

ALEXANDER BRUNGS – GEORGI KAPRIEV – VILEM MUDROCH (eds.), *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters. Band 1: Byzanz. Judentum (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie)*. Basel: Schwabe Verlag 2019. 362 + xxvii pp. – ISBN: 978-3-7965-2623-7 (Hardback: €160)

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This first volume in the subseries “Philosophie des Mittelalters” is a most welcome addition to the ongoing revision of the standard reference: *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. It consists of two disparate parts: the first section, comprising the bulk of the work, presents a chronological survey of Byzantine philosophy. It ties into and continues chapter 13 of the previous volume, which discusses early Byzantine thinkers until John of Damascus.¹ The second section gives a critical appraisal of the history and the historiography of medieval Jewish philosophy. It supplements chapter 7 and 15 of the previous volume, which review philosophy in Hellenistic and Rabbinic Judaism.² Each section closes with a rich bibliography, which is – with few exceptions – confined to scholarly works penned in Western European languages (cf. p. xxv). The peculiarity of the volume is that the two parts do not share any substantial connection (p. xxi); their juxtaposition is motivated by their respective otherness vis-à-vis medieval Latin philosophy. Byzantine and medieval Jewish philosophy are incorporated here into the historiographical metanarrative of the *Grundriss* series that revolves around the history of European philosophy.

The Byzantine section aims at giving a complete overview of philosophy in the Byzantine Empire (p. xvii). This broad scope evokes the methodological difficulty to determine when the Byzantine Empire came into being. While there exists the general consensus that the empire ended in 1453, there exists no consent for its beginning. The authors choose the seventh century as the demarcation line and identify Maximos Confessor as the first Byzantine philosopher (pp. 5f, 23). The survey traverses 800 years of intellectual history and closes with Georgios Scholarios and Matthaïos Kamariotes in the fifteenth century.

1. CHRISTOPH RIEDWEG – CHRISTOPH HORN – DIETMAR WYRWA, *Die Philosophie der Antike. Vol. 5/3: Die Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*. Basel 2018, pp. 2250–2322.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5/1, pp. 707–766 and Vol. 5/3, pp. 2431–2444.

The chronological survey is prefaced with an introduction that considers key aspects of medieval Greek philosophy. Important characteristics are the unbroken chain of the transmission of classical texts, the emphasis on commentary work, and the circumstance that higher education was not institutionalized in Byzantium. Arguably, the latter inhibited the development of school traditions and, concomitantly, facilitated the image that philosophical positions are private affairs. As a result, one can assume – *cum grano salis* – that “there existed as many philosophies as there existed philosophers in Byzantium” (p. 8). The lack of an institutional platform is also said to have curtailed the independence of philosophy as a disciplinary domain and to have led to its frequent subordination to theology (p. xxiii). At the same time, the (relative) autonomy of philosophy is vindicated, although the reader is not given any definitive argument in support of this claim (pp. 8f). Much ink has been spilt over the issue of autonomy;³ recently, the very notion of “Byzantine philosophy” has come under attack.⁴ Instead of entering this debate, the introduction delineates Byzantine philosophy with reference to its intrinsic connection to (a vaguely defined notion of) historicity, on the one hand, and to the key concepts of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, on the other (p. 9). Philosophy is characterized as the study of the personalized reality (ὑπόστασις) and of the dynamics of being (οὐσία) (pp. 9f). The introduction closes with a short but useful historiographical review of scholarly milestones in Byzantine philosophy (pp. 11f).

Each Byzantine author is described with regard to his life and work; occasionally, his influence is sketched as well.

