synoptic study of particular reigns difficult.4

A very few typographical errors must be noted: ‘... provincial mints in the both
the West and the East’ (p. viii); inconsistency between ‘Tarracensis’ (p. viii) and
‘Terracensis’ (p. xi); ‘accomodate’ (p. xv); and perhaps ‘this viciousness’ (p. xiii,
remarked above) should be ‘his viciousness’. The proportional spacing is not always
reliable, and there are many instances throughout of spaces within words or between
word end and punctuation mark (for example, on pp. x-xi I noted ‘embodime[]nt’,
‘inform[]al’, ‘b[]roke’, ‘praenomen []’, ‘show[]ing’, ‘Gaul[],’). This is a general
problem of computer-generated text, which lacks the elegance of traditional
typesetting, though it is a relatively small price to pay for convenience, flexibility and
relative cost-effectiveness. The merits of this volume—its inclusiveness, its clarity, the
range of coins catalogued and illustrated in a relatively small compass—far outweigh
its few shortcomings. It will be used and enjoyed by numismatists and historians,
students and all who share Herbert’s evident interest and pleasure in coins.

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Maria Dzielska (tr. F. Lyra), Hypatia of Alexandria. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

This is the first monograph available in English on Hypatia of Alexandria. It is
also one of only a few scholarly books on this remarkable woman.1 Dzielska sets out
to research the life of Hypatia from the available sources and to clear away the
cobwebs of centuries of biased and unreliable opinions on this famous philosopher and
mathematician of Alexandria who was brutally murdered by Christians in AD 415.

In the first chapter, ‘The Literary Legend of Hypatia’ (pp. 1-26), she deals first
with the modern literature from 1720 to 1989 in which Hypatia appears as a character
in essays, poems, plays and historical novels. Authors often used the story of the
beautiful, innocent Hypatia to express certain philosophical ideas or biases. Most often
her death at the hands of ‘barbaric Christians’ is used to discredit the Church as such
or the clergy of Alexandria. Gibbon is among those who see her death as an example
of how Christianity was the cause of the downfall of ancient civilisation.2 This train of
thought has persisted until the present day, for example, the plays by the Italian author

4 The publication in 1992 of the first volume of Roman Provincial Coinage, edited by A.
Burnett et al., marked the broadening in scope of numismatic studies, in line with more
inclusive tendencies in classical historical investigation.

1 Since W. A. Meyer, Hypatia von Alexandrien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des
Neuplatonismus (Heidelberg 1886) no monograph has appeared except for the recent work by
G. Beretta, Ipazia d’Alessandria (Rome 1993). Unfortunately Dzielska was unable to consult
Beretta before her work was completed (p. 112).

2 E. Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London 1898) 109f.
Mario Luci in 1978. Dzielska also mentions Hypatia's appeal to feminists: two feminist journals are named after her. She concludes this section by saying that these literary sources have little to do with the historical Hypatia. In the second part of this chapter, "The Origins of the Legend" (pp. 17-26), Dzielska extensively quotes and discusses the ancient sources on Hypatia such as Socrates Scholasticus, the Suda, Damascius' Life of Isidore, and an epigram of (perhaps) the early fourth-century poet Palladas (Anth. Pal. 9.400) about a Hypatia, who is often assumed to be this Hypatia (but the name was common and the dates probably wrong). Dzielska briefly discusses the use other modern scholarly works make of these sources.

