

### Ryan C. Fowler

*Imperial Plato. Albinus, Maximus, Apuleius. Text and Translation, with an Introduction and Commentary.* Las Vegas; Zurich; Athens: Parmenides Publishing, 2016, 362pp. ISBN 9781930972872. \$78.00.

The present book collects three Middle-Platonic texts, with a translation and commentary by Ryan Fowler. The works, all dating back to the second century AD, are: Albinus of Smyrna, *Introduction to the Book of Plato*—probably a section of a technical treatise in Greek, which suggests an ideal reading order for Plato’s dialogues; Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertation 11*—a captivating philosophical oration in Greek, addressing Plato’s ideas about god; Apuleius of Madauros, *On Plato and His Doctrine*—an intricate exposition of Plato’s teachings, written in Latin.

The volume opens with a general *Introduction* (pp. 1-31), where Fowler explains the reasons behind his choice of these three heterogeneous writings. According to him, these texts exemplify very well the way in which philosophy was intended and practised during the first imperial age. They also have the merit of displaying three different visions and argumentative strategies employed to read, explain and discuss the works of Plato, thus offering a manifold perspective on the figure, philosophical reflection, and heritage of the founder of the Platonic tradition. Fowler strengthens this aspect by emphasising the different geographical origins of Albinus, Maximus and Apuleius, their distinct cultural backgrounds, languages and literary styles. He seems particularly interested in the connections that these texts display with the Second Sophistic movement. The wide approach that he adopts in his commentary sections is especially attentive to the question as to what kind of relationship philosophy had with rhetoric, and which place and role rhetoric had within the educational curriculum of the imperial elite. The *Introduction* also contains a brief—and, probably for this reason, quite cursory—historical/philosophical presentation, which contributes to sustain and re-state the idea at the basis of the book: the works by Albinus, Maximus and Apuleius well represent the specific stage reached by the development of the Platonic tradition in the second century AD, characterised by the rising importance of “summaries” of Plato’s works. At that time, teachers, who were facing an exceptionally cramped philosophical “market”, were called upon to provide appealing, competitive and accessible handbooks or “guides” to the dialogues of Plato (p. 21).

In the volume each translation is preceded by a concise discussion of author, style, context, content, editions and a useful summary of the work, to be followed by the original text, as drawn from well-established critical editions. First, we find Albinus, whose authorship for the *Introduction to the Book*

of *Plato* Fowler takes as uncontroversial, while stressing the doubtful compositional nature of the text. This is the first English version to follow the one by George Burges (London, 1865). Fowler's translation is based on the recent Greek critical edition by Burkhard Reis (Wiesbaden, 1999). Second, we find Maximus of Tyre and his *Dissertation*. Fowler relies on Michael B. Trapp (Oxford, 1997) for the Greek text and, as he himself declares (p. 85), also partly on his translation and commentary. Third, we find Apuleius, with his two-book *De Platone et eius dogmate*. In this regard, it might be worth reminding the reader of Justin A. Stover's recent and challenging, but not uncontroversial, proposal of adding a third book to this Apuleian work (Oxford, 2016). Also in the case of Apuleius, the most recent English translation was by Burges (London, 1976). The authoritative and renowned Jean Beaujeu's edition of Apuleius' *Philosophica* (Paris, 1973), with its translation and rich commentary, is the one on which Fowler admittedly relies the most (p. 139). It might be useful to signal that a new critical edition of Apuleius' philosophical writings is in preparation for Oxford Classical Texts by Giuseppina Magnaldi (cf. C. Moreschini in *BMCR* 2017.03.31).

One of the major hindrances that the readers will probably find in *Imperial Plato* is the puzzling use of the Greek. Greek words are written in Greek letters in the body of the text, and transliterated in the footnotes. There are frequent exceptions to this rule, and the style of transliteration is not always consistent, not only with itself, but also "with the general rules of transliteration", as Fowler himself recognises at p. 2. The worry is that non-specialist readers, attracted by the transliterated Greek words, and specialists alike, will be disoriented when these same words are the objects of lengthy—and sometimes redundant—philological-semantic considerations in the footnotes. Another aspect of the work that might have been improved concerns the organisation of its content, particularly the possibility of connecting (through tables, internal references, etc.) the three texts, at least in their key-points, in order better to show the different perspectives that they offer on some philosophical questions. Possibly, this task is left to those to which this book is firstly targeted, arguably university students.

*Imperial Plato* is for the most part a nicely edited volume, complete with an extensive bibliography and indexes (*locorum, rerum, verborum*), and enriched by a selection of fascinating manuscript images. It is certainly to Fowler's credit to have produced and collected some usable translations of this material—an endeavour that will contribute to attract the attention of scholars and students on these too often overlooked writings. Fowler's zeal and his enthusiasm for the ancient texts he deals with is likely to spur the readers' desire to dig deeper into the study of imperial Platonism. As he points out (p. 3), the three works