of their field of study, the introduction to *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (which also has the title A *Historical Narrative of the Period of Distress which Occurred in Edessa, Amid, and all Mesopotamia*) is a model of how to engage non-specialists in one's field. This earliest extant work of Syriac historiography is preserved only in a single manuscript and only as a section of a larger work. It was once thought that Joshua the Stylite was the author because this name was mentioned in a note on the manuscript, but it is argued that this refers only to the scribe. The work covers a much shorter period than Evagrius, from 494 to 506, and there is a substantial prologue where the author says he is writing the history because the abbot Sergius asked him to create a memorial of all the punishment suffered for the sins committed. This is an accurate description of the work, which is a catalogue of disasters: people go blind, buildings and sometimes whole cities collapse, locusts descend and ravage, starving people resort to cannibalism, there are earthquakes, eclipses, upside-down rainbows, and a goose who lays an egg which is not golden but inscribed with Greek letters, saying 'the Romans will conquer'.

Thanks to these new translations, the voices from the late antique past often seem more alive than those of today.

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GREEK ALCHEMISTS

A. COLINET (ed., trans.): *Les alchimistes grecs. Tome X: L'Anonyme de Zuretti ou l'Art divin et sacré de la Chrysopée par un Anonyme* (Collection des Universités de France publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé). Pp. cxvi + 438. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000. Cased, €82.32. ISBN: 2-251-00478-5.

After volumes devoted to papyri in Leyden and Stockholm (1981) and to Zosimus' *True Memoirs* (1995), *Les alchimistes grecs* receives its third instalment. This text, first edited by C. O. Zuretti in *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs* (*CMAG* VII, 1930), is the longest known Greek alchemical work, consisting of a complete and systematic treatise carefully compiled by a Greek from southern Italy. It offers both a synthesis of alchemical knowledge in A.D. 1300 and evidence for the cultural and linguistic fusion which flourished at Naples in the Angevin period.

This new edition is preceded by an Introduction which analyses in detail the work's historical aspects and methodological principles. After describing the historical context, Colinet tackles questions of manuscripts, sources, and language. The principal manuscript, *Vaticanus gr.* 1134 (R), comparable in its importance to the famous Venice alchemical manuscript which belonged to Bessarion (*Marcianus gr.* 299), was written at Oppido in Calabria in 1377/8. The anonymous author's main sources were basically Latin and Arabo-Latin, including works of Roger Bacon (*Speculum Secretorum*, *Breve breviarium*, and *Liber experimentorum*), the *De perfecto magisterio* ascribed to Aristotle, the *Semita recta* ascribed to Albert the Great, and the *Seventy* books in Arabic ascribed to Jabir. There are also frequent references to ancient Greek alchemists and some to accounts whose source cannot be identified.

The language of the text is quite strange and represents a fascinating example of the

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medieval Greek language of Calabria. Far removed from classical Greek but close to modern Greek, both intellectual and demotic, the language demonstrates an unstable orthography. In phonetic terms it is very advanced, whereas its morphology is very close to classical Greek; the syntax is fairly sparse and modern. The vocabulary is vast—Aristotelian terms, terms from the ancient Greek alchemists (though often used in a more modern sense), words of Latin and Arab origin, and numerous rare technical terms.

After suggesting hypotheses about the order of chapters, the meaning of the title and the treatise's date, C. identifies the anonymous author as one of the translators in the circle of the kings of Naples—perhaps Stephen, bishop of Oppido, to whom Charles II allocated a sum of money in 1301 to translate medical works. The author does not come across as a theorist: he updates, abbreviates, and changes the style of his sources; he is driven by a concern for clarity, he explains symbols, he tries to be comprehensive. His objective is to produce a complete compendium of contemporary practical alchemy.

The Greek text is based on a single manuscript, the *Vaticanus gr*. 1134. C. is concerned both to preserve the most interesting linguistic usages and to correct the orthography of the text to make it readable. Latin sources are given at the foot of the page. In order to get as close as possible to the texts as the author read them, C. relies mainly on manuscripts, in particular the Palermo MS, BC, 4QqA10. The translation aims to respect as far as possible the author's style, which is 'sober, repetitive and sometimes naive'. With regard to content, this survey of practical alchemy is based on the principle (universally accepted in the Middle Ages) that metals—gold, silver, iron, tin, copper, lead—are all composed of mercury and sulphur. They differ on account of the variation in these components and the extent of their cooking (*pepsis*). Transmutation is conceived as curing their defects by means of remedies, which are the spirits (*pneumata*); the action of the spirits takes effect through assistants (*boēthika*). The first part of the treatise (pp. 1–82) describes these three categories of substances, first in general and then in detail. In the second part (pp. 84–100), the orderliness vanishes and several types of extracts are muddled up.

The text is provided with notes which explain extremely clearly the components, the substances, and the operations, and which provide complete dossiers on the sources and parallel references. Although this treatise is not properly a theoretical work, some historians of science and philosophy will perhaps regret that neither in the notes nor in the introduction is an analysis developed of the philosophical ideas, basically of an Aristotelian type, which form the background to the doctrine of the nature of metals expounded in this treatise.

The volume is rounded off by a thorough bibliography and a most useful collection of indices—of Greek, Latin, and French terms, authors and persons mentioned, a complete list of sources and passages used by the author, a list of the folios of the Palermo manuscript, and a table to reconcile this edition with that of Zuretti.

Just like the two previous volumes of this collection, this remarkable work is a valuable research tool. It underlines the originality and importance of this treatise, which in itself summarizes the three basic components of medieval alchemy: the Latin, Arabic, and Greek traditions.

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