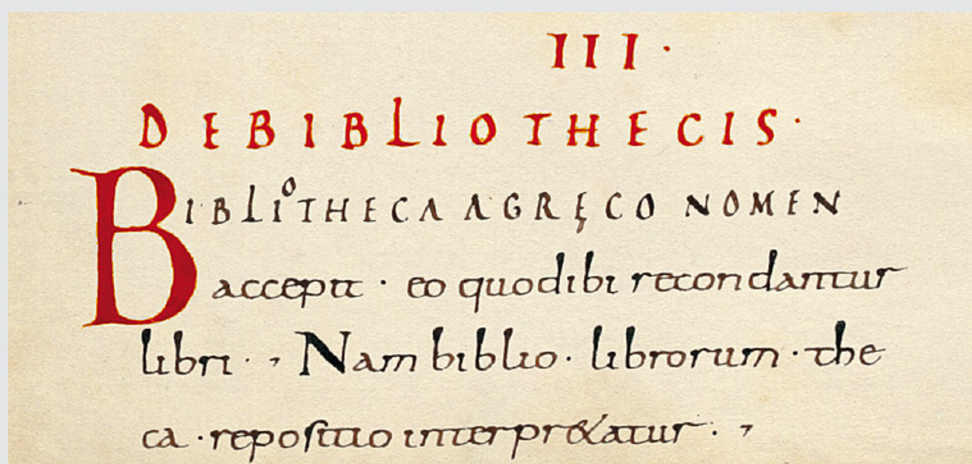
Libraries, Handbooks, Encyclopedias

Ancient and Early Medieval Repositories of Knowledge and Their Religious Aspects

Edited by
Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler



Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs 22

Mohr Siebeck

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Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler

Mohr Siebeck

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Johannes Bergemann took an active part in the organisation of the colloquium and in the editorial preparation of the two archaeological contributions for publication. Cordial thanks go to Lucrezia Ungaro, Roberto Meneghini and Claudio Parisi Presicce for hosting the colloquium in the Mercati di Traiano, Museo dei Fori Imperiali in Rome, as well as to Leonie von Alvensleben for her help in organising the conference and to Helen Traupe and Carl-Constantin Ohlms, who as student assistants diligently worked to prepare the manuscript for publication. The team of Mohr Siebeck, especially Tobias Stäbler, Linnéa Hoffmann and Rebekka Zech, have given the project their usual excellent support in bringing the volume to press.

Göttingen, March 2024 Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements V

Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler
Introduction 1

Gaëlle Coqueugniot
Le contenu des bibliothèques était-il consacré ?
Les dons d'ouvrages dans les bibliothèques publiques de la Méditerranée orientale hellénistique et romaine 27

Lilian Balensiefen
Bibliothek und *templum*. Zum Kultbezug öffentlicher Bibliotheken im kaiserzeitlichen Rom 43

Gabriela Ryser
Hinc prima diabolo fides aedificatur ab initiis eruditionis.
Some Remarks on Literary Education and the Non-/Religious in Tertullian's *De idololatria* 71

Jörg von Alvensleben
Theologisieren – systematisieren: Darstellung und Kohärenz philosophischer Bildung in Salustios' *De deis et mundo* 91

Philippe Hoffmann
ζάθεοι βίβλοι. Livres et religion savante dans le néoplatonisme tardif (V[e]–VIe siècles) 135

Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler
Knowledge about the Divine in Late Antique Handbooks: Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 1,1 177

Marietta Horster
On Language and Faith – Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* 235

Andreas Streichhardt
Die Darstellung der Philosophie in den *Etymologiae* Isidors von Sevilla. Präsentation und Kontextualisierung philosophischer Inhalte als religiöses und religionsbezogenes Bildungswissen 265

Hedwig Röckelein
Medicine and Religion in Carolingian Discourses and Libraries 287

Silviu Ghegoiu
Religious and Non-Religious in Carolingian Computistical Manuscripts. *Prognostica* among other Encyclopaedic Material 309

Index of Ancient and Medieval Sources 329
Index of Names 343
General Index 345

Introduction[*]

Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler

1. The topic of the volume: physical and virtual libraries and religion

The library (*bibliotheca*) has its name from the Greek, because books are stored there. For *biblion* translates as "of books", *theke* as "repository". The library of the Old Testament was restored by Esdra the scribe by the divine inspiration of the Spirit after the Chaldaeans had burnt the Law, when the Jews had returned to Jerusalem. […] Among the Greeks, the first to have established a library is believed to have been Pisistratus, the ruler of Athens. This library was then enlarged by the Athenians. Xerxes took it to Persia after burning down Athens, and a long time later Seleucus Nicanor brought it back to Greece. Hence kings and other cities developed a zeal to acquire the books of the various nations and to have them translated into Greek by interpreters. […] Especially Ptolemaeus surnamed Philadephus, who was extremely well-versed in all of literature, as he rivalled Pisistratus in his zeal for libraries, brought into his library not only the writings of the nations (*gentium scripturas*) but also the divine writings (*divinas litteras*). For at that time in Alexandria were found seventy-thousand books. […] The first to bring a large number of books to Rome was Aemilius Paulus, when he had defeated Perses, king of Macedonia; later Lucullus from the Pontic booty. After these, Caesar entrusted Marcus Varro with the task of building a library that was to be as large as possible. The first to open libraries to the public in Rome was Pollio, Greek as well as Latin ones, and he added the portraits of authors in the atrium, which he had built magnificently from spoils. Among us, too, the martyr Pamphilus […] was the first to attempt to equal Pisistratus in his zeal for the sacred library. For he had in his library almost thirty-thousand volumes. Jerome and Gennadius, too, searched all over the world for ecclesiastical writers, pursued them in an orderly manner and encompassed their studies in the brief overview of one single volume.[1]

This short history of the library as a cultural institution of the ancient world is included by Isidore, bishop of Seville, in the early seventh century into his encyclopaedic *Etymologies* or *Origins*, a major reference work of medieval knowledge.[2] Using information found already in Gellius, Tertullian or Jerome,[3] Isidore tells a tale not of

* I cordially thank Marvin Döbler for his careful and critical reading and his valuable suggestions.

[1] Isid. *Etym.* 6,3. 5–6.

[2] For Isidore and his medieval reception, see Fear / Wood 2020. Isidore's discussion of the library is frequently quoted in studies on ancient libraries; see e.g. Greg Woolf's introduction in König / Oikonomopoulou / Woolf 2013, 1–7, who also uses Isidore as the entry-point to his reflections and points that his is "the only history of libraries that has survived from antiquity" (1–2), or Hendrickson 2017, 6–22 for Isidore within the tradition of library history from Antiquity to humanism.

[3] Canfora 1987 / 1990, 126–131; Woolf 2013, 1–4.

private, but of public libraries[4]: libraries that belong to the emblematic cultures in whose tradition he situates his own intellectual universe. The first place is assigned to the divinely inspired "library of the Old Testament", later on referred to as the "divine writings". The focus then shifts to the Greeks and singles out Athens as the symbol of culture, presenting a library supposedly founded by Pisistratus as the origin of Greek and Hellenistic royal and civic libraries. This library is depicted as a coveted war spoil in the symbolically charged struggle between Greece and Persia. After the public libraries of the Hellenistic world, Isidore records the translation of this cultural institution to Rome, underscoring its embeddedness in political representation and military exploits: the first Roman library is presented as war booty from Greece, but unlike in Xerxes' case the transition initiates a permanent tradition connecting Greece and Rome. Having discussed Judaea, Greece and Rome, Isidore comes to his own tradition: the Christian "sacred" libraries. The "sacred" may be taken as an oblique reference to the "divine" library of Scripture as the focal point of Christian libraries. However, Isidore's explicit statement does not emphasise this link but places the Christian libraries in the tradition of Greco-Roman public libraries instead, turning Pamphilus into a Christian Pisistratus.[5]

