§71,4: τὰ ὑπάρχοντα bezeichnet nicht «die herrschenden Umstände», sondern ‘das Vorhandene’, ‘das, worauf man sich stützen / berufen kann’; vgl. in ganz ähnlichem Zusammenhang 4,68 u. 10,12.


Köln

Sandra Zajonz


As is well known, Epicurus was regarded by many in antiquity as the enfant terrible of philosophy and several of his positions elicited lively reactions on the part of both pre-Christian philosophers and ecclesiastical writers. Among the latter, the case of Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 190–265), one of the most influential and most interesting representatives of the pre-Constantinian Church, is especially remarkable. This renowned Christian theologian, who had been a pupil of Origen and Bishop of Alexandria since 247/248, composed several works and letters that made him famous, and which are partially known to us through numerous and even extensive excerpts and quotations, mostly from Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria. This is also the case with Dionysius’ Περὶ φύσεως or On Nature (hereinafter DN), a polemical work in at least two books against Epicurean physics – as mainly developed in Epicurus’ famous treatise by the same title – that has partially been preserved in Eusebius’ Preparation for the Gospel (14, 23–27) and John of Damascus’ Sacred Parallels. This eminently philosophical work is the only explicitly Christian treatise ever written on, and against, Epicurean physics, and represents a Christian response to ancient atomism and materialism. Surprisingly, it has been neglected by scholars in modern times, and no analytical commentary or comprehensive interpretation of it had been offered until now.

The book under discussion here, published within the Brepols series ‘Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy’ edited by Carlos Lévy and Gretchen Raydams-
Schils,1 fills these gaps in patristic and Epicurean studies for the first time. The A(uthor), on the one hand, provides the first detailed commentary and general interpretation of Dionysius’ DN and, on the other, conducts a thorough investigation into the history of Epicureanism in Alexandria, embedding the discussion about Dionysius’ work in this philosophical and historical context. A broad range of philological, philosophical, historical, theological, papyrological and literary issues are discussed in a scholarly and lively fashion. Many problems and aspects are brought up and elucidated for the first time. In particular, F(leischer)’s in-depth philological approach has enabled him to discover some new hard facts and to assess the role played by Dionysius’ DN in the history of Christian literature and Epicureanism, along with its Alexandrian context.

The volume, which represents a slightly modified version of the doctoral dissertation submitted by the A. at the University of Würzburg in 2015, consists of two major parts. Part I (23–212) is devoted to an historical treatment of Epicureanism in Alexandria from its very beginnings up to Dionysius’ time and serves as a general introduction to the second part. Part II (213–450), which represents the central core of the book, encompasses the Greek text of the surviving excerpts of Dionysius’ DN, a German translation, a thorough commentary and a final comprehensive interpretation of it. Owing to their generality and inner consistency, both parts could easily have been published as separate monographs. However, their numerous reciprocal interconnections perfectly justify a joint treatment in one and the same book. Each part is divided into several chapters, which can also be read as independent essays, and are in turn divided into sub-chapters. The volume opens with a short introduction (17–22) and concludes with a useful summary of results (451–462), a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, an ‘Index nominum et rerum’ and an ‘Index locorum’.

In the introduction,2 F. outlines the historical and philosophical framework into which Dionysius’ DN is to be placed, offers a short survey of the scholarship concerning this work and sketches out the scope and structure of his study.

Part I,3 which represents the very first study on Alexandrian Epicureanism, encompasses eight chapters arranged in chronological order, each of which is devoted to a certain period, author or aspect of the history of Epicureanism in Alexandria, and seeks to answer these and other questions: what are our sources? Who were these Epicureans? When precisely is the presence of Epicureans attested in Alexandria? What was their relationship with Alexandria’s philosophical and cultural milieu? What kind of relations did they have? Was there any real Epicurean school in Alexandria? May one speak of institutional continuity? How did Alexandrian Epicureans teach? Did Alexandrian Epicureanism have a

---


2 ‘Einleitung’ (17–22).

distinctive character? What inferences can be drawn from pagan, Jewish and Christian Alexandrian anti-Epicurean polemics on Epicurean life and activities in this city? The A. discusses all these issues acutely and competently. It goes without saying that this part of the book is destined to leave a lasting trace on Epikureisfung.

