

Zitierhinweis

Gerson, Lloyd P.: Rezension über: Udo Hartmann, Der spätantike Philosoph. Die Lebenswelten der paganen Gelehrten und ihre hagiographische Ausgestaltung in den Philosophenviten von Porphyrios bis Damaskios, Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 2018, in: Plekos. Elektronische Zeitschrift für Rezensionen und Berichte zur Erforschung der Spätantike, 22 (2020), S. 1-6, DOI: 10.21245/rec.ant.235582875, heruntergeladen über Website



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Udo Hartmann: *Der spätantike Philosoph. Die Lebenswelten der paganen Gelehrten und ihre hagiographische Ausgestaltung in den Philosophenviten von Porphyrios bis Damaskios*. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag 2018 (*Antiquitas I 72*). xxvi, 2273 p. in 3 volumes, continuously paginated. € 198.00. ISBN: 978-3-7749-4172-4.

I would like to start by providing my *bona fides* as a reviewer of this extraordinary work of scholarship. I am a professor of ancient philosophy. I have edited *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (2010) and I have written a number of books and articles treating of the doctrines of the philosophers discussed here. I am not, however, a historian of Late Antiquity. Therefore, I read this work thinking of its contents as background to my own. I am in no position to make informed judgments about the author's frequently sceptical answers to the myriad of strictly historical questions treated by him. I can say, however, that I found Hartmann's conclusions admirably clear and well-argued. I was especially impressed by his rigorous insistence on not going beyond what the evidence indicates or even suggests. The speculative tendency of scholars writing on a period in antiquity about which we are not very well informed is perhaps overwhelming. Yet speculation about, say, motives or about implied relationships among prominent persons does not rise to the level of fact, though it is sometimes presented as such. Hartmann never succumbs to this tendency and never mentions such speculation without adding that there is little or no evidence to substantiate it.

The substance of the book is an exhaustive analysis of four volumes treating of the life and times of prominent ancient philosophers. These are Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Eunapius of Sardis's *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*, Marinus's *Life of Proclus*, and Damascius's *Life of Isidore*. Focusing on these "Lives," Hartmann aims to provide a comprehensive survey of the political and social background to ancient philosophy roughly from the third to the sixth centuries. More precisely, he wants to provide a portrait of the ancient *philosopher* in Late Antiquity, focusing on the subjects of the four "Lives." This focus means that Hartmann pays no attention to the doctrines or doctrinal disputes within and around the philosophical schools. Philosophers will no doubt regret the absence of any discussion of such material, but they

will be rewarded by a tremendously rich, comprehensive, and clear presentation of all we know that can reasonably be said to be the background or context within which these doctrinal discussions occurred.

As the author says at the beginning of the book, his approach means that he must ignore Christian philosophers like Synesius, Boethius, and Philoponus and those who are usually characterized as rhetoricians like Themistius. This approach also means that short shrift is given to prominent philosophers like Hierocles of Alexandria and Olympiodorus of Alexandria who did not happen to have devoted biographers.

The book is divided into seven sections over three volumes. The first section (1–33) is an introduction in which we get an overview of the project, a rationale for its self-imposed limitations, and an explanation for the focus on the four “Lives.” The second section (35–354) contains an account of (a) *The Life of Plotinus* by Porphyry, (b) *The Lives of the Philosophers* by Eunapius, (c) Marinus’s *Life of Proclus or On Happiness*, and (d) Damascius’s *Life of Isidore*. Each sub-section describes the sources used by the authors, dating, the aim of each work, and some of its special features and interpretative problems. The third section (355–1088) ranges over the rise of the dominance of Platonism from among the philosophical schools of antiquity, and the members of the various schools. It provides extensive treatment of the schools in Athens and Alexandria, especially in the fifth century, along with some discussion of the minor centers of learning in Asia Minor. The fourth section (1089–1431) presents a panoramic picture of the social milieu within which philosophers in Late Antiquity worked. It includes discussions of the structure of the schools, the mode of teaching, the connections between the schools, especially in Athens and Alexandria, and the religious dimension of ancient pagan philosophy in its confrontation with the rise of Christianity. The fifth section (1433–1817) gives an account of the engagement of the philosophers of Late Antiquity with the political face of the Roman Empire. The participation in politics which gave way to the withdrawal from politics as the Empire was Christianized is recounted, along with the brief but explosive anti-Christian reign of Julian and the persecution of pagans by the Emperor Valens. The differing political circumstances in Constantinople, Athens, and Alexandria are included. The sixth section (1819–2064) focuses on the portrait of the pagan holy man, represented above all by the main philosophers in the “Lives.” The union of *bios* and Platonic doctrine is ex-

amined and the changing image of the holy man in competition with Christian holy men is also treated. The seventh section (2065–2088) is a summary once again situating the “Lives” within the larger framework of late antique thought. The book concludes with an extensive bibliography (2093–2238) of primary and secondary sources.

For those who are specialists in the history of Late Antiquity, this work will serve admirably as a reference resource. The bibliographies relating to the major topics surrounding late ancient philosophy are, apparently, virtually complete. The author provides concise summaries of the principal interpretative positions. And, as already mentioned, he shows a principled restraint in speculation beyond what the evidence allows. It is easy to imagine that among the many authors criticized in the notes, there will be some who will insist that their interpretations have been misunderstood or even unfairly represented. This is hardly surprising.

As someone for whom this entire work can be characterized as ‘context’ and ‘background’ to the study of the doctrines of the late Platonists, I ask the following question. How do these volumes help me and those like me whose principal focus is philosophy and its history? Here is my answer to this question.

