

BOOK REVIEW

Imperial Plato: Albinus, Maximus, Apuleius. Text and Translation, with an Introduction and Commentary. By RYAN FOWLER. Las Vegas, Zurich, Athens: Parmenides Publishing, 2016. P. x + 362. Softcover, \$78.00. ISBN 978-1-930972-87-2.

Imperial Plato, a new volume by Ryan Fowler, is a collection of Second Sophistic texts on Plato, including Albinus' *Introduction*, Maximus of Tyre's *Dissertation 11*, and Apuleius' *On Plato and His Doctrine*, along with a helpful historical introduction on the philosophical and rhetorical background of the second-century CE. The translations are quite readable and accurate and the texts themselves are presented with a short overview and synopsis, detailed critical notes, and manuscript images. In addition to the extensive bibliography, the volume includes an index locorum, index rerum, and index verborum. Greek and Latin texts with critical apparatuses are printed after rather than facing Fowler's English translations. The annotations are extensive and insightful; however, Fowler is sometimes underserved by typographical problems.

For readers who are not very familiar with the way that intellectual culture in the second-century CE continued to examine, employ, and invoke Plato—not only as a philosophical writer but also relating to the religious and rhetorical market of the time (21)—this volume will be greatly rewarding. The selected texts, though only a small sample of the diverse writings of the time, provide a helpful first look at various Platonic rhetorical traditions. The three texts offered present differing approaches that collectively demonstrate the richness of Platonic writing and Platonism in general as important components of literary, religious, and educational culture some six centuries after Plato.

Albinus' *Introduction* is quite short and perhaps the most philosophically significant contribution among the collection, in particular for those readers more interested in Plato than in Platonism. It presents an approach to Plato's dialogues with an emphasis on learning; the aim is to guide the student of Plato through the dialogues in what purports to be the most efficacious way. That is, Albinus presents what he thinks is the best order to study the dialogues: an order that is "in accordance to reason." This approach to Plato, differing significantly from the current 'developmental' model, claims that although the dialogues

should be encountered in an order based upon the student's current disposition, the ideal student who is most prepared to study should begin with the *Alcibiades*, followed by the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and the *Timaeus*. Albinus' recommendation suggests that the dialogues can be understood as some form of a pedagogical curriculum, centered around the disposition of the learner, rather than a record of the development of the thought of the author. To this end, Albinus' *Introduction* may be considered as a serious reflection on the dialogues worthy of consideration even today.

Following the *Introduction*, Fowler places Maximus of Tyre's *Dissertation 11* "What is God According to Plato." Maximus, known for his rhetorical flourish, is an example of a rhetor employing Plato as source material. His text is more Platonism than Plato; however, the stylized writing reveals the orator as a master of his craft, and Plato as an important and authoritative figure through whom Maximus can wield his power. Maximus' ideas about Plato can appear at times to be somewhat shallow in a philosophical sense, but the style and persuasive rhetoric suggest that he actually aims at entertainment more than at a critical reflection on the details of Plato's dialogues. Nonetheless Maximus' text works to convey to his audience a sense of the moral benefits that come from philosophy (18; 82). Fowler's point here, in part, is to show that Plato remained an essential part of the culture of rhetorical speech and oratory in the Second Sophistic, and to suggest that readings of Plato's texts were employed for the purpose of moral education through oratory.

Apuleius' *On Plato* is the longest of the three texts in the volume, and presents a doxographic report about the biography of Plato along with a discussion of Platonic physics in book 1, and ethics, and politics in book 2. The biography of Plato reinforces the tradition of understanding Plato as divine, and Apuleius' Platonism leans towards the peripatetic. While the author of *The Golden Ass* might seem far removed from the author of *On Plato*, the picture of Apuleius painted by Fowler is that of a rhetor or even a *philosophus* (135), suggesting that Apuleius' sober writings can be seen as the work of a scholar. *On Plato* serves to inform and instruct the student, like Maximus, on the moral benefits of Plato's (i.e., of Platonism's) philosophical teachings in a more scholarly way than with Maximus.

The volume as a whole is a most welcome, and Fowler's intention to provide new accessible English translations along with historical and critical notes is laudable. The history of the reception of Platonic themes and Platonism in the Second Sophistic is in itself a rich and often under-appreciated field of study. Fowler's presentation of the landscape of Second Sophistic Platonic thought

through his historical introduction and the presentation of the texts themselves is quite thoughtful and thorough. The volume serves as an entrance to the history of late Platonism in the second-century, but the reviewer was left wondering whether Fowler's book would be accessible to new readers. The detailed footnotes and annotations at times seem aimed rather at the (classicist) specialist, while the introduction would primarily benefit new readers. Additionally, the general intellectual landscape of the period is of course much larger and much more complex than the three provided texts can show. Fowler of course knows this (2) and tries to strike a difficult balance between catering to these different audiences. This volume, nevertheless, will be greatly appreciated by many readers as it is one of currently too few English volumes concerning the late Platonic tradition in the second-century CE.

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