

Peter RIEDLBERGER, *Domninus of Larissa: Enchiridion and Spurious Works*, Pisa–Roma: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2013 (Mathematica Graeca antiqua, vol. II), 281 pp., ISBN 978-88-622-7567-5, €86.00.

The study of Greek mathematics, as demonstrated by recent studies by Reviel NETZ and Serafina CUOMO, or, for a more philosophical (and fairly recent) example, Nicolas VINEL, is a fascinating and highly rewarding subject, bearing on the understanding of ancient literary culture and society¹. However, the absence of a concept which is fundamental to modern science, i.e. that of zero, and the intricacies surrounding the concept of monad combined with the importance held by this in ancient philosophy, all contribute to the difficulty of the matter, easily confusing an aspiring initiate. Still, there are considerable rewards – in studying the surviving documents of mathematical literature, we get an insight into the science which is counted among the most elevated *epistemai* of the ancient world, and, at the same time, a glimpse of the very thought that founded our civilization.

The surviving works of Domninus of Larissa, the only securely attributable being his *Encheiridion*, do not count on a par with the legacy of Archimedes. Written in the late antiquity by a contemporary and colleague of the much better known Neoplatonic philosopher, Proclus (with whom, we are told by Damascius, Domninus found himself at considerable odds), the *Encheiridion* is of an elementary, basic character, far from the magisterial magnitude of Euclides' *opus magnum* or Nicomachus' *Introductio*, on both of which it heavily relies in both content and method of exposition. It is similarly distant from the *Timaeus*-oriented explorations of Theon or the often fanciful insights of Iamblichus and the *Theologoumena arithmeticae*. Essentially, it remains what it claims to be: an introduction, comparable in content and construction (if not in scope) to the two works already mentioned: the *Introductio arithmetica* and the *Elementa*. Before RIEDLBERGER (= R.), recent (i.e. twentieth century) scholarship has produced a single edition of the work², the assessments in secondary literature remaining linked to that of Paul TANNERY in his own studies on Domninus, which in their turn are reliant on the 1832 edition by J.F. BOISSONADE³. The list of extant works that have been attributed to our author comprises also a short treatise on the deduction of ratios, the *scholia* on Nicomachus, and summaries of the principles of optics. The authorship of these is far from certain: R. himself prefers to call the author of *How to Deduce a Ratio from a Ratio* Pseudo-Domninus (his argument for this name on p. 79 may serve as a methodological warning and instruction to all researchers of Antiquity), the *scholia* have been considered spurious since TANNERY⁴, and general scholarly sentiment (shared by R.) favours a distinction between Domninus and the “summaries” author. Among the works lost to posterity, one must number a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, a commentary on Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* and, perhaps most importantly given the subject of R.'s investigation, the *Arithmetike stoicheiosis*, the alleged *opus magnum* of the Larissene, possibly construed along (methodological) lines parallel to those of the famous *Stoicheiosis theologike* of Proclus.

¹ Compare R. NETZ, *Ludic Proof: Greek Mathematics and the Alexandrian Aesthetic*, Cambridge 2009; S. CUOMO, *Ancient Mathematics*, London 2001; L. RUSSO, *La rivoluzione dimenticata: il pensiero scientifico greco e la scienza moderna*, Milano 1996; N. VINEL, *Jamblique: In Nicomachi arithmetica*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction française et notes de commentaire, Pisa–Roma 2014.

² F. ROMANO, *Domnino di Larissa. La svolta impossibile della filosofia matematica neoplatonica. Manuale di introduzione all'aritmetica*. Introduzione, testo e traduzione, Catania 2000.

³ The respective works of TANNERY are collected in P. TANNERY, *Memoires scientifiques*, vols. II–III, ed. by J.L. HEIBERG, H.G. ZEUTHEN, Toulouse 1912–1915. For BOISSONADE's edition, cf. J.F. BOISSONADE, *Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regiis*, vol. IV, Paris 1832, pp. 413–429.

