that some of Amelius' philosophical writings at least exhibited the sustained and systematic engagement with individual dialogues that is characteristic of the commentary tradition. But I think very little of that evidence positively recommends the hypothesis. The strongest indication is perhaps the report of Amelius' views on the hypotheses in the *Parmenides* but this is by no means decisive.

What about Theodore? In terms of biographical facts, we are largely in the dark. Damascius implies that he studied with Porphyry, while Eunapius tells us that he was at one time student of Iamblichus.⁷ Both are of course possible and this perhaps suggests a range of dates between 275 and 360 CE. A letter from the Emperor Julian implies conflict between his followers and the followers of Iamblichus.⁸ So it would seem the two came to some parting of the ways and, perhaps, that Theodore himself had a school, though we know not where.⁹

6 Lautner (1997).

7 Damascius, *PH* 110. Athanassiadi (1999) = T1, Deuse; Eunapius, *vs v* 1.4.3–1.5.5 = T2.

8 Julian, *Letters* 12 = T4.

9 Brisson (1987) left it open that Amelius might have met Theodore when the former was an old man in Apamea, but Brisson (2010d) concludes that there is no reason to think the two met in person.

Our testimonia identify two works by name. The first is called *On Names* and we know that in it Theodore offered a reading of the sub-celestial arch mentioned at *Phdr* 247b1 (T8, Deuse). I think we may also assume with a fair level of certainty that this work included Theodore's derivation of the first principles of his metaphysics from the nature of the word $\xi\nu$ (T9) and possibly his exegesis of the symbolic significance of the word $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ (T6). The other title we know of is *That the Soul is all the Forms*. Here our informant is Nemesius and he nicely contextualises Theodore's work for us. He presents Theodore, along with Cronius and Porphyry, as champions of the view that human souls can enter animal bodies. He informs us that Iamblichus opposed this view and wrote a work against it entitled *That transmigrations from humans into irrational animals do not take place, nor from irrational animals into humans*. Importantly, Nemesius also presents this as a disagreement among Platonists about whether Plato's remarks on human souls passing into animals are to be taken literally or figuratively. Since there are a variety of Platonic passages in which this idea comes up, it would seem that both *On Names* and *That the Soul is all the Forms* take the proper interpretation of key phrases or claims in Plato's dialogues as their point of departure. It seems probable that these thematic essays drew on the evidence of a number of Platonic dialogues.

In addition to these thematic essays, did Theodore write commentaries on Plato's works? One of our longest testimonia comes from Proclus' *Republic Commentary*, but consideration of its content does not recommend the hypothesis that it was drawn from a line-by-line commentary on Theodore's part. Indeed, it seems more plausible that either (1) the arguments reported by Proclus are also drawn from Theodore's essay on transmigration or (2) that if there was a work on the *Republic* by Theodore, it was more like Proclus' own *Commentary* – a collection of essays on key themes or questions in Plato's dialogue.

At least as Proclus reports it, Theodore's engagement with the education of women in the *Republic* centres on the question of women's virtues. Are they the same as men or different? Do they have their own virtues or none at all? He addresses the question of the virtue of women philosophically, historically, theologically, physically and finally adds a proof from an Egyptian priest. These perspectives – often labelled as such – are common to the subsequent commentary tradition. But there is little direct engagement with the text of Plato. Importantly, Theodore does not take up the question that occupies Proclus himself for a long time: how does one square what is said in *Republic* V with the account of women as the reincarnated souls of men from *Timaeus* 42b2–d1?¹⁰ Or at least Proclus does not present him as offering any reconciliation of the apparent tension between these passages.

10 Baltzly (2013).

Two testimonia from other sources, however, do add some weight to the idea that Theodore wrote commentaries. Damascius' *Commentary on the Philebus* (§3 = Theodore, T43) reports the view of Theodore's companion on the *skopos* of this dialogue:

Peisitheos the companion of Theodore of Asine deemed it worthwhile to say that the dialogue deals with Intellect as the *Parmenides* is concerned with the Good. This is because the argument concerns the mixed life and because Intellect is the first ingredient.

