Reviews


Ever since A. von Harnack published his collection of the fragments of Porphyry's *Contra Christianos* in 1916 (with Addenda in 1921), this edition has been regarded as authoritative, even to such a degree that in his 1993 Teubner edition of the fragments of Porphyry's work, A. Smith omitted those of *Contra Christianos* because, he said, these were available in von Harnack's reliable edition. But it is not reliable, because of two reasons: firstly, his criteria for inclusion (and exclusion) are controversial; and secondly, there is new evidence which Harnack did not know. These and other matters concerning Porphyry's treatise are discussed at length in the present volume which contains fifteen papers read at a conference at Paris in 2009. In this short review I can only briefly indicate the topics dealt with in this rich volume, without discussing them in any detail.

In a lucid introduction (in fact a detailed *Forschungsbericht*), Sébastien Morlet presents a status quaestionis in which he sketches all the problems still haunting the students of *Contra Christianos*. He rightly criticizes some recent attempts to improve upon Harnack, which sometimes include even more dubia than he did, and develops a sophisticated set of criteria for a new edition. André Laks compares Harnack's edition with Diels' *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* and shows how certain 'Vorentscheidungen' influence in a problematic way the classification and the presentation of the fragments. Ariane Magny argues that 'fragments' often are not what they seem to be (literal quotes) because they frequently have been distorted by the hidden (or not so hidden) agenda's of those who quote them, by inadequate translation (Porphyry's Greek into Jerome's Latin), by quoting from memory, and by corruption during the textual transmission history. She sets out what this implies for the presentation of a collection of fragments of
Porphyry's work against the Christians, but the results are rather meager (her new edition is in preparation). Olivier Munnich deals with the evidence from Macarius Magnes' *Monogenes*: Harnack adopted the fragments of the unnamed opponent of Christianity in that work as Porphyrian, a questionable decision (see my review of R. Goulet's new edition of Macarius in *VC* 58 (2004) 332-341), but Munnich shows that also Harnack's handling of this material (demarcation of the fragments, treatment of the biblical quotes etc.) is highly problematic. In the longest contribution to the volume (and the only one in Italian), Marco Zambon discusses Porphyry's knowledge of Origen. He deals in great detail with the knotty question of whether there were two Origens (a pagan Neoplatonist and a Christian theologian) or only one, to come hesitantly to the conclusion that there were two indeed. In ‘Porphyry’s Hellenism,’ Aaron Johnson shows convincingly that on the whole the Syrian Porphyry did not hold the Greeks in very high esteem. Porphyry’s ideas were formed according to a strictly philosophical grid, not an ethnically-rooted one. Bernard Pouderon discusses Porphyry’s (i.e., Macarius Magnes’ anonymous opponent’s) anti-Christian use of Exodus 22:27 in the LXX translation (‘Thou shalt not revile the gods’) in light of the ‘Wirkungsgeschichte’ of this biblical verse in early Judaism and Christianity. Richard Goulet analyses passages from Macarius’s *Monogenes* demonstrating the fundamental difference between Porphyry’s and Macarius’s views on God’s omnipotence and contextualizing this conflict in the intellectual history of late antiquity. He restates his position (already spelled out in his edition of Macarius) that the opponent’s arguments against Christianity do not represent the exact wording of Porphyry (so they are not ‘fragments’ in the technical sense of the word) but do reflect his ideas. John Granger Cook argues *inter alia* that in Porphyry’s view of salvation (the soul’s return to the gods) there was some value in the sacrifices in his society (at least the vegetarian variety) but for the philosopher there is a much better way, also better than belief in salvation through Jesus Christ. Luc Brisson neatly situates Porphyry’s polemics against the idea that Christ is the *Logos* within the Neoplatonic philosophical tradition. José Zamora analyses Porphyry’s rejection of the divinity of Jesus Christ (even though he calls him a *sophos kai theios anêr*).

The final part of the volume contains six essays on “la postériorité du *Contra Christianos*”. Volker Henning Drecoll investigates whether one can find traces of Porphyry’s polemics in the works of Gregory of Nyssa (who never mentions him), with (predictably?) “un très modeste résultat” (327):