Isidore's account synthesises earlier Imperial and Late Antique views on libraries that reach him through his sources, and in turn decisively shapes medieval views, as Thomas Hendrickson points out.[6] We can therefore read it as an authoritative mirror of Late Antique and medieval perceptions. In ths mirror, the reader notes the characteristic polysemy of the term *bibliotheca*, 'library'. Firstly, it denotes an institution functioning in a given architectural setting that houses a collection of books. Secondly, *bibliotheca* refers to book collections: the books supposedly taken to Persia by Xerxes and rescued by Nicanor, those of the Alexandrian library, the collection of Pamphilus. Thirdly, the mention of the Old Testament as a *bibliotheca* points to collections not just of books as physical objects, but of texts which are in principle independent of their material substrate – the virtual aspect of books. A fourth step of sublimation and abstraction is represented by the Late Antique overview of ecclesiastical writers assembled by Jerome and continued by Gennadius of Marseille (*De viris illustribus*), which condenses and represents in a shorthand, endeictic manner the whole of Christian literature[7]. This project is comparable to that which Jean Bouffartigue has termed the "ideal library" in his study of the pagan emperor Julian: a canon

[4] Already Gellius, with whom Isidore shares his account of the development of the library from Pisistratus to Nicanor had pointedly focused his narrative on public book collections (*Noct*. 7,17).

[5] Already Jerome had pointed out that Pamphilus had attempted to equal Demetrius of Phaleron and Pisistratus *in sacrae Bibliothecae studio* (ep. 34,1, PL 22, 448); cf. Canfora 1987 / 1990, 130; for the succession pattern established here see Woolf 2013, 4 or Hendrickson 2017, 13.

[6] Hendrickson 2017, 14: *Etym*. 6 as "the definitive resource on books up to the sixteenth century".

[7] On Jerome's *De viris illustribus* see SanPietro 2017, who speaks of a "notional Christian library", ibid. 231. For the concept of "condensing" texts or information see the seminal contributions in Horster / Reitz 2010.

of authors and books.[8] With another term loosely used in research for texts aiming to condense whole libraries into a manageable text, we could also term it a "virtual library".[9] As Isidore's text shows, the semantic spectrum of the library in Late Antiquity, which builds on earlier literature from the Roman Empire, covers a continuum which gravitates around books in their dual character as material objects and embodied texts and ranges from libraries as institutions functioning in physical spaces designed to house or display books, to the very books as objects forming tangible but movable collections, to books as object-detachable texts, finally, to information about writings and authors that constitutes an ideal canon.[10]

The present volume explores this continuum from physicality to virtuality by analysing selected knowledge repositories from Hellenistic times to the Carolingian period: physical libraries as well as virtual libraries in the sense indicated above.[11] Within the panorama of recent research,[12] the analysis focuses on one particular aspect which transpires in Isidore's distinction of "divine" and "sacred" libraries from others: the connections between such knowledge repositories and religion. How are we to interpret the location of libraries in religious spaces – does that impact on the perception and function of the libraries? Under what circumstances do libraries or texts take on a religious aura or assume religious functions? How do religious and non-religions connotations and functions intersect and coexist? What is the place of religious knowledge within the larger architecture of knowledge that shapes physical or virtual libraries? Pursuing these questions for selected case studies promises to yield not only a more nuanced insight into the relationship between learning and religion, but also a clearer picture of how religion works in ancient and early medieval contexts.

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[8] Bouffartigue 1992, 51. All subsequent use of the phrase "ideal library" in the introduction refers to Bouffartigue's concept.

[9] E.g. Horster/Reitz 2010 (the subtitle for the section discussing Stobaeus' *Anthologium* and Photius' collection of reading memoranda, the *Bibliothēkē*).

[10] This semantic continuum is not specific to Antiquity: cf. Werle 2007, 3–8 as a preamble to a study of early modern "imagined libraries". He begins with another famous threefold definition of the library focused on the various aspects of its materiality: Justus Lipsius' remark that *bibliotheca* signifies either the place or the bookcase or the books (*locum armarium libros*; *De bibliothecis* 1,1 p. 66 Hendrickson). As Hendrickson 2017, 172–173 points out, Lipsius adapts a juridical clarification of the term 'library' by Ulpian, recorded in Justinians' *Digesta* 32,52,7. The polysemy of 'library' there takes on a very practical aspect: what exactly is included in the bequest of a library – the bookcases or the books as well?

