

On Simplicius' Life and Works: A Response to Hadot

Pantelis Golitsis
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
pgolitsis@edlit.auth.gr

As its title 'Le néoplatonicien Simplicius à la lumière des recherches contemporaines. Un bilan critique' suggests, the book recently published by Ilsetraut Hadot is a critical overview of scholarly research on the Neoplatonist Simplicius.¹ It focuses on Simplicius' biography [13–134] and on a selection of his commentaries, namely, his commentaries on Epictetus' *Encheiridion* [148–181] and on Aristotle's *On the Soul* [182–228], *Categories* [228–266], and lost works [267–283]. It therefore puts aside Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* and *On the Heavens*. No proper explanation is given for this omission but it is reasonable to assume that selection is related here to Ilsetraut Hadot's own research. Hadot is the first scholar after World War II to engage extensively with Simplicius, providing among several related contributions:

- (1) a study of his life and works [[Hadot 1987a](#)];
- (2) the first critical edition of Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Encheiridion* [[Hadot 1996](#)];

(By taking into account, in the first study, not only Greek but also Arabic sources, Hadot made obsolete Karl Praechter's entry in the *Realenzyklopädie* [[1927](#)], while her contextualized study of the commentary on the *Encheiridion* (i.e., as an introductory part of the Neoplatonic curriculum) enabled her equally to discard Praechter's view [[1910](#)] that Simplicius, before going to the School of Athens, adhered to an allegedly simplified form of Neoplatonism that was taught at the School of Alexandria.)

- (3) a sustained defense of the attribution of the commentary on *On the Soul* to Simplicius [see, most substantially, [Hadot 2002](#)], restituted to Simplicius' fellow philosopher Priscian of Lydia by Ferdinand Bossier and Carlos Steel [[1972](#): cf. [Steel 1997](#), 105–140 and [2013](#), 1–4]; and

¹ Ilsetraut Hadot. *Le néoplatonicien Simplicius à la lumière des recherches contemporaines. Un bilan critique*. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2014. Pp. 311. ISBN 978–3–89665–639–1. Paper €34.50.

- (4) extensive studies of the prolegomena of Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories* [Hadot 1991, 2004], having also supervised a richly annotated translation of these prolegomena into French [Hadot et alii 1990].

Simplicius' biography, the identity of Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism, the importance of the prolegomena for correctly assessing the commentaries and the authorship of the commentary on *On the Soul*, along with questions of dating Simplicius' commentary on the *Encheiridion*, constitute the bulk of Hadot's *bilan critique*. In her account of the controversial issues that are involved, Hadot reaffirms views that are well known from her previously published work, while she criticizes, at times harshly and in a repetitious style,² several scholars (from Karl Praechter to me) who have been led to different conclusions. Her reason for taking these conclusions as mistaken is that they derive, on the whole, from two starting-points which she takes to be false:

- (a) the interpretation of Simplicius' commentaries as self-standing works and not according to their place in the Neoplatonic curriculum.

(Obvious differences of style and doctrine in these commentaries, Hadot argues [136, 147, 200], should not mislead us as to their authorship or to the overall validity of their contents but should be explained as adaptations of Simplicius' style and doctrine to pedagogical demands.)

² To give an example, she criticizes me twice [24, 39] for entitling a section of my book [Golitsis 2008] 'Un maître sans école' in reference to Simplicius. See pp. 17, 21, 141, and 145 for other instances of harsh criticism. There is at times a notable lack of objectivity: Alan Cameron, in addition to his publishing an 'essai infructueux' [27] on the dating of Simplicius' commentary on the *Encheiridion*, is reprimanded for identifying 'd'une manière assez peu correcte [l'Académie de Platon] avec l'école néoplatonicienne d'Athènes' [166], despite the fact that Cameron's article dates prior to Gucker's study [1978], which shed light on the institutional history of the ancient Academy. Michel Tardieu and David Pingree, on the contrary, whose studies were published in 1986 and in 2002 respectively, are justified in their references to the Neoplatonic School as the Athenian Academy: 'C'est en suivant la coutume des néoplatoniciens que l'on peut parler d'Académie platonicienne dans le cas des écoles d'Athènes' [57]. There are, nonetheless, instances of generosity, e.g., 'l'on peut dans les grandes lignes souscrire à l'interprétation que Perkams donne de ce passage, y compris à sa critique de I. Hadot (concernant un détail de ce passage)' [204].

- (b) not reading several passages in Simplicius' commentaries in the light of the testimony of medieval sources as to Simplicius' life and works [24, 41], which, she maintains, can give us clues as to the historical circumstances in which these commentaries appeared.

My general view is that Hadot's use of the structure of the Neoplatonic curriculum and of the medieval testimonies is an unsafe guide for assessing Simplicius' life and works. The Neoplatonic curriculum is certainly of help but not as Hadot employs it. I believe that only if we take notice of Simplicius' liberation from the constraints of the curriculum can we properly account for the rich contents of his commentaries. As to the medieval testimonies, which are external to, and significantly later than, Simplicius, they should be carefully interpreted and verified against the contents of the commentaries. On several occasions, the reader gets the impression that Hadot's interpretation of Simplicius is meant to verify Michel Tardieu's hypothesis [1986, 1990], according to which a Platonic school in Mesopotamian Harran, (presumably) attested by the Arabian historian al-Mas'ūdi in the 10th century, was founded by Simplicius.

I hope to make clear in what follows that if Hadot had taken into account Simplicius' commentaries on the *Physics* and *On the Heavens*, which represent in terms of quantity more than half of his exegetical work, she would have been enabled to give a picture of Simplicius that would be less distanced from Simplicius' own texts and more critical of medieval testimonies (and modern hypotheses). To give an example at hand, Hadot affirms that 'the adjective 'divine' is never attributed to Aristotle' [143]. But, in fact it is, by Simplicius in the two commentaries that Hadot does not study [Heiberg 1894, 87.27; Diels 1882–1895, 611.8]. Qualifying Aristotle as divine is important. It underscores Simplicius' difference from his predecessors, which consists in his seeing Aristotle as a philosopher fully equal to Pythagoras and Plato.

Likewise, Hadot also claims that 'the harmony in the sense of identifying the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato never existed [in Neoplatonism]' [145]. Although it is not entirely clear to me what Hadot means by 'identifying', her view is that the study of Aristotle was preparatory to the study of Plato [142–143] and that Plato was considered to be superior to Aristotle [143–144]. This is true for other Neoplatonists but not for Simplicius, as the following passage allows us to infer:

I, putting forward the truth, which is dear to god and to Aristotle [*Eth. Nic.* 1096a16–17], will here add and try to do a careful investigation of the things which Alexander says are the opinions of Plato about the motion of the soul. I do this because of those who read Alexander's words in a more superficial way and are at risk to be misleadingly set against Plato's doctrines, which is the same as to say against Aristotle's doctrines and against the divine truth (πρὸς τὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος δόγματα, ταῦτὸν δὲ εἰπεῖν καὶ πρὸς τὰ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ πρὸς τὴν θεῖαν ἀλήθειαν). [Heiberg 1894, 377.29–34: trans. in Mueller 2004 (my underlining)]

In Simplicius' view, Platonic truth, Aristotelian truth, and divine truth (say, the truth contained in the *Chaldean Oracles*) are interchangeable; and they are interchangeable because, in spite of being formulated differently, they are identical.