First, let us assume for the sake of argument that Theodore shared this view with Peisitheos – a philosopher about whom we otherwise know nothing. In all our surviving commentaries in the Neoplatonic tradition the specification of the *skopos* is a vital element in the introduction to the dialogue. Perhaps we can couple this with a similar report on the *skopos* of Aristotle's *Categories* (Ammonius, *in An. Pr.* 1.9–18 = Theodore T44*). It is possible that Theodore could have had views on the *skopos* of these works without having written commentaries on them. Alternatively, it is possible that Ammonius and Damascius are characterising some sort of contribution on these works by Theodore in terms that seem natural to them: he didn't write a commentary that began with the specification of a *skopos*, but they express the import of whatever work they had before them in the standard terminology. However the simplest explanation for why subsequent writers have reported Theodore's views on Aristotelian or Platonic works in terms drawn from the commentary tradition is surely that it was because he wrote commentaries on these works. Such commentary writing, or at least lectures on Platonic dialogues that students might have recorded, would be a normal expectation if Theodore did, in fact, have a school. Thus it seems to me that in the case of Theodore we have slightly better evidence for a systematic engagement with both Plato and Aristotle in the form of commentary writing than we do in the case of Amelius.

III Their Engagement with Plato's Dialogues

One way to pose the question of a Platonist's role as an interpreter of Plato is to ask *which* dialogues in particular the Platonist in question spends most of his time and effort on.¹¹ With Platonists who follow after Iamblichus, the pattern

¹¹ The importance of judgements about which Platonic dialogues are really central to Neoplatonism is explored in Tarrant (2014)

of engagement with the Platonic corpus is clearly shaped by the canonical ten dialogues and, in addition, the role of the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus* as “crowning dialogues”. The centrality of the *Parmenides* to a Platonist’s engagement with Plato’s works is particularly important, for it is characteristic of the Neoplatonist (and perhaps the Neo-Pythagorean) reception of Plato to treat the *Parmenides* as conveying Plato’s theology in a particularly concise and systematic manner.¹² Are Amelius and Theodore like these Platonists?

One of the most notorious views of Amelius shows the extent of his engagement with the *Parmenides*. Amelius apparently posited Forms for things that are evil.

Amelius – I know not from what motivation – supposed that there are also *logoi* of evil things present to the Demiurge.¹³

Proclus, at *in Parm.* 829.22 and *PT* I 98.16–20, notes the view that there are intellectual paradigms of evil things though without naming Amelius in this connection.¹⁴ The discussion at *in Parm.* 829.22 follows the lemma at *Parm.* 130c5–d2 where Parmenides asks Socrates about whether there will be Forms for things that are base and dishonourable. Any careful interpreter of Plato’s dialogue must surely come to grips with such a question. But why answer it in the affirmative? Why suppose that there are Forms for evil things?

Proclus’ *On the Subsistence of Evils* gives us what I believe was Amelius’ reason and this shows us something about Amelius’ as a reader of Plato. *De malorum subsistentia* §43 poses an argument – which of course Proclus will go on to reject – for positing Forms of evil things. Proclus alludes to one potential understanding of Socrates’ remark at *Theaetetus* 176a7–8 that “evils hover over the realm of mortal nature of necessity”. One could take this to mean that evil things are *eternally* present to the realm of mortals. But images that exist eternally must have an eternal paradigm. So there are intellectual Forms of evils things. It is this line of argument, I believe, that prompted Amelius to accept paradigms of evils.¹⁵

¹² Tarrant, art. cit., 29 n.22.

¹³ Asclepius of Tralles, *Commentary on Nicomachus of Gerasa’s Introduction to Arithmetic*, Tarán (1969), 1.43–5

¹⁴ But that’s not surprising: both works contrast with the *in Tim.* in as much as the views of other philosophers are discussed, but not attributed. I assume that it is Amelius that is under discussion and that the context of Proclus’ remark tells us something about what prompted Amelius to propose such a thing.

¹⁵ Cf. D’Hoine (2010).