[11] To view libraries as repositories of knowledge is one possible, but not the only option: for an emphatic rejection see Johnstone 2014, 349, who emphasises their political dimension. The two aspects need not be played out against one another.

[12] For compilations, compendia and other knowledge-digesting types of texts see e.g. Horster/Reitz 2010 and 2018; Dubischar 2010; Dusil/Schwedler/Schwitter 2017; for encyclopedism König/Woolf 2013a and b, who point out the variety of encyclopaedic projects in Imperial times. For libraries, see e.g. König/Oikonomopoulou/Woolf 2013b; Meneghini/Rea 2014, Amoroso/Cavalieri/Meunier 2017. König/Oikonomopoulou/Woolf 2013 and König/Woolf 2013 are conceived as two parts of the same project, given the interlinking between encyclopedism and libraries (see Woolf 2013, 1). However, the two volumes amount to two distinct endeavours without actually exploring the interplay between encyclopedism and libraries.

2. Distinguishing between the religious and the non-religious

The very assumption that we can meaningfully speak of religion and distinguish between religious and non-religious social facts in the ancient and medieval world challenges the contention that religion is an essentially modern, European category that cannot be applied fruitfully to earlier or non-European material. This contention has been voiced for the ancient world recently by Brent Nongbri or, with much more philological and historical sophistication, by Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin.[13] Their arguments centre on the lack of a term fully equivalent to what the authors take to be the modern meaning of 'religion'. Whereas this approach can produce valuable results on occasion, as for example the sophisticated and fine-grained analysis of the semantic of *thrēskeia* and *religio* presented by Daniel Boyarin and Carlin Barton, its exclusive focus on 'the' ancient term for 'religion' is misleading, as critics have pointed out.[14] The point of departure is a narrow notion of religion based on the complete separation (and isolation) of the religious domain from other social spheres,[15] nuanced in Nongbri's case as a supposedly Protestant understanding of religion as an exclusively interior affair.[16] The adequacy of this idea of religion appears questionable even for the modern and contemporary periods.[17] Even more importantly, such approaches do not do justice to the fact that Greek and Roman intellectuals conceptualise their world in ways that mark out a socio-cultural domain that strongly resembles what many, if not all, modern users of the term 'religion' would understand as such. Therefore, the claim that using 'religion' as a scholarly meta-language term would totally obscure emic distinctions cannot be upheld. The following brief considerations sketch an alternative starting-point.

Religion in ancient discourse: assuming and worshipping gods

In Greek texts from the fifth century BC onwards we find that the assumption of gods together with the practices and infrastructure designed to achieve communication

[13] Nongbri 2013; Barton / Boyarin 2016 (both with extensive earlier bibliography). They both look back to Jonathan Z. Smith's idea that religion is "solely the creation of the scholar's study" (Smith 1982, xi), however, they go beyond Smith in denying the utility of "religion" as a scholarly meta-language term. See, however, even Nongbri on the possibility of using religion as a "redescriptive concept" (2013, 157).

[14] Frankfurter 2015 (review of Nongbri); Broucek 2015 (review of Nongbri); Schilbrack 2017 (review of Barton / Boyarin); Casadio 2010 (engaging with earlier instances of this type of approach) and 2016; Tanaseanu-Döbler 2018. For a pertinent philosophical critique of the social-constructionist foundations and implications of Nongbri's approach see Schilbrack 2019, who advocates a stance of "critical realism" (60). Martin 2019 voices a similar critique from the perspective of a historian of religion, linking Schilbrack's critical realism with the cognitive science of religion (420).

[15] Nongbri 2013, 2–7; Barton / Boyarin 2016, 4–5. 8–9.

[16] Nongbri 2013, 8. 16–18.

