of marriage in Hellenistic Egypt (p.xviii). No evidence of this is presented as far as I can see.

V. J. Gray


This book is mainly about Proclus, which is no fault. Its chief theme is that language, for Proclus, was the revealing analogue to reality. Language was not, as some philosophers would have it, a diminution of the truth, a mere spinning out into *prolixité*. It was capable of describing wholes, and indeed the whole, the All. Proclus did not deny that Being was extended, dispersed. But each level of Being was, he believed, imprinted with the All, though in its own way, and was therefore open to a description that did not isolate it from the ultimate sources of meaning in the universe. For language possessed (and this, according to the author, was Proclus’s major point) a richness that enabled it to bridge gaps, so to speak, between the different levels, ranging in modern terms from the empirical to the poetic. Language was, in other words, ambiguous, and thus preserved genuine analogies, allowing all levels of Being to be embraced within one mode of expression. Modifications of reference could be simply adverbial: good in this way, beautiful in that. Each level possessed what could be attributed to all, but οἰκείως.

Such a view of the world had epistemological consequences. Order in Being was presupposed. The extension of Being simply provided a context in which order became observable. The qualities of divinity present at each level operated within the same space, so to speak, as the factors that controlled human knowledge of them. To know, and to express the knowledge, called above all for what the author calls a species of imagination. Here lies a kinship to mathematics. But that is almost the only place where such kinship can be convincingly alleged. For, in spite of his famous attachment to numbers, and in spite of the central role played in his system by relations (thanks to the emphasis on analogy), Proclus did not regard the extension of divinity throughout Being as the result of anything genuinely mathematical, of any sequential logic; it was produced by specifically metaphysical powers — cosmic fertility, παρουσία. So language was still, for Proclus, descriptive. He was looking (with some success) for words that were equal to a theology already proposed, albeit a theology of relationships.

This provides a different and refreshing portrait of the philosopher. Pro-
clus is so often presented as the deadend of the Neoplatonist tradition; a scholastic if not ponderous disappointment, after the irresponsible mysticism of Plotinus. Of course, Proclus played into the hands of that mythology, by trying to create in his work a single summation of the Platonist tradition. Professor Charles-Saget has unscrambled that beguiling unity.

In the process, we discover how Plato himself inevitably led his followers away from honest inquiry and argument, and encouraged them to concentrate more on the order of things. That became particularly easy when they hearkened most to his own later preoccupations with the All and with the questions raised by the relation of parts to whole.

But Proclus’s chief fault remained epistemological. He had placed himself obstinately outside the system he observed. By asking about the mathematics in Proclus, the author has unmasked that weakness with particular skill. For we quickly discover that there is little of that kind of logic genuinely to be found in Proclus’s works. Mathematics simply provided at times a descriptive model, which was given (for quite unmathematical reasons) an ontological status.

The contrast with Plotinus is most interesting. Plotinus felt that language was in the end inadequate. It was always, for him, subsequent to any useful or reliable perception, and it was limited to the level at which description first operated. Plotinus, most famously, was a man who wished to rise above such limits; to bring into full play his destined familiarity with the divine (riding a little on the back of Stoic concepts, πνεύμα and συμπάθεια). Hence his struggle for serenity of thought, and what the author calls his *intensité*. His language was not discursive. The philosophical debate, as he conceived it, was designed above all to return again and again to a resting place of perception, from which one could at the appropriate moment leap to another level of understanding.

These sections of the book are particularly convincing. The author, I suspect, finds Plotinus in this regard a little naughty. But he remains for me the more attractive figure. That is partly because I want to know what happened between Plotinus and Proclus: the author’s silence is disturbing, particularly since we now know how dangerous it is to assume that Plotinus seemed an obvious staging post in the eyes of later Platonists. But he is attractive chiefly because he was less exegetic: he felt less obliged to comment on received and sacred texts from the philosophical past. He was himself more genuinely philosophical, because he was still interested more in questions than in structures. He retained Plato’s redeeming attachment to unsettled curiosity.

Professor Charles-Saget is Professor of Philosophy at the Université de Clermont II. It will be clear that the book is deeply marked by the linguistic interests of post-Structuralist French thinkers. But the writing is not charged with the doctrine, nor marred by jargon. The ancient philosophers are not
praised for their modernity, nor castigated for their ignorance of what is now afoot. They are approached on their own terms, as distant figures of unfailing interest.

*Philip Rousseau*


The scope of this book is narrower and more coherent than its title might suggest. The papers are limited largely to Bawit and (especially) Saqqara, and are predominantly the work of Marguerite Rassart-Debergh.

Two important and complementary contributions focus on the monastery at Saqqara, each supported by a large number of drawings and black-and-white photographs.

The first, an ‘essai de reconstitution’ by Mme Rassart-Debergh, is a cautious reassessment of the work carried out by Quibell and Maspero at the beginning of this century. The author correlates and makes explicit what was often present in the photographs of early reports, but less frequently explained or commented upon in the texts of the reports themselves. We are invited to retrace the steps of the early excavators. Quibell’s photographs, many of them reproduced and even enlarged, are made to speak again in ways he omitted to allow. Sketches and earlier descriptions are also brought in as evidence. The paintings are thus restored to their archaeological context and presented, as far as is possible, in the form they displayed before restoration or destruction took their toll.

The second contribution, by Paul van Moorsel and Mathilde Huijbers, describes exhaustively (and in this case with a few colour plates as well) what now survives from Saqqara in the Coptic Museum of Old Cairo.

The two studies, juxtaposed, provide an arresting example of method in art history. How often we need, how rarely we are able, to recapture the moment of first discovery, in order to make sense of what now resides outside its setting, in this museum or that.

But perhaps the most important piece in the book is Mme Rassart-Debergh’s article, ‘La Peinture copte avant le xiie siècle. Une approche’. She lists, first, what survives and what is known from literary evidence to have existed in all the major sites from Alexandria to Aswan (there are several asides on links with Nubia). She then catalogues the paintings according to iconographical theme, all with a rich bibliography and an abun-