

Patrizia TAORMINA, Rosa Maria PICCIONE (a cura di), Giamblico: *I frammenti dalle epistole. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento*, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2010 (Elenchos. Collana di testi e studi sul pensiero antico 56), 680 pp., ISBN 978-88-7088-600-9, € 60.00.

This review has been long in coming. But then, the work is somewhat demanding, the volume constituting much more than a straightforward edition of the fragments of Jamblichean letters surviving in the Stobaeus anthology. It is an exhaustive study into the surviving fragments of the epistles and the relevant philosophical issues, supplemented with textual comments, a study distinguished by immense attention to detail and impressive sensitivity to the intricacies of Neoplatonic thought.

The introductory part of the volume, extending for 273 pages, comprises two monographic studies of considerable scholarly value – one devoted to the Jamblichus in Stobaeus issue, the other dedicated to the study of Jamblichus' philosophy as it appears in his letters. The first, by PICCIONE (= P.), presents the problems related to the way of transmission: after all, the passages, extrapolated from original writings, come to us in a form of *doxai*, dispersed in the anthological opus of Johannes of Stobi. This complicates matters: though some passages are introduced by a heading attesting to the (more or less) precise origin, others are introduced in a more general manner, sometimes leading the reader to wonder what was the actual context of a given fragment, while at other times, even knowing the point of origin leaves us at loss: what was the original content of a letter in question, was it devoted to the problem of fatality alone or is the excerpt on fate taken from a treatise of far more general scope? P.'s work exemplifies possible complications providing the reader not only with a multifaceted and fascinating investigation of the Jamblichean presence in Stobaeus' work, but also, with a valuable lesson in reading the latter.

The second part of the introduction, authored by TAORMINA (= T.), considers the place of the material contained in the letters in Jamblichus' philosophy. Notably longer than the first, it is divided into four sections, dealing with the general character of philosophy in the letters (pp. 89–134), and then, with the more specific questions of individual soul (pp. 134–180), fate/providence (pp. 181–226) and the classification of virtues (pp. 227–271). The task faced by the author was hardly a simple one: to consider the letters of Jamblichus against the background of his surviving works, detect the possible divergences and then to reconcile the respective teachings, hence furnishing the reader with a coherent account of Jamblichus the philosophic epistolographer. Of the four, the last is possibly the easiest read – dealing with the well known sequencing of virtues (which led to very detailed rules concerning the philosophical curriculum), it stays notably free from more intricate metaphysical or logical considerations which may prove daunting to less experienced readers in the previous sections. By contrast, the section devoted to the individual soul, dealing with the important issue of Jamblichus' rejection of the Plotinian notion according to which a part of our soul remains undescended into generation, puts considerable demands on the reader: nevertheless, it remains particularly clear and convincing in its presentation of Jamblichean (but also Porphyrean) *ousia homoiomeres*, the unified entity, cognizing as a unified whole. The section of fate, finally, presents a plausible reconstruction of Jamblichus' opinion of the providence vs. fate problem as once discussed in the (now lost) *De providentia et fato*. I confess, this is the only part where I felt some dissatisfaction: I wonder whether a reference to the hierarchical arrangement of providences/fates in certain Middle Platonic writers would not be of use in the exposition¹. Yet, the

¹ On the issue compare R.W. SHARPLES, *Threefold Providence: History and Background of the Doctrine*, in: R.W. SHARPLES, A. SHEPPARD (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's "Timaeus"*, London 2003 (BICS Suppl. 78), pp. 107–128.

omission (if we could call it thus) is only too understandable – T. focuses on reconstruction from vastly fragmentary testimonies, not on detailed discussion of a complete and surviving doctrine.

The actual edition, accompanied by translation and basic apparatus, comprises pp. 282–331 (less than 8% of the volume), all textual discussions having been relegated to the commentary. It is not the most practical of solutions given the bulk of the volume: having to track the commentary (and it is certainly worth tracking) while at the same time controlling the often complex text may well prove unnerving. Certainly, the editorial choice has a merit of presenting a clear vision of Jamblichean text in its relative scarcity: nevertheless, I would have preferred the solution taken in MANSFELD'S and RUNIA'S edition of *Placita* or in BRISSON'S edition of *Sententiae* – it is far easier on the reader.

Comprising nearly two hundred pages (333–517), the commentary deserves the reader's particular attention: far more than providing a list of *loci paralleli* or bibliographic references, it discusses the structure of respective fragments, the meaning of actual choice of arguments and their arrangement, the status of related discussion in the philosophical debates of late antiquity, and even more importantly, its place in the Platonic tradition. It is an erudite and impressive work bearing comparison to that produced by Luc BRISSON'S team when preparing the Paris edition of Porphyry's *Sententiae*. It seems a pity that smaller font makes the pages so hard to read – the commentary abounds in insightful critical remarks and explanations of textual emendations and editorial decisions of considerable philosophical importance: in his own review², Peter LAUTNER has stressed the importance of the choice of *to prōtōs on* over *to prōton on* in I 5, 17; 80, 13 W. – the emendation is carefully justified on pp. 338–341 and one nearly deplores the fact that it was relegated to the endnotes. It is, however, only one of the many examples of T.'s and P.'s careful revisions of the text, each editorial choice and its philosophical implications being meticulously discussed in the endnotes. To provide an illustrative example of the authors' critical method one may invoke note 256, where the choice between the manuscripts' *en eisi* and the more likely *eneisi* in III 9, 35 (358, 6 H.) is discussed – though the mechanical error is given as the most likely reason of the assumed corruption, P. nevertheless describes the more remote possibility of the transmitted *en eisi* being an intentional allusion to *Prot.* 329c2–d1. Just to provide the glimpse of this commentary's character: the two excerpts from the letter to Anatolius (III 9, 35 f.), devoted as this latter is to the issue of justice, are equipped with a sort of introduction (it is hard to dismiss the text as a simple endnote given that it extends over seven pages, pp. 468–475) covering their textual tradition, actual Stobaeian context, possible *loci paralleli*; the ideas contained therewith being carefully traced back to their possible origin, the possible philosophical implications intimated.

The work is supplemented by two short appendices, indexes (*verborum Graecorum* and *locorum*) and extensive bibliography. Of the appendices, one, by P., deals with the problem posed by the presence of distinctly un-Jamblichean gnome in IV 5, 71, while the other, by T., comprises the text (*cum interpretatione Italica*) of two testimonies concerning the existence of Jamblichus' letters, coming respectively from Olympiodorus (*in Gorg.* 46, 9) and Damascius (*in Phd.* I 549 W).

On the whole, this is a praiseworthy effort. The volume manages to convey to the reader the magnificence and pull of Jamblichean philosophy, while at the same time displaying laudable lucidity and overall methodological cohesiveness. Admittedly, an inexperienced reader may occasionally be baffled – but this is mostly due to the intricacies of Neoplatonic/Neopythagorean lore. This work is not for a beginner – occasionally taxing, it demands more than casual or passing acquaintance with the Neoplatonic thought.

Joanna Komorowska
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warszawa

² BMCR 2012.08.56 (<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2012/2012-08-56.html>).