

J.C. Alby, P.A. Ciner and J.B. García Bazán (eds.), « *El conocimiento oculto* »: *Homenaje a Francisco García Bazán*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Trotta—Guadalquivir, 2020. 487 pp., paperback. ISBN 9789874553812.

‘All men by nature desire knowledge’, Aristotle wrote. Evidence of this seems to be our interest in sensation, especially vision. However, several ancient traditions have also held that there is a special kind of knowledge that cannot be reduced to perception and which few seek, namely the knowledge that deals with an invisible truth that needs to be disclosed, a knowledge that, due to its sacred character, demands to be handed down with care and secrecy. The roots of such arcane traditions have thriven in lands eastwards and westwards alike, and the last two centuries have witnessed the flourishing of a set of disciplines which take these traditions as their field of inquiry and aim to bring their concealed gnosis to light. These modern disciplines can be compared, not so much to horticulture, but to botany. Following this metaphor, we can say that Francisco García Bazán is a botanist who has devoted—and still does—his life to the systematic study of the roots of (some) ancient traditions of hidden knowledge.

García Bazán was born in 1940 in Malaga (Spain) but spent most of his professional life in Argentina. Awarded a doctorate in Philosophy (USAL) in 1975, he taught in the most prestigious universities of the country, as well as abroad, and, in 2003, became a Superior Researcher in the National Research Council (CONICET). In the course of his career, he attracted many disciples and followers. The present volume is a *Festschrift* edited by some of them, consisting of the proceedings of the 2015 conference organized in his honour at the National Academy of Science of Buenos Aires.

The book opens with Bazan’s impressive bibliography (1967 to 2017) of seven hundred and fifty-four publications. Thirty-five of these are books dealing with the following topics: Gnosticism, Plotinus and Neoplatonism, Hermetism, the Vedānta, Comparative philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Early Christianity, the History of the Church and of the papacy. Included also are translations from Ancient Greek, Latin, and Coptic. In many cases these translations are the first and only translations available in Spanish of newly discovered manuscripts, such as the papyrus rolls of the Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi.

The papers are arranged in five sections, which correspond to the scholarly interests and publications of Professor García Bazán. After a short biographical section (I) the volume is divided into four parts containing works on Judaism and Primitive Christianity (II); Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and Chaldean

Oracles (III); Patristics and other Christian writings (IV); and Religions and Philosophy (V). Twenty-seven of these pieces are in Spanish, three of them in French. Since the papers are too numerous to be discussed in a short review, I shall limit myself to making brief comments on the four chapters which deal with Plotinus' philosophy.

All four papers approach Plotinus' thought from the point of view of its relationship to other thinkers or schools, thus highlighting two features characteristic of the study of the philosophies of hidden knowledge. Firstly, hidden truth was sought in the contexts of traditions, and the links that bind these traditions were made evident in the direct and indirect connections shared by their adherents. Secondly, traditions of hidden knowledge engaged in dialogue, polemics, and borrowings from one another. This shows, on the one hand, that hidden truths were in part disclosed through dialectical, creative, and exegetical procedures and, on the other hand, that hidden knowledge traditions were not completely hermetic to one another.

The first essay examines the notion of *arkhētypos* in the philosophies of Philo of Alexandria and of Plotinus, and its continuation in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa. The second approaches the intermediary roles of memory and remembering in the contemplative path of the soul's return to the One. The paper draws similarities between the conceptions of memory and its mechanisms in Plotinus and the Gnostic *Tripartite Tractate*. The third, by Jean-Marc Narbonne, reexamines the issue of Plotinus' anti-Gnostic polemics under two headings. Firstly, it focuses on the conception of the world, involving Plotinus' disagreement with the Gnostics on the hierarchical structure of reality and the origin and value of the sensible world. Secondly, it treats of the conception of man's place in the world, including Plotinus' rejection of the "chosen" nature and privileged position of the Gnostics. Narbonne also discusses the Gnostic notion of *gnosis* and concludes that the concept of a scientific theology or science of revelation, which would later be significant for Iamblichus, was already present in several Gnostic circles. The fourth chapter deals with Porphyry *De abstinentia* and aims at deepening our understanding of the controversial relationship between Plotinus, Porphyry, and the Gnostics. The paper picks up J. Bernays' view that the Gnostics alluded to in *De Abs.* 1 42 were Valentinians and his conviction that this school should also be taken to be the target of Plotinus' criticisms in *Ennead* 11 9.

The present volume, apart from conveying the gratitude and admiration that the disciples and friends have for their master and colleague, contains several very fine research papers. As such, it is a highly valuable contribution,

not only to the study of the traditions of hidden knowledge, but also to the history of philosophy.

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