

ANDREA FALCON (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016, xvi+512 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-26647-6 (hardback), 978-90-04-31540-2 (e-book).

A common contemporary understanding of Aristotle—but one that extends back at least to Dante's characterization of him as '*il maestro di color che sanno*'—is summarized by the eminent mid-twentieth-century historian of philosophy John Herman Randall, Jr.:

remain[ing] the aloof, impartial observer, not deeply implicated in the struggles of that [Greek] world, . . . his great aim in life was to understand. . . . His crabbed documents exhibit. . . the passionate search for passionless truth. . . . There is in him a tremendous energy, an indefatigable industry, a sheer power of thought, that fascinates anyone who takes the trouble to understand what he is doing (John Herman Randall, Jr., *Aristotle* [New York: Columbia University Press], 1).

Is Randall's Aristotle the "real Aristotle"? Or must we look elsewhere? Serious study of this splendid anthology will surely lead the reader to suspect that such questions are misplaced. If ever there were a philosopher the real life of whose thought exists in the various, diverse readings of him, Aristotle must be a prime candidate.

Of course, part of the reason for this situation lies in the fortune—or misfortune—of his *corpus*. On the one hand, there were Aristotle's "published" works, now only extant in fragments but once famously characterized by Cicero as '*flumen orationis aureum*' (*Acad.* 2.119). On the other hand, we have the 'crabbed documents' referred to by Randall. These are the works that constitute the extant *corpus*; they are what Cicero called *commentaria* and what contemporary scholars now often term the 'school treatises'. To those who (unlike us) knew both groups of works, the contrast must have been striking. But just the *corpus* that we do have makes it understandable why there seemed to be, in antiquity, a felt need to explain its shape and form. An account from the late first century B.C./early first century A.D. (augmented by Plutarch's later *Life of Sulla* 26) is what Randall terms the 'romantic story of Strabo' (Randall, *Aristotle*, 23), found in Strabo's *Geography* (Str. 13.1.54). According to the story, at the death of Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor as Peripatetic scholar, the school treatises, in some form, were

bequeathed to one Neleus, who hid them away. They remained in the possession his descendants, who eventually sold them to a famous bibliophile, Apellicon of Teos, in the first century B.C. The works were then brought by the Roman general Sulla, with the rest of Apellicon's library, to Rome, where they received 'some form of scholarly attention by the grammarian Tyrannio [who, incidentally worked on Cicero's library], who passed them on to Andronicus of Rhodes' (Myrto Hatzimichali, 'Andronicus of Rhodes and the Construction of the Aristotelian Corpus', 81 in the present volume). Hatzimichali points out that 'the most extraordinary claim made in Strabo's story is that Aristotle's books were unavailable to the Peripatetics after Theophrastus and this compromised their level of philosophizing' (ibid., 82). She also notes that this claim is one feature of Strabo's story which is particularly open to scholarly doubt and concludes that 'the question of precisely which Aristotelian texts were available in the Hellenistic period, and where, cannot be settled with full certainty, especially since availability does not imply easy access, interest, and use. Moreover, our evidence suggests that different transmission histories apply to different texts, depending on the interest of readers at various parts of the Hellenistic world' (ibid., 83).

This rich volume addresses the controversial issue of the extent and nature of Aristotle's influence in the Hellenistic era in the first of its three major parts, *The Hellenistic Reception of Aristotle*. Perhaps because of the relative dearth of hard evidence, this is the shortest of the three parts. It consists of three chapters: 'Aristotle and the Hellenistic Peripatos: From Theophrastus to Critolaus', by David Lefebvre; 'Aristotle and the Garden', by Francesco Verde; and 'Aristotle and the Stoa' by Thomas Bénatouil.

The second part is entitled *The Post-Hellenistic Engagement with Aristotle* and consists of two subdivisions, *The Peripatetic Tradition* and *Beyond the Peripatetic Tradition*. The former subdivision contains five chapters, beginning with the contribution of Hatzimichali from which I quoted above and continuing as follows: 'Aristotelianism in the First Century BC', by the editor of the volume, Andrea Falcon; 'Peripatetic Ethics in the First Century BC: The Summary of Didymus', by Georgia Tsouni; 'Aristotelianism in the Second Century AD: Before Alexander of Aphrodisias' by Inna Kupreeva; and 'Alexander of Aphrodisias', by Cristina Cerami. From the second subdivision, *Beyond the Peripatetic Tradition*, we have seven chapters: 'The Reception of Aristotle in Antiochus and Cicero' by John Dillon; 'The Appropriation of Aristotle in the Ps-Pythagorean Tradition' by Angela Ulacco; 'The Reception of Aristotle in Middle Platonism: From Eudorus of Alexandria to Ammonius Saccas', by Alexandra Michalewski; 'Galen's Reception of Aristotle', by R. J. Hankinson; 'Plotinus' Reception of Aristotle' by Sara Magrin; 'The Ancient Biographical Tradition on Aristotle' by Tiziano Dorandi; and 'Aristotle in the Aëtian *Placita*' by Jaap Mansfeld.