If this is the correct understanding for Amelius' motivation, then this shows us several things about him as a reader of Plato. First, he had taken pains to address a puzzle in one of the two dialogues that the Neoplatonists regard as the twin summits of Plato's philosophy – the *Parmenides*. Moreover, we know that this engagement was not confined to the initial, aporetic section of the dialogue. Proclus in *Parm.* 1052.31–1053.9 shows us that he had a developed view about, first, the structure of the latter part of the dialogue (it contains eight, not nine hypotheses) and, second, about the different levels of being that those hypotheses are meant to be about. Furthermore, if the above speculation is correct, then we can see him bringing another of the Neoplatonists' canonical dialogues – the *Theaetetus* – to bear on the interpretation of the *Parmenides*. Finally, it would seem that Amelius supposed that Plato's philosophy cannot simply be “read off” what the character Socrates says, for in the *Parmenides* Socrates says that he supposes that there are not Forms for things that are base and dishonourable (though, of course, he hints that he is not entirely confident in this initial judgement).

Amelius' engagement with the Neoplatonists' other capstone of Plato's philosophy – the *Timaeus* – exhibits a similar commitment to inter-textual interpretation of the dialogues. We do not know what Proclus thought about other aspects of Amelius' understanding of the dialogue, for he seldom mentions him in the *Timaeus Commentary*,¹⁶ but he certainly disagreed with Amelius' view that the dialogue contains three Demiurges. This reading looks as if it is initially grounded in a rather pedantic treatment of *Timaeus* 39e7–9:

Therefore, in as much as intellect *saw* that “that which Living Being is” (*ho esti zōon*) had forms present to it, being such in number and kind, he *thought* it necessary for this [universe] too to have such things.

Proclus explains that this passage was regarded by Amelius as the textual basis for the three demiurges.

It is from these words in particular that Amelius established his triad of Demiurgic intellects. He calls the first “that which is” (*onta*) from the phrase that “which Living Being is”, while the second he calls “that which has” (*exonta*) from the fact that it “has” [forms present to it] (for it is not

16 The remarks in Proclus' *Tim.* on Amelius address three themes. First, the proper interpretation of the Atlantis myth (two testimonia); second, the identity of the Demiurge and his relation to the Paradigm (six testimonia); and the interpretation of the numbers in the soul (one testimonium). We also find a remark on participation relations among Forms.

the case that the second intellect *is* [the forms] but they are instead introduced in it), while the third intellect is “that which sees” from the fact that it “saw” [that it had these forms]. (*in Tim.* III 103.18–24)

Proclus goes on to reject this idea, but also to connect it to the view of Numenius (fr. 22 Des Places). In the next paragraph, he provides Iamblichus’ refutation (fr. 71 Dillon) of *these* – note the plural – men. It seems plausible to suppose that this material is drawn from Iamblichus’ “Refutations of Amelius and his school and of Numenius”. But intertextuality in the Platonic corpus enters elsewhere when Proclus explains that Amelius justified his view on the three Demiurges by reference to *Letter II*:

Amelius hypothesises these three intellects and demiurges and [identifies them with] the three kings of Plato and the three Orphic [figures] of Phanes, Ouranos and Kronos, and according to him it is Phanes in particular who is the demiurge. (*in Tim.* I 306.10–14)

The “three kings of Plato” is clearly a reference to 312e. Now *Letter II* is neither ignored nor widely referred to – much less discussed extensively – in the works of other Platonists.¹⁷ So it is not that the recourse to this intertextuality as such that is rejected by Proclus. (Nor, of course, would he be in principle opposed to confirming a reading of Plato by showing how it aligns with Orphic theology.) Rather, what Proclus objects to is the mistaken use of alleged connections between one Platonic work and another. Had Amelius applied the distinctions among the three kings of *Letter II* to the *activities* of the single Demiurge – rather than multiplying those activities into a plurality of *numerically distinct gods* – then Proclus thinks that there would be no problem (*in Tim.* I 361.19–26).

