Dillon, John M. and Polleichtner, Wolfgang (eds). *Iamblichus of Chalcis: The Letters*, (Writings from the Greco-Roman World, Volume 19), Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009. 1 vol, 119 pages. ISBN 978 1 58983 161 2.

The publication of this slim volume, which collects the surviving fragmentary excerpts of Iamblichus' philosophical letters, chiefly preserved in the *Anthology* of John of Stobi, will be an invaluable resource not only for the flourishing number of scholars working on Iamblichus, but also for all scholars and students of Neoplatonism and for social, cultural and literary historians of late antiquity. This volume follows the usual SBL format of text with introduction, translation and annotation, yet offers something particularly special, for John Dillon and his colleague Wolfgang Polleichtner have produced the first English translation of and commentary on these letters. This volume acts as a fitting complement to John Dillon's editions and translations of other Iamblichean works, largely undertaken in collaboration with other scholars, which include his magisterial collection of the extant fragments of Iamblichus' commentaries on Plato's works, now well-established as the critical edition, the *De Anima* (with John Finamore), *On the Mysteries* (with Emma C. Clarke and Jackson Hershbell) and *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (with Jackson Hershbell), and demonstrates once again Dillon's exemplary contribution to Iamblichean studies, particularly in making Iamblichus widely accessible.

Wolfgang Polleichtner has re-edited the text, which is based on the 1958 reprint of Curt Wachsmuth and Otto Hense's edition of the *Anthology* of John of Stobi. Fragments of twenty letters are included along with two *testimonia*, from Damascius and Olympiodorus respectively, which help to corroborate their authenticity and confirm that the collection of the *Letters* was known to the Athenian School of the sixth century. It is of course deeply regrettable that so little material from Iamblichus' epistles survives. The letters examine a wide variety of topics, including providence, marriage, ingratitude, music and the cardinal virtues, among others. The collaboration of Dillon and Polleichtner has resulted in a translation and commentary of philological thoroughness and erudition. The commentary particularly focuses on significant philosophical precedents for the concepts discussed and terminology used in Iamblichus' epistles. The introduction sets the epistles within their full historical, intellectual and cultural context, including discussions of Iamblichus' life and works, the genre of philosophical epistolography, the philosophy contained within the epistles and their style and vocabulary. The extensive discussions contained within the introduction and the commentary regarding the identity of Iamblichus' correspondents are particularly noteworthy. Many epistles are addressed to former pupils but several show that Iamblichus' philosophical advice and discourse extended much further.

As Dillon and Polleichtner make abundantly clear, a number of Iamblichus' epistles are addressed to prominent members of late antique Syrian society and of the Roman imperial administration. As such, they confirm the political dimension of Platonic philosophy in late antiquity, so well delineated in Dominic O'Meara's *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). In particular, the divinization of political life, the "imagining forth of divine life" and its transposition to the political sphere by the philosopher, which O'Meara likens to the descent and return of the philosopher into the cave in Plato's *Republic*, surely correlates with one of the most important dimensions of Iamblichus' metaphysics and philosophy. The *philanthropia* (translated quite fittingly as "sympathy for one's fellow human beings" by Dillon) and "providential care" ideally exhibited by the philosopher towards his fellow human beings was seen by Iamblichus and his circle as a manifestation of divine providence, spontaneously expressed in religious, political and all other spheres of human life and activity. In the same sense, Iamblichus' endorsement and approval of popular cultic activity and traditional religion which is so evident in the *De Mysteriis*, as well as his specific insistence on the necessity of cultic and ritual worship for the vast majority of people (*De Mysteriis* 5.18 (223.8-224.3)), can be viewed as an expression of all-encompassing care and concern for humanity at large, which Iamblichus clearly saw as an expression of the providential care of the gods and a communication of the absolute Good. In this sense, the endorsement of cultic worship for all of humanity on the one hand, and philosophical advice and wisdom on a popular level for all on the other hand, embody some of the central purposes and values of the theurgist: to co-create with the Demiurge and to bring divine wisdom to all souls and to the entire cosmos, so far as this is possible. The "divinization of political life" which theurgy necessarily entails is thus effected through the theurgist-philosopher's care for wider human communities, extending from the philosophical school to the imperial administration, from advice to pupils to advice to local dignitaries and grandees. As such, Iamblichus' epistles will also be relevant to scholars and students of political philosophy, particularly those interested in ancient political theory and science.

While Iamblichus' *Letters* reflect the concerns of popular philosophy, as Dillon and Polleichtner make clear, they have a subtle yet vitally important significance: they remind scholars and students of Neoplatonism that for these philosophers, philosophy was not merely a discursive, mental activity but *a way of life*. As the editors note in their introduction, there are not many precedents within the Platonic tradition for Iamblichus' philosophical letters, a fact which only adds to their significance, yet testimonies and fragmentary excerpts of letters attributed to Plato (probably spurious), as well as to Pythagoras and members of the latter's family (palpably spurious), survive and would have been considered as genuine by

Iamblichus, indicating that for him the composition of protreptic letters was a wholly Platonic and Pythagorean activity. In addition, a collection of letters (probably spurious) survives under the name of the Pythagorean “holy man” Apollonius of Tyana. This legendary Pythagorean sage, whom Iamblichus would have held in the highest regard, was also famous for his philosophical advice to Greek *poleis* and political leaders, suggesting that philosophical and religious advice to the general public and to wider communities was seen as a central role and duty of the philosophical sage. Dillon and Polleichtner also note the plethora of philosophical letters written in the generation after Iamblichus, by the emperor Julian, the Antiochene rhetorician Libanius and other prominent figures. Iamblichus’ philosophical epistles certainly help to put Julian’s prolific correspondence in perspective and show Iamblichean influence in an area perhaps previously unrecognised.

This edition of Iamblichus’ epistles and the accompanying commentary provide a much deeper, firsthand insight into Iamblichus’ practical philosophy and philosophical community. Our chief source for Iamblichus’ life is the biographer and hagiographer Eunapius of Sardis. Eunapius’ portrayal of Iamblichus and his circle is, as Dillon and Polleichtner point out, unsatisfactory and ill-informed. The vivid sense of Iamblichus’ community and circle of followers which can be gleaned from the *Letters* is certainly more profound than the characterisation found in Eunapius’ *Life*. It is touching to see Iamblichus offer discussion and advice to his chief pupil Sopater (among others) on subjects as diverse as bringing up children, fate, virtue, dialectic and truth. It is also particularly intriguing to note that at least one recipient was a female philosopher, Arete, perhaps the woman whose interests were defended by the emperor Julian when she was experiencing difficulties with her neighbours in Phrygia.

The edition contains a very helpful bibliography, *Index Rerum* and *Index Verborum*. It will be an invaluable resource for every academic library, for scholars of Neoplatonism and for cultural and literary historians of late antiquity. In relation to the latter, it will undoubtedly be useful for undergraduates and postgraduates studying the social, cultural and intellectual aspects of late antique history. It will be greatly appreciated as an important resource by scholars working on the philosophy of Iamblichus and those interested in related writers with a “theurgic” bent such as pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. This elegant volume will surely become the critical edition of the extant fragments of Iamblichus’ epistles. John Dillon and Wolfgang Polleichtner are to be congratulated on the publication of this important and fascinating work.

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