In Chapter 1 F. tries to detect the beginnings of Epicurean activities in Alexandria. After a survey of early Epicureanism in general, early Alexandria and early philosophical life in this city, he analyses two passages from Plutarch which suggest that Epicureanism took root in Alexandria from Epicurus’ days onwards, i.e. from the early 3rd century BC. Epicurus exchanged letters with friends in Alexandria, and his pupil Colotes dedicated his book Ne vivi quidem posse secundum aliorum philosophorum decreta – against which Plutarch wrote his Adversus Coloten – to an early Ptolemy, probably Ptolemy II. F. discusses the dating of this dedication and its implications and intriguingly proposes that Colotes’ dedication is due to the fact that the philosopher personally spent some time in Alexandria.

Chapter 2 deals with the supposed relationship of some 3rd/2nd-century BC Epicureans (Philonides, Basilides, Protarchus) with mathematicians in Alexandria. The A. skillfully tackles some chronological issues related to these figures and suggests a plausible chronology for the people mentioned in the ‘Hypsicles-preface’. Unfortunately, F. could not take into account a recent article by Netz, who has claimed – not beyond all doubts but with good arguments – that the Basilides and Protarchus mentioned in the preface are not actually Epicurean philosophers, a matter which is still open to debate. Anyway, the A.’s chronology remains well argued and his philological skill leads him to some solid conclusions. The relationships in question might hint at Epicurean activities in Alexandria during this period.

Chapter 3 focuses on the question of Philodemus’ stay in Alexandria. A new reading in Philodemus’ Index Academicorum (PHerc. 1691/1021, col. 34, 3–5), whereof F. is currently producing a new comprehensive edition, reveals that the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus (110–post 40 BC) stayed for a while in Alexandria before moving to Athens in order to pursue some advanced studies. This self-reference was heavily debated some years ago. The A. re-assesses the evidence basing himself on his personal inspection of the papyrus and convincingly concludes that there cannot be any reasonable doubt about Philodemus’ actual sojourn in Alexandria. He originally discusses some aspects of the philosopher’s stay (its exact time frame, length, motivation, and influence), concluding that in all probability he dwelled in Alexandria between 90 and 86/85 BC before moving to Athens.

Chapter 4 is another example of F.’s sound papyrological background. Here he collects all the material evidence for Epicurean life in Egypt and Alexandria. Whereas a bust of Hermarchus and a base inscription are the only pieces of archaeological evidence from the Ptolemaic period, nine literary papyri and two documentary ones dating from between

1 Anfänge des Epikureismus in Alexandria (27–58).
3 ‘Epikureer als Freunde alexandrinischer Geometer’ (59–80).
5 ‘Philodem in Alexandria’ (81–104).
8 ‘Papyri und archäologische Spuren’ (105–112).
9 A famous text is the letter containing a request for Epicurean books (PGGettyMus acc. 76AI.27). The most recent piece of evidence is a fragment probably coming from a collec-

G. Ranocchia: Fleischer, Dionysios von Alexandria
the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD attest to the wide circulation and reading of Epicurean texts in the Egyptian countryside (smaller towns) and allow for some inferences concerning their availability in the city of Alexandria, hinting at the vitality of Epicureanism throughout the centuries in this region of the Mediterranean world.

In Chapter 5 the A. discusses the critical reception of Epicurean philosophy by Philo of Alexandria. The survey owes much to the works of Lévy and myself on the subject, while offering some new thoughts and insights. Interestingly, F. argues that the term μετακόσμιον in De somniis 1, 184 might show that the linking of this term with the dwelling place of the Epicurean gods is already pre-Ciceronian. The whole chapter is very learned. In particular, the A. mitigates – without entirely rejecting it – Ferguson’s illation that to some extent Philo’s polemics can be regarded as evidence of a lively presence of the Epicurean school in Alexandria.

Chapter 6 begins with a general introduction to Roman Alexandria and Epicureanism in the Imperial age, thereby laying a solid foundation for both the following chapters and the discussion of Dionysius’ DN in Part 2 of the book. The rest of the chapter evaluates the relationship and possible connection between Seneca, Ammonius Saccas, Plutarch, Athenaeus and Athenodorus, on the one hand, and Epicureanism and Alexandria on the other. The Epicurean references in the works of the first three authors do not obviously imply any sojourn in Alexandria, whereas the last two authors might be seen to offer some evidence for Epicurean activity in the city.