17 Cf. Plotinus, VI 7 42, 1–24. Proclus ranks it of third importance in communicating Plato’s theology (*PT* I 24.24–25.2). This fact does not prevent him from giving it significant attention (*PT* II chs. 8 and 9), though much of his effort in this regard seems to be directed at countering what he regards as the misuse of the passage by Numenius and Amelius. On the role of *Epistle II* in the Neoplatonic tradition generally, see Saffrey & Westerink (1968–97) vol. II, XX–LIX. It should be added, however, that Proclus’ use of *Ep. II* to interpret *Tim.* – a dialogue of the first importance – is modest. At *in Tim.* I 356.10 it is used as an additional confirmation of the premise that all things result from the Good and *in Tim.* I 393.19 reports a similar use by Porphyry. At I 308.12 it is invoked in an objection against Iamblichus. It seems plausible to me that Proclus himself would balk at using a less important work, like *Ep. II*, as an essential key for unlocking the meaning of *Tim.*

Turning now to Theodore, the question of the centrality of the *Parmenides* to his approach to Plato is harder to assess. If we follow the hypothesis of Saffrey, however, then we will think it right to say that he, like Amelius, had a synoptic account of the structure of the latter part of the *Parmenides*.¹⁸ The crux of the matter is whether Theodore should be identified with “the philosopher from Rhodes” that Proclus refers to in his *Parmenides Commentary*.

Saffrey notes that Proclus’ survey of views about the structure and subject matter of the eight or nine hypothesis of the *Parmenides* corresponds neatly with the Bacchic chorus of Platonists in *PT* I.1, 6.16, ff. At *in Parm.* 1052.31, ff Proclus relates the views of some of his predecessors. The scholiast to the manuscript identifies these men, in order, as: Amelius, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. Proclus himself calls the fourth Platonist “the philosopher from Rhodes”. There then follows the views of Plutarch of Athens and Proclus’ teacher Syrianus. Saffrey’s tabular presentation makes the attraction of a certain identification obvious.

TABLE 20.1 *Saffrey’s correlations between Proclus’ Bacchantes and the Platonists discussed in his Parmenides Commentary*

<i>PT</i>	<i>in Parm.</i>
Plotinus	
Porphyry	Porphyry
Amelius	Amelius
Iamblichus	Iamblichus
	The philosopher from Rhodes
Theodore of Asine	
	Plutarch
Syrianus	Syrianus

If “the philosopher from Rhodes” were Theodore of Asine, we’d have one less mysterious Platonist populating the pages of the *Parmenides Commentary*. What does Proclus tell us about the philosopher from Rhodes?

Proclus holds out particular praise for this philosopher, crediting him with being the first to see the hypotheses that begin with the sixth are *reductio* arguments. They show the absurdity of denying the existence of the One for the subject matter of corresponding positive hypothesis. Thus, according to the philosopher from Rhodes, the second hypothesis concerns “intellect and the

18 Saffrey (1984a) and (1994).

intelligible” while the seventh with which it is to be paired shows that if intellect and the intelligible do not exist “we overturn all true statements about them.” So, in contrast to the philosophers who come before him on the list, the philosopher from Rhodes needs to specify subjects only for the first five hypotheses.

1. The One
2. Intellect and the intelligible
3. The objects of *dianoia* that come after the intelligibles in the doubly-divided line of *Republic*
4. The corporeal forms that are next after the objects of *dianoia*
5. The Receptacle of bodies

So it appears that our philosopher from Rhodes is someone who thinks that the distinctions drawn in the *Republic* shed light on the structure of the hypotheses in the *Parmenides*. Our testimonia on Theodore reveal significant engagement with the *Republic*. So perhaps that fits.

The problem that initially confronted Saffrey was that he couldn’t see how to make our testimonia on the order of being for Theodore match up with the philosopher from Rhodes’ structure for the *Parmenides*. Our fullest testimonia on the first principles of his metaphysics are T6 and T9 (Deuse). They recommend the following picture:

1. “The first” which is utterly inexpressible.
2. A triad that comprises “the intelligible” and it is revealed through the name One (*hen*). The rough breathing is the closest approximation to the inexpressible first principle from which the intelligible triad results.
3. A triad that comprises the intellectual depth (*bathos*): “the being (*to einai*) prior to Being (*to on*), the knowing (*noein*) prior to Intellect (*nous*), and the living (*zên*) prior to Life (*zôê*).”
4. A demiurgic triad: Being, Intellect and the “source of souls”.
5. A psychic triad: Soul-Itself, Universal Soul, and the World Soul. While these three result form the Demiurgic level as a whole, Soul-Itself is particularly related to Being, Universal Soul to Intellect, and the World Soul to the source of souls.