In the beginning of the second chapter, "Hypatia and Her Circle" (pp. 27-65), Dzielska states that, in view of the small amount of direct evidence about her which has survived and because we know that Hypatia had many students and followers in her mature years, 'we can approach Hypatia indirectly, through a survey of her disciples and her teachings' (p. 27). The most important source is the correspondence of one of her pupils, Synesius of Cyrene, some to Hypatia herself, and some to fellow students. Although not too much is known of all the people Synesius refers to, there were clearly people among the friends and students of Hypatia who became important in the political and clerical life in Alexandria, including Orestes and other leaders, and some of these may have been Christians. The impression is that there were almost no problems between Hypatia and the leaders of the town or church. Dzielska extracts from Synesius' letters and from Damascius' fragmentary biography of her life information on Hypatia's methods of teaching, the neo-Platonic philosophy underlying her search for 'the mystery of being' (p. 49), and her aversion to physical sensuality. Synesius also writes with great respect about Hypatia's lectures on mathematics and astronomy, which were used to achieve a higher understanding of divine knowledge. She was the daughter of Theon the philosopher from whom she learned mathematics, for which she was almost more honoured after her death than for her philosophy. Although we have no titles of her philosophical works, enough is known of her mathematics to reconstruct the topics she dealt with (p. 54). Hypatia's inner circle of disciples formed a close community held together by respect, love and the knowledge that they were privileged to be initiated into the divine intellect. From Synesius' letters Dzielska makes the assumption that there might have been even some 'ingredients of ritual' in her method of lecturing (p. 64).

The social and political world of Hypatia in Alexandria is covered in chapter 3, "The Life and Death of Hypatia" (pp. 66-100). Her father, Theon, was not only her teacher, but she also became his closest associate. Theon's own work (including his poetry) and life are thoroughly discussed and the mathematical achievements of Hypatia herself are reconstructed as far as possible from the sources. From the discussion of her father's work it is inevitable to conclude that the atmosphere in which she grew up and worked was one of learning in the widest sense. Dzielska discusses the political and ecclesiastical events in Alexandria in Hypatia's time,

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especially the activities against paganism of the patriarch Theophilus which eventually led to the destruction of the Serapeum. She sets out the possible reasons for Hypatia’s low profile in this period. It seems as if she had no special feeling for any of the pagan religions and that Greek polytheism was for her ‘only beautiful embellishments to the spiritual Hellenic tradition that she valued and cultivated’ (p. 83). The next main part of the chapter, ‘The Circumstances of Hypatia’s Death’ (pp. 83-100), explains the changes in Alexandria that followed the election of Cyril as Theophilus’ successor. Cyril expanded his influence into civic and public affairs, strove for the purity of the faith, and turned against the Jews. The prefect Orestes was involved in this struggle and the sources suggest that Hypatia was supportive of him and of the old civil order. Hypatia’s circle of influence included more than just her pupils: it also included several very wealthy and influential people, among whom was a large group of Christians, inside and outside Alexandria. A slander campaign against her, which was perhaps Cyril’s only possible method of attack, implied that she was involved in sorcery and black magic. In the name of Christianity, under the leadership of a certain Peter, a mob brutally murdered her in the city. Dzielska suggests the possibility that Cyril’s own guard might have been implicated in the murder. The fact that most historians of the fourth century and later were Christians is, according to Dzielska, the main reason for the scarcity of the sources on Hypatia and the reason that the truth about her death has been covered up.

The conclusion summarises all the facts about Hypatia as Dzielska has deduced them from actual historical sources rather than from biased legend. Hypatia was not killed because she opposed Christianity but because she was falsely accused of sorcery (p. 105). After the conclusion, there is a most valuable section in which Dzielska discusses and evaluates all the ancient and modern sources that she has consulted (pp. 109-17). Attached to this section in a very loose way is a discussion of ‘Other Learned Women of Late Antiquity’ (pp. 117-19). Here the names and a short description of female philosophers of the neo-Platonic era appear in a way that has very little to do with the book as such, except that it includes a reference to another Hypatia, who is sometimes confused with our mathematician. The notes at the end of the book show thorough scholarship and it becomes clear that all available material that was even remotely linked to Hypatia of Alexandria was consulted. The book has a brief index of mainly personal names, which unfortunately does not cover the notes.

This book is an important monograph for anyone with an interest in fourth- and fifth-century Alexandria, its social life, church history, neo-Platonism and mathematics. The book reads well and for this the translator must be congratulated. One minor irritation is having to refer to endnotes rather than footnotes. But Hypatia of Alexandria is a valuable addition to Bowersock’s series Revealing Antiquity. Whether one agrees with Dzielska’s conclusion that Hypatia was killed for political reasons or not, one should not ignore this book and its valuable contribution to the scholarship it has made available to the English reader.

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