Simplicius, a native of Cilicia, first studied philosophy with Ammonius, son of Hermias, in Alexandria and later joined Damascius, the head of the Platonic School at Athens. Hadot, who has devoted an influential book to establishing the philosophical identity of the two schools [1978], opens her *bilan critique* by justly underlining [16–17] 'the extreme religiosity and the practice of theurgy by some Alexandrian Neoplatonists contemporary and prior to Damascius', while she criticizes the author of this response for presenting the School of Athens as 'a bastion of pagan culture and religion' and for making Hierocles' establishment of the agreement of Plato with the *Chaldean Oracles* (as reported by Photius), 'an exceptional case in the history of philosophical exegesis in Alexandria' [see Golitsis 2008, 9n9].

To make sense of this criticism, one is forced to admit that Hadot confuses here two quite different things:

- (a) the practice of theurgy, from which are supposed to derive the *Chaldean Oracles* themselves;³ and
- (b) the exegesis of the *Chaldean Oracles*.⁴

³ Characteristically, Proclus writes in his *In rem publicam*: 'This is also shown by the *Oracles*, which clearly say to the theurge (δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ τὰ λόγια πρὸς τὸν θεουργὸν λέγοντα σαφῶς) that...' [Kroll 1899–1901, 1.39.17–18].

⁴ It is unfortunate that Hadot fails to make this distinction in her recently published book about Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism, and vainly refutes the same misunderstood thesis [Hadot 2015, 1].

Whereas theurgy was practiced, one supposes, not only in Alexandria but also at every place where fervent paganism existed,⁵ the philosophical exegesis of the *Chaldean Oracles* was, in all probability, a distinctive feature of the School of Athens.⁶ Hierocles himself says that the agreement of Plato with the *Chaldean Oracles* (and with other theological traditions) was taught to him by Plutarch [see Photius, *Bib.* 173a37–39 (cod. 214)], the founder of the School of Athens. The *Suda* informs us that Plutarch's successor Syrianus composed a work in 10 books entitled *The Agreement of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato with the Chaldean Oracles* (Συριανοῦ συμφωνία Ὀρφέως Πυθαγόρου Πλάτωνος πρὸς τὰ Λόγια βιβλία δέκα) and we know from Marinus, *Vita Procli* §27 that Syrianus' successor Proclus enriched with his own explications his master's commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*. Proclus himself refers to it in his own commentary on Plato's *Republic* [Kroll 1899–1901, 1.40.21–22] and frequently quotes verses from the oracles in his *Platonic Theology* as well as in each of his Platonic commentaries. The last 'Platonic successor' of Athens, Damascius, envisaged composing a commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*,⁷ while Damascius' disciple, Simplicius, is to my knowledge the only exegete who quotes them while commenting on Aristotle.⁸ In sum, not only

⁵ Note, however, the presence of *philoponoi* in Alexandria, i.e., 'an association of Alexandrian laymen, many of them professors and students...[whose] favorite task was monitoring the activities of the pagan professors for sacrifice and other cult practices' [Trombley 1993–1994, 2.1].

⁶ This, of course, does not mean that the exegesis of the *Chaldean Oracles* originated in Athens. It suffices to think of Porphyry's *De philosophia ex oraculis* (Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας) and of Iamblichus' *Chaldean Theology*, referred to in Damascius, *De principiis* [Westerink 1989, 2.1.8].

⁷ Westerink 1989, 2.1.13–16; Westerink 1997–2003, 1.9.6–7, 1.12.1–2, 3.5.5–6.

⁸ See Diels 1882–1895, 614.8–617.32, where Simplicius sets forth an explication of *Or. Chald.* [des Places 1996, fr. 51 v. 3] in order to rectify Proclus' interpretation. This is 'proper philosophical exegesis of the hidden meaning of the Oracle', in Philippe Hoffmann's words [2015, 105]. It is worth noting in this context that Syrianus quotes in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* one and a half verses of the *Iliad*, qualified as 'the divine poetry (ἡ θεία ποίησις)' [Kroll 1902, 183.3–4], in a way that implies the reader's acquaintance with the allegorical interpretation of Homer. Syrianus' commentary on Homer is reported by the *Suda*, which also informs us about Proclus' (presumably allegorical) commentaries on Homer and on Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

were the Athenian philosophers well versed in the exegesis of the *Chaldean Oracles*, they also refer to them in their commentaries.

There is, *pace* Hadot, nothing comparable to be found in the commentaries produced in Alexandria, not even in the Platonic commentaries of Olympiodorus. Hadot [17] refers to Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus*, in which two verses of the *Chaldean Oracles* are quoted [Couvreur 1901, 110.5 and 184.21] but she fails to notice that Hermias' Alexandrian commentary consists in the lectures of his Athenian master Syrianus. All we find in the Alexandrian commentaries are two Pythagorean oracles (the so-called *πυθόχρηστα λόγια*) quoted by Ammonius, which fit well into the context of a series of lectures on the *Metaphysics* [Hayduck 1888, 20.27–28, 38.19]. Hadot's contention that there were no differences between the Schools of Athens and Alexandria is an oversimplification which looks exclusively at the general metaphysics of the two schools, overemphasizes the role played by the Neoplatonic curriculum, and overlooks the differences of the two schools as to the selection of texts to be commented on—a selection that is quite significant for a philosophy that, above all, conceived of itself as an explication of texts. Damascius reports that Ammonius, a highly influential figure in the history of the Alexandrian School, mostly explicated Aristotle's texts; and reprimands him for having made concessions to the Christian bishop of Alexandria [Zintzen 1967, fr. 79.1–2, 192]. Although the two points are not necessarily related to each other, it is reasonable to assume that Ammonius made concessions as to the selection of texts and the deepening of their exegesis for the benefit of the Christian audience that is known to have attended his lectures. This is an important point. For, as we shall see, it seems that Alexandrian Pagans had to appeal in the 530s to Simplicius, who had left from Alexandria many years ago, to provide them with a philosophical defense of their ancestral beliefs.

Despite Hadot's aspiration to the contrary, the place in which Simplicius settled after his leaving Persia in AD 532 remains an open issue. According to the sixth-century historian Agathias, Simplicius fled Athens to the court of the Persian king together with six fellow philosophers because of oppression by Christian authorities and locals, which apparently began after Justinian's banning of the teaching activities of the School of Athens in 529. Following Tardieu, Hadot is as convinced as ever [see 1987a] that:

the city where Simplicius lived happily until the end of his life without having in the least to conceal his pagan beliefs (according to Agathias), where he was able to found a school that persisted after him and where also the Manichaeans had found refuge, should be located in a territory out of the control of Byzantine State and preferably under Persian surveillance. When we add indications 7, 8 and 9, we are naturally oriented towards eastern Syria, especially to Harran. [132]

Alas, nothing is less certain than this conclusion. To begin, Agathias does not mention any ‘city’ in his report. He says that the seven self-exiled philosophers, who preferred to enter the territory of the Byzantine Empire and die there instantly than to remain in Ctesiphon (such was their profound disappointment and disgust for manners at the Persian court), were nevertheless able, thanks to their sojourn in Persia, to end their lives ‘in the most pleasant way (ἡδέως)’, *scil.* from a spiritual point of view; for upon request of the Persian king a clause was inserted in the *pax perpetua* of 532, according to which

those men [i.e., the philosophers] should be allowed to return to their homes (εἰς τὰ κοίτῃρα ἦθι)⁹ and to live out the rest of their lives fearlessly as they wish (ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῖς), [that is,] without being compelled to alter their ancestral religious beliefs or to accept any view which did not coincide with theirs. [Keydell 1967, 81.15–19; trans. Frendo 1975, 67 (modified)]

That Simplicius should set out for a Byzantine territory out of the control of the Byzantine Empire, as Hadot speculates, is both contradictory in itself—Hadot [25] transfers this contradiction to Agathias in order to explain why Agathias does not specify where Simplicius went—and openly contradicts Agathias’ testimony. For, in spite of Hadot’s astonishment (‘Quelle peut être la raison de ce silence?’), Agathias *does* tell us where the seven philosophers settled: in their homelands, which he has carefully specified at the beginning of his narrative:

Damascius of *Syria*, Simplicius of *Cilicia*, Eulalius of *Phrygia*, Priscian of *Lydia*, Hermes and Diogenes of *Phoenicia* and Isidore of *Gaza*, all of them,...the quintessential flower of the philosophers of our age.... [Keydell 1967, 80.7–9]

⁹ According to the pertinent translation suggested by Watts 2005, 306n76.

