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**Review of M. Monfrinotti, *Clemente lo Stromateo: fama e oscurità. Rassegna e studio dei Testimonia greci (III-XVI sec.)*, “Patrologia. Beiträge zum studium der Kirchenväter” 40, Peter Lang, Berlin 2020, 206 pp.**

This book intends to provide a reconstruction of the historical, biographical, and literary profile of Clement of Alexandria, through the presentation and the critical commentary of two different kinds of sources: on the one hand, some autobiographical elements within his works, and, on the other hand, all the later Greek testimonies, namely, the *Testimonia*, which embrace a chronological span from the IIIrd to the XVIth centuries.

The figure of Clement, as it is presented in this research, is as much celebrated and worthy of fame as it is shrouded in darkness. As a matter of fact, during his life and in the period immediately following, Clement became a landmark, a real *auctoritas*, for all the authors who wanted to be defenders of orthodoxy and who saw precisely in him a strong advocate of the correct Christian doctrine against the heretics of his time. However, although we dispose of many details about his thought, Clement’s life is in some ways unknown. Most of the studies published to date focus on Clement’s thought and theology, whereas the biographical sphere of the author is still in the shadows, with the exception of some studies published from the beginning of the last century. Monfrinotti refers to these studies and, albeit placing himself in continuity with them, in the volume he nevertheless makes some original contributions, analysing various sources in depth and providing an updated and more systematic picture of the biographical story of the Alexandrian theologian. The author presents, for orientation purposes, an overview of these studies in the introduction to the volume but, although in continuity with these, Monfrinotti’s work claims a further contribution, examining all the Greek *Testimonia* ranging from the IIIrd to the XVIth century, from the pre-Constantinian age to the

Byzantine age, providing a broader picture and a critical analysis of the sources that integrates and completes the previous literature. The several testimonies are not studied individually, but are constantly placed in dialogue with each other, in order to evidence similarities and differences between them, which are noteworthy for a broader and deeper historical research. And this method is probably the most considerable contribution of Monfrinotti's book.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first section takes into account the autobiographical sources, whereas the second part proposes a review and commentary on the Greek *Testimonia*.

The autobiographical sources investigated in the book describe Clement's intellectual training and his teachers, on the one hand (chapter 1.1), and his conversion, on the other hand (chapter 1.2). The autobiographical sources are given greater reliability, although they do not have a biographical aim and they keep silent about important elements of the Stromateus' life, such as his origins, the identity of his teachers, his education, and the teaching in the *Didaskaleion* of Alexandria, the last years of his life. As a matter of fact, these sources do not have an autobiographical aim and they must be read considering the literary context in which they are placed. Clement's biographical background in his work is always secondary to the teaching he wants to convey and, when quoted, it has no memorial or historical purpose, but it must only help to better understand his message. Starting from these autobiographical passages, Monfrinotti manages not only to outline a biographical profile of the author, as far as possible with the aspects present in the Clementine work, but also to shed light on the biographical details which Clement passes over, trying to explain the reasons of this silence. Hence, the investigation into the autobiographical sources also manages to explain some aspects of Clement's thought and to clarify them further.

The second section, which occupies the largest part of the volume, is dedicated to the study of the Greek *Testimonia*, listed in

chronological order. The selected texts, translated and commented by the author, are those considered relevant for the purposes of the biographical investigation, whereas the remaining testimonies, in which a reference to Clement appears, but irrelevant for the purposes of the investigation, are cited in the “Appendix” at the end of the work. Therefore, Monfrinotti’s book, as compared to the previous literature, in particular to the repertoire of texts provided in Adolf von Harnack’s *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, has the merit of taking into consideration all the Greek *Testimonia* which have come down to us between the IIIrd and the XVIth centuries, providing a broader and more systematic picture of the sources.

Among the different testimonies, a central position is undoubtedly occupied by the *Historia ecclesiastica* by Eusebius of Caesarea, since most of the later sources are based on that. According to this tradition, which originates from Eusebius and it is also found in Julius Africanus, Simeon Logotheta, John Zonaras and Ephrem of Oenus, Clement would have been known at the time of the emperor Commodus, he would have been a pupil of the presbyter Panthenus, he would have taught in the *Didaskaleion* of Alexandria, and he would have been also the teacher of Origen. However, there is no lack of divergent testimonies from Eusebius’ tradition, such as that of Philip of Side. The value of a global reconsideration of the *Testimonia* lies precisely in the need to discuss these positions. Finally, starting from Eusebius’ writings and the most recent studies about that, Monfrinotti defines also an updated chronology of Clement’s works.

For the reconstruction of Clement’s biography, the analysis of the *Epistulae* of Alexander of Jerusalem is also crucial. They report some elements which are noteworthy in order to clarify the last years of the Stromateus’ life and his role in the Church. Furthermore, they give us also an important notice about the relationship between the Alexandrian Church and the Cappadocian one before Origen.

A further detail highlighted by the research is that, over the centuries, the *Testimonia* turned their interest less and less to historical-biographical details to focus more attention on the works of Clement, on his theological authority and on the importance of his thought within the history of the Church. From this point of view, the reconsideration of the *Testimonia* in their entirety helps to shed light not only on the author's biographical background, but especially on the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, on the history of the effects of Clement's thought and on the reception of his works and thought in the following centuries. Hence, in the IIIrd-VIIIth centuries there is a great interest in the figure of the Stromateus, because of the interest of historians, such as Eusebius, for a reconstruction of the first steps taken by the Christian religion and by the Church. In this period, Clement was also respected by historians and heresiologists, and he enjoyed great fame due to his undisputed theological authority and fervent anti-heretical commitment. However, in the IXth century, following the harsh condemnation of the Clementine work by Photius, we notice a lesser interest in the Alexandrian theologian. That interest was rekindled in the period between the XIIth and XVIth centuries by Byzantine authors, thanks to whom Clement was also rediscovered in the western, Latin intellectual world. On the analysis and commentary of the Latin *Testimonia*, the author refers to a second volume, which will constitute the natural completion of the one reported here.

Therefore, Monfrinotti's volume is able to provide an updated profile of the person of Clement of Alexandria, although it is not completely exhaustive, because of the scarcity of sources and the difficulties of such research. Another important aspect of Monfrinotti's study is that the critical analysis, both of the autobiographical sources and of the Greek *Testimonia*, allows us to outline the historical-biographical past of the Stromateus, but at a certain point it goes beyond the simple historiographical investigation and shows, depending on the details highlighted in the single testimony, the reception of Alexandrian

philosophical-theological thought over the following centuries, offering a significant contribution not only to historical studies, but also to philosophical and theological ones.

In conclusion, the identity of Clement of Alexandria, as it is reconstructed by Monfrinotti in the book, is never completely defined, since it is the identity of a person who has enjoyed great fame over the centuries and who is still an object of interest for scholars today, but at the same time he remains in the shadows, without being completely acquainted. Fame and obscurity have matched the figure of Clement for ages, and they still match him today: famous and studied, the Stromateus's life is never fully known and his identity seems to be enigmatic just like his celebrated works.

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