



## Form and Matter in Porphyry and Iamblichus

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### ABSTRACTS

**Yury Arzhanov** (Paris Lodron Universität Salzburg)

*Porphyry's notion of matter in the light of recent discoveries: The treatise On Principles and Matter preserved in Syriac*

The recent publication of the treatise *On Principles and Matter* preserved in Syriac provided us with a new source for Porphyry's notion of matter. Though the text has been preserved anonymously, there is little doubt that it derives from the most famous disciple of Plotinus. Large portions of it find close parallels in the section *De Silva* of the Latin commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Calcidius and thus give good reasons for reconsidering Calcidius' dependence on Porphyry. The Syriac treatise provides us with a number of lengthy quotations from the Middle Platonists Atticus and Severus, but also suggest Porphyry's own notion of prime matter. The text speaks of the two co-equal principles, matter and Demiurge, which also appear as an active and a passive principle in the world. This notion should be contextualized within Porphyry's predominant view of one principle (i.e. the One) above the active and passive principles and shows the influence of Middle Platonic views on Plotinus' disciple.

**Michael Griffin** (University of British Columbia)

*Attention and Inspiration: Porphyry and Iamblichus on Living in Intelligible and Material Worlds*

For Porphyry, a human being must attend either to contemplating the intelligible Forms or to engaging the sensory world embedded in matter: for "we pay attention not with a part of ourselves, but with the whole of ourselves" (*De Abst.* 1.41). Porphyry goes on to criticize certain *barbaroi* who assert that we can attend to both at once. I argue that later Platonists, like Syrianus and Hermias, present a different view: it is possible, if rare and difficult, for a human being to sense and act in the sensory world without abandoning intelligible contemplation (cf. Hermias *On Phaedrus* 77,20-78,7), through divine inspiration (58,19-59,25). I propose that this view has roots in Iamblichus' philosophy of attention and inspiration.

**Irmgard Männlein-Robert** (Universität Tübingen)

*Zeus as Nous: From Matter to Form via Symbols (Porph. Περί ἀγαλμάτων 354F Smith)*

In his treatise *Περί ἀγαλμάτων* Porphyry presents allegorical explanations of statues of Greek gods, whom he philosophically explains as material symbols of physical and cosmological *Dynameis*. As an exception, he introduces a multi-layered interpretation of Zeus, who is first praised in an orphic hymn as *Kosmos*, but then via a characteristic statue explained as *Nous* and Demiurge of the Cosmos (354F Smith). This finds in some aspects a parallel in his allegory of a statue of the Egyptian deity Kneph (360F Smith), who is treated by Iamblichus as well (*Responsum ad Porphyrium* VIII 2-4). In my paper, I will focus on the relation between physics and metaphysics in the figures of Zeus and Kneph and discuss the problem of their ontological position in Porphyry and Iamblichus.

**Anne Sheppard** (Royal Holloway, University of London)

*The Iamblichean Soul and the Problem of Evil*

Plotinus held that a part of our soul never descends from the intelligible world. Accordingly, in *Ennead* III.6 (26) he discusses the *apatheia* of the soul and in I.8 (51) he argues that evil is not intrinsic to the soul but arises from the interaction between the fallen soul and matter. Iamblichus, on the other hand, believed that the soul descends in its entirety and his view of the soul implies that it is responsible for moral evil (cf. Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, III.313.19–24 and 333.28–334.9). This paper will examine two passages from Ps-Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, 89.33-90.25 and 240.33-241.26, which present Iamblichus' view of the human soul as a mean, along with fragment 39 (Finamore and Dillon) of Iamblichus' *De anima*, on *katharsis*, in order to understand more about Iamblichus' approach to evil in the soul.

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## BIOS

PD Dr **Yury Arzhanov** is a Research associate at the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg (Austria). He is currently leading the research project "Sergius of Reshaina and the beginning of Syriac philosophy" funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and based at the Center for Research of the Christian East at the University of Salzburg. The project focuses on the role of Syrian Christians in the process of transmission of Classical Greek philosophical and scientific literature during the early medieval period. He is the author of the monograph *Syriac Sayings of Greek Philosophers: A Study in Syriac Gnomologia with Edition and Translation* (Peeters 2019) and the editor of a previously unknown work of Porphyry of Tyre preserved in Syriac: *Porphyry, ›On Principles and Matter‹: A Syriac Version of a Lost Greek Text with an English Translation, Introduction, and Glossaries* (De Gruyter 2021).

**Michael Griffin** is Professor of Classics and Philosophy at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and currently Head of the Department of Ancient Mediterranean & Near Eastern Studies. His books include *Aristotle's Categories in the Early Roman Empire* (2015) and a two-volume translation of Olympiodorus of Alexandria's lectures on the *Alcibiades I*. With Richard Sorabji, he is co-editor of the *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle series* ([ancientcommentators.org.uk](http://ancientcommentators.org.uk)), and he is a participant in the Buddhist-Platonist Dialogues working group hosted by Yale-NUS ([buddhistplatonistdialogues.com](http://buddhistplatonistdialogues.com)). His current project is a book-length study of the Greek Neoplatonic scale of virtues.

**Irmgard Männlein-Robert** studied Classics and German Philology at University of Würzburg and UCL London. She finished her PhD in 2000 on Porphyry's teacher Longinus (*Longin. Philologe und Philosoph*, München/Leipzig 2001). During her assistant professorship in Würzburg, she was Margo Tytus Fellow at University of Cincinnati (2003). In 2005 she got her Habilitation and since 2006 she is full professor for Greek Philology at University of Tübingen. She has widely published in her fields of interest, i. e. Plato as a literary author and as a philosopher, philosophy and literature of Platonism in late antiquity, and ancient aesthetics and poetics.

**Anne Sheppard** is Professor Emerita of Ancient Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her publications include *Studies on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (1980), *Aesthetics. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (1987), *Greek and Roman Aesthetics* (with Oleg Bychkov, 2010), *The Poetics of Phantasia: Imagination in Ancient Aesthetics* (2014), and a translation and commentary of Plotinus, *Ennead I.8* (Parmenides Press, forthcoming). She is currently working on a book provisionally entitled *Drama, Dance and Dialogue: Neoplatonic Views of the Theatre*.