

DISCOVERIES FROM FRAGMENTS

PIANO (V.) *Il Papiro di Derveni tra religione e filosofia*. (Studi e Testi per il Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici Greci e Latini 18.) Pp. xxiv + 406, ills, colour pls. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2016. Paper, €50. ISBN: 978-88-222-6477-0.

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The past is rubbish till scholars take the pains / to sift and sort and interpret the remains. / This chaos is the past, mounds of heaped debris / just waiting to be organized into history.

T. Harrison, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (2nd ed., 1991), p. 79

In the course of reflecting on this quote, P. van Minnen, in establishing the relationship between archaeology and papyrology, observes that ‘the advantage of having two kinds of data ... makes a more comprehensive understanding possible’ (‘Archaeology and Papyrology: Digging and Filling Holes?’, in K. Lembke et al. [edd.], *Tradition and Transformation: Egypt under Roman Rule* [2010], p. 469). If there is a find that necessitates this kind of approach, it is the Derveni papyrus.

P. adopts this comprehensive approach in developing her interpretation of the Derveni papyrus. Within this all-encompassing strand of thinking she lists a diversity of disciplines among the resources to employ in her study, drawing on archaeology, epigraphy, papyrology, philology and philosophy in order to provide a holistic approach.

In an endeavour to enlarge the scholarly scope of study on the Derveni papyrus, she focuses on this papyrus in a three-part discussion. With a view to refining the understanding of the intricate first six columns, and expanding the debate on them, the method she uses is different in each part: the macro in Part 1, where she examines the context; the general in Part 2, touching on the text and its interpretation; and the micro in Part 3, in an attempt to explore text production. Prior to the three main parts, apart from P.’s ‘Premessa’, there is a preface by G. Betegh. The book ends with an epilogue and an extensive bibliography, followed by eight colour illustrations of archaeological material.

In Part 1 P. draws on archaeological evidence to frame her study and enlists the help of funerary findings to leverage her arguments along with evidence from the ‘orphic’ gold plates and an array of Macedonian funerary paintings. In her concluding comments to this first part, she addresses the hard facts on the Derveni papyrus and purports that it derives from a milieu of the royal Macedonian elites.

In the second part P. presents a reconstruction of the first six columns of the papyrus (the first three columns in two versions) along with an elaborate critical apparatus (Chapter 2). Through a restructuring of the alternative interpretations of the fragments she presents a critical approach to previous readings along with a re-appraisal of the fragments. According to her understanding of some of the focal points, she offers a fresh interpretation of fragmented words or obscure concepts in the text to endorse the arguments for her reconstruction (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). While addressing the outcomes of previous studies, her approach is rooted in a more philosophical reading and a contextual framework drawn from a broader perspective, ideological and religious in nature. P.’s prime concern in reading this papyrus revolves around eschatology, including ancient reflections on the soul, daemones, Erinyes and ritual aspects, sacrificial rites, libations and incantations to invoke the blessings of the gods and demi-gods.

In the final part of the study (Chapters 7 and 8) the same principle is employed to justify the literary approach and link it to the philosophical allegories in order to ratify the

multifaceted nature of the text and distance it from the Stoic traditional approach so as to highlight its eclectism.

P. draws on her previous studies of the Derveni papyrus, enlisting the help of her doctoral thesis and of previously published papers. In addition P. employs research from other relevant studies and disciplines along with the extensive bibliography on the subject. At this point, it is without reticence that I add that her contribution to the unravelling of the Derveni papyrus is a pioneering piece of work, which ranks high among an array of works before her.

In the wake of the most recent edition of the Derveni papyrus, in the Tusculum series (M.E. Kotwick, *Der Papyrus von Derveni. Griechisch–deutsch. Eingeleitet, übersetzt und kommentiert* [2017]), it should be noted that P.'s book precedes the as yet unpublished original version of her text (vol. 17 of the same series as the volume under review, preannounced as *L'inizio del Papiro di Derveni. Il rotolo e il testo*), 'per ragioni editoriali' (p. ix). Conclusive evidence drawn from the unpublished vol. 17 occurs in a number of places, which renders the volume seemingly founded on evidence that cannot be checked.

This book is an incisive piece of work, which displays P.'s critical powers of argument along with an impressive command of the immense and diverse work in this field. The volume demonstrates her excellence in mastering the shift from one scholarly discipline to another from the gamut of surrounding disciplines such as papyrology, philology, linguistics and philosophy. The untangling of the diverse studies in these different disciplines signifies the profound depth of P.'s knowledge. However, it is precisely the wide-ranging nature of the work that results in an outcome that is complex in nature and makes deciphering the underlying arguments truly taxing. The sub-topics are fragmented and divided, so that the commentary appears sporadic and inconclusive; this may be due to a lack of transitional or concluding paragraphs. P.'s expanse of coverage burdens the documentation with an abundance of fine points of detail, often affecting the overall comprehension of the Derveni papyrus. It is evident that this is inevitable given the volume of work undertaken; hence, even the explanatory footnotes prove to be oversized in some areas. These elements are, in some ways, the pitfalls of a comprehensive and 'hybrid' approach. P. shifts from text-and-commentary and then back to running-text. Occasionally she indulges in an inarticulate discourse, a kind of jigsaw puzzle, much like the Derveni papyrus itself.

Overall, P. makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on the papyrus. But she goes beyond that. Although at times her point is unclear, the research vindicates its complex presentation and justifies its position among the scholarship on the Derveni papyrus. P.'s work contains thorough and incisive criticisms of past endeavours to decode the fragments by proposing a fresh approach to the compilation of the first few columns and a clear connection between the first part and the second part. P.'s new perspective merits its place among the valid sources that aim at untangling the web of the fragments and clears up some of the 'debris' that surrounds this outstanding discovery.

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