

Book Reviews

In brief, this is a very useful conference report, and one that shows the virtues of co-operation among the various specialists of Antiquity.

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Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena: questions to be settled before the study of an author, or a text*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, vol. 61, Leiden and New York, E J Brill, 1994, pp. vii, 246, Nlg. 100.00, \$57.25 (90-04-10084-9).

Contrary to what its title suggests, this book is not a prescriptive argument about principles of hermeneutics but a study of Greek and Roman (and early Christian) views on what preliminary issues (philological, biographical) should be dealt with before actually reading the texts of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, medical writers such as Hippocrates and Galen, and the Bible. Thus the book is mainly about (some aspects of) ancient theories of reading and interpretation, although these are likely to reflect to a considerable extent what actually went on in the philosophical and medical schools of late antiquity. Drawing from a great variety of texts (mainly proems to ancient commentaries on Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates and Biblical texts, but also Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives and doctrines of the famous philosophers*, and Galen's works on his own writings), Mansfeld deals with the topics students were required to be aware of early in their studies, such as the life of the author, the systematic arrangement of his works and the order in which they are to be read, the theme or purpose of a particular text, its title, questions of authenticity, the style or character of the work, problems of unclarity, etc. These requirements were eventually schematized into "introductory patterns" (the so-called *schemata isagogica*) in Neoplatonist exegesis (particularly by Proclus), but Mansfeld's main thesis is that many of these issues were, in a more or less systematic way, already recognized and applied much earlier, e.g., by

Alexandrian philologists and Middle-Platonist commentators. He pays special attention to the notion of "intentional obscurity" of the ancient authors, which served as an appropriate starting point for what he calls "creative exegesis", or as a justification for thinkers such as Galen to read their own ideas into texts of earlier authorities such as Hippocrates.

This is a useful book on an interesting subject. Thanks to its abundant bibliography and its analytical *index nominum et rerum* guiding the (specialist) reader conveniently through a huge collection of references, quotations and enumerations, it will particularly serve as an instrument of research for future work on the history of ancient practices of interpretation. Although Mansfeld generously acknowledges earlier scholarship and meticulously records his indebtedness in the footnotes, it is not always clear to what extent he goes, or claims to go, beyond what other scholars have already achieved (my impression is that, as far as novelty is concerned, there is a considerable variation between the six chapters, which raises the question for what kind of audience the book is intended). As a result of the wealth of material, the argument itself is not always easy to follow, and it would have been preferable if more ancient passages had been placed in the footnotes or in the complementary notes at the end of the book, leaving room for a more compact statement of the main theses (which are not very conspicuous). The style displays a certain looseness (e.g., p. 26, third paragraph; there are some strange personal outpourings on p. 122, first paragraph, and p. 161, end of second paragraph), which sometimes makes for inaccuracy. Thus on p. 16, lines 7–8, it is unclear what "these scholars" refers to; on p. 25, line 6, "read" should be "heard"; on the same page, second paragraph, the words "or even intentionally obscure" go beyond Galen's text (cf. also p. 160), and Aristotle's insistence on clarity as a virtue of applies to the style of the orator, not just to any style; on p. 57 it is, of course, not correct that "Plato wrote nothing but dialogues"; and on p. 124, the first "pupils" should be "fellows" (*hetairoi*).

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Another weakness is Mansfeld's tendency to equate or relate without further argument items or concepts from different contexts whose similarity is not immediately evident; thus he persistently presents the preliminary issues "theme", "contents", "aim", and "purpose" under the same rubric, whereas it is hard to believe that *skopos*, *prothesis*, *hupothesis*, *prohairesis*, *telos* really mean the same thing. A systematic comparative semantic analysis of the major Greek and Latin technical terms would have been desirable (thus it is confusing to read on p. 35 that *hupothesis* means "dramatic setting", whereas it is translated on p. 19 and p. 21 as "theme", "subject"). On p. 23, n. 30, Plato's use of the word *tupos* in *Resp.* 379 a 5 ("sketch, outline") is not a good parallel for Proclus' use of it in the sense of "model". I noticed one important omission: on

p. 23, n. 34, a reference to Ps.-Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.3 (also lacking in the *index locorum*) would have been appropriate.

To sum up, one should be grateful to Mansfeld for making this interesting material accessible and drawing in such an illuminating way the historical lines running through this heterogeneous collection. However, one would have preferred him to make this subordinate to a more systematic and comprehensive argument about how all these views on preliminary issues affected the ancient practice of reading the texts of the great authorities in medicine and philosophy and, perhaps, how this still influences the way we read those texts today.

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