Simplicius, therefore, in all probability, returned to Cilicia, as Damascius is known to have returned to Syria.¹⁰ I suppose that Agathias found it superfluous to specify that the philosophers acquiesced to what was ordained for them in the treaty ratified by Justinian.

Let us assume, however, for the sake of argument, that Simplicius returned to Cilicia (a fact that Agathias was aware of) and that he later decided (or was forced, if you prefer) to leave his homeland and to establish a school at some other place (a fact that Agathias was not aware of). Hadot deduces from Simplicius' reference to a conversation that he once had with a Manichaean sage that Manichaeans too had settled in that place [1996, 35.90–91]. Following Tardieu's contention that 'the only place where a direct contact [between Simplicius and the Manichaeans] was possible...is Harran' [1986, 24n105], she then concludes that Simplicius settled in Harran. Concetta Luna [2001, 491], however, has pointed out that there are three short passages in Ammonius' lectures on the *Metaphysics* [cf. Hayduck 1888, 271.33–36, 285.17–19, 292.26–29] which show that Ammonius too was polemicizing against the Manichaeans. Hadot [37] reads Ammonius' passages cursorily and discards them as simply adding to Aristotle's doxography of people believing in the simultaneous truth of contradictories. Nonetheless, the vocabulary used by Ammonius (ὥς πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐλέγομεν...; οὕτως ὑμεῖς φατε...) indicates real circumstances and suggest that the Manichaean propaganda was also active in Alexandria. Moreover, Hadot does not justify the transformation of the Manichaean sage, of whom Simplicius speaks (ὥς ἐμοί τι τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς σοφῶν ἐξέφηνε), to 'a group of Manichaeans'. Still, she criticizes [38] Robin Lane Fox [2005, 232] for not adducing any proof for his claim that 'in c. 530–50, Manichaeans still travelled all over the place.' The *onus probandi*, I think, is on the one who claims that a Manichaean, or anyone for that matter, did not travel.

Granted Simplicius' traveling to Persia, his relation to Damascius, and the latter's presence in Syria, point no. 7 in the passage from Hadot quoted above,

¹⁰ I here modify my previous account [Golitsis 2008, 21], according to which the philosophers continued to form a group around Damascius in Syria. This account was based on a false understanding of «ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς», as “amongst themselves”; they might philosophise, but not in public' [so Foulkes 1992, 143]. But in such a context «ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς» clearly refers to human freedom and self-determination: cf. the philosophical meaning of «ἐφ' ἡμῶν», i.e., 'what depends on us'.

namely, Simplicius' traveling on the river Aboras in a *kelek* [Heiberg 1894, 525.10–13 ὡς ἐπειράθην καὶ ἐγὼ κατὰ τὸν Ἀβόραν ποταμόν] should not surprise us: Simplicius must have traveled to Syria. This, however, is not established by point no. 8, namely, Simplicius' reference to the Syrian Atargate and the Egyptian Isis as meaning 'places of gods' [Diels 1882–1895, 641.33–35 διὸ καὶ τὴν Κυρίαν Ἀταργάτην τόπον θεῶν καλοῦσιν καὶ τὴν Ἰσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, ὡς πολλῶν θεῶν ιδιότητα περιεχούσας]. Hadot, following Tardieu [1990, 159–160], ascribes to Simplicius knowledge of the etymology of the word 'Atargate' thanks to the use of a Syrian version of a Hermetic book (Tardieu actually speaks of a 'local Greek version') in which Atargate was identified with Isis. Nevertheless, all there is in this passage is a reference to, if not a quotation from, the Corpus Hermeticum, which is preceded by a quotation of the *Orphica* [Diels 1882–1895, 641.30–32] and followed by a quotation of Plato's *Phaedrus* [Diels 1882–1895, 641.35–37]. Hadot oversimplifies this passage when she affirms [94] that it claims that the ancient philosophers used the generic notion of place (τόπος) where they should use the specific notion of container (περιοχή). The scope of Simplicius' remark is larger and more sophisticated, since he wants to show that all three senses of «τοπός» as 'the determination of the position' («ὁ ἀφορισμὸς τῆς θέσεως») of bodies—i.e., as

- the receptacle of a body,
- the limits of the container of a body, and
- the ordering of some thing's position with regard to others

—apply equally to incorporeal substances according to the Pagan theological traditions taken as a whole. He therefore quotes Orpheus for an example of the first sense, the Egyptians (that is, Hermes Trismegistus) for the second sense, and Plato for the third. There is nothing suggesting that Simplicius was acquainted with the Greco-Aramaic etymology of 'Atargate', as Tardieu and Hadot think, nor that such knowledge was essential to his argument. What he needed was the Egyptians' reference to (καλοῦσιν) Atargate and Isis as a 'place of gods'. There is no reason to believe that such a Hermetic book was available exclusively in Syria.

Point no. 9 refers to the dedication of the commentary on *On the Soul*, mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* (10th century), to a certain Atā-Wālis according to the vocalization suggested by Philipp Vallat, who helpfully discusses the relevant passage [102–129]. Vallat shows that al-Nadīm had secondhand knowledge of this commentary and entertains the possibility that

it was not the Greek original but the Syrian translation of the commentary that was dedicated to this person. I think that the latter alternative is more plausible, given that the dedication is not attested in the Greek manuscript tradition. Vallat claims that al-Nadīm could have had this information only from a Harranian source, which I am not in a position to verify. But even so, the presence of a commentary in a given place does not imply that its author was also there.

It remains to deal with Hadot's final (and crucial to her conclusion) point: the existence of a School of Simplicius. Hadot's belief in it starts from Tardieu's controversial thesis [1986], based on an interpretation of a passage of al-Mas'ūdī, that a School of Platonist Sabians, different from charlatan Sabians, existed in Harran in the 10th century. The interpretation of al-Mas'ūdī's passage as distinguishing between two types of Sabians is disputed by Lameer [1997]. I am not competent to interpret al-Mas'ūdī's text but I think that one has to agree with Dimitri Gutas [1988, 44n34] that Tardieu's understanding of «al-Yūnāniyīn» ('Pagan Greeks') as members of the 'Platonic Academy' is forced.