⁴ P. TANNERY, *Notes critiques sur Domninus*, in: IDEM, *Memoires...* (n. 3), vol. II, p. 212.

R.'s study improves on the previous editions of Domninus' legacy both in the quality of the textual research and in the comprehensiveness and the detailedness of the commentary: of the nearly two hundred and forty pages of the book (not including indexes or bibliography), not even thirty are occupied with Domninus' text – in bilingual version at that (pp. 108–135). The author opens his investigation with a sketch of the Athenian Neoplatonic school, the background of Domninus' scholarly activities, then discusses the surviving sources on Domninus' life, then proceeds to sketch the problems related to the textual transmission of the *Encheiridion* and its modern editions, the issue of respective titles and characteristic features, with a discussion on both the *Encheiridion* and other works attributed to the Larissene.

After a cursory overview of fifth and sixth century Neoplatonism, with particular emphasis on the Athenian school with which the name of Domninus is associated in the surviving testimonies (pp. 19–41), the biographical part of the introduction (pp. 43–64) centres on the stories transmitted by the ancient sources on Domninus, i.e. Proclus, Damascius, and Marinus (these stories include tales of his alleged conflict with Proclus, his misanthropic tendencies and superciliousness, and then, the tale of the miraculous, pork-based cure he employed to heal his proclivity to blood-vomiting). R.'s argument remains balanced and persuasive, supporting his vision of a hardly unorthodox thinker with possibly a slightly more “scientific” approach to philosophical investigation than that of his contemporaries. This point is important, for our image of Domninus must rely on the testimonies – the basic nature of the *Encheiridion* hardly allows for a more general assessment of its author's actual and more advanced philosophical views. Next (pp. 65–90) comes the discussion of the works associated with the Larissene, with particular emphasis on issues related to the questionable authenticity of the extant writings except the *Encheiridion*, a brief recapitulation (pp. 91 f.), detailed editorial prolegomena (pp. 93–106), and, finally, the actual edition, supported by a carefully compiled and instructive *apparatus*.

As manifest in the above outline, the image resulting from the opening chapter is a portrait of the Larissene against the background of contemporary Neoplatonism, or a consideration of Domninus as seen by his near contemporaries rather than an image of Domninus the mathematician. The latter image is likely to be gleaned from the commentary part of R.'s work (pp. 137–238), where the *Encheiridion* is carefully measured against the mirror of Euclides and Nicomachus, with the effect of stressing the possible divergences and authorial strategies assumed by the late antique thinker. The commentary, impressive both in its scope and exhaustiveness, comprises detailed comparisons drawn with respective *loci paralleli* which emerge in other authors, with a careful tracing of the possible filiations. One also notes the careful balancing of R.'s own opinions concerning possible theoretical or methodological preferences of the author under consideration – thus, contrary to previous editors (most particularly TANNERY), he seems disinclined to consider Domninus as anti-Nicomachean on account of his chosen definition of monad (pp. 137–142). It would however be remiss of this reviewer not to note that, perhaps quite understandably given the subject, R.'s work does more for the history of mathematics than it does for that of philosophy. Iamblichus' mathematical theories are repeatedly dismissed as simply examples of bad mathematics (one wonders what Iamblichus' own reaction would be), as are most of the theological inquires into the nature of numbers.

To sum up: carefully worded, well argued and, last but not least, beautifully edited, R.'s study provides an authoritative and valuable account of a nearly forgotten author, thus contributing to our knowledge of a still rarely studied field. While the opening part provides us with a glimpse of the mathematician as seen by contemporary philosophers, the commentary, owing to the lucidity of its discussion, allows the reader to move with relative comfort through the exposition of ancient mathematical dogmas, all the while being aware of the possible connections to Euclid and Nicomachus. Even more importantly, R.'s work deals with someone he himself described as unexceptional (pp. 63 f.) – as such, it provides its reader with an interesting glimpse of “school” mathematics at the close of Antiquity.

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