

assistance in gaining a quick foothold on aspects of Stoic thought, since all texts feature in translation. As such, it constitutes an ideal tool for teaching ancient Stoicism and making it a widely accessible subject.

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READING – SILENT OR ALOUD?

HEILMANN (J.) *Lesen in Antike und frühem Christentum. Kulturgeschichtliche, philologische sowie kognitionswissenschaftliche Perspektiven und deren Bedeutung für die neutestamentliche Exegese*. Pp. 707. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2021. Cased, €128. ISBN: 978-3-7720-8729-5.

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H.'s book on reading in antiquity and early Christianity is a strong work that deserves a wide readership. It changes influential assumptions about reading in antiquity, driving home its argument with slow circumspection. The book is H.'s *Habilitationschrift*, and the author demonstrates his intimate knowledge of the field, but also his ability to use a relevant range of theoretical approaches beyond classical New Testament exegesis. In research on ancient reading it has been common knowledge that ancient literature was read aloud. This is the key idea that H. challenges in a set of convincing analyses. Moreover, and persuasively, he offers analyses of several other empirical sources that demonstrate that individual, quiet reading was much more common than previously thought.

The book is clearly structured, with an extensive introduction that first treats the state of the art in research on reading in early Christianity, especially cultic reading, performance criticism and public or communal reading, then provides an overview of the long debate on the question of loud or silent reading in antiquity and a methodological discussion of shortcomings of previous research. Finally, it presents H.'s methodological approach and terminology. The remainder of the book is divided into two major parts, 'Grundlagen' and 'Anwendung der erarbeiteten Grundlagen zur Analyse spezifischer Textcorpora'. Then follows an 'Anhang' providing helpful lists of the evidence for silent reading, terms for reading objects, Greek and Latin terms for reading, abbreviations, lists of the empirical materials and, finally, the substantive list of references and helpful indexes. The first part, 'Grundlagen', presents an overview of the multitude of reading media in antiquity, the semantics of Greek and Latin reading terms, and a stimulating discussion of the typographical qualities of *scriptio continua* up against contemporary cognitive and neuroscientific studies of reading processes. In the second part of the study, 'Anwendung', H. presents and discusses empirical case studies first from ancient Judaism (the Hebrew Bible, LXX and selected Second Temple literature such as Philo and evidence from Qumran), then from the New Testament (Paul, Mark and the Apocalypse of John are given attention), before he summarises and discusses the methodological implications for exegesis and the consequences for research on the emergence of a New Testament canon. Then, he concludes on the status of reading in early Christian groups overall.

To bring out some of the main points, let us start with the ideas that it refutes. The thesis that ancient literature was predominantly read aloud hinges on a specific understanding of how *scriptio continua* could be, and was, decoded in antiquity. Most texts in antiquity were written in *scriptio continua*, i.e. without spaces between words and without markers of sentences. The idea that such writing could only be decoded if read aloud (identifying words and sentences as one was reading) has been prevalent in the field. Contemporary research on reading processes shows, however, that no voice is necessary to decode written texts – not even an interior voice or mumbling the words to oneself. The thesis that reading in antiquity was done aloud thus runs counter to how *scriptio continua* can be decoded by human visual and cognitive systems and how the reading of it can be, and was, trained. With training, headings, columns, paragraphs and other visual aids, *scriptio continua* can be decoded fully in individual, silent reading. H. shows, with a solid basis in careful, philological examinations of words for reading and the reception of texts. In Greek, the word used of the reception of texts, ἀκούω, is usually translated ‘to listen’, but H. shows how it also means simply ‘to understand’. It is thus not an argument in favour of the old thesis. The treatment of Hebrew Bible, Second Temple and New Testament sources is competent and clear. The consequences of H.’s work for the study of the emergence of the New Testament canon also deserve mention: that the early Christian movement must be seen as a reading-oriented and reading-based new religious movement from the outset. The importance of reading for the Christ-movement was not limited to the cult (‘Gottesdienst’), but can be seen in many contexts and forms. Early Christian meals cannot have been the only context of reception of all the early Christian literature (p. 300), so theology and the emerging church did not have a monopoly on reading (p. 539). H.’s simple calculation of how long it would take to read out Paul’s Letter to the Romans, for instance, is illuminating: roughly 90 minutes. Ancient social conventions make it quite unlikely that such letters would have been read out in totality in a communal setting (p. 299). Members of ancient Christian groups did not only encounter literature in a cultic or communal context (p. 288). Indeed, no constraints prevented ancient people from reading silently (p. 225); ancient books were craft products (‘Handwerk’) that, contrary to real luxury items, were likely also used and handled by others than the very elite (p. 287).