Let us grant, however, for the sake of Hadot's argument, that a School of Platonist Sabians did exist in Harran. Her saying that Simplicius founded it is, however, an extravagant claim which rests on her misinterpretation of testimony by the mathematician Ibn al-Qiftī (1172–1248). Here is how Hadot reports and comments on al-Qiftī's testimony:

According to Gätje [Gätje 1982, 16], [Ibn al-Qiftī] adds that Simplicius had composed, among other widespread writings, 'a commentary on the introductory part of Euclid's book, which is an introduction to geometry' and had gathered around him pupils and successors who were named after their professor.... The information about Simplicius' celebrity as a mathematician, his activity as a professor and his school, his successors who were named after him, is of great interest, since it shows not only that Simplicius himself was teaching but also that his school persisted after him. [39–40: my underlining]

We do not need to look far to see that the Arabic source, which is quoted *verbatim* selectively, is erroneously reported by Hadot. Vallat provides us later in the book with a translation of this passage from al-Qiftī:

Simplicius: mathematician and geometer, who lived after Euclid's time. In his time, he was celebrated. His science, as we have described it [i.e., mathematics] was then honored; he was given the first rank because of the usefulness that

was recognized for [mathematics] in the land of the Hellenes. His name there became famous and his position eminent among all, and he had friend colleagues (*ashāb*) and successors (*atbā'*), who made a name for themselves. He was Roman by birth. Among his well-known writings, there is the book *Commentary on Euclid's Book*, that is, the introduction to geometry, and other writings. [128: my underlining]

First of all, Simplicius' alleged successors were not named after him, as Hadot affirms. All al-Qiftī says is that the successors themselves became famous. Nor does the passage mention any foundation of a school. But leaving aside such obvious shortcomings, we should ask: Is al-Qiftī's testimony, if correctly interpreted, reliable? Let us look into the details of the passage, which unfortunately neither Hadot nor Vallat discusses.

Al-Qiftī says that Simplicius was 'Roman', a word that, as Hadot (relying on Vallat) explains while defending Tardieu's translation of «al-Yūnāniyīn» as 'Platonists', should mean 'Christian' [60]. Now, making Simplicius a Christian would cast serious doubt on al-Qiftī's reliability. But let us be charitable and take the phrase for what it apparently means: that Simplicius was Roman by birth. Simplicius was not, of course, Roman but he did have a Latin name. It only takes a step from knowing that 'Simplicius' is a Latin name to supposing the Roman origin of its bearer; or, alternatively, it is easy enough to take a Roman official named Simplicius ('Simplicius' was not a rare name: Hadot mentions [13] a *magister utriusque militiae per Orientem*, who was an acquaintance of Synesius) for the mathematician Simplicius and to infer the mathematician's Roman origin and high social position.

Moreover, al-Qiftī's reference to Simplicius' *ashāb*, where «ashāb» in all probability renders «ἐταῖροι» [43], seems to be deduced from al-Nayrīzī's (865–922) so-called commentary on Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, which is an Arabic translation of a wide-ranging compilation of Greek scholia worked over by al-Nayrīzī [see Arnzen 2002, xxxvi]. In addition to the scholia attributed to Simplicius himself, this commentary contains nine references by Simplicius to his *sāhib* (pl. *ashāb*) Agānīs, i.e., his ἐταῖρος Ἀγαθινός according to Vallat (or Ἀγάτιος, according to Tannery [1915] and Lo Bello [2009]). Reporting the views of a ἐταῖρος within a commentary has an interesting parallel

in Hermias, who mentions twice the interventions of his ‘*hetairos* Proclus’ during Syrianus’ lectures on the *Phaedrus* [Couvreur 1901, 92.6, 154.28].¹¹

As for Simplicius’ unnamed *atbā*, i.e., his successors, it suffices for a compiler, as al-Qiftī avowedly was [109], or for his source to have misunderstood a text referring to Simplicius as διάδοχος, that is, as Πλατωνικός διάδοχος. Indeed, there is a passage in Simplicius’ commentary on *On the Heavens* that suggests it [Heiberg 1894, 640.24–25 Πρόκλος δὲ ὁ ἐκ Λυκίας ὀλίγον πρὸ ἐμοῦ γεγονώς τοῦ Πλάτωνος διάδοχος] and it would not be implausible to think that Damascius designated Simplicius as his successor, even if there was no Platonic school to lead by that time.

Be that as it may, al-Qiftī’s entry in his compilatory *Ta’rīh al-hukamā* is an amalgam of information coming from different sources. It should, therefore, be treated with caution. Hadot, following Vallat [105], takes ‘the land of Hellenes’ to stand for Harran. But this seems an exaggerated, if not to say biased, interpretation. Even if such an expression was used to denote the Pagans of Harran,¹² there is nothing to suggest that al-Qiftī did not use it literally.

That a source almost as late as al-Qiftī, if not interpreted carefully, can mislead us in our reconstruction of Simplicius’ life is shown by further medieval testimony that Hadot adduces [48–49, 131], namely, the Byzantine manuscript Laurentianus pluteus 85,1 (cited as Laurentianus 85 by Hadot). This Constantinopolitan manuscript from the last quarter of the 13th century [see Golitsis 2017] known as Oceanus due to its large dimensions, contains among other commentaries Simplicius’ commentary on the *Physics*. In the title that precedes the commentary proper, Simplicius is qualified as ‘great teacher’ (Σιμπλικίου μεγάλου διδασκάλου). Hadot takes this to indicate that Simplicius’ activity as a professor, presumably in Harran, had left some traces in Byzantium. Now, this title is copied, as is the whole text in the Oceanus, from the manuscript Marcianus gr. 227, written by George of Cyprus some

¹¹ It would be worthwhile to consider whether Simplicius’ commentary on Euclid, which is attested by the Arabic sources, was an early commentary based on the seminars of Ammonius, who is referred to by Damascius as the most excellent geometer of his time [Zintzen 1967, 79.3–6].

¹² Vallat [105–106] quotes as evidence two references in the *Sancta Acta Conciliorum* and Tābit b. Qurra (d. 901), as interpreted in a forthcoming study by Tardieu. This does not seem grounds enough for such a strong identification.

years before his ascension to the Patriarchal throne of Constantinople in 1283 [see [Golitsis and Hoffmann 2014](#), 127–128]. Not being able to find Simplicius’ commentary in its entirety, George has copied after Simplicius’ text a collection of scholia (also copied into the Oceanus) which are attributed to John Philoponus (Ἰωάννου τοῦ Φιλοπόνου εἰς τὸ ἐπίλοιπον τῆς Φυσικῆς ἀκροάσεως), although the manuscript from which the majority of them derive, namely, Parisinus gr. 1853, contains no attribution to Philoponus. At around the same time, a literary friend of George of Cyprus, the princess Theodora Raoulaina Palaiologina, made her own copy of Simplicius’ commentary on the *Physics* (the actual Mosquensis GIM 3649). Its title presents Simplicius’ commentary as being ‘from the voice of Ammonius’ (ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἀμμωνίου), so that Simplicius is no more a teacher but a disciple. On what grounds should we prefer George’s testimony to Theodora’s? Hadot also refers to four Byzantine manuscripts of Simplicius’ commentary on the *Categories*, whose titles also qualify Simplicius as μέγας διδάσκαλος. She fails to notice, however, that these titles do not only say this; they also claim that the commentary on the *Categories* is ‘from the voice of the great teacher Simplicius’ (ἀπὸ φωνῆς Σιμπλικίου μεγάλου διδασκάλου). In other words, these manuscripts are supposed to reproduce Simplicius’ oral teaching. This, of course, is not true. Simplicius’ commentaries exceed the limits of any commentary actually taught at schools and Simplicius himself constantly addresses in them not real pupils but readers (οἱ ἐντυγχάνοντες, οἱ ἐντευζόμενοι).¹³ This important feature of Simplicius’ exegesis, already pointed out by Praechter, is not discussed by Hadot.