The third major part of this volume, *Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, contains eight chapters. Not surprisingly, this part is the most wide-ranging both chronologically and in other respects. It begins with the post-Plotinian Neoplatonist encounters with Aristotle and concludes with his reception by early Christian writers (from Clement of Alexandria to Nemesius of Emesa). Its eight chapters are as follows: 'Porphyry and the Aristotelian Tradition', by Riccardo Chiaradonna; 'An Intellectual Perspective on Aristotle: Iamblichus the Divine', by Jan Opsomer; 'Themistius', by Arnaud Zucker; 'Syrianus and Proclus on Aristotle', by Pieter d'Hoine; 'Ammonius and the Alexandrian School', by Michael Griffin; 'Simplicius and Philoponus on the Authority of Aristotle', by Pantelis Golitsis; '*Aristoteles Latinus*: The Reception of Aristotle in the Latin World', by Christophe Erismann; and 'Early Christian Philosophers on Aristotle', by George Karamanolis.

The volume is prefaced by 'Acknowledgments', 'Notes on Contributors', and a brief 'Introduction' by the editor, Andrea Falcon, in which he discusses the periodization underlying the volume. At the end of the volume there are indices *nominum* and *locorum*. There is no general bibliography, since each chapter concludes with its own list of references. I note the welcome fact that, with the exception of several senior scholars such as Dillon, Hankinson, and Mansfeld, most of the contributors are early- or mid-career scholars. Thus, this anthology provides compelling evidence that the future of Aristotle studies is in good hands.

The contents of this volume are too deep, detailed, and diverse to admit of any brief summary. However, what one might term the trajectory of the reception of Aristotle in antiquity is discernible in its several chapters. Along this trajectory are at least three points of particular significance. To begin with, at the close of the Hellenistic period (during which Aristotle and his works remain, at least from our perspective, in something of a haze), there is the renaissance of the first century B.C., to which I have already alluded. How much this had to do with elements of Strabo's 'romantic' story and the textual work of Andronicus is uncertain. Renewed interest in Aristotle extended beyond the Peripatetic tradition; and Falcon claims that 'the rise and gradual affirmation of the idea that there are ancient authorities and that Aristotle is one of them is now considered an important factor in the return of his writings' (Falcon, 'Introduction', 2). This development did not lead to a unified interpretation of Aristotle. Rather, again according to Falcon, it resulted in 'a number of different, and often competing, interpretations based on a selective reading of his writings and responding to essentially post-Aristotelian concerns' (Falcon, 'Aristotelianism in the First Century BC', 102).

A second major point of the reception of Aristotle in antiquity surely is the work of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who 'presents himself as a teacher appointed to a state-endowed chair of Aristotelian philosophy by the emperors

Septimius Severus and Antoninus Caracalla (*On Fate* 1.18–2.2) (Cristina Cerami, ‘Alexander of Aphrodisias’, 160). This places his *floruit* in the late-second and early-third centuries A.D. Cerami notes that ‘Alexander designs his own reading of Aristotle to answer not only competing philosophical systems [e.g., Stoicism, in his discussion of the determinism–responsibility issue in the *De Fato* and elsewhere], but also alternative interpretations of Aristotle’ (ibid., 161). She believes—rightly, in my view—that Alexander ‘is without doubt the most prominent figure in the reception of Aristotle in antiquity’ (ibid.) and that ‘it is not inappropriate to speak of Alexander’s philosophical project as a form of Neo-Aristotelianism’ (ibid.). Alexander is not only an important philosopher in his own right, working within the Aristotelian tradition, but is also the *fons et origo* of the ancient tradition of commentary on Aristotle—although Aspasius’ slightly earlier commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the earliest extant commentary on any of Aristotle’s works (see Inna Kupreeva, ‘Aristotelianism in the Second Century AD’, 138ff.). Alexander’s commentaries (some of which are now lost) serve as important sources for later ancient commentators, down to Simplicius and John Philoponus in the sixth century A.D.; and his interpretation of Aristotle was known and used by Plotinus in the third century A.D. (see Sara Magrin, Plotinus’ Reception of Aristotle’, 258 ff.). Long before Ibn Rushd (Averroës) (1126–1198) became “the Commentator”, Alexander surely merited that title.