Saffrey made the two lists correspond by supposing that the inexpressible First could not be “the One” that Proclus tells us was the subject of the first hypothesis according to the philosopher from Rhodes.

TABLE 20.2 *Saffrey's correlations between Theodore and the Philosopher from Rhodes*

Théodore d'Asiné	le «Philosophe de Rhodes»
L'Indicible	
L'Un, triade intelligible (<i>hen</i>)	1 ^e hypothèse
La Profondeur intellectuelle = l'Intellect	2 ^e hypothèse
La Profondeur démiurgique = le <i>discursus</i>	3 ^e hypothèse
La triade des Ames = les Formes des corps	4 ^e hypothèse
La matière	5 ^e hypothèse

Saffrey completes his case by offering two possible transcription errors that could have resulted in the words $\delta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\acute{\eta}\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\varsigma\ \phi\iota\lambda\acute{\omicron}\sigma\sigma\omicron\phi\omicron\varsigma\ \Theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\delta\omega\rho\omicron\varsigma$ becoming $\delta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \rho\acute{\omicron}\delta\delta\omicron\ \phi\iota\lambda\acute{\omicron}\sigma\sigma\omicron\phi\omicron\varsigma$.

Should we believe him? The question matters for us because the only other highly plausible allusion to Theodore in Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* draws on Theodore's work *On Names*.¹⁹ So at stake is the question of whether we possess any evidence showing that Theodore had views about the structure of the *Parmenides*. This, in turn, matters because regarding the *Parmenides* as the key to understanding Plato's philosophy is characteristic of the Neoplatonic commentary tradition. Did Theodore receive Plato's dialogues in this way? Does he belong with Proclus' other Platonic Bacchantes in this respect?

The desire to reduce the number of unknown Platonists populating the pages of Proclus' often cryptic *Parmenides Commentary* is a strong one. But in this case, I must recommend caution. It is not unreasonable to suppose that a completely inexpressible first principle should not be discussed in the system of hypotheses that make up latter part of the *Parmenides*. So Saffrey's shift of the right-hand column down one row seems to me relatively unproblematic. It is when we look more carefully at the glosses that he provides for Theodore's triads in T6 that I become more sceptical. With respect to third hypothesis, the case for equating the Demiurgic triad of Being, Life and Mind with the objects of *dianoia* is not obvious. Nor, I submit, is the identification of the psychic triad that Proclus describes in the *Timaeus Commentary* with the "corporeal forms" of the *Parmenides Commentary* entirely clear. For all that has been said thus far, Tarrant's speculation that the philosopher from Rhodes might be Thrasyllus seems to me just as likely.²⁰

19 Tg = in Plato. *Parm. interprete G. de Moebeka*, 52.9–27 (Klibansky).

20 Tarrant (1993), 177 n.53. This assumes that it would not be anachronistic to attribute such speculations to Thrasyllus. See the article in this volume on the *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides* and the question of its novelty and its authorship.

If this scepticism about the identity of the philosopher from Rhodes with Theodore of Asine is justified, then we cannot say that we have evidence for the centrality of the *Parmenides* to his reception of Plato. The case for Amelius' seems somewhat different. Here I think we can be confident that he at least had views about structure of the latter part of the *Parmenides*. Since this was a question that a Platonist in the tradition of Iamblichus and Proclus would be expected to address, he appears somewhat closer to that tradition than Theodore. But even in the case of Amelius, it appears that he drew conclusions in his interpretation of the dialogue that other Neoplatonists rejected.