We have come, at last, to Simplicius’ own texts. Hadot, following Tardieu’s interpretation of a passage in the commentary on the *Physics* about the conventional use of the four calendars—Athenian, Asian, Roman, and Syrian-Arabic [see [Diels 1882–1895](#), 875.19–30], where the words « ἡμεῖς ποιούμεθα » are taken by Tardieu to designate Simplicius and his auditors in Harran—states that ‘it is probable that this commentary was addressed to the members of the school and the inhabitants of the city where this [school] was situated’ [97]. She later concludes that all of Simplicius’ commentaries on Aristotle were probably written in Harran [135]. Simplicius, however, says

¹³ See [Heiberg 1894](#), 48.22, 75.13, 102.16, 298.21, 653.9; [Diels 1882–1895](#), 88.11, 111.17, 601.13, 762.29, 1040.16, 1182.38, 1333.34; [Kalbfleisch 1907](#), 3.14, 370.6. There is no reference to readers in the commentary on *On the Soul*.

straightforwardly a few things about the people to whom he addressed his commentaries; and we need not force, once more, the meaning of a passage in order to make some reasonable guesses.¹⁴

Despite her overall commitment to the logic of the curriculum as an interpretive tool of Neoplatonic commentaries, Hadot does not address in her book a crucial question: Why did Simplicius reverse the traditional order of commenting on Aristotle's treatises, as is established by cross-references, by commenting on the first Aristotelian treatise to be studied, i.e., the *Categories*, only after having commented on *On the Heavens* and *Physics*, which themselves ought to be studied the other way round? The only compelling explanation that I can see for this anomaly [see Golitsis 2008, 200–201] is that Simplicius judged it opportune to launch his exegetical work on Aristotle with a commentary on *On the Heavens* because this treatise was the most concerned with John Philoponus' *On the Eternity of the World against Aristotle*. Quite early in the commentary, Simplicius makes clear his resolution to refute Philoponus' arguments. He describes this as an unseemly task that 'the more purified (οἱ καθαριώτεροι)'—that is, philosophers who possess the high purificatory (or cathartic) virtues (e.g., Damascius)—would be unwilling to assume:

Because of his desire [this man, i.e., Philoponus] proposes to contradict the arguments of Aristotle before us in books of enormous length, not only hoping to intimidate the fools (τοὺς ἀνοήτους [i.e., the Christians]) by quantity but also deterring, I think, the majority [of us], in particular, the more purified (τοὺς καθαριωτέρους), from reading this extraordinary nonsense. As a consequence, his writings have remained unexamined, and just from the fact of his having written so many pages against Aristotle they have earned the author a reputation for wisdom (δόξαν σοφίας). [Heiberg 1894, 25.28–34: trans. in Wildberg 1987 (modified).]

¹⁴ Luna 2001, 484–488 shows that Tardieu's interpretation of this passage is untenable. Hadot's attempt [99] to defend anew Tardieu's interpretation by pointing out the use of the indicative, instead of the optative used for other examples of conventional use quoted by Simplicius is infelicitous. As Hadot says, the indicative is used to refer to historical reality. But one does not need *to be physically present* at the place where all four calendars are used nor does this place have to be unique. It suffices *to know* that all four calendars are used. In other words, the problem with Tardieu's interpretation does not lie in the reference «ποιούμεθα» but in the referent of «ἡμεῖς». As Luna points out, «ἡμεῖς» is used for all the examples quoted by Simplicius from Diels 1882–1895, 874.27 onwards.

It is clear that Philoponus, who in 529 composed his *On the Eternity of the World against Proclus*, had made himself quite a name in Alexandria by publishing soon thereafter (around 532) his *Contra Aristotelem*. By then, Simplicius was living far away from Alexandria and Philoponus' polemical works must have been brought to his attention (or, alternatively, to Damascius' attention, who transmitted them to Simplicius) by people who were worried by their contents, i.e., Alexandrian Pagans. Simplicius, who, as he says [Heiberg 1894, 26.18–19], was not aware of having ever met Philoponus, apparently refers to those people when he says, 'Now, I do not know how but Plato's works seem to please him [i.e., Philoponus], although, *as they say* (ὥς φασί), he had no teachers to teach him those works' [Heiberg 1894, 84.11–12]. Simplicius undertook to rebuke Philoponus' polemical discourse thoroughly so as to defend Aristotle's authority:

I thought that it would be good too to help in this way those who have, as a result of this man's [*scil.* Philoponus] recklessness, been led into a disdain of Aristotle's writings, by showing them that his vainglorious ignorance (κενόδοξον ἀπαιδευσίαν) is entirely despicable. [Heiberg 1894, 26.28–31; trans. in Wildberg 1987 (modified)]

and, thus, the rightness of the traditional pagan belief in an eternal creator who is the unchanging cause of the everlasting universe. 'It is necessary', Simplicius says, 'to refute his unsound argument for the benefit of those who understand him [i.e., Philoponus] superficially (τοῖς ἐπιπολαίως ἀκούουσιν αὐτοῦ βοηθοῦντα)' [Heiberg 1894, 184.30–31]. In other words, he means to refute Philoponus' arguments for the benefit of those who were at risk of being convinced by his arguments and, we may surmise, losing their faith in their ancestral beliefs.

Simplicius' refutation of Philoponus is orchestrated in two parts: in his commentary on the first book of *On the Heavens* and in his commentary on the last book of the *Physics*. Having completed the first part, Simplicius declares his readiness to refute Philoponus' arguments against *Physics* 8 'beginning from another starting point (ἀπ' ἄλλης ἀρχῆς)', i.e., through commenting on the *Physics* [Heiberg 1894, 201.3–10]. This concerted effort against his adversary's case for creationism explains, in my opinion, why the first Aristotelian treatise to be studied in the Neoplatonic curriculum, that is, the *Categories*, was commented last by Simplicius.

Simplicius makes in his commentaries a distinction between the educated (οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι) and the uneducated (ἀπαίδευτοι). Whereas he considers the first to be immune to Philoponus' unsound arguments,¹⁵ the latter risk being tempted by Philoponus' innovative philosophy, which casts into doubt the 'ancient glory (παλαιὰ εὐκλεία)'. It is for the sake of these people, i.e., uneducated or less educated Pagans and Christians alike—there existed, of course, students who wavered between Hellenism and Christianity—on condition that they are 'lovers of learning (φιλομαθεῖς)',¹⁶ that Simplicius sets forth his refutation of Philoponus:

And as for me, in setting myself to elucidate Aristotle's treatise *On the Heavens* to the best of my ability, I thought I should not pass over this man's [i.e., Philoponus'] objections, which will disturb no educated men but rather the uneducated, in particular those who always take pleasure in unusual things and are oppressed by the glory of the ancient [philosophers], and still more those who think they serve God if they believe that the heavens which, as they say, came into existence for the service of man, possess nothing exceptional in comparison with the things below the moon, and if they take the heavens to be perishable like them. For in the belief that [Philoponus'] objections support their opinion about God they hold them in great esteem, although they know nothing about these things and still less about the writings of Aristotle, against which they dare to raise the objections, but boast to each other and say to us [i.e., Hellenes] with youthful insolence that the doctrines of the philosophers have been overturned. Thus, for the sake of these people [i.e., the uneducated Christians] and of those [i.e., those Hellenes] who are easily misled [in their interpretation of the ancient philosophers], and so that Aristotle's treatise *On the Heavens* and the religious conception of the universe should keep their ancient glory unrefuted, I decided to set forth these objections and to refute them to the best of my ability. For it

¹⁵ Heiberg 1894, 180.23–27 [trans. in Mueller 2011 (modified)];

Let no one of the more purified (τῶν καθαριωτέρων) [scil. philosophers] blame me for pursuing inappropriate leisure if I choose to quote so much of this sort of thing from this person. Rather let him blame those who attach themselves uncritically to what this person says and those who will doubt at times that someone wrote such things and spoke so shamelessly [against Aristotle].

