Book Reviews

Stavros Lazaris: *Le Physiologus grec, vol. 1: La réécriture de l'histoire naturelle antique*

Firenze: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016; 178 pages.
ISBN-13: 9788884507389

Little do we know about the earliest Christian book of science, *Physiologus* ("natural philosopher"), the main object of Stavros Lazaris' (the French National Centre for Scientific Research) interest over the years. The book reviewed here, the first volume of the trilogy *Le Physiologus grec* ("the Greek *Physiologus*"), has already been followed by a second volume (2021) analysing the illustrations that accompany the description of animals, plants, and minerals in this ancient work. The project will include a third study, on the posterity of *Physiologus* in the Renaissance and in modernity. Lazaris has also edited *A Companion to Byzantine Science* (2020).

The volume under consideration has two main parts. The first part discusses the origins of *Physiologus* and its manuscript traditions. Lazaris reviews the scholarly hypotheses regarding the authorship of this otherwise anonymous work (pp. 9–16) and its dating, with the author advocating a very early recension, in the first half of the second century (pp. 17–30, 144), and Alexandria as the place of its composition (pp. 31–36). While, here, I am not much interested in such technicalities, I voice my agreement on the proposed time and place. I have personally found allusions to *Physiologus* in Clement of Alexandria's *Exhortation*, written in the second half of the same second century, which confirm Lazaris' views. Accordingly, I must raise an eyebrow at the consensus, which Lazaris repeats (pp. 14–15), that there are no traces of *Physiologus* in Clement—especially given that eventually Lazaris returns to the matter by acknowledging Clement as inaugurating the approach at the heart of *Physiologus*' method (p. 143). Of lesser interest,

here, is the discussion of recensions and editions (pp. 47–78), which undoubtedly causes delight to philologists and others.

Fascinating is Lazaris' enquiry about the sources of *Physiologus*, classical and scriptural alike (pp. 37–46), with the schema of direct and indirect sources at p. 44 providing extremely useful information. When considering this schema—which includes twenty classical sources and innumerable scriptural references—one quickly realises that this early Christian work perfectly exemplifies an integrated discourse, where faith and the available sciences creatively intersect. It is upon concluding this section that Lazaris gives the reader a sense of *Physiologus*' approach. Specifically, in describing animals, plants, and minerals scientifically, by the standards of the time, together with offering ethical interpretations of the items, the work does not cultivate theory for the sake of theorising or knowledge as an end of all scientific enquiry; it is in order "to propose an exhortation for virtue and Christian edification" (p. 46). By the way, Clement also used animal types to indicate human characters and behaviours (see *Exhortation* 1.4.1).

The second part of the monograph deals with *Physiologus* as an illustration of how science can serve the goals of Christian faith (pp. 78–141). Here, Lazaris examines the ways the anonymous author(s) and editor(s) pushed the envelope of a Christian view of the available sciences, with faith, we read, confirming the validity of and reinterpreting scientific knowledge (pp. 101–109). The rest of the book considers *Physiologus*' aims and reception (pp. 111–141).

Of particular interest is the section "The Content and the Structure of the Chapters" (pp. 81–99). There we learn that the main manuscript of *Physiologus* includes forty-eight chapters (other manuscript traditions giving either less or more sections), with animals featuring prominently whereas plants and minerals receive much less attention (two and six chapters, respectively). Of the animal kingdom, preference is given to terrestrial wild things, domestic animals being totally ignored, while crawling things and aquatic lifeforms are discussed sporadically (p. 83).

Lazaris shows that the author(s) of *Physiologus* treat(s) the items according to the accepted scientific standards of the time, describ-

ing their nature (*physis*) in detail. That some listed animals, like the phoenix or the siren, were imaginary was not known to the author(s), who assessed all by the same method. Accordingly, Lazaris refuses the anachronistic taxonomy of scholars, who classify the items as either real or fantastic (p. 82). In so doing, he brings the reader closer to the universe of the ancient author(s), whose world was as fascinating as that of the occasionally unbelievable lifeforms contemporary scientists discover in oceans, caves, and jungles. And, Lazaris notes, the more fantastic, the better these beings served the ethical purposes of the work. But this is not to say that *Physiologus* treats the various animals differently. They are all considered in the same manner, through relevant scriptural references, the available natural description, and by highlighting their moral significance (p. 85). Said otherwise, *Physiologus* establishes links between animal features and human attitudes. One would contemplate the nature of certain animals in order to learn something more than what they are and how they live—namely, what they teach us about ourselves (pp. 83–84). This, to me, is a way of saying that, for the ancient Christian author(s), the natural continuum between animals and people was as much a given as the common behavioural traits between them. And so, within *Physiologus*, while the Scriptures interpret life, the sciences analyse it.

This is a very interesting approach, especially for educated Christians, including scientists and students of science, and Lazaris is correct to characterise *Physiologus* as an early Christian "handbook for initiation in the Christian faith, a catechetical project whose goal was to communicate to its readers Christian ethics and the fundamentals of the new religion" (p. 144). While contemporary educators do not have to turn to the natural sciences of *Physiologus* in order to illustrate ethical principles for Christian students, the lessons of this ancient book can inspire them to follow a similar method when they discuss what we know about life, nature, and the cosmos.

While Lazaris' take on *Physiologus* appears to have stirred a flurry of reactions among scholars (see the many references to his book in the edited collection of *The Multilingual Physiologus*, 2021), his contri-

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bution is of great relevance to educated Christians who cultivate wonder for God's creation and seek to contemplate it through their own, Christian that is, eyes. A translation into English of his work would be extremely useful.

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D. Gareth Jones: *At the Margins: A Life in Biomedical Science, Faith, and Ethical Dilemmas*

Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2022; 193 pages.
ISBN-13: 9781666744712.

This book is Jones' personal reflection, as a scientist and committed Christian, on a number of bioethical issues he has been involved with over the years. This includes the ethics of procuring and studying deceased bodies, the COVID pandemic, the ethics of cystic fibrosis, IVF and the study of fertilised human eggs, same-sex attraction, and living as a Christian in a secular world.

As professor of anatomy at Otago University, Jones faced the challenge of obtaining anatomical specimens ethically. In the process, he was able to strengthen the procedure of ensuring informed consent before bodies were used. This then meant that bodies from the indigent or those who had no kin were no longer available to anatomists. He also raised the dilemma of using highly detailed drawings taken from political prisoners during the Nazi era by Professor Pernkopf, a committed ideologue of the regime. Jones also examined the ethics of plastination—preserving bodies in a very life-like manner for public display (e.g., BodyWorlds, https://bodyworlds.com/) and the role of profit-making in these anatomical displays.