Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, Paul Géhin, and Matthieu Cassin (eds.), Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Psalms, tomes 1–11 (Sources Chrétiennes 614–615), Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf 2021, 1551 pp., ISBN 9782204141864/9782204142052, € 64.00/€ 64.00 (pb).

The appearance of three scholars’ names connected with Evagrius Ponticus gives one a good sense of the amount of work involved in collating, critically editing, translating, and discussing the Scholia on the Psalms, the largest work that Evagrius wrote. The size of these two volumes, which together run to 1551 pages, has the same effect.

The history of the modern editing of the text is quite as long as the text itself. In the early twentieth century Hans Urs von Balthasar, no great admiror of Evagrius, announced the discovery of various scholia, but it was Marie-Josèphe Rondeau who in 1960 would publish a key for Vaticanus Graecus 754, a tenth century Greek manuscript that contained Evagrius’ notes on the Psalms. Her unpublished collation of this manuscript was then passed along to the great benefit of Evagrian scholarship, as one witnesses in the 2005 monograph of Luke Dysinger, to give just one example. This key and collation were only one small part of her groundbreaking work on the many patristic commentaries on the Psalms. Much of the commentary tradition that she marked out and described still deserves fuller exploration in the form of critical editions, translations, and synthetic commentary, but it is worth celebrating the appearance of these volumes some sixty years after the publishing of Rondeau’s key.

The next editor listed, Paul Géhin, likewise deserves praise. This publication marks, roughly speaking, a kind of trilogy of sorts, since in 1987 and 1993 he published editions, translations, and commentaries of the Scholia on Proverbs and Scholia on Ecclesiastes, respectively, also in Sources Chrétiennes. As his editions and translations of several texts of Evagrius and many articles demonstrate, Géhin has now matched his predecessors, Claire and Antoine Guillaumont, in making Evagrius available to historians, theologians, philosophers, and interested readers of all kinds. It fell to the third editor, Matthieu Cassin, to create the critical apparatus and to classify and describe the very complicated manuscript tradition of the scholia. To Géhin fell, as they write in the forward: “the rest.” He translated, introduced, commented on, and established the critical text.

In each of these tasks, Géhin’s work is superb. His introduction, which runs nearly the length of a monograph, brings the reader through the genre of scholia, the biblical text that Evagrius used, a proposed date for the authorship of the scholia, as well as the exegetical mode and theological and philosophical teachings that one finds in the scholia. In addition, he evaluates the long
and complicated manuscript tradition of the *catenae* collections in which the scholia appear. Though one might disagree with Géhin on one or two points – his later dating of the scholia (the standard theory) and his doubt that Evagrius might have used the *Onamastica sacra*, for instance – I nevertheless recognize the critical care and thoroughness with which Géhin has introduced this text. The same care is evident in Géhin’s translation, which retains the sometimes jargony quality of Evagrius’ Greek without becoming so clunky as to obfuscate the sense. I have, I admit, occasionally glanced from the Greek to Géhin’s French when reading difficult sentences in this text. His notes, nonetheless, surpass it all and best indicate how long Géhin has taken in this project. His other extensive work shows itself here, as he makes astute cross-references that range widely across the Evagrian corpus, including and especially from the *Kephalaia gnostika*, which he is currently editing. More than that one sees the Alexandrians, Philo, Clement, and Origen of course, but also Eusebius, the Cappadocians, Jerome, and Didymus the Blind. Of less importance to the scholia are the writings and sayings that go back to the Egyptian monks of Evagrius’ days, though they appear occasionally as well.

The value of the *Scholia on the Psalms* for understanding the theological and philosophical system of Evagrius is without question. Here preserved in Greek are the thoughts of Evagrius on a variety of difficult subjects: judgment, providence, the orders of knowledge (of corporeals, incorporeals, Christ, God), the orders of bodies and *kosmoi* (angelic, human, demonic), and, perhaps of greatest interest to many, his reflections on Christ. In the *Scholia on the Psalms* one finds numerous useful descriptions of spiritual kingship as mastery of the passions and knowledge of creation to match the comparatively greater emphasis on spiritual priesthood in the *Kephalaia gnostica*, even though priesthood does feature prominently in the scholia as well. If Evagrius does not always quite come out and say what he means in the scholia – an old habit of his – then at least our access is one step closer than in his other most speculative work, the *Kephalaia gnostica*, which is only available in its entirety in Syriac translations, and from them in Armenian and Arabic. Géhin does a great job in his introduction and notes of evaluating the numerous places in which the two works cross over, especially when they share the same exact language and mysteriously seem to be quotations of each other.

Still the *Scholia on the Psalms* is not a mere cipher to unlock the meaning of the *Kephalaia gnostica*. To the contrary, the availability of this text will make possible a much fuller evaluation of Evagrius as an interpreter of Scripture. Several causes determined that he would not be remembered as an exegete. For one, his ascetic writings of the desert turned out to be enormously popular, even if they were copied under other names in the West. Next, his exegetical
writings remained almost entirely obscure until recently. Now that they are available, it is time to ask why he chose the clipped form of scholia, why he expressed his most speculative theological theories in an exegetical genre, and how his exegesis relates to that of his predecessors and contemporaries. The richness, and sometimes oddity, of his scholia suggest that these questions deserve our full attention. This attention will, we can hope, push past what is available now. Although Géhin thinks that the scholia collections on Job, the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes make up the totality of Evagrius’ formal exegesis, there is a strong possibility that Evagrius also wrote scholia on other books of Scripture. This project will likely occupy scholars for years to come.

One minor criticism of these volumes is that they lack the index of Greek vocabulary that one is accustomed to find in SourcesChrétiennewolumes. The enormous size of the Scholia on the Psalms made this task too onerous, and understandably so. To solve this problem Joel Kalvesmaki has uploaded a searchable Greek text of the Scholia on the Psalms, one of the many treasures on his richly abundant website, evagriusponticus.net. In sum, these two volumes are to be highly commended, since they promise to breathe further life into the study of Evagrius, a study that is already being pursued across the globe with great verve.

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