With chapter 7 we come to the early Christian authors, who lived in Alexandria for a while and who provide several Epicurean references in their works. The chapter is devoted to Clement of Alexandria, one of the most well-educated (in a pagan sense) Christian writers ever. The A. offers first an informative introduction to early Christianity in Egypt and Alexandria with its various heresies and early history, which before the time of Bishop Demetrius († 231), somewhat surprisingly, remains relatively obscure. He also attempts to estimate how many Christians lived in early Alexandria and Egypt and discusses the recent scholarship on the matter. Next, he provides a general overview of the anti-Epicurean polemics of the Church Fathers, a task which is essential for contextualising the Christian criticism of Epicureanism that will be discussed in Part 2 of the book. Finally, F. focuses on Clement of Alexandria, an author who had an astonishingly and unusually profound knowledge of Epicurean doctrine, and who in this was second to none of the other Church Fathers. Surprisingly enough and differently from almost all other Christian writers, his attitude towards Epicurean philosophy is not completely hostile. On the contrary, he even acknowledges some positive aspects of it. He touches upon almost all aspects of Epicurean doctrine in his works and may even have read some original Epicurean texts. Clement knows what he is struggling against and the A. argues that his Epicurean allusions reflect a still vigorous Epicurean life in the Greek East and, especially, in Alexandria. There would
seem to have been a certain need for Christians to refute Epicurean views because apparently these were still a matter of debate.

The last chapter of Part 1, chapter 8, deals with the Epicurean polemics of Origen, who was Dionysius' master, and represents, in this way, a sort of transition to the treatment of the latter in Part 2 of the book. As in Clement's case, Origen's life, work and thought are briefly outlined. Then his criticism of Epicurus in Contra Celsum is discussed. As is known, the middle-Platonist writer Celsus compiled an anti-Christian pamphlet entitled Ἀληθὴς λόγος. Oddly enough, Origen wrongly identifies him with an Epicurean philosopher of Hadrian's age. This leads him to absurdly attack Celsus for a philosophical position which is not his own. He even assumes that Celsus is intentionally concealing his Epicurean views. By combining certain passages for the first time, F. plausibly suggests that some anti-Christian works by another, really Epicurean, Celsus were circulating at that time. Origen's grasp of Epicureanism is much poorer than Clement's, but compared to later Church Fathers it is still rather good. He knows Epicurean doctrines only from doxographical works and his treatment is superficial and biased. His mistaken identification of Celsus suggests that Origen expected an Epicurean attack on Christianity and that adherents of the Garden were still a dominant voice in philosophical debate in Alexandria and elsewhere, regardless of the fact that the Contra Celsum was written when Origen was no longer living in this city. 2

Part II, which is the raison d'être of the book, is divided into five chapters. In this part, the A. enters in medias res by first introducing the figure of Dionysius of Alexandria and then focusing on his DN. As already mentioned, he offers a modern translation of the text, along with an extensive commentary and a final interpretation. In particular, F. shows how meaningful this unique work is for our knowledge not only of Christian and anti-Epicurean literature, but also of the history of Epicureanism in the late Imperial age (in Alexandria and elsewhere).

Chapter 1 constitutes the proper introduction to Dionysius of Alexandria, who is described as a pivotal figure in the history of the early Alexandrian and universal Church. A pupil of Origen and a distinguished leader of the Catechetical school in Alexandria, Dionysius was a charismatic bishop who earned merits in many fields. However, the fame of his teacher Origen overshadowed him to such an extent that to this day he is not very well known among theologians or classicists. Yet the substantial remains of his oeuvre and his impact on later theological developments do not justify this relative negligence. So, the reader should be grateful to F. for this nicely written chapter on Dionysius' life, character, works and theological position, which allows one to appreciate DN within the context of its author's oeuvre and time.

In Chapter 2 the A. presents the Greek text of DN, offering a few original conjectures. 5 Mras' edition 6 is followed for the excerpt to be found in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica (14, 23–27), which represents our principal witness (≈ 95 %) for the work. For the five minor fragments of it preserved in the Sacra Parallela by John of Damascus, Holl's edi-

---

1 ‘Origenes und Epikureismus’ (189–211).
2 In this chapter as well as in Part 2 F. draws upon the important contribution by Ch. Markschies, 'Epikureismus bei Origenes und in der originistischen Tradition', in: M. Erler and R. Bees (eds.), 'Epikureismus in der späten Republik und der Kaiserzeit', Stuttgart 2000, 191–217.