IV Plato and Others

Apart from the centrality of the *Parmenides* to the Platonic corpus, another distinctive feature of the Neoplatonic commentary tradition is the desire to exhibit a confluence of wisdom between Plato and other sources of authority. Among these are the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Orphic texts, Homer and ideas that the Neoplatonists associate with Pythagoreanism. In many cases, an author's interpretation of Plato is confirmed by the fact that such an understanding reveals how Plato is in agreement with the other authorities. Proclus, in particular, often works hard to resolve apparent inconsistencies between Plato and the *Oracles*.

Amelius seems to refer to some of the same texts to confirm his understanding of Platonism. Thus we have seen already that he sought to align the three demiurges he took to be implied by the *Timaeus* 39e7–9 with the Orphic Phanes, Ouranos and Kronos (*in Tim.* I 306.10–14). The evidence is not so clear with Amelius' reference to the *Chaldaean Oracles*. At the very least we can say that Proclus pulls a quotation from fr. 33 of the *Oracles* in his discussion of the three demiurges at *in Tim* I 361.26–362.1. It is not entirely clear whether this is Proclus' observation or whether he is suggesting that Amelius himself sought to align his reading of the multiple demiurges of the *Timaeus* with deities of the *Oracles*. If he did, this would be unsurprising. After all, both Numenius and the city of Apamea are thought to be linked to the *Chaldaean Oracles*.²¹ Moreover, Porphyry's testimony presents Amelius as a man much interested in matters mystical.

None of our evidence for Theodore definitively shows him attempting to establish correspondences between Plato's texts and the *Oracles* or Orphic texts.²²

21 Athanassiadi (2005); Majercik (1998).

22 One possible exception may be Proclus, *in Tim.* II 154.4–9 = T 19 (Deuse). Here Proclus relates Theodore's views on the existence of two intellects prior to the soul and notes that this view "derives from the Persians through Porphyry. Or at least this is what Antonius, who was the student of Ammonius, reports."

What is most striking about the manner in which Theodore interprets Plato's thought is the specific nature of the Pythagorean number symbolism that he utilises. It is common enough for Neoplatonists of both the Athenian and Alexandrian schools to assume that one can elucidate Plato's texts by reference to number symbolism. The parallels between the *Theology of Arithmetic* (attributed to Iamblichus) and interpretations of mathematical concepts that appear in Plato's text are frequent. Thus Proclus reports Syrianus' interpretation of the whole numbers from which the soul is composed in the *Timaeus* (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 27) as symbolising the remaining, procession and reversion of different kinds of things.²³ Theodore sees universal significance in the number series too, but the associations are much more elaborate.²⁴ Thus he derives the visible cosmos from the soul by equating the double series (2, 4, 8) with the heavens and the triples (3, 9, 27) with the sub-lunary region. Further, different elements are associated with both whole numbers and ratios with geometric proportion (1, 2, 4) assigned to the element earth on two grounds. First, the similarity of *Gé* and *geômetrês* and, secondly, the fact that the other proportions are included in the geometric proportion just as all the elements are found on Earth. The latter is the kind of justification that Neoplatonists frequently offer. They will even sometimes reason from the similarities of words. However, nothing in their interpretive resources parallels Theodore's more adventurous moves.

Lest one think that this number [sc. the soul's number] is lifeless, you will discover Life in the letters at each end, if you take the first heptad instead of the third. If, however, you posit the base number of the first letter and those subsequent to it you will see that the soul's life is intellectual. Take ζ ο ψ (i.e. 7, 70, 700). The circle [ο] is intermediate, being intellectual, because intellect is the cause of the soul. But the smallest term shows that the soul is a sort of geometric intellect because what joins the parallel lines is a straight line across the diagonal. (*in Tim.* II 275.23–31).

Let us first consider the way in which ψυχή allegedly manifests life. The letter ψ represents the number 700 in the Greek notation for writing numbers. This is the "third heptad" in the sequence 7, 70, 700. Now we are instructed to begin with the first heptad instead of the third. This is the number 7, represented in the Greek notation by ζ. If you combine this with the final letter of ψυχή you get ζη for life or living. This living soul is then argued to be a "geometric intellect". In the midst of the sequence of heptads of 7 (ζ, ο, ψ) we have the "ο"

23 Cf. *in Tim.* II 219.3–25. The reading that Iamblichus gives is similar; cf. II 215.5–29.

24 *in Tim.* II 216.25–217.3 = T22 (Deuse) part.

