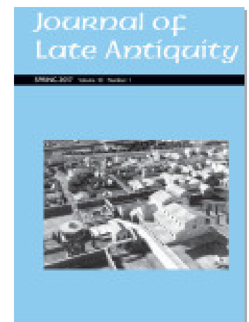
Porphyrios: Gegen die Christen (Contra Christianos). Fragmente, Testimonien und dubia mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen by Matthias Becker (review)



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president in Egypt! Long ago, in a series of lecture notes that Palladas seems to have known and that is still valuable for understanding ancient poetry, Aristotle (*Poet*. 1461a-b) criticized readers who fixated on one connotation of a word, to the exclusion of all others, and then absurdly blamed the poet when they failed to understand the point.

Cameron claims to have no idea what the "Four-time Sarmatian" epigram is about. However, he is quite certain that the *nine* identifiable tetrarchic allusions, and the two or three correspondences with the opinions of Lactantius (who similarly once refers to tetrarchic emperors with the mocking noun *Sarmatae* rather than the technically precise adjective *Sarmatici*), which together form a fully coherent critique of the emperor Galerius, are the result of miraculous coincidence.

Conclusion

It is true that eventually, after years of investigation, I was compelled by the evidence, some of it new, to reject some aspects of Cameron's early work on Palladas. But only *some* aspects. If I have not already made this clear, let me say now that his articles on this topic from the 1960s are brilliant and remain fundamental. My own work would have been much more difficult and would have taken much longer without them. In fact, it might not have been possible at all without them, and it certainly would have been inferior.

Why, then, has Cameron so strongly resisted the evidence that Palladas was active roughly between the Tetrarchs and the end of Constantine's reign, accepting what he can while still trying to preserve a post-Constantinian date? There is an important issue of historical interpretation at stake here. If it is determined that Palladas's latest epigrams were composed during Constantine's reign over the eastern provinces, then one must come to grips with the fact that they give an impression very much like the contemporary impression given by Eusebius. This is bound to be troubling to some. At least, it is bound to be troubling to those who would casually dismiss our best source for the years 324–337 whenever he is inconvenient, and then also rely on him whenever he is convenient. Palladas's vindication of Eusebius might be even more difficult for a few to accept after T. D. Barnes made some trenchant statements in 2011. Personally, while I find Barnes's account of Constantine to be convincing in most respects, I might demur at a few points. But this is a different conversation, and one's views on the general character of Constantine's reign must not be allowed to interfere with an impartial assessment of the date of Palladas.

[As this review was in press, the sad news broke of Alan Cameron's death, an immeasurable loss.]

Porphyrios: Gegen die Christen (Contra Christianos). Fragmente, Testimonien und dubia mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen

Matthias Becker
Texte und Kommentare 52.
Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2015.
Pp. x + 667. ISBN 9783110432152.

Reviewed by Aaron P. Johnson
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A mountain of scholarship on Porphyry's famous third-century polemic against Christianity has, from the nineteenth century to the present, continued to grow: the last seven years alone have seen at least four books dedicated to Porphyry's

religious thought, two international colloquia dedicated entirely to his *contra Christianos*, and dozens of articles (whether dedicated to the anti-Christian treatise or to his religious thought more generally). Because the *contra Christianos* survives in fragments of varying degrees of reliability, the constructions of different scholars predictably vary a great deal. A particularly significant culprit in fanning the diversity of interpretations has been the problematic nature of von Harnack's 1916 edition of the fragments. Under the inclusive label of "Fragmente und Exzerpte, Referate und Abgeleitetes," Harnack included verbatim quotations and paraphrases directly attributed to Porphyry, paraphrases or passing statements about Porphyry and other anti-Christians, and criticisms attributed to anonymous Greeks by Christian authors (such as Eusebius or Macarius Magnes). Critical assessments of Harnack's methodology began to be aired in the 1970s and have increased so that now only a few accept his collection without demur. And yet, in spite of the growing complaints about including anonymous material in an assessment of Porphyry's original work, post-Harnack collections of the fragments have only supplemented his collection with later discoveries rather than trimmed the collection down to the securely attested material. Becker's new collection, in the book under review here, has superseded all previously published collections in its truly critical methodology and commentary (although its minimalist approach was preceded by Muscolino's Salerno thesis, 2008–2009, which is generously made available online).

The book contains a lengthy introduction, the collection of fragments with German translation and commentary following each, and then an exhaustive bibliography and several useful indices. The introduction covers Porphyry's life and the composition of the *contra Christianos*; an extended account of the anti-Christian work that sets it within the framework of pagan perceptions of Christians as a threat; and an articulation of the methodology used in collecting and arranging the present collection of fragments. Porphyry composed the fifteen-book treatise at some point after he left Plotinus for Sicily and before the beginning of the Diocletianic persecution—any time between 270/271 and 303—and probably at Rome, though, as with the dating, certainty is impossible (22–27). The treatise drew upon a wide range of sources from biblical to Greek philosophical texts and early Christian authors such as Julius Africanus and especially Origen (28–32).

