not everybody would have made an identical choice! Among a number of misprints and mistakes, without which no book seems to appear in print these days, one particularly glaring example is found on Plate 29, labelled "Bust of Plato", where the bust itself is clearly seen to have been labelled by its creator: ZHNON (i.e. Zeno)!

A good book, strongly recommended for serious students of the period, who desire a general, well-documented and fairly detailed introduction to the subject.

R.G. Cowlin


A one-volume history of philosophy covering some fifteen centuries, from the Old Academy to St. Anselm, is a brave undertaking. Some years ago, Copleston traversed the field in a polished way in the course of his monumental survey of philosophy, from its beginnings in the 6th Century B.C. to the present-day frontiers of Russell and Wittgenstein. Copleston is informative, humane, and comprehensive, but necessarily brief.

Professor Armstrong has adopted a different plan. Following the style of the Cambridge composite histories, he has recruited a number of authorities, each to write on a particular topic. P. Merlan treats on Greek philosophy from Plato to Plotinus; H. Chadwick on Philo and the beginnings of Christian thought; A.H. Armstrong on Plotinus; A.C. Lloyd on the Neoplatonists; R.A. Markus on Marius Victorinus and St. Augustine; I.P. Sheldon-Williams on the Greek Christian Platonist tradition; H. Liebeschütz on Western Christian thought from Boethius to Anselm; and finally R. Walzer on Early Islamic Philosophy. The editor provides an introduction in which he endeavours to bring some unity into this mosaic.

The work is designed, the editor tells us, "to show how Greek philosophy took the form in which it was known to and influenced the Jews, the Christians of East and West, and the Moslems, and what these inheritors of Greek thought did with their heritage during, approximately, the first millenium A.D.". (p.xii).
Again: “We set out to show how Greek philosophy reached its latest, and perhaps most influential phase, that which modern historians of ancient philosophy call Neoplatonism”. (p.1).

Given this programme, the contributors do their work well. “One object of this volume,” writes the editor, “is to make generalization about the thought of the period more difficult. This is particularly necessary, because there is no period about which sweeping and ill-founded generalizations have been more common. So we have tried to show its philosophies and theologies in all their complexities and variations, and in particular to give some idea of how many different things ‘Platonism’ or ‘Christian Platonism’ can mean.”

The old dichotomy between Platonism and Aristotelianism, to which philosophers tend to be wedded, has been under suspicion for some time on the part of historians, for instance Festugière. These detailed studies dispel the last remnants of that dichotomy as regards early medieval philosophy. Their effect on our understanding of the 13th Century panorama should be salutary. Earlier studies of 13th Century thought were built around an alleged polarisation of Christian Platonism and Christian Aristotelianism. More perceptive historians have long warned against accepting this polarisation uncritically. The present volume shows more fully why the polarisation is untenable.

In a work covering such an immense span, there is, inevitably, much compression and summarising. What are we to make of Aristotle’s ethics dealt with in a page? And even the fifteen pages devoted to Dionysius the Areopagite (here obediently called the Pseudo-Dionysius) are perforce so concentrated that they can scarcely induct us into the spirit of that mysterious author. Summarising means that the articles at times degenerate into thin recitals of doctrines, with reflective judgement and experiential sting at a minimum. This can be tedious in the more familiar regions. But it has its uses in a terra incognita, especially in Sheldon-Williams’ explorations of Greek Christian Platonism. Though some articles are at times technical almost to the point of unintelligibility, others are more leisurely. Walzer on the place of philosophy in early Islam has the note of humanity. Armstrong writes urbanely on Plotinus.
The connotation of 'philosophy' as understood in this work is somewhat straitened. It tends to be speculative, abstract, even esoteric. It is the kind of philosophising which practical men view with suspicion. This restriction is partly a foible of the historical figures themselves. But not wholly so: St. Augustine, for instance, cannot be accused of severing himself from the world of praxis. More important, however, is the predilection of most of the contributors to keep to the aerial paths. They show not only no inclination to bring philosophy from heaven down to earth, they convey a sense of aversion to any such suggestion. This is borne out by the omission in this volume of any serious consideration of Cicero. Cicero's robust return to the Cave, following Plato's own earnest injunction, is surely a landmark in the history of philosophy. By rescuing philosophy from its captivity to wandering 'intellectuals', Cicero has no small claim to being the second father, after Plato and Aristotle, of European philosophy.

The editor speaks of the deep influence of Neoplatonism on our theology, literature, art, social behaviour and institutions. No doubt this is true in a way, but surely at a remove. A closer examination of the history of dogmatic theology, jurisprudence, education and so on would be necessary if the editor's sweeping claim is to be brought down to earth. Such an examination is likely to bring into more prominence the vigorous good sense of Cicero, and the imperial intellect of Aquinas, at the beginning and end of our period respectively. It is not a case of such a man as Cicero vulgarising a refined philosophy. Philosophy lives in its specificities, in its conjunction with the stream of historical life. The kind of philosophy dwelt on in this volume is not so much the essence of philosophy as an abstraction from philosophy. Nevertheless, though it courts the charge of being too much a history of remote and ineffectual dons, the present work is eminently worth while, even if its main function is to dispel illusions about the activities of dons.

This Cambridge History is not likely to replace the earlier volumes of Copleston for the purposes of general reading. But for those launching into a closer study of the original authors, and especially for those trying to make their way through the 13th Century labyrinth, the Cambridge History will be invaluable as a work of reference. A select bibliography of editions and modern
commentaries is a useful feature for the latter purpose.

G.W.R. Ardley