See also Heiberg 1894, 184.31–185.2.

¹⁶ These people must be distinguished from the fools (ἄνῳτοι), i.e., the ignorant Christians, whom Simplicius considers to be incurable. The latter are bound to be impressed by the mass of Philoponus' work since they are wholly unable to go through its content.

appeared to be more suitable to combine the objections and their refutation with the comments on the treatise. [Heiberg 1894, 25.36–26.17: trans. in Wildberg 1987 (modified)]

Simplicius presents his refutation of Philoponus' arguments as being aside from his main task, that is, his commenting on *On the Heavens*, but it is clear that his lengthy rejection of Philoponus (both in his commentary on *On the Heavens* and in his commentary on the *Physics*) constitutes an essential part of his exegesis. His wish to treat Philoponus' objections within a commentary proper suggests a two-fold strategy:

- (a) rebuttal of the opponent's arguments by showing them to be based on an inadequate understanding of Aristotle's text, and
- (b) establishment of Aristotle's true doctrine by correct interpretation of his text.

Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle aim at providing a model of how to perform philosophical exegesis correctly, so as to secure the irrefutable truth that is contained in Aristotle's texts. In his commentary on the *Physics*, Simplicius calls his readers to intellectual resistance:

What, then, would we say that so many great men were mistaken in their doctrines about place, putting forward our difficulties as an unfortunate feast for those [i.e., Christian Apologists] who are accustomed to abuse at pleasure the apparent contradictions of the ancients? [Diels 1882–1895, 640.12–14: trans. in Urmson 1992 (modified)]

In his commentary on the *Categories*, he invites his readers to follow his model and do away with claims about Aristotle's instantiating, through his criticisms of Plato, the internal contradiction of ancient philosophy:

The disciple must also be sufficiently good and virtuous, and above all he must carry out, both by himself and with other *philomatheis*, the in-depth examination of Aristotelian concepts, while he must guard against the disputatious twaddle into which many of those who frequent Aristotle fall. [Kalbfleisch 1907, 7.33–8.2]¹⁷

In sum, if we are to make full sense of Simplicius' Aristotelian commentaries, we have to discard Hadot's reconstruction of the historical circumstances in which they appeared. Simplicius' commentaries were addressed to people

¹⁷ For a passage stressing Aristotle's opposition to Plato, see Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* [Rabe 1899, 29.2–13].

who were affected, in one way or another, by Philoponus' polemical treatises and, more generally, by Christian writings against Hellenic philosophy, and who were therefore daring to abandon their ancestral beliefs. It is evident that no such readership existed in Harran, Hadot's and Vallat's 'terre des Hellènes'. In addition to their being 'spiritual exercises' for himself, Simplicius' commentaries were meant to be read and used as models of correct philosophical exegesis in Alexandria, where Christian apologetics were becoming all the more robust. This explains the transmission of Simplicius' commentaries together with texts of undisputed Alexandrian origin in the so-called philosophical collection, i.e., a collection of philosophical manuscripts copied in Constantinople in the late ninth century. In virtue of their not being linked to actual teaching, Simplicius' commentaries do not, and need not, obey the logic of a real curriculum. In order to illustrate the constraints imposed by the curriculum, Hadot quotes passages from Ammonius, Philoponus, and David [142–145] but not from Simplicius himself. She adduces as evidence for her claim [147, 158] a phrase from Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories*, 'the ears of the beginners do not support precision' [Kalbfleisch 1907, 67.10–12]. But this phrase is quoted out of context, since it is said in defense of Aristotle—i.e., against anyone who, ignorant of the introductory character of the *Categories*, would criticize Aristotle for his lack of precision—and in no way does it mean that Simplicius' own text is introductory.

Scholars who are familiar with the entire work of Simplicius have shown that, in each one of his Aristotelian commentaries, Simplicius provides us, albeit from different starting points, with an integral interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, which does not respect the formal ordering of the latter before the study of Plato's works.¹⁸ Simplicius quotes Plato abundantly, and several 'micro-commentaries' on Platonic passages are scattered in his commentaries.¹⁹ His commentaries on the *Physics* and on *On the Heavens* are enriched with extensive digressions that clarify difficult philosophical notions in view of the agreement of Aristotle with Plato and, in general, of the harmony reigning over Hellenic philosophy, while his commentary on

¹⁸ See many of Philippe Hoffmann's publications and Baltussen 2008.

¹⁹ Heiberg 1894, 103.28–107.23, for instance, is a characteristic micro-commentary on select passages of the *Timaeus*. Gavray 2007 is devoted to the presence of the *Sophist* in Simplicius' commentaries.

the *Categories* incorporates Iamblichus' intellectual theory, which shows, in opposition to Plotinus' criticism, in what way the 10 Aristotelian categories apply to the intelligible realm—a lesson that arguably is not appropriate for people who are supposed to be exclusively instructed in logic. It suffices to compare this commentary with any Alexandrian commentary on the *Categories* to see the difference between a properly written composition and written versions of oral teachings within a real curriculum. Simplicius' commentaries contain, in a sense, the most that they could contain. Simplicius shows himself aware of his not respecting the logic of the curriculum, when he closes a six-page digression on the theology of Parmenides [Diels 1882–1895, 142.28–148.24] with the following words:

But enough with that, as we may seem to someone [τοῖς δοξώμεν, presumably one of the purified philosophers] to have 'crossed the borders (ὑπὲρ τὰ ἐκκαμμένα πηδᾶν)', as the saying goes, by introducing the most extreme of theological doctrines into a treatise about physics.

Simplicius' role as a master without a school, composing his commentaries liberated from the restrictions of a real curriculum, invalidates one of Hadot's main arguments in favor of the authenticity of the attribution of the commentary on *On the Soul* to Simplicius. Hadot does away with indisputable differences of style between this commentary and other Aristotelian commentaries attributed to Simplicius by pointing out the pedagogical demands to which Simplicius had to conform [200]. But, practically, there were no pedagogical demands. And even if there were, theoretically, we can explain only with great difficulty and much speculation why the commentary on *On the Soul* is so different from Simplicius' other commentaries on Aristotle. The commentaries on *On the Heavens*, on *Physics*, and on the *Categories* are interrelated not only in style but also in content²⁰ and, more significantly, in spirituality. The commentaries on *On the Heavens* and on the *Categories* close with a prayer in prose (as also does Simplicius' commentary on the *Encheiridion*), whereas the same religiosity is expressed in the commentary on the *Physics* when Simplicius discusses the utility of the study of physics

²⁰ Think, for instance, of Damascius' doctrine of the μέτρα συναγωγή which confer determination to sensible things. This doctrine is fully expanded in the so-called *Corollarium de loco* and *Corollarium de tempore* of the commentary on the *Physics*. But it is also referred to in the commentaries on *On the Heavens* [Heiberg 1894, 94.8–95.16] and on the *Categories* [Kalbfleisch 1907, 364.7–35].