Gnomon 6/91/2019
Dionysius aims to reject the Epicurean teachings thoroughly. F. brilliantly faces and solves the first lines of the work the polemical intention is more than clear and it is obvious that of introduction and definition of the questions Dionysius intends to discuss. Already in Eusebius’ excerpt, which omits some passages of varying length, starts (14: from the Bible – without making them an integral part of the philosophical discussion. line for his philosophical polemic and adds some Christian elements – mostly quotations many occasions. He seems to use pagan anti-Epicurean arguments as a pattern and guide-
what is excellent Classical Greek for his time and proves his rhetorical-stylistic skills on well as pagan works, focusing in particular on ‘Epicurean’ questions. Dionysius writes in time, while numerous argumentative and stylistic peculiarities and literary aspects are
for the first time in all its facets. 4 Eusebius’ excerpt from DN can be arranged into five main topics according to the chapter division that Eusebius himself applies:


Human beings as evidence of divine providence (ibid., 14, 24).
The nature of the cosmos as evidence of divine providence (ibid., 14, 25).
The nature of the human body as evidence of divine providence (ibid., 14, 26).
Criticisms Epicurus’ view of the gods (ibid., 14, 27).

Conveniently, in this chapter the A. prints again the Greek text of every commented passage. The commentary provides plenty of material, parallels and information, potentially covering all aspects of DN, be they philosophical, patristic or literary. The Quellenforschung too has its place. Many ideas and arguments are brought up here for the first time, while numerous argumentative and stylistic peculiarities and literary aspects are clarified. The A. elucidates the relation between the text and other passages in Christian as well as pagan works, focusing in particular on ‘Epicurean’ questions. Dionysius writes in what is excellent Classical Greek for his time and proves his rhetorical-stylistic skills on many occasions. He seems to use pagan anti-Epicurean arguments as a pattern and guideline for his philosophical polemic and adds some Christian elements – mostly quotations from the Bible – without making them an integral part of the philosophical discussion. Eusebius’ excerpt, which omits some passages of varying length, starts (14, 23) with a kind of introduction and definition of the questions Dionysius intends to discuss. Already in the first lines of the work the polemical intention is more than clear and it is obvious that Dionysius aims to reject the Epicurean teachings thoroughly. F. brilliantly faces and solves

2 The previous German translation of DN was that of W. Bienert, ‘Dionysios von Alexandria. Das erhaltene Werk’, Stuttgart 1972.
the puzzle of the initial passage referring to the ‘two worlds’ by taking it as a reminiscence of Plato’s *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 31b). Next, Dionysius defends the notion of natural providence with examples taken from daily life (14, 24), before moving on to the cosmos and its beautiful order. He composes, as it were, little satires against the atomic theory which are of some literary value. The A. lists – often for the first time – numerous parallels with other works and concentrates on philosophical aspects without ever forgetting the Christian perspective and intention behind the work. Dionysius’ main and ultimately only answer to Epicurean physics is πρόνοια, whose existence he tries to prove in many different ways. After dwelling at length on the cosmos, Dionysius moves on to the human body, regarded as an example of the governing of the world on the part of divine providence (*PE* 14,26). The similarities with the argumentation to be found in Lactantius’ *De opificio Dei* and Galen’s *De usu partium* are highlighted for the first time. Two enigmatic allusions to later treatments of certain problems (14, 26, 6 and 26, 9) could refer to passages in other books devoted to people other than Epicurus. The last section of Eusebius’ excerpt (14, 27) deals with Epicurean theology, which Dionysius regards as absurd and hypocritical. In particular, F. examines in depth some Democritean quotations or paraphrases and argues that Cicero *DND* 1, 85 and 123 in the following section suggests a common *Urquelle*. The whole chapter is an impressive example of in-depth philological and ‘quellenkritische’ analysis and is the basis for a thorough understanding of the work.