The third juncture in the trajectory of the reception of Aristotle in antiquity is more of an interval than a point. Although, in some sense, it begins with Plotinus as the founder of Neoplatonism, it is the contention of this volume that its real beginnings lies with his successors—in particular, Porphyry, who initiates both the late-antique tradition of Neoplatonist commentary on Aristotle and the conception of a particular philosophical concord between the thought of Plato and that of Aristotle. Of course, pre-Plotinian Platonism had encountered Aristotle. Those encounters tended to oscillate between the poles of accommodation, as in the unacknowledged use of Aristotelian terminology and doctrine by the so-called Middle Platonist Alcinous in his *Handbook of Platonism* (*Didaskalikos*) (second century A.D.), and explicit rejection of Aristotle’s thought as incompatible with that of Plato, as in the ‘confessional anti-Aristotelianism’ (to use the phrase of Riccardo Chiaradonna) of Atticus (also second century A.D.), ‘the virulence of [whose] critique was not based on a direct reading of the Aristotelian corpus; rather it was a reaction to readings of exegetes who attempted to unify Plato and Aristotle into a single philosophical position’ (Alexandra Michalewski, ‘The Reception of Aristotle in Middle Platonism’, 228).

Plotinus’ reaction to Aristotle seems to lie somewhere between these poles. It might be maintained that his use of Aristotle’s thought, while critical to the point where he might be considered, as by Karl Praechter,

‘the last anti-Aristotelian Platonist’ (Riccardo Chiaradonna, ‘Porphyry and the Aristotelian Tradition’, 322), was nonetheless probing and constructive. In the estimation of Michalewski, ‘it is only with Plotinus that an in-depth engagement with Aristotle and the Peripatetic commentaries on his works entered the Platonic *cursus*’ (Michalewski, ‘Aristotle in Middle Platonism’, 234). It is the contention of several authors in this volume that the true heir of the concordist reading of Plato and Aristotle initiated by Ammonius [Saccas—the teacher of Plotinus] was Porphyry rather than Plotinus’ (Michalewski, *ibid.*). Chiaradonna argues that ‘after Plotinus it was simply impossible to rehearse the old pre-Plotinian harmonizing approach to Aristotle [and Plato]... it was no longer enough to say that some Aristotelian theories are prefigured in Plato. Plotinus’ engagement with Aristotle and the Peripatetic commentators established a much higher standard for debates about Plato and Aristotle’ (Chiaradonna, ‘Porphyry and the Aristotelian tradition’, 337). According to Chiaradonna, Porphyry took up this challenge in his concordist project ‘through an in-depth exegetical work that crucially relies on the previous Peripatetic commentators. After Plotinus, it was necessary to make sense of Aristotle in his own terms in order to properly integrate his philosophy into Platonism’ (*ibid.*).

The following chapters in the third part of this volume show the variety of shapes that this project assumed among the Neoplatonist commentators. Thus, toward the beginning, we have Iamblichus ‘the Divine’, ‘who was convinced that Aristotle’s works contained the essence of Plato’s ontology, as Aristotle was an heir to the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition. In order to bring these nuggets of wisdom and hidden layers to light, he resorted to his famous intellectual contemplation’ (Jan Opsomer, ‘An Intellectual Perspective on Aristotle’, 355). And, at the end of the late antiquity, we have Simplicius, who ‘endeavoured to establish Aristotle not only as an unshakable authority in philosophy of language and natural philosophy but also as a philosopher who fully shared with Plato knowledge of the divine truth (i.e. the truth about the first realities of the cosmos: the Soul, the Intelligence, and the One)’ (Pantelis Golitsis, ‘Simplicius and Philoponus on the Authority of Aristotle’, 419). Golitsis argues convincingly that Simplicius self-consciously uses Aristotelian commentary as a means of refuting the deviations of his Christian contemporary (and former fellow-student of Ammonius, son of Hermias) John Philoponus from this ‘divine truth’—as, for example, in Philoponus’ arguments against the eternity of the world.

The life of Aristotle’s thought extends, of course, far beyond the chronological boundaries of this volume. And the various engagements of later thinkers with that thought are perhaps even more diverse in content and form than those instances studied in this volume. To consider just several examples from contemporary philosophy, Aristotle’s thought has played a significant role in finitistic and intuitionistic philosophy of mathematics,

in the renaissance of virtue ethics, and in the development of functionalistic theories of mind. This outstanding “Companion” should prove of great interest to anyone who has studied or encountered the Philosopher, whatever the nature of that study or encounter. Although the reader’s particular background and preoccupations will mean that some chapters hold more interest for him or her than others, all the contributions are just that—scholarly, thoughtful, and useful contributions to our understanding of Aristotle and his place in the intellectual history of our world.

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