[Diels 1882–1895, 5.10–20]. There is nothing of the sort in the commentary on *On the Soul*.

On the contrary, there are three passages in the commentary on *On the Soul* that refer to a commentary on the *Physics*:

- (1) Hayduck 1882, 35.10–15,
- (2) Hayduck 1882, 120.24–25, and
- (3) Hayduck 1882, 198.5,

which are problematically correlated by Hadot [219–220] to passages in Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics*. In the first of them, a distinction is made between the 'complete presence (ἀθρόα παρουσία)' of a given disposition in the soul of a living being (so that the soul herself remains unaltered) and the 'discursive change (διεξοδική μεταβολή)' of the living being itself which passes from the state before the disposition to the state after the disposition. The passages in Simplicius, *In phys.* [Diels 1882–1895, 1061.25–1063.16 and 1064.28–1067.2] to which Hadot refers rather vaguely, contain none of the terms involved in this distinction.²¹ The second passage requires one to correct 'book 4' to 'book 3' only to be, once again, vaguely identified in Simplicius' commentary: 'Les passages auxquels Simplicius fait allusion se trouvent dans son commentaire au livre III. p. 408,1 sqq.'. Only the third passage, which mentions the continuity of natural time (as distinguished from the discrete psychic time), can be said to refer to Simplicius' *In phys.* [see Diels 1882–1895, 788.14–16].²² Three lines, however, cannot do justice to the author's claim that he has spoken more about that in his commentary on the *Physics* (ἐπὶ πλεον δεῖ ἡμῖν περὶ τούτου ἐν τοῖς εἰς τὴν Φυσικὴν ἀκρόαειν εἰρηται). There is, in my view, no sufficient reason not to identify this author as Simplicius' fellow-philosopher Priscian.

Let me close this very long response with two last remarks on Simplicius' commentary on the *Encheiridion*, which Hadot thinks it is impossible to date, and on Simplicius' commentary on the *Metaphysics*, of whose existence

²¹ Note that the term «διεξοδικός» is not encountered in any other commentary attributed to Simplicius.

²² Hadot is content to refer to the *Corollarium de tempore* in its entirety:

De tout cela il est effectivement longuement question dans le *Corollarium de tempore*, *In Phys.*, p. 773,8–800,26. [220]

Hadot is convinced. Hadot rightly rejects [167] Alan Cameron's understanding of «τοῖς παροῦσιν», mentioned by Simplicius in the epilogue of his commentary on the *Encheiridion*, as a code-word («τὰ παρόντα») referring to the oppressions of the Athenian philosophers by the Christian regime in 529–531 [Cameron 1969]. Indeed, the expression «εὐχὴ...τοῖς παροῦσιν οἰκεία» is meant to introduce Simplicius' final prayer, which culminates in 'the mist over the eyes of the soul' that the 'father and sovereign of human *logos*' is asked to take away, and must refer to Simplicius' finishing a text about the purification of the human soul. It probably means, therefore, as Hadot suggests, 'a prayer...conformable to the present discourse'.²³ Still, before introducing his prayer, Simplicius refers to his explication of the *Encheiridion*, which he

carried out at an appropriate opportunity during a situation of tyranny.

ἐν προσήκοντι καιρῷ μοι γινομένη τυραννικῆς περιστάσεως.

Granted that it is rather improbable that the words «καιρός» and «περίστασις» refer to long term situations and, in light of Agathias' testimony that Simplicius lived a pleasant life after his leaving Persia (indeed, there are no similar statements in his Aristotelian commentaries composed after 532), there are but two tyrants to which the epilogue of the commentary can refer: Justinian, at the time of the banning of the school's activities, and Chosroes with his court, where according to Agathias the bodily passions reigned, provoking the disgust of the self-exiled philosophers. The composition of the commentary on the *Encheiridion* should, therefore, be situated in 529–532.

Marwan Rashed has shown [2000] that some Byzantine scholia and marginal annotations contained in the manuscripts Parisinus gr. 1853 and Parisinus gr. 1901, if carefully interpreted, do not support Hadot's reading according to which Simplicius wrote a now-lost commentary on the *Metaphysics* [Hadot 1987b]. In what is perhaps one of the most awkward moments of the book, Hadot counters one of Rashed's main arguments in the following way:

²³ scil. «τοῖς παροῦσι [λόγοις]». Philippe Hoffmann reads «τὰ παρόντα» (and not «οἱ παρόντες») but not as a code-word. Two parallel passages in Proclus' commentary on the *First Alcibiades* and Simplicius' commentary on *On the Heavens* suggest that Simplicius' epilogue may refer to the present historical circumstances, i.e., to the Christian empire in general, in which irrationality dominates: see Hoffmann 2012, 170–173.

[Rashed] writes, ‘*These three annotations prove one thing: that Michel Ephesus thought that Simplicius wrote a commentary on the *Metaphysics*. But if we want this first conclusion to have a value, we should require, if not a proof, at least a simple indication that we have a reason to believe that Michael did not attribute the problematic commentary on the *De anima* to Simplicius*’. If we want to understand this last sentence, we should know that Rashed finds ‘very solid’ Steel’s arguments in favor of Priscian’s being the author of the commentary on the *De anima*, which is attributed to Simplicius by the manuscripts and in which Simplicius refers twice to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Therefore, as Rashed thinks highly probable that Priscian is the author of the *De anima* commentary attributed by the manuscripts to Simplicius, the commentary on the *Metaphysics* to which the scholia and Michael of Ephesus refer as being a commentary by Simplicius should therefore be by Priscian too. We have said above *in extenso* (pp. 187–218) what we think of the ‘solidity’ of Steel’s theses. Since this attempt to attribute Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* to Priscian has failed, Rashed’s argument loses at the same time his *raison d’être*. [276]

It seems that Hadot’s passion to defend Simplicius’ authorship of the commentary on *On the Soul* made Rashed’s point invisible: Michael, who was a philosopher well versed in the Aristotelian commentaries, could deduce the existence of a commentary by Simplicius on the *Metaphysics* from the references made to it in the commentary on *On the Soul* [Hayduck 1882, 28.17–22; 217.23], which is unanimously attributed in the Byzantine manuscript tradition to Simplicius.

Ilsetraut Hadot has devoted a great deal of her scholarly research to Simplicius and this book is a useful summary of her approach. She has helpfully collected most of the secondary literature on Simplicius [289–311] but, on the whole, her book is an unsafe guide to Simplicius as approached by other scholars and, regrettably, to Simplicius *tout court*. Despite this verdict, it is my firm belief that Hadot should be thanked for all the previous work that she has done, not at least because it is also thanks to her that younger scholars have been able to take different ways towards understanding better one of the last great philosophers of late antiquity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnzen, R. 2002. *Abū l-'Abbās an-Nayrīzīs Exzerpte aus (Ps.-?) Simplicius' Kommentar zu den Definitionen, Postulaten und Axiomen in Euclids Elementa I*. Cologne/Essen.
- Baltussen, H. 2008. *Philosophy and Exegesis in Simplicius: The Methodology of a Commentator*. London.
- Bossier, F., and Steel, C. 1972. 'Priscianus Lydus en de „In de anima” van Pseudo (?) -Simplicius'. *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 34:761–822.
- Cameron, A. 1969. 'The Last Days of the Academy at Athens'. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 195:7–29.
- Couvreur, P. 1901. *Hermiae Alexandrini in Platonis Phaedrum scholia*. Paris.
- des Places, E. 1996. *Oracles chaldaïques avec un choix de commentaires anciens*. 3rd rev. edn. Paris.
- Diels, H. 1882–1895. *Simplicii in Aristotelis physicorum libros commentaria*. 2 vols. Berlin.
- Foulkes, P. 1992. 'Where was Simplicius?' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 112:143.
- Frendo, J. D. 1975. *Agathias: The Histories*. Berlin.
- Gätje, H. 1982. 'Simplicius in der arabischen Überlieferung'. *Der Islam* 59:6–31.
- Gavray, M.-A. 2007. *Simplicius lecteur du Sophiste. Contribution à l'étude de l'exégèse néoplatonicienne*. Paris.
- Glucker, J. 1978. *Antiochus and the Late Academy*. Gottingen.
- Golitsis, P. 2008. *Les Commentaires de Simplicius et de Jean Philopon à la Physique d'Aristote. Tradition et innovation*. Berlin/New York.
- 2017. 'Quelques remarques sur les copistes et le contexte d'apparition du ms. *Laurentianus plut.* 85.1, dit l'«Océan»'. In C. Brockmann ed. *Griechische Handschriften. Gestern, Heute und Morgen*. Actes du VIIIème colloque international de paléographie grecque. Hamburg, 22–28 September 2013. (In press)