The entries were penned by GEORGI KAPRIEV, TZOTCHO BOIADJIEV, JOHN A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, and KATERINA IERODIAKONOU, re-

3. See, among others, LINOS BENAKIS, Die theoretische und praktische Autonomie der Philosophie als Fachdisziplin in Byzanz. In: MONIKA ASZTALOS – JOHN E. MURDOCH – ILKKA NIINILUOTO, Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy, Vol. 1 (Acta Philosophica Fennica 48). Helsinki 1990, pp. 223–227, KATERINA IERODIAKONOU – GEORGE ZOGRAFIDIS, Early Byzantine Philosophy. In: LLOYD P. GERSON (ed.), The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity, Vol. 2. Cambridge 2010, pp. 843–868, 1162–1170, at pp. 844–846, MICHELLE TRIZIO, Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project. Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales 74.1 (2007) pp. 247–294, at pp. 277–287.

4. See DIMITRI GUTAS – NIKETAS SINIOSSOGLOU, Philosophy and ‘Byzantine Philosophy’. In: ANTHONY KALDELLIS – NIKETAS SINIOSSOGLOU (eds.), The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium. Cambridge 2017, pp. 271–295, who argue that philosophy did not exist in Byzantium due to the predominance of orthodoxy, which obstructed free scientific inquiry.

spectively, who are all known experts in the field. The chronological survey begins with pre-byzantine, i.e., patristic traditions (Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysios) before starting in earnest with Maximos Confessor and John of Damascus. The survey quickly passes over the iconoclast controversy (pp. 32f) before zooming in on Photios, who is presented as the originator of “Byzantine classicism” (p. 34). This pregnant term is borrowed from PAUL LEMERLE and denotes the appreciation of the Hellenic (pagan) heritage within the Byzantine (Christian) framework.⁵ Photios is also said to have shaped the theocentric thought of later generations (p. 45). KAPRIEV reproduces here his earlier approach of distinguishing two main trends in Byzantine philosophy, namely a theocentric and an anthropocentric trajectory (pp. 7, 53–70).⁶ Symeon the New Theologian and his disciple Niketas Stethatos represent the former, while Michael Psellos, John Italos, and Eustratios of Nicaea belong to the latter camp. The opposition revolved around the status of discursive thought and whether it can facilitate knowledge of God. The theocentric faction is assumed to have doubted the usefulness of intellectualizing tendencies and, in particular, of discursive thought and thereby to have presented a systematic criticism of philosophy (p. 55).

Subsequent chapters are structured by centuries. The thirteenth century saw the formation of a cultural patriotic consciousness, which emerged as a reaction to the Latin sack and occupation of Constantinople (1204) (p. 79). This tendency can be clearly seen in the work of Theodore II Laskaris. Moreover, the thirteenth-century patriarchs John XI Bekkos and Gregorios II intensified the disputes over church union with the papacy (as well as the filioque), while Gregorios Sinaïtes laid the groundwork for the hesychast controversy, which erupted in the fourteenth century. Theodore Metochites’ scholarship is presented as a turning point, as he established a classicist and “secular” humanism that strove to operate independently from Christian theology (p. 118).

Most attention is paid to the last two centuries of Byzantium, which were dominated by quarrels over the rapprochement (or antagonism) with the Latin West. Philosophers are categorized according to their sympathies regarding the hesychast controversy and Palamite theology. It is conspicuous

5. PAUL LEMERLE, *Le premier humanisme byzantin: Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle* (Bibliothèque byzantine 6). Paris 1971, pp. 177–204.

6. Cf. GEORGI KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz*. Würzburg 2005, pp. 201–223.

that the largest section in the book so far is devoted to Gregorios Palamas (pp. 145–154). Earlier sections (pp. 17, 25, 97, 119f) had already anticipated the climactic significance of hesychasm. Palamite thinkers such as John VI. Kantakouzenos and Philotheos Kokkinos are juxtaposed in opposition to anti-Palamite philosophers such as Barlaam of Calabria and John Kyparissiotis. After the canonization of Palamism in the middle of the fourteenth century, the controversy shifted towards the status of Thomist philosophy. Byzantine Thomists, such as Demetrios Kydones or Andreas Chrysoberges, favored Thomas Aquinas' epistemological restraint over hesychast claims to the beatific vision. Concomitantly, they promoted the prospect of church union. Against them stood the anti-Thomist faction, which opposed church union as much as it refuted the possibility to approach God by rational means. The final chapter covers the fifteenth century and the debate over the significance of Platonism, epitomized by the scholarship of Gemistos Plethon and Georgios Scholarios. The controversy is rightly portrayed as a reaction to the reception of Thomist thought in Byzantium and, more broadly speaking, pertains to the controversy over church union (p. 197).

