

Heike Bottler: *Pseudo-Plutarch und Stobaios. Eine synoptische Untersuchung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2014 (Hypomnemata 198). 552 S. EUR 100.00. ISBN 9783525253052.

In her book, a revised version of her 2012 doctoral dissertation, Heike Bottler (henceforth ‘B.’) sets out to reexamine the currently more or less accepted reconstruction of Aëtius’ *Placita* (1st cent. AD). This leads B. straight into one of the very thorny fields in the scholarship on Greek philosophy, which may require a brief and simplified sketch before the proper review of B.’s book: H. Diels argued in *Doxographi Graeci*, published in 1879, that the close similarities – in content, arrangement, and phrasing – between considerable sections of two preserved doxographical works, Ps.-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum* (2nd cent. AD) and Stobaeus’ *Ἐκλογαί* (5th cent. AD), are best explained by assuming that they rely on a common source, that this source is Aëtius’ *Placita*, and that the text of this lost work can be reconstructed on the basis of Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus along with other complementary textual witnesses. Diels also developed further theses about Aëtius’ immediate and more distant sources, about additional sources of Stobaeus (in particular Arius Didymus), and eventually about the role of Aëtius in the transmission of pre-Socratic philosophy. Diels’ views about Aëtius and his reconstruction of the text of Aëtius’ *Placita*¹ were quickly accepted. In *Aëtiana*, whose first volume was published in 1997 with volumes 2 (in two parts) and 3 to follow in 2009, J. Mansfeld and D.T. Runia reexamined Diels’ evidence, arguments, and conclusions and generally confirmed his results, albeit with modifications.²

In her ‘synoptic study’ (cf. the book’s subtitle) of Ps.-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum* and Stobaeus’ *Ἐκλογαί*, B. thoroughly revisits the two texts on which the reconstructions of Aëtius have been based. In Part One, the book’s important introduction (15–55), B. devotes the first two sections to Diels’ *Doxographi Graeci* and Mansfeld/Runia’s *Aëtiana*. She emphasizes that many points in both these works are uncertain and speculative and that Aëtius and his *Placita* are ‘constructs’ deserving to be reexamined (15 and 21) rather than secured facts. In the introduction’s third section, B. partly calls into question two tenets that are fundamental to today’s common understanding of Aëtius, namely, that Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus independently used Aëtius as a source and that reliable criteria allow us to identify which sections in Stobaeus derive from a different source, Arius Didymus, and therefore cannot be attributed to Aëtius.

1 Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, 269–444.

2 See, e.g., Mansfeld/Runia, *Aëtiana* 1.73–84 (esp. 81) and *Aëtiana* 1.327–329 or compare Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* 73–75 and Mansfeld/Runia, *Aëtiana* 1.245–249.

In section four of the introduction, B. brings into play the many other complementary textual witnesses that are also valuable in determining the text of Ps.-Plutarch's and Stobaeus' common source. Some of them have independently used that same source as well (Theodoretus and Nemesius), others have directly used either Ps.-Plutarch (Eusebius, Ps.-Galen, Qoṣṭā ibn Lūqā, Ps.-Justin, Cyrillus, Lydus, and the Antinoopolis Papyrus) or Stobaeus (Photius), others represent parallel transmissions altogether (Achilles, Doxographi Pasquali, Isidorus of Pelusium), and some texts' relationships with Aëtius cannot be safely determined (Athenagoras, Philon of Alexandria, Hermeias, Irenaeus). Here B. concisely discusses many different scenarios of textual congruence or divergence among these authors and explains what each scenario means for the attempt to constitute the text of Aëtius' *Placita* or, as she prefers to call it, of the "PS *Placita*" (i.e., the hypothetical source of Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus; 13). In section five, B. gives an account of textual witnesses that have either been 'newly' discovered ("Neuentdeckung") or whose status as a textual witness has been 'newly' assessed ("Neubewertung"). But 'newly' here oddly only means more recent than the publication of *Doxographi Graeci* in 1879. Therefore, this entire section is heavily indebted to Mansfeld/Runia. Occasionally, however, B. points out where the textual evidence's difficulties and inconsistencies have in her opinion not been sufficiently acknowledged by her predecessors. In section six of the introduction, B. contends that textual contamination between Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus and the circulation of both texts in different versions are more serious obstacles for the reconstruction of the common source of both authors than Mansfeld/Runia admit.