25 Plato, *Leg.* 898a8–10, *Tim.* 34a1–3; cf. and Proclus, *in Tim.* II 94.20–22.

which, of course, is the visible image of the motion of Intellect.²⁵ But this intellect is revealed to be a geometric one because of the *shape* of the letter corresponding to the first heptad. The relevant fact here seems to be that the capital form of the number corresponding to 7, Z, can be thought of as connecting two parallel lines. The path of the ecliptic describes a similar Z pattern joining the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Moreover, the line of the ecliptic passes through the centre of the universe where the Earth, which has previously been associated with the geometric proportion, is located.

Generally speaking, it seems that Theodore regarded the correlations between letters in words and the use of those letters in writing numbers – that is, the techniques of psephy – as a legitimate source of interpretative insight. Moreover, the shapes of Greek letters themselves were also treated as grist for his interpretive mill.²⁶ Kalvesmaki argues persuasively for seeing affinities between Theodore's methods and those of Valentinian gnosticism.²⁷ The latter was the subject of criticism by the Christian theologians Irenaeus and Clement. While both these writers themselves indulged in some limited number symbolism in their readings of Scripture, they regarded the structuring principles behind the plurality of Aeons in Valentinian gnosticism as too much of a good thing. Similarly, Kalvesmaki argues, Iamblichus sought to place limits on numerological speculation in the Platonist tradition. His thesis is that Iamblichus stands to Theodore much as Irenaeus and Clement stand to the excesses of the Christian gnostics. It is important for our purposes that Iamblichus' criticisms of Theodore seem to come from a work known to Proclus called *Refutations of Amelius and his school and of Numenius*. Is there any evidence that this work was directed at Theodore's methods of interpretation and further that Amelius shared these methods?

With respect to the first question, the answer is clearly yes. Having reported Theodore's views extensively (*in Tim.* II 274.10–278.25), Proclus immediately follows this report with criticisms from Iamblichus' work against Amelius as if this covered Theodore as well (*in Tim.* II 277.26–278.25). Iamblichus first complains that the psephic method is arbitrary, since one might find similar things about other four letter words, like *sôma* or *mê on* which are unrelated to *psychê*. Second, the shapes of letters are arbitrary. In fact, Iamblichus insists that Z was written differently on ancient monuments. Third, Iamblichus complains that Theodore's arithmetical manipulations are arbitrary as well: “we could thus transform any number into any other by dividing, adding or multiplying.”

26 Cf. *in Tim.* II 277.25–26 where Proclus describes his thoughts as ἀπὸ τῶν γραμμάτων καὶ τῶν ἐκφωνήσεων τὰς ἐξηγήσεις.

27 Kalvesmaki (2013).

So far as we can tell from the evidence, Amelius' interpretations of Plato's texts do not dwell too much on number symbolism, nor does Proclus attribute to him psephic techniques. His interpretation of the psychic numbers in the *Timaeus* (*in Tim.* II 213.8–214.4) is a little odd but roughly in line with the views of Iamblichus and Syrianus. It is odd in that he takes the salient question to be how these numbers reveal the manner in which the World Soul connects everything – including the gods! It connects to the gods by virtue of the 1, but to the daemonic genus by virtue of the 2 and the 3. The reasons offered for this are vaguely familiar from our discussion of Syrianus and relate to the stages of procession and reversion. The World Soul connects to human souls and exercises providence over them by virtue of the 4 or the 9, depending on whether the human souls are good (even) or bad (odd). Similarly, it connects to animals via the 8 or the 27, depending on whether the animal in question is domestic (better) or wild (worse). By the standards of Neoplatonic hermeneutics, this is nothing too unusual. Similarly, Amelius' exegesis of the *Republic's* nuptial number is pretty tame. Consistently with his interpretation of the “perfect number” of the *Timaeus*, it is the period that it takes for all the heavenly bodies to come to their *apokatastasis* (Proclus, *in Remp.* II 30.6–24).