Hartmann approaches from a number of different angles and in many different places the principal political and sociological fact in Late Antiquity, namely, the rise and eventual dominance of Christianity. He provides in considerable detail an account of the course of intellectual history from Plotinus’ evident indifference to Christian thought, to the sea-change that begins to occur in the lifetimes of Porphyry and Iamblichus, to the trench-warfare of the fourth century CE, to the various efforts at suppression in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, to the dramatic end of public pagan philosophy teaching in the first third of the sixth century. Hartmann shows, through his analysis of the “Lives,” that beginning perhaps with Porphyry and certainly with Iamblichus, philosophical doctrine or ‘Platonism’ for short, was shaped in direct response to the rising Christian threat. Broadly speaking, this means the introduction of practical religious elements – scriptural, liturgical, personal – in order to enable the presentation of a pagan gospel in competition with the Christian one. Porphyry’s written attack on Christianity and Iamblichus’s introduction of and devotion to theurgical practices stand in sharp contrast to Plotinus’s indifference to pagan religion which I take to be consistent with his lack of interest in Christianity. Even his treatise “Against the

Gnostics” is not so much an attack on the Christian religion as a critique of the theoretical philosophical foundations of certain Christian and non-Christian teachings. The integration of theurgy with philosophy continued apace until the end with Damascius who was an extremely acute philosopher but who evidently did not see a conflict between philosophy and religion.

By the time of the reemergence of a ‘school’ of Platonism in Athens at the end of the fourth century, Platonism was thoroughly integrated with a form of pagan religious practice. To be sure, this was a religion that was in no way acceptable to Christians. Nevertheless, Proclus, the great figure of the Athenian school, was quite openly a religious leader as well as a philosophical exegete and theoretician. His biographer, Marinus, was a Samaritan from present day Nablus, who actually in some sense ‘converted’ to the pagan religion professed by Proclus and those around him in Athens. The specific doctrinal relevance of these facts, in my opinion, is that the utterly impersonal first principle of all in Plato’s writings, which becomes slightly more personalized in Plotinus, encounters the thoroughly personal deity of Jewish and Christian scriptures. For Platonists, this encounter is fraught with conceptual difficulties. The principal one is that the grounds for positing an absolutely simple first principle of all – the central idea of the Platonic ‘system’ – make it extremely difficult to personalize this principle in the way that Christianity requires. As a result, and as Hartmann clearly shows, from Iamblichus to Syrianus to Proclus, the ‘personality’ of the One is transferred to the multitude of personalities of the traditional gods. For these gods, providence and prayer, responsibility for rewards and punishments, make sense. The only possible *rapprochement* between Christianity and paganism on this score was eliminated with the suppression of various subordinationist ‘heresies.’ ‘Jesus’ would have been an acceptable name for a traditional god if he had not been elevated to a status co-existing with the first principle of all.

Hartmann writes extensively of the portrait of the pagan ‘holy man,’ and compares him with the Christian counterpart. It is illuminating to compare the Plotinian doctrine of strictly philosophical soteriology with the various Christian soteriological doctrines focusing on the second person of the Trinity. The pagan exhortation to live like Pythagoras is contrasted with the Christian exhortation to live like Jesus. The only sharp difference, as far as I can see, is that the latter exhortation produced a monastic strain and certain ascetic practices mostly alien to Hellenism. Even this gulf is partially

breached with the stories of pagan miracle workers, including Iamblichus and Maximus of Ephesus.

Marinus describes Proclus as the exemplary pagan holy man, infused with perfect virtue, and favored above all others by the traditional gods. For Marinus, what separates Proclus and other holy men from their Christian competitors is the latter's disdain for and ignorance of Hellenic culture. That cultural friction underlies a number of strictly doctrinal disputes is surely of far-reaching significance. And the pagan contempt for Christian decadence is matched and then overmatched by Christian contempt for pagan decadence.

It is of course not possible in a review such as this to provide a detailed listing of all the topics canvassed in this work. I found valuable the detailed and even-handed account of the extant evidence surrounding the assassination of Hypatia, the presentation of the very scarce material surrounding the re-founding of the Academy by Plutarch of Athens at the end of the fourth century CE, and the multiple discussions of the various communications between Athens and Alexandria, the two principal centers of pagan learning in Late Antiquity. I am inclined to accept Hartmann's argument for refusing to identify the Christian Origen with the evidently pagan Origen known to Plotinus. The discussion of Athens and Alexandria throws new light (for me) on the succession of scholarchs in Athens after Proclus and leading up to the last one, Damascius. Proclus was evidently troubled by the difficulty of finding someone like himself, an at least competent administrator, an indefatigable scholar, an acute philosopher, and above all, a genuinely pious Hellenic. Proclus must have known that Marinus, who did succeed him, did not really fit the bill. Proclus knew of the philosophical community in Alexandria and, of course, in Constantinople, and was no doubt aware of the local talent. According to Damascius, the much desired authentic successor did not arise until Isidore, the hero of Damascius's *Life*. But Isidore was not up to the demanding post and left Athens to return home after a brief period. Damascius had no doubt that he himself was, at least philosophically, a worthy successor, and his tenure at head might have borne fruit if the events of 529 had not occurred.

This book is overall a considerable achievement and deserves the attention of all scholars interested in the period. The bibliography and index are exemplary. It should be an easy task for anyone to find the discussions and survey of relevant literature even for the more esoteric topics. I am glad it is on my bookshelf. I am sure that I shall return to it again and again to insure

the most accurate possible framework for investigation in the later history of ancient Greek philosophy.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Lloyd P. Gerson: Rezension zu: Udo Hartmann: *Der spätantike Philosoph. Die Lebenswelten der paganen Gelehrten und ihre hagiographische Ausgestaltung in den Philosophenviten von Porphyrios bis Damaskios*. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag 2018 (*Antiquitas* I 72). In: *Plekos* 22, 2020, 1–6 (URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2020/r-hartmann.pdf>).