Following these long and important preliminary remarks, B. outlines in the introduction's last section (50–55) the methods and goals of her study. She declares that she is not interested in a general reevaluation of Diels' and/or Mansfeld/Runia's overall doxographical reconstructions. Instead she will more narrowly focus mainly on the texts of Ps.-Plutarch's *Placita philosophorum* and Stobaeus' Ἐκλογαί, and more specifically on those parts and sections where Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus share common material ("der gemeinsame Grundstock"; 50–51). Furthermore, B. announces that she will limit her analyses only to the first two of the five books of Ps.-Plutarch, along with their analogous passages in Stobaeus, because this is where both texts most strongly correspond (54 with n. 203) – which is true, even though Ps.-Plutarch's books three and four share much more material with Stobaeus than B. is suggesting here.³

B. aims to achieve three goals (50–53): 1) to give the reader guidance what to make of instances where the texts of Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus differ; 2) to produce a more nuanced account of Ps.-Plutarch's and Stobaeus' individual authorial traits and to reexamine the criteria proposed by her predecessors

3 Cf. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* esp. 364–374, 382, 386–394, 404–408.

by which we may identify material stemming from Arius Didymus; and 3) to rekindle the discussion about the textual dependence or independence of the other textual witnesses, especially Theodoretus, because these texts, too, contain elements that do not sit well with the currently established – or as B. calls it, ‘canonized’ (53) – reconstructions proposed by Diels and Mansfeld/Runia.

In the book’s bulky Part Two (“II. Untersuchung”, 56–492) B. executes the program developed in the Introduction. Proceeding lemma by lemma – “lemmata” in this context are the smallest units of meaning in Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus (headers, individual sentences, occasional short passages) – B. subjects the material to a systematic and relentlessly detailed examination. Each lemma is treated in the same fashion and presented in a well thought-out ‘synoptic’ layout that is very convenient for the reader but must have been incredibly cumbersome to produce for B. For each new lemma, the reader is provided with a wealth of heterogeneous information: in the center of each section are, juxtaposed in two columns (following Diels’ example in *Doxographi Graeci*), the Greek lemmata as they occur in Ps.-Plutarch and in Stobaeus along with B.’s German translations; elements that occur only in one of the two authors are printed in bold, whereas elements that are present in both authors but betray differences are underlined with dotted lines; occasionally, additional text-critical information is also integrated into the columns. These central text columns are preceded by German translations of other text witnesses relevant for the lemma in question, which are presented in the order of decreasing closeness to the Ps.-Plutarchian and Stobaeian base texts. The two text columns are followed, whenever the material requires it, with content analyses and/or structural analyses, which are visually marked by a smaller font. Next, B. describes in a formulaic one-line summary for each lemma which text witnesses are congruent and which differ. Many of these brief formulas are then followed by a thorough review and long discussion of how this evidence has been discussed by earlier philologists, most notably by Diels and Mansfeld/Runia, who are ever-present in B.’s discussions and footnotes.

In the relatively short Part Three (“III. Abschließende Betrachtung”; 493–516), B. draws some general conclusions from her preceding explorations. These concluding remarks concern textual incongruences and continuities in Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus, the working and citation methods of both authors, and the relationships of dependence and independence among the various text witnesses. B. ends her study with a final remark (“IV. Schlussbemerkung”; 516–517), appendices (519–528), the bibliography (529–539), and indices (540–552).

B.’s book has several strengths. While the difficulties of attempting to reconstruct Aëtius have of course always been known (“There can be no doubt

that Aëtius is a [sic] extremely shadowy figure”),⁴ B. still deserves praise for having produced, with great patience and perseverance, a carefully designed study that will always warn readers, especially those not already familiar with this topic, not to mistake constructs and theses, even if they are reasonably plausible, for indisputable facts. B. is unrelenting in pointing out details in the complicated textual evidence that are not as easily reconcilable with Diels’ and/or Mansfeld/Runia’s reconstructions as one might initially be inclined to think. There is no doubt that this book will be of great value for textual specialists working on Aëtius, but also for anyone working on Ps.-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum* or Stobaeus’ Ἐκλογαί. One can only admire the hard work that B. has devoted in her synoptic examination to an extremely detailed presentation and discussion of difficult and sometimes unsolvable textual problems.

