

volume is undoubtedly the strong focus on detailed studies for a specific region: a chapter by Silvia Forti on oil lamps from Leptis Magna (p. 103–120); a contribution by Cristina Bassi on literacy and the use of letters in the Alpine regions (p. 139–157); Silvia M. Marengo on alphabets and the colonisation of the Hadriatic Regions V and VI (p. 159–168); and Fulvia Mainardis on the reception of administrative epigraphical documents in municipalities of Italy in the Late Republic and Early Empire (p. 181–202). Cultural approaches characterise both Javier Velaza's chapter on alphabets as ritual elements in the ancient world (p. 121–138) and Simona Antolini's study on the famous new letters, the inverse digamma and the half H, as developed by Emperor Claudius (p. 169–180; the latter letter, incidentally, occurs in Germania Inferior too, as witnessed by C. Rüger, "Eine Ubica aemulatio Claudi Caesaris? Beobachtungen zu einem Graphem in Niedergermanien", *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia* 24 (1985) 159–166 and T. Vennemann, †, *Sprachwissenschaft* 19 (1994) 235–270).

Overall, this is a most important and well-edited volume that deserves full attention in the ever-growing debate on ancient literacy. Both the editor and the contributors deserve all praise.

Christian Laes
University of Manchester

LAURITZ NOACK: *Religion als kultureller Ordnungsrahmen in Platons Nomoi*. Philippika 143. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2020. ISBN 978-3-447-11484-4; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-447-39033-0. VIII, 140 S. EUR 38.

For a long time, Plato's last work – probably partly not written by him – the *Laws* remained largely unread among the Platonic corpus, mostly due to its style, which had been regarded as less vivid than most of his other dialogues, as well as its emphasis on religion, with curious references to folk beliefs and folk religion. However, in recent decades the *Laws* has aroused considerable interest. In addition to an extensive commentary by Klaus Schöpsdau (1994–2011), several monographs on different aspects of the *Laws* have been published, especially about the cultural institutions of Greek *poleis* (for instance, *Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws*, edited by Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, 2013). Lauritz Noack's book is a recent contribution to this "renaissance" of the *Laws*. It is a reworking of his dissertation (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2019). The title of the book contains, again, the difficult concept of *culture*, which Noack addresses briefly in a footnote (p. 5 n.19). Although the common notion of the religious emphasis of the *Laws* is of course valid (the dialogue famously begins with the word θεός), Noack's starting point emphasises that the *Nomoi* is a philosophical work: in the *Laws* we have a philosophical approach to society, and the references to folk religion are an important

means for the people of the new settlement to accept the new legislation. To reinforce his argument, Noack introduces a fresh methodological tool, the so-called *New Institutional Economics* (NIE), as his framework for analysing the “laws” in the *Laws*.

When speaking of Plato’s dialogues, including the *Laws*, it is always worth remembering that they are both argumentative and dramatic. The setting of the *Laws* is dramatic enough: three old men from Athens, Sparta, and Crete are walking in Crete and discussing, first, the religious foundation of laws, and then the creation of laws for a new settlement in Crete. They are reworking the organizations and institutions of existing *poleis* to create an ideal polis. There are to be two main methods of making people comply with this new kind of polity: the new laws, and the so-called preludes to law (προοίμια), which are first introduced in Book Four (722d–723a). The preludes are the means of persuasion, whereas the laws also operate by compulsion (a punishment follows from breaking the rules of a law).

After the Introduction (Chapter I), Noack provides a brief survey of the emphasis on religion and theology in the *Laws* (Chapter II). After that, he analyses the two imaginary speeches to the new settlers, which are reported by the Athenian interlocutor at the end of Book IV and the beginning of Book V (Chapter III. “Die Generalansprache”). The central argument in the first (715e7–718a6) is that good citizenship equates with concentrating on worshipping the gods, whereas the second speech (726a1–734e2) states that the second most important work for the citizens of the new polity, after worshipping the gods, is cultivating their souls. This abstract ideal is made more concrete through the preludes of the laws of the new polity, which make this kind of idealised life possible for the citizens of the new settlement. The preludes to the laws are discussed in the next chapter (IV “Die Proömien”, Noack also uses the term *Gesetzvorworte*), after which follows the main part of the book, namely the application of the methodological tool, the New Institutional Economics (NIE), to analysing the proposed institutions, both on an internal and external level, as well as some individual preludes to the laws (Chapter V. *Die Neue Institutionenökonomik*).

What, then, is the “NIE”? According to Noack, the NIE analyses and predicts human behaviour under the influence of institutions (p. 78), and emphasises that there are different types of rules, the breaking of which cause different kinds of sanctions. A table on pp. 84–85, by two researchers of Institutional economics, Daniel Kiwit and Stefan Voigt, illustrates these points: there are conventions (e.g., grammar), ethical rules (e.g., Kant’s categorical imperative), customs (e.g., social manners), formal private rules (e.g., the “laws” of the economy), and finally codes, the various *corpus jure*. Only the last ones are “external”, in regard to their surveillance and sanctions (sanctioned by polities) – all the others are “internal”, in the sense that they include different aspects of self-commitment, restrictions, and control. Thus, the NIE emphasises that most rules overlap with the sphere of culture, which is usually understood as not quite a controlled process, but as developing

“naturally”. The cultural sphere is undoubtedly formalized in the ideal *polis* as proposed in the *Laws*, insofar as certain behaviours that are normally not subject to any control are regulated and sanctioned.

Noack analyses three preludes: preludes to marriage (VI 772d5–774c2), preludes to rules pertaining to finding and obtaining treasures, which relates to the concept of inheritance (XI 913a1–914a5), and, thirdly, testaments (XI 922d4–8). Through these chosen examples, Noack argues that the concept of *homo economicus* in the NIE – that people are primarily interested in maximizing their personal benefit (see p. 78) – can be compared with the equally vague concept of pleasure in the *Laws* (cf. II 664b-c: a life of pleasure and a life of virtue are the same) as the basis for a person’s decision making. However, the preludes to the laws in the *Laws* are mainly ethical rules, and they override the cost-benefit calculation and encourage citizens to take actions that run counter to their maximization of benefits – such as not accepting one’s monetary inheritance. This argument does not solve the problematic “pleasure principle” in the *Laws* but, all in all, the NIE is an interesting tool for analysing the complexities of the many quite curious stipulations in the longest work of Plato’s *oeuvre*.

Tua Korhonen
University of Helsinki

Natur – Mythos – Religion im Antiken Griechenland / Nature – Myth – Religion in Ancient Greece. Herausgegeben von TANJA SUSANNE SCHEER. Postdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 67. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2019. ISBN 978-3-515-12208-5; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-515-12209-2. 297 pp. EUR 54.

The title of this volume, edited by Tanja Susanne Scheer from papers presented at an international meeting at the Georg-August Universität in Göttingen in 2015, is very interesting and immediately thought-provoking. What is ‘nature’ here, and how will the relationship between nature and religious-mythical spheres of ancient life and thought be understood in this book? This interesting and intriguing bilingual volume consists of fourteen articles divided into four sections. They are briefly discussed below and at the end I present a few thoughts which the volume provoked in me.

Scheer sets the scene with her informative opening introduction. She takes a brief and useful look into a research tradition in which religion has been variously conceptualised and interpreted in relation to nature. Nature is approached against a backdrop of the humanist or romantic ideas of *Naturreligion* and *Naturmythologie*, or as a concept mirroring evolutionary theories of religion