The second, much shorter section of the book (pp. 301–351), is authored by YOSSEF SCHWARTZ, who discusses prominent characteristics of medieval Jewish philosophy and situates the evidence in the wider context of contemporary approaches to the historiography of medieval Judaism. In contrast to Latin, Byzantine, and even Arabic philosophy, Jewish philosophy is linguistically and geographically not delineable (p. 308). Its polycentric character is a function of the diasporic setting, the lack of institutionalized authority, and the exposure to different cultural milieus. Jewish philosophy is said to have emerged – for the first time – in the ninth century during the cultural renaissance of the early Abbasid caliphate (pp. 308–310, 324). In terms of content, Jewish philosophy was virtually indistinguishable from Arabic philosophy. Only formal aspects, such as the use of the Judeo-Arabic script and particular metaphors, revealed the Jewish background (p. 310). Hebrew steadily developed into a scientific language and by the twelfth century functioned as a link between Arabic and Latin (p. 325). The migration and expulsion of Jewish thinkers led to new societal phenomena in the domain of medicine, education, and political philosophy (pp. 328f). SCHWARTZ not only surveys the main historical developments (esp. pp. 324–340) but also reviews various historiographical approaches, such as the view that it was Jewish philosophy that formed the foundation on which Western modernity and secularism is based (pp. 320f). He contex-

tualizes this view by pointing to its implicit apologetic tendency that seeks to integrate Jewish philosophy into the metanarrative of an occidental, European historiography (p. 323) – a tendency that admittedly reverberates in the present volume (p. 324). Instead of adopting a linear metanarrative, SCHWARTZ promotes an “atomizing” methodological approach, which appreciates the linguistic varieties and the complexities of disjoint, polycentric communities, whose examination requires a range of social and cultural “micro-histories” (pp. 314, 324, 330, 334 *passim*).

The two sections of the book differ not only with regard to size but also in terms of methodology. The discussion of philosophy in medieval Judaism is at least as much concerned with concrete philosophical developments as with methodological and hermeneutical concerns. In contrast, the survey of Byzantine philosophy gives a linear, coherent, and chronologically stringent prosopographical account. If the task of a handbook is to present a uniform and focused exposition of its subject matter, then the section on Byzantium has achieved this. As a result of this focused effort, the survey largely neglects alternative interpretations on the discussed authors.⁷ What is more, the linear narrative is evocative of a teleological metanarrative that aims at the great controversies of the Palaeologan age, especially the hesychast debate and Byzantine Thomism. Moreover, it insinuates that there existed only frank and explicit philosophical teachings in Byzantium. Yet it is important to appreciate the practice of dissimulation, which was a didactic device as well as an effective rhetorical technique to conceal political incorrectness.⁸ For instance, the numerous trials during the eleventh

7. For instance, it could be pointed out that the nature of the early Arian controversy has been much debated and that the view that Areios was disinterested in soteriology (pp. 13f) has been challenged. See ROBERT GREGG – DENNIS GROH, *The Centrality of Soteriology in Early Arianism*. *Anglican Theological Review* 59 (1977) pp. 260–278, *IDEM*, *Early Arianism – A View of Salvation*. Philadelphia 1981. Likewise, the view that Symeon the New Theologian dismissed discursive thought and favored a merely ‘mystical’ approach to the knowledge of God (p. 55) has been contested. See ISTVÁN PERCZEL, *The Bread, the Wine and the Immaterial Body: Saint Symeon the New Theologian on the Eucharistic Mysteries*. In: ISTVÁN PERCZEL – RÉKA FORRAI – GYÖRGY GERÉBY (eds.), *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy: Issues of Doctrinal History in East and West from the Patristic Age to the Reformation* (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Series 1, 35). Leuven 2005, pp. 131–156.

