

Lewy, Hans. 2011. *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mystic Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, Troisième édition par Michel Tardieu avec un supplément « Les Oracles chaldaïques 1891-2011 ». Paris, Institut des Etudes Augustiniennes, 770 + xxvi pp., paperbound, 978-2851212436.

In 1956 Hans Lewy published his seminal work on the *Chaldaean Oracles*. In 1978 Michel Tardieu produced a second edition of the work, adding several indices and a concordance to the works of Kroll, Tyler, Hadot, and des Places. He also appended Dodds' article, "New Light on the *Chaldaean Oracles*,"¹ Hadot's "Bilan et Perspectives sur les *Oracles Chaldaïques*," and his own "Notice sur Hans Lewy" along with a bibliography of Lewy's works. Tardieu has now issued a third edition, adding the very helpful "Les Oracles chaldaïques 1891-2011," which traces our knowledge of the *Oracles* from Jahn onwards and then enumerates the ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance references to the *Oracles* along with references to modern discussions of those references.

It is nearly impossible to overstate the importance of Lewy's book. The *Oracles* were a conundrum, difficult to place in the history of ancient philosophy and even more difficult to interpret. Lewy's intellectual achievement was breathtaking. He placed the *Oracles* in their philosophical milieu of Platonism but also considered their links to Oriental mystery religions. He set out clearly the Middle-Platonic metaphysical system that was the backbone of the *Oracles*, and then showed their relationship to theurgy and demonology. The result was the best overall picture of the importance and role the *Oracles* held in antiquity. He also explored the meaning of many of the denser fragments, interpreting arcane phrases in line with Platonic principles. The *Oracles* emerged as a part of what Dillon would later call the Platonic underground: they represented a religious extension of existing religious-philosophical principles.

Admittedly, Lewy, as Dodds pointed out, was too cavalier in accepting new fragments into the Chaldaean canon. Nonetheless, his interpretation of the established fragments was for the most part correct. More importantly, for students of Neoplatonism, Lewy provided the clearest links between Chaldaean theurgy and Neoplatonic ritual. Lewy's account of the ascent ritual remains the best description of the mystery. His research was impeccable, leaving ample evidence from multiple generations of Platonists in his copious footnotes. No one today could write on the topic of the *Oracles* and not be in Lewy's debt.

For these reasons alone, Tardieu's new edition is welcome. His earlier edition, of course, had made Lewy's work more accessible, especially by the addition of indices. Anyone who works on the *Oracles* must appreciate Tardieu's additions. In this

¹ It was originally published in *Harvard Theological Review* 54 (1961) 263-273.

latest edition, his chapter “Les Oracles chaldaïques 1891-2011” continues that tradition. Scholars will especially appreciate his long section on “Réception et fragments,” which provides a kind of mini-bibliography to earlier citations of the *Oracles* and the relevant modern discussions of them. For example, if you are interested in Iamblichus’ use of the *Oracles*, Tardieu leads you to works from Dodds through Athenassiadi. In another section, “Les interprétations,” one can find references in modern works for various concepts, word usages, religious concepts, and even triads. Tardieu concludes with two bibliographies: the first chronologically (1891-1978) and the second alphabetically by author (1979-2011). The result is a useful tool for scholars to employ as they research the *Oracles*.

In the end, though, it is the work of Lewy that shines through. His research still resonates and carries weight. Tardieu’s edition makes it easier for scholars to read and appreciate the great scholar.

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