V Conclusions

The limited evidence available to us recommends the hypothesis that Proclus puts Amelius and Theodore together, not because both employed the same interpretive methods but because they accepted many of the same *conclusions*.²⁸ Thus both seem to have accepted that there are intellectual paradigms of particular things (*in Tim.* I 425.16–22 = Theodore T11). Furthermore, Proclus attributes to both of them the idea that the *Timaeus* contains three numerically distinct demiurges (I 309.14–20 = Theodore T12). But the use of psephic techniques on the part of Amelius is not attested. In this case, the

28 And even this may need to be contextualised. It is true that there are certain conclusions shared by Amelius and Theodore that Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus all reject. But these doctrinal commonalities don't seem to bind Amelius and Theodore more closely to one another than, say, other doctrinal commonalities bind Theodore closely to Porphyry. Indeed, if we think of the issue that creates the sharpest dividing line between Plotinus and the rest of the Neoplatonic tradition – the undescended soul – then we find that he and Theodore are fellow travellers on *this* crucial issue. Cf. *in Tim.* III 333.28–30 = Theodore T36 (Deuse).

absence of evidence is evidence of absence, since one would expect Proclus to condemn Amelius at the same time as he criticises Theodore had the former utilised psephy in his reading of Plato. After all, the two authors are regularly linked by Proclus. But Proclus does not usually suggest that Amelius is approaching Plato's text in a hermeneutically irresponsible manner, even when he thinks that Amelius has Plato wrong. In fact, Proclus is apt to regard Theodore and *Porphry* as similarly arbitrary in the interpretive presuppositions that they bring to Plato's dialogues. At *in Tim.* III 63.30– he relates Porphyry's and Theodore's explanation for the differing speeds of the Mercury and Venus (*Tim.* 38d1–6). Both explain this by reference to whether the intellects associated with the planets revert directly upon Intellect or through intermediaries like Being and Life. Proclus regards these ideas as fanciful – these philosophers “working from their own personal suppositions” – and follows this with criticisms by Iamblichus (= fr. 70, Dillon) that centre on the artificiality and arbitrariness of reading these ideas into Plato's text. With regard to the methods he brings to interpreting Plato, Theodore is unique in his excessive Pythagorean number symbolism. If there is another Platonist whose methods resemble his own it is rather more Porphyry than Amelius. Amelius and Theodore seem to be grouped together rather by their acceptance of similar conclusions.

What, then, should we say about Proclus' and Iamblichus' tendency to associate both Theodore and Amelius with the thought of Numenius? It seems that Proclus himself is somewhat unsure about why Iamblichus' work, *Refutations of Amelius and his school and of Numenius*, is titled in this way. He says “such is the title he gives – whether he is ascribing Numenius' opinions to them or perhaps finding that they have written similar things concerning these matters, I am unable to say” (*in Tim.* II 277.28–278.1). Here too I think our very limited evidence points to similarities in their conclusions, but not necessarily similarities in their principles for the interpreting of Plato's texts. From a hermeneutic point of view, I think we should be cautious about positing any “Numenian school of Apamea”, with a distinctive interpretive method, of which both Amelius and Theodore are representatives. I think it is fair to say that – so far as we can tell at least – none of the three take the same systematic approach to line by line exegesis of individual Platonic dialogues. One might speculate that their approach to Plato is a bit too intertextual for the followers of Iamblichus who made a discipline of the *skopos* of each dialogue. But apart from this somewhat free-wheeling attitude toward reading Plato, I think that there is little evidence for a distinctively Neo-Pythagorean methodology shared by all three. Our evidence suggests that Theodore's use of psephic methods in his

interpretation of Plato is unique to him. In this respect, he is truly an outlier in the Platonic tradition.

What we can say is that our principal source – Proclus – *knows* a lot more about Porphyry and Iamblichus than he seems to know about Amelius and Theodore. This situation would be explained if Proclus' knowledge of the philosophy of Amelius and Theodore – and perhaps of Numenius as well – is indirect and mediated through Porphyry and Iamblichus. It seems possible that it is the nature of our sources that create the impression of a particularly deep affinity between Amelius' and Theodore's reception of Plato.