8. See ANTHONY KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Greek Culture and the Roman World). Cambridge 2007, pp. 202–209 and *IDEM*, *Byzantine philosophy inside and out: Orthodoxy and dissidence in counterpart*. In: BÖRJE BYDÉN – KATERINA IERODIAKONOU (eds.), *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy* (Papers and monographs

and twelfth centuries can be seen as evidence for suppressed philosophical currents in Byzantium.⁹ In this regard, it is worthwhile to consider the importance of Origen, without whom “the whole Eastern Church tradition is unthinkable” (p. 13). Given the sixth-century condemnations of Origenism and the recurrent Origenist accusations in later centuries, the reader may wonder whether there existed a clandestine Origenism that occasionally resurfaced. In this regard it may be worthwhile to review the assumption (made in both sections of the book, pp. xxiii, 7f, 339) that one cannot speak of philosophical schools of thought without an institutionalized framework akin to Western universities. Finally, the two sections differ with regard to their appreciation of the Near Eastern context. While SCHWARTZ pays due attention to the indebtedness of Jewish thinkers to the flowering of Arab philosophy, KAPRIEV et al. do not present parallels or comparisons with Syriac or Arabic sources. It is revealing that Symeon Seth (d. c. 1112) finds no mention. The only remarks on Eastern influence pertain to Bessarion’s and Georgios Amiroutzes’ use of Averroës (pp. 211, 224) and the assumption that the hesychast practice of navel-gazing derived from Sufism (p. 128).

The approach to orient the history of Byzantine philosophy towards the background of Scholastic philosophy resembles KAPRIEV’s earlier work.¹⁰ In addition to the comparative approach with the Latin West, both works agree on the time frame (seventh to fifteenth centuries), the preeminent importance of Maximos Confessor, Photios, Gregorios Palamas, as well as the underrepresentation of the iconoclast controversy and of developments in the eleventh/twelfth centuries. These limitations do not diminish the considerable achievement of this erudite handbook but merely exemplify the hard authorial choices that are a function of editorial constraints and our limited access to the source material. Accordingly, the emphasis on philosophy during the Palaeologan period does not only faithfully reflect the series’ orientation towards Latinity but also the greater availability of critical editions.

from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 1). Athens 2012, pp. 129–153, at pp. 132–143.

9. See MICHELE TRIZIO, *Trials of Philosophers and Theologians under the Komnenoi*. In: ANTHONY KALDELLIS – NIKETAS SINIOSSOGLOU (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*. Cambridge 2017, pp. 462–475.

10. KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz*.

Finally, the different methodological approaches to Byzantine and medieval Jewish philosophy generate an instructive contrast that well illustrates the diversity of possible approaches and reminds the reader that even the best handbook can only give a partial picture.¹¹

Keywords

Byzantine philosophy

11. The following errata should be addressed in a second edition: p. 13: etliche origenischen Positionen instead of etliche origenische Positionen; p. 41: κατ' ουσίαν instead of κατ' οὐσίαν; p. 43: σύνοδος καθ' ἔνωσις φυσική instead of σύνοδος καθ' ἔνωσιν φυσικήν; p. 44: keiner solcher Bestimmung instead of keiner solchen Bestimmung; p. 84: Blemmydes verdanken sich instead of Blemmydes verdanken wir; p. 95: ἀντιρρητικός τῶν instead of ἀντιρρητικός τῶν; μόνος instead of μόνος; p. 96: aus einer anderen Verständnis instead of aus einem anderen Verständnis; p. 118: Σιναίτης instead of Σιναίτης; p. 209 Misra instead of Mistra.