- Golitsis, P. and Hoffmann, P. 2014. 'Simplicius et le « lieu ». À propos d'une nouvelle édition du *corollarium de loco*'. *Revue des études grecques* 127:119–175.
- Gutas, D. 1988. 'Plato's *Symposium* in the Arabic Tradition'. *Oriens* 31:36–60.
- Hadot, I. 1978. *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrine. Hiéroclès et Simplicius*. Paris.
- 1987a. 'La vie et l'oeuvre de Simplicius d'après des sources grecques et arabes'. Pp. 3–39 in I. Hadot ed. *Simplicius. Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*. Berlin/New York.
- 1987b. 'Recherches sur les fragments du commentaire de Simplicius sur la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote'. Pp. 225–245 in I. Hadot ed. *Simplicius. Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*. Berlin/New York.
- et alii 1990. *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories, traduction et commentaire comparative des pages 1–9,3 Kalbfleisch*. Leiden.
- 1991. 'The Role of the Commentaries on Aristotle in the Teaching of Philosophy according to the Prefaces of the Neoplatonic Commentaries on the *Categories*'. Pp. 175–189 in H. Blumenthal and H. Robinson edd. *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*. Oxford, UK.
- 1996. ed. *Simplicius. Commentaire sur le Manuel d'Epictète*. Leiden.
- 2002. 'Simplicius or Priscianus? On the Author of the Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* (CAG, XI): A Methodological Study'. *Mnemosyne* 55:159–199.
- 2004. 'Simplicius, *In Cat.*, pp. 1,3–3,17 Kalbfleisch. An Important Contribution to the History of the Ancient Commentary'. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 147:408–420.
- 2015. *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*. Leiden.
- Hayduck, M. 1882. *Simplicii in Aristotelis libros de anima commentaria*. Berlin.
- Hayduck, M. 1888. *Asclepii in Aristotelis metaphysicorum libros A-Z commentaria*. Berlin.

- Heiberg, J. L. 1894. *Simplicii in Aristotelis de caelo commentaria*. Berlin.
- Hoffmann, P. 2012. 'Un grief antichrétien chez Proclus. L'ignorance en théologie'. Pp. 161–266 in A. Perrot ed. *Les chrétiens et l'hellénisme. Identités religieuses et culture grecque dans l'Antiquité tardive*. Paris.
- 2015. 'Φάος et τόπος. Le fragment 51 (v. 3) des Places (p. 28 Kroll) des *Oracles Chaldaïques* selon Proclus et Simplicius (*Corollarium de loco*)'. Pp. 101–152 in A. Lecerf, L. Saudelli, and H. Seng edd. *Oracles Chaldaïques. Fragments et philosophie*. Heidelberg.
- Kalbfleisch, C. 1907. *Simplicii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*. Berlin.
- Keydell, R. 1967. *Agathiae Myrinaei historiarum libri quinque*. Berlin.
- Kroll, W, G. 1899–1901. *Procli Diadochi in Platonis rem publicam commentarii*. Leipzig.
- 1902. *Syriani in metaphysica commentaria*. Berlin.
- Lameer, J. 1997. 'From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflexions on the Genesis of a Problematic Tradition'. Pp. 181–91 in G. Endress and K. Kruk edd. *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*. Leiden.
- Lane Fox, R. 2005. 'Appendix: Harran, the Sabians and the Late Platonist "movers"'. Pp. 231–264 in A. Smith ed. *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*. Swansea, UK.
- Lo Bello, A. 2009. *The Commentary of al-Nayrizi on Books II–IV of Euclid's Elements of Geometry*. Leiden.
- Luna, C. 2001. Review of [Thiel 1999](#). *Mnemosyne* 54:482–504.
- Mueller, I. 2004. *Simplicius: On Aristotle On the Heavens 2.1-9*. London, UK.
- 2011. *Simplicius: On Aristotle On the Heavens 1.3–4*. London, UK.
- Pingree, D. 2002. 'The Sabians of Harran and the Classical Tradition'. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9:8–35.
- Praechter, K. 1910. 'Richtungen und Schulen im Neuplatonismus'. Pp. 105–156 in *Genethliakon für Carl Robert*. Berlin.

- Praechter, K. 1927. 'Simplikios'. Pp. 204–213 in *Paulys Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart.
- Rabe, H. 1899. *Ioannes Philoponus. De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*. Leipzig.
- Rashed, M. 2000. 'Traces d'un commentaire de Simplicius sur la *Métaphysique* à Byzance?' *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 84:275–284.
- Steel, C. 1997. 'Simplicius' on Aristotle On the Soul 2.5–12 (together with P. Huby, Priscian on Theophrastus on Sense-Perception). London.
- 2013. 'Simplicius' on Aristotle On the Soul 3.6–13. London.
- Tannery, P. 1915. 'Le philosophe Aganis est-il identique à Géminus?' Pp. 37–41 in J. L. Heiberg and H. G. Zeuthen edd. *P. Tannery. Mémoires scientifiques*. vol. 3. Paris/Toulouse.
- Tardieu, M. 1986. 'Sābiens coraniques et Sābiens de Harran'. *Journal Asiatique* 274:1–44.
- 1987. 'Les calendriers en usage à Harrān d'après les sources arabes et le commentaire de Simplicius à la *Physique* d'Aristote'. Pp. 40–57 in I. Hadot ed. *Simplicius. Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*. Berlin/New York.
- 1990. *Les Paysages reliques. Routes et haltes syriennes d'Isidore à Simplicius*. Louvain/Paris.
- Thiel, R. 1999. *Simplikios und das Ende der neuplatonischen Schule in Athen*. Mainz.
- Trombley, F. 1993–1994. *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370–529*. Leiden/New York.
- Urmson, J. O. 1992. *Simplicius: Corollaries on Place and Time*. London, UK.
- Watts, E. 2005. 'Where to Live the Philosophical Life in the Sixth Century? Damascius, Simplicius, and the Return from Persia'. *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 45:285–315.
- Westerink, L. G. 1989. *Damascius. Traité des premiers principes: 2. De la triade et de l'unifié*. Paris.
- 1997–2003. *Damascius. Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*. Paris.

Wildberg, C. 1987. *Philoponus: Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*. London.

Zintzen, C. 1967. *Damascii vita Isidori reliquiae*. Hildesheim.