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INNA KUPREEVA

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ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND ALCHEMY

VIANO (C.) (ed.) *L'Alchimie et ses racines philosophiques. La Tradition grecque et la tradition arabe*. (Histoire des Doctrines de l'Antiquité Classique 32.) Pp. 242. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2005. Paper, €28. ISBN: 978-2-7116-1754-8.
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This is a collection of papers presented at a seminar on the theories of matter in alchemy organised by CNRS at the centre 'Léon Robin' at the Sorbonne in 1996–1998 (the papers by Carusi, Marquet, Papathanassiou, Rudolph, Saffrey and Thillet appeared in issue 7 of *Chrysopoeia* [2000–3]). The aim is to set a perspective for a scholarly discussion of the impact of ancient philosophy on alchemy, recovering the links between the two traditions. The volume is divided into three thematic sections: 'Theories of matter in ancient Greece', 'Greek alchemy' and 'Arabic alchemy'.

Luc Brisson gives a useful summary of Plato's theory of the Receptacle and its criticism by Aristotle in *Phys.* IV 2. J.-B. Gourinat discusses the Stoic theory of matter, showing how Zeno develops Plato's concept of the Receptacle. He justly emphasises the importance of the distinction between materialism and corporealism, often lacking in the literature, though he strangely omits to mention Hahm's *Origin of Stoic cosmology* (1977) where this is well addressed. D. O'Brien shows that Plotinus' concept of matter as pure privation is based on a misreading of Plato, *Soph.* 258e2–3 as referring to the part incapable of partaking of Forms, which corresponds to matter (*τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὂν ἕκαστον μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον*, where the MSS reading defended by O'Brien against most modern editors is *ἑκάστου*). This raises an important question about the textual and doctrinal sources for Plotinus' reading of Plato.

Cristina Viano traces Platonic influences in alchemical texts by Zosimus, ps.-Olympiodorus and ps.-Stephanus that treat of the moist as the matter of metals, geometrical description of the structure of matter, and the role of the Demiurge. The approach is solid and promising: one wants to see more research in this direction, with attention to the lost streams within the Platonic tradition (e.g. corpuscular doctrines).

H.D. Saffrey proposes to emend the impossible *ἔχοντος* obelised in Mertens's 1995 edition of Zosimus' second *Authentic memoir* to *ἀκόντως*, which would make better sense and construe grammatically. Maria Papathanassiou discusses the treatise *De magna et sacra arte* by Stephanus of Alexandria (Ideler 1841, critical edition currently in preparation by Papathanassiou), whose author she identifies with both the eponymous Neoplatonic philosopher and a medical writer, analysing some philosophical principles underlying the alchemists' practice and pointing out parallels with a whole range of sources, from Presocratics to Church Fathers. Some minor errors: in *GC* 325b24, Aristotle says that Plato's indivisibles are planes, and Leucippus' solids, not vice versa (pp. 118–19 n. 36); the source for Democritus A 57 is Plutarch, not Aristotle; in the *Epinomis* (probably by Philip of Opus, not Plato), aether is the second layer after fire, unlike in Aristotle (pp. 122 n. 63 and 123 n. 67); *Definitiones medicae* and *Introductio* are considered to be pseudo-Galenic (pp. 122 n. 60, 127 n. 96). Andrée Colinet discusses the *Anonymous of Zuretti*, a Greek alchemical manual composed in southern Italy in the early fourteenth century (ed. A. Colinet, Budé, 2000), and situates its main ideas (generation of metals, four elements, chemical hylozoism, constitutive moistures) within the intellectual context of the school of Salerno. Given the goal of identifying contemporary sources, she does well

to avoid the problem of pseudepigraphy in citing parallels; but the further problem of the philosophical pedigree of this text *and* its sources remains.

Ulrich Rudolph examines three Arabic Presocratic doxographies, in Ps.-Ammonius and *Turba philosophorum* (both of which, he claims, are based on Hippolytus' *Refutatio*) and *K. Sirr al-ḫalîqah*, arguing that the Greek doxographical reports are modified to support the ideas of Islamic origin. The question of Ammonius' relation to the Arabic treatise might eventually be worth revisiting after more work is done on his school. Paola Carusi discusses the appropriation by tenth-century Islamic alchemy of Greek philosophical cosmology (Presocratic doctrine of opposites, Aristotelian doctrine of generation, particularly the embryology of *GA*, the ideas of *scala naturae* and world cycles) and Qur'anic cosmogony (interpreted in the literature of early Ismailism). Yves Marquet gives a survey of alchemy-related texts from *Rasâ'il Iḫwân al-Ṣafâ*, pointing out that the authors had no special interest in alchemy and noting affinities with the Jâbirian corpus in the analysis of the composition of natural bodies which, he suggests, might be explained by a common source of which the Ihwân and the Jâbirian writers, respectively, made different use. Pierre Thillet surveys the use of Greek proper names and terminology in the Arabic *K. al-rawâbi' li-Aflâṭûn* and its Latin translation.

The volume will be of use for students of ancient alchemy and historians of science and philosophy; it covers many subjects and gives a fairly good idea of the state and direction of research in this fascinating field. There are too many misprints, in French and Greek as well as in Arabic transliterations.

University of Edinburgh INNA KUPREEVA
inna.kupreeva@ed.ac.uk

PLATONISTS ON ARISTOTLE

KARAMANOLIS (G.E.) *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*. Pp. x + 419. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Cased, £50. ISBN: 978-0-19-926456-8.
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If all philosophy begins with wonder, all systematic philosophy – or at least all systematic Platonic philosophy – begins with assumptions. So runs the adage that seems to sweep through George E. Karamanolis' book like an undercurrent. The author makes his own view clear at the start: Plato's written work 'strongly resists systematization, however much interpreters, from antiquity to the present, try to impose it' (p. 11). Not only does the dialogue form of his writing encourage such misgivings, especially since Plato himself never appears as a proper character who might relate his views to us (the Letters are only referred to once in passing [pp. 129 and 129 n. 7], and K. appears to consider them spurious, though he does not bracket them in the *Index of Passages*), but so do the many discrepancies between the views seemingly advocated in the dialogues of which K. provides a handful of familiar examples, such as how the soul is divided differently in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Politicus* and the *Timaeus* (pp. 9–10, 19–20). (Perhaps surprisingly, this attitude does not appear to rest on any doubts about the chronology of Plato's writings; at least K. subscribes to the general division between earlier, middle and later dialogues [e.g. pp. 64, 116, 118].) What we have, then, are 'sophisticated literary monuments in which Plato raises basic philosophical problems and shows ways to argue about them' and