In chapter 4 a new general appraisal of Dionysius’ *DN* is made, which is grounded in the results deriving from the commentary and other evidence. The A. appreciates Dionysius’ efforts to approach the particular field of Epicurean physics in a serious philosophical and scholarly manner, going beyond the common stereotypes to which many Christian writers restrict themselves. Although his style is elegant and partially witty and a certain doxographical knowledge on his part is undeniable, he hardly has the originality or philosophical depth of Origen and other Fathers of the Church. Nevertheless, Dionysius’ treatise presents certain valuable aspects and creative elements. He uses the concept of providence as a link between paganism and Christianity to attack Epicurean views on nature. While the fifteen quotations from the Bible are obviously typical Christian elements, the main discussion seems free of any significant Christian influence. *DN* must have enjoyed a certain afterlife, as both Eusebius and the fragments from John of Damascus show. However, it is impossible to trace any influence on particular Christian writers or identify references to the work in their writings. Although the treatise falls short of other works criticising Epicureanism in terms of its philosophical quality, its ‘physical-Christian’ character makes its polemic unique in some respects. As for Dionysius’ sources, F. concludes that he had access to doxographical literature and possibly to anti-Epicurean polemics of Stoic or Platonic provenance, but not to original Epicurean works. For *DN* Dionysius probably exploited an anti-Epicurean, Stoic treatise. Possibly, he also had access to Democritus’ *Υποθήκαι*. Dionysius can be credited with a basic knowledge of Epicurean physics, but nothing more than that. This was sufficient for this kind of treatise, which would nevertheless have profited from the knowledge of some genuine Epicurean texts. Concerning the relevance of *DN* for the history of Epicureanism in Alexandria in Dionysius’ days, the A. argues that the composition of such a particular work (or at least of one of its books) might be a reaction to still ongoing Epicurean activities in the city, which also had an impact on the local Christian community. Dionysius obviously aimed to offer a striking Christian response to the seduction of Epicurean physics – the first and only genuinely Christian response of this kind.

Chapter 5 contains a short survey of Epicurean life in Alexandria after Dionysius’ age (from ca. AD 250 up to ca. 400). Not much can be inferred from the allusions to be found in Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus and Theophilus of Alexandria. The preface to Clau-
G. Ranocchia: Fleischer, Dionysios von Alexandria

dius Claudianus’ *In Rufinum*, however, is noteworthy inasmuch as it suggests the existence of an Epicurean phase in Claudianus’ early life in the late 4th century AD, when he was living in Alexandria. Here, as elsewhere in the Roman empire, Epicureanism would appear to have died out in Alexandria by the early 5th century AD.

In the ‘Summary of Results’,¹ F. recapitulates the main outcomes of the book and makes inferences on both the history of Epicureanism in Alexandria and the character of Dionysius’ *DN*. On the one hand, he concludes that there is no hard evidence for any institutionalised Epicurean school in Alexandria. However, the overall evidence suggests uninterrupted Epicurean activities in the city from ca. 300 BC up to ca. AD 400 and Epicurean individuals might have formed circles or networks of some sort at some time during this period. On the other hand, the A. summarises his most important discoveries on Dionysius’ *DN*, emphasises once again the latter’s special character and assesses its place within early Christian literature, its possible purpose and the role played by this work in the history of anti-Epicurean polemic and philosophical literature. Some fine and humanistic thoughts about the ‘Classical momentum’ of the discussion between materialists and non-materialists mark the end of the book.

To sum up, this book is a milestone in the research concerning Dionysius of Alexandria, his *DN*, the Christian reception of Greek philosophy and the history of Epicureanism. It covers a wide range of historical, philosophical, theological, papyrological, philological and literary topics, which are analysed with acumen and a multi-disciplinary approach. While the (Epicurean) philosophical perspective is predominant, the Classical-philological aspects are never overlooked. The A.’s good arrangement of the material and his clarity of exposition are praiseworthy. The short introductions to each chapter, while suitable for non-specialist readers, sometimes appear too didactic. Various repetitions are detectable here and there. I have found very few orthographic mistakes. In conclusion, F.’s study is of great utility to both scholars of ancient philosophy with an interest in Epicureanism and specialists in patristics, who may especially profit from the chapters on Clement of Alexandria and Origen. This fairly priced book should not be missing from any classical, philosophical or theological library.

Rome

Graziano Ranocchia

---

¹ ‘Ergebnisse und Resümee (Teil I und II)’ (451–462).

---

Georg Luck (†): *A textual commentary on Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book XV*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva 2017. 163 S. (Exemplaria Classica. Anejo. 8.).

In its journey through the ages, the last book of Ovid’s *met.* seems to have suffered more than the rest of the poem. The so-called ‘Lactantian’ branch of the transmission, which preserves a number of true readings and often points out corruption, is almost missing in book 15 (the text is not available in M and N, and U ends at 493). Thus, editors lack an important foundation of the text. So in book 15 it becomes more necessary than anywhere else to investigate the ‘recc.’.

It does not strike me as a surprise that someone like Georg Luck, who recognized the depth of interpolation and contamination in this paradigm, chose to work