The lengthiest portion of Becker's introduction devotes itself to a presentation of the modern theory of threat communication (Bedrohungskommunikation) as an attempt to render more precise and careful the ongoing scholarly search for what Porphyry might have perceived as threatening in Christianity (32–41). Porphyry's perception of Christians saw them as threatening the religious (44–45, 57–61) and political order (48–57), an interpretation that, I would argue, should devote more attention to those passages which show the clear distance between Porphyry's philosophical position and the standard defense of civic loyalty. Ultimately, however, what may have most provoked Porphyry's sense of a Christian threat was the growing competition felt between pagan philosophers, especially Platonists, and Christians, whose numbers within the educated elite had

been growing, even as these developed intellectual positions akin to those of the Platonists (62–70). Porphyry's *Contra Christianos* sought to sharpen distinctions between Christians and pagan philosophers that were otherwise increasingly blurred in the third century (68). Several of the main argumentative themes of the fragments resonate with this concern. His rejection of allegoresis of biblical texts, his criticisms of Christian notions of the deity, his attack on the character of persons depicted in the Bible or more recent Christian history, and his historicizing approach to Christianity and the Bible all can function as a means of discrediting Christianity as an inherently weak or illegitimate philosophy, which was therefore closer to sophistry (71–85).

The present collection contains three categories of material based on a generally minimalist approach (neither an extreme minimalism nor maximalism, 95). Material given in direct speech or a verbal citation by their ancient or medieval sources are fragments proper, marked with an F; texts providing indirect speech or a concrete allusion to Porphyry and his work are testimonies, marked with a T; and material not naming Porphyry or the title of the work are dubia and marked with a D (97–100). These three categories of material are divided into three sections: the first contains a mix of fragments and testimonies which were explicitly assigned to a particular book of the *Contra Christianos* by their ancient source (or are closely related to texts that are so assigned—a point that might cause discomfort for some stricter minimalists); the second contains fragments and testimonies not assigned to a particular book and thus placed within general thematic categories (on the Old Testament; on the Gospels or evangelists; on Jesus and his sayings; on the apostles; and mixed content); the third section presents the doubtful texts in the chronological order of the sources from which they are drawn. Significantly the material from Macarius Magnes (totaling 51 fragments in Harnack's collection) is omitted from the collection, although several Macarian passages are quoted in the commentary as comparanda. In turn, Becker's collection contains new material recently discovered by Morlet, Goulet, and Riedweg. While Becker's presentation of texts does not constitute a critical edition, he uses the given text of the latest critical editions where possible and the notes in the commentary frequently present substantial textual issues that have prompted attempts at scholarly emendation (for example, the semantically and syntactically troublesome *diastolai* in a Methodius *dubium*; 440).

The commentary contains lemmata on individual words and phrases and focuses upon explicating their precise signification and relationship to other Porphyrian texts and earlier or later anti-Christian criticisms (especially comparanda from Celsus and Julian). Obviously, in a project such as this, many readers of the commentary will find details to quibble over: for instance, there is nothing directly in the texts as they stand to suggest that Porphyry's criticism of the conflict between Peter and Paul (reported in the epistle to the Galatians) targeted the veneration of these two saints at Rome (119–120). For the most part, however, the commentary is judicious and illuminating. One point that becomes clear as one reads Becker's commentary-notes is the recurrence of Celsus' arguments as comparanda; this

would seem overwhelmingly to confirm the suspicion that Origen's *Contra Celsum* provided a pervasive intertext in the *Contra Christianos*.

Becker provides a much firmer basis for reconstructions of Porphyry's anti-Christian arguments than any previous edition. While this reviewer wishes that Becker had included the Macarian material in the section of dubia, students of Porphyry may use this collection as the standard by which to evaluate any possible connections to Porphyry in the thought or wording of the later anonymous material. It replaces all previously published collections of the fragments: Harnack's, Muscolino's updated Harnack (in Italian translation), Berchman's, and that of the Spanish team headed by Ramos Jurado.

For the sake of full transparency, the reviewer notes that he has met the author and encouraged him in the present project.

Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics

Noel Lenski

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. x + 406.
ISBN 978-0-8122-4777-0.

Reviewed by David Woods
(University College Cork)

Lenski is familiar to students of the reign of Constantine I (306–337) as the author of a number of insightful papers on this period and the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (2006). Hence the present volume represents the mature work of someone who has immersed himself in the vast array of complicated primary materials—archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic as well as literary—and mastered the ever growing volume of secondary material before offering his own contribution to the field. The result is a volume that convincingly analyses the interactions between Constantine and the cities of the empire, focussing upon the emperor's varied efforts to convert these to Christianity and their different responses to the same. However, a warning is necessary. Lenski reserves his detailed treatment of the relations between Constantine and the two major imperial cities of Rome and Constantinople for another volume, so while they do occasionally receive mention they do not dominate in the way that one might otherwise expect.

The introduction attempts to justify what follows in the sort of tiresome theory that is best ignored. No one should let the pseudo-technical jargon ("pre-reflective knowledge"!) therein deter him or her from continuing into what is actually a well-written, highly accessible text. After the introduction, the book divides into four parts. The first part, "Constantine's Self-Presentation," consists of three chapters and focusses on the messages communicated from the emperor to the cities through various official channels. In chapter one, Lenski argues that Constantine's self-presentation went through four successive phases, emphasizing in turn his qualities as tetrarch, tyrannicide, champion of Christianity, and divine ruler. In chapter two, he argues that there were four constants in Constantine's self-presentation, which he identifies as Constantine's use of symbols of light, emphasis on the victorious nature of his rule, his constant receipt of divine favour, and his role as a member of a dynasty rather than as an isolated individual. Finally, in chapter three, Lenski analyses how Constantine presented himself to his Christian subjects in the various communications directed particularly at them.