What is most exciting about this study is, first, the convincing way in which H. uses contemporary cognitive theories and experimental data on how the visual side of writing is processed cognitively. Second, the comprehensive analysis of Hebrew, Greek and Latin terms for the cultural technology of writing that on its own would be a valuable study for all who are interested in ancient literature and writing as a technology. H.’s careful analyses clearly demonstrate, in my assessment, that individual, quiet reading was a much more widespread activity in the ancient world than has been previously understood. I would add that data from one of my own areas of study, the Mesopotamian tradition, could likely support H.’s argument, even though the visual decoding of cuneiform is more difficult than *scriptio continua*. To add to H.’s discussion of documentary papyri and letters (p. 491), it is also more likely that empirical sources such as laundry bills, inscriptions, letters, economic transactions etc. – of which we have many different sorts from ancient Mesopotamia – would have been processed via silent reading (p. 491) than via loud reading. For historians of religion interested in ancient religious literature, H.’s work provides an essential background of support for the importance of literary analyses in addition to more classical historical work. The literary qualities of ancient works and the importance of individual, silent reading in the ancient world must be factored into our understanding to a much higher degree than previously assumed. H. concludes that close reading, reception aesthetics, narratology and other literary approaches are less anachronistic than the assumptions of the paradigm of reading in groups (pp. 487–9). Another result that deserves to be

highlighted is that items of early Christian literature such as the gospels were not only written for specific groups, but also with a broader reading audience in mind (pp. 487, 538). Individual, silent reading was not a marginal phenomenon in antiquity, a small island in a sea of orality (pp. 496, 538). The early Christ movement was from the outset based not only on books, but also on reading (p. 538).

The work has very few typos and omissions. As a historian of religion, I would have liked more engagement with media theory, theories of materiality and religion, and book history. Also, the terms relating to the ‘canonical’ and ‘extra-canonical’ should have been used more critically. But this should not detract from the praise that this work deserves; it leaves readers with a wish for further, detailed studies of reading and literarity in Jewish, Near Eastern and other ancient sources. H.’s basic approach of studying how a given language communicates about reading and reflects on reading, of analysing the metaphors and terms used of reading and of bringing out clearly the heterogeneity of ancient reflections and descriptions of reading practices and techniques breaks new ground. This is an important and original work.

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THE BIBLE AND GREEK LITERATURE

GMIRKIN (R. E.) *Plato’s Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts. Cosmic Monotheism and Terrestrial Polytheism in the Primordial History.* Pp. xvi + 344. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. Cased, £120, US\$160. ISBN: 978-1-032-02082-2.

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This is the third monograph-length study by G. on the issue of possible Greek influence on the Hebrew Bible. The current book continues and expands the theory first argued in his 2006 study *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* and reaffirmed in the 2017 monograph *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*. Both studies proposed that the Pentateuch in its Greek and Hebrew form was authored in Alexandria c. 270 BCE. Such a date is necessary as G. bases most of his argument on the premise that Greek literature – and especially Plato – has significantly contributed to the shape of the Bible. This influence has seldom been doubted for later books of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. parts of Proverbs, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon), and modern scholarship tends to agree that the creation account of Genesis 1 may allude to concepts also known from Ionian philosophy, but whether these points of contact are a result of influence or simply signs of an Eastern Mediterranean *koinê* is highly debated.

On the basis of a preconceived conclusion, G. embarks on a detailed comparison of the biblical creation accounts with Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Especially the *Timaeus* has long been correlated with Genesis 1–3, and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.22, 150:4) reports a saying of the Neo-Platonist Numenius: ‘For what is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek’. As a result, Plato’s work is generally included in any discussion of ancient creation accounts (see most recently P. Schäfer, *Die Schlange war klug: Antike*