This study, however, also has a number of serious limitations that must be mentioned, the author’s merits notwithstanding. The book is written in a way that makes its reading much more difficult than necessary. At the beginning of new sections, B. regularly jumps right into the discussion of details without first giving the reader sufficient indication as to what point she next intends to establish. B.’s writing style feels forced and unnatural, and sentences are repeatedly difficult to understand, especially when B. tries to explain or argue complex matters, as her topic often requires. In some passages, the use of abbreviations and sigla in the main text is excessive and, while convenient for the author, cumbersome for the reader. As a result of all this, many sentences and paragraphs must be read twice or more before one sees with clarity what points exactly are being established and how the discussion is progressing.

In addition, there is a fundamental methodological problem with the texts that B. studies. As she herself points out (52–53), the source texts she investigates have been very imperfectly transmitted and edited. This is partly an unavoidable result of the textual fluidity of doxography and compilatory writings in general. But it means that B. is forced to base her close synoptic analyses on works whose textual constitution is not firm and reliable. This evidently restricts from the start what is achievable in a project whose substance lies precisely in the close study and comparison of textual details. It is also puzzling why B. does not use the conventional citation systems for Ps.-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum* and Stobaeus’ Ἐκλογαί. It is thus difficult in the case of Ps.-Plutarch and nearly impossible in the case of Stobaeus directly to check B.’s observations and discussions against the editions of Ps.-Plutarch by Mau (1971) and Lachenaud (1993) and of Stobaeus by Wachsmuth (1884), editions which B. herself continually consults.

4 Mansfeld/Runia, *Aëtiana* 1.319. See also Mansfeld/Runia’s review in *Aëtiana* 1.1–63 of the discussions surrounding the Aëtius hypothesis already prior to Diels.

One must instead always use Diels' text of Aëtius in *Doxographi Graeci* as an intermediary guide or concordance. This is surprising for a study whose explicit goal (54) is to go back to the preserved ancient source texts themselves and not base itself on Diels' reconstruction. Another reason, it must be added, why it is advisable to check B.'s findings is that inconsistencies and typing errors are disturbingly frequent, and occasionally B. seems to have become tangled up with the complicated principles that govern the presentation of her material.⁵

Finally, it is a missed opportunity that B., who has made herself an expert not only on doxography in general but even on such special facets as the working methods and presentational strategies of Ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus (see esp. 500–509), has no interest in issues outside the narrow realm of strictly textual questions. She neither contributes to nor takes serious note of the recently blooming discussions of literary and cultural aspects of doxography and related branches of ancient technical literature. The book's framing first and third parts would have greatly profited from even a brief engagement with works like M. Asper, *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte* (2008), M. Horster/C. Reitz (eds.), *Condensing Texts – Condensed Texts* (2010), or G. Reydam-Schils (ed.), *Thinking Through Excerpts: Studies on Stobaeus* (2011); none of these titles even appear in B.'s bibliography.

What remains? Despite these points of criticism, B. must be greatly commended for the immense labor she has put into conducting a close and outstandingly detailed textual study. Her book will be of supreme interest for anyone wishing to reexamine the current reconstructions of Aëtius' *Placita*. In addition, scholars investigating Ps.-Plutarch's or Stobaeus' literary technique or working methods will find very useful information in B.'s book.

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5 For instance, p. 36: “auf die” should be deleted; on p. 40 the main text speaks of “*Isagoge*” and “Arat”, but footnote 132 of “*Eisagoge*” and “Aratos”; in the same footnote “sind” should be “ist”; p. 42: “sein Wert” should be “ihr Wert” because reference is to “DP”, which stands for “*Doxographi Pasquali*” [p. 42, line 1], which appears as “*Doxographica Pasquali*” in the list of abbreviations on p. 13; p. 50: the cross reference to “Kap. I.6.2.6” is wrong and should perhaps be to “Kap. I.5.2.6”; p. 52: the cross reference to “Kap. I.4.2” should be to “Kap. I.3.2”. Or from a later part of the book, p. 304: “sich frage” should be “sich fragen”; p. 305: “in secundo loco” should be “in secundo loco”.