[17] See Casadio 2010, 304, n. 11; his critique, targetting earlier approaches which postulate "a current univocal meaning of religion" and conceive of it along supposedly Protestant lines, can be extrapolated to Nongbri 2013 as a new variation on the same theme.

and contact with them is perceived as a distinct socio-cultural domain.[18] The core element by which this domain is discursively indicated is the assumption of gods,[19] mentioned and treated by Greek intellectuals either as a general anthropological phenomenon (humans form notions of gods) or in the specific context of a given culture (the gods worshipped by a particular people or group). A frequent phrase for this is *nomizein (einai) theous*, conceived not merely as a cognitive act but as a social fact that entails corresponding behaviour. Another recurrent way of indicating the same fact are references to humans forming or having a notion or idea of god or gods (*ennoia theou / tōn theōn)*. The domain may be further outlined through enumerations of other aspects added to the assumption of gods, typically references to cultic infrastructure (mostly temples, altars and statues; additional elements include holy precincts or groves) and / or to various rituals (e. g., sacrifice, processions). Without one all-encompassing dedicated term, such accumulative enumerations, whether employed generally to outline a feature of human culture or specifically to describe the gods, beliefs and practices of a particular culture, are equivalent to what modern substantive approaches to religion take as the core of their object of study.[20] From the sixth century BC onwards, we can detect a discourse on the cultural and anthropological roots of belief in gods and conceptions of gods, ranging from reductionism to theories about the "naturalness of religious ideas"[21]. These theories can be fruitfully compared to present-day theories about religion as cultural construction or, with the cognitive science of religion, the product of innate pre-formatting of the human brain.[22] For Latin literature, which adopts and develops the Greek discourse, the same notion of a distinctive socio-cultural domain gravitating around the acknowledgement of superior forces and their subsequent cultic worship can be grasped at least from the late Republic onwards;[23] it can be designated by various terms such as *cultus deorum*, *res divinae* or *religio*.[24] In this light, the distinction between the religious and the non-religious does not appear to be foreign to ancient conceptualis-

[18] The argument sketched in this section is fully developed in Tanaseanu-Döbler 2018, where the reader will find the relevant source references and bibliography. See also Casadio 2010 and 2016, as well as Roubekas 2017, esp. 5–10. 27–29. 33–44, and 2019a.

[19] Cf. also Roubekas 2017, 6. 16 and 2019b, 131.

[20] E. g. Riesebrodt 2007; see also the approach of the cognitive science of religion, e. g. Pyyssiäinen 2001; Boyer / Bergstrom 2008, who explicitly point out the long tradition of conceptualising religion as an anthropological universal in which the cognitive approach ultimately stands (*ibid*. 112).

[21] To take up the title of Boyer 1994, a classic of the cognitive science of religion.

[22] For ancient theories of religion and their relationship to modern theories see also Roubekas 2017, 2019b, 2020, 2021; Mogyoródi 2019; Wiebe 2019. In this regard, also the impact of classical education on modern thinkers should not be neglected: Massa 2017, 591, cf. also Roubekas 2017, 36–37 and 2020, 92, n. 6.

[23] See e. g. Beard 1986; Casadio 2010, esp. 308–317; Rüpke 2015.

[24] This is not to claim that *religio* is perfectly identical with 'religion', but that the semantic range of *religio* includes also, as the survey of evidence in Casadio 2010 demonstrates, the above-mentioned usage: a specific domain of human socio-cultural activity, whether generally or for a given culture.

ations of the world. If we understand religion, as in this volume, substantively as encompassing beliefs, practices, institutions etc. embedded in the assumption of supra-empirical entities, in notions about what constitutes correct behaviour towards them and in practices of communication and exchange resulting from these assumptions,[25] we are in line with the basic approach of ancient discourse.[26] For the period in question, these entities are firstly god(s), secondly demons, heroes, angels or other supra-empirical powers. For our enquiry into texts and libraries, the connection of a given *datum* – a text, a space, a book – to the divine realm or other supra-human entities can thus be taken as the chief marker of religion. Following the ancient pattern, two other markers can be identified in the connection between libraries, books or knowledge with cultic space and infrastructure, as well as in the connection of texts, books or library buildings to religious practices of communication or exchange with the divine.[27]

Is there always religion where there are gods? A plethora of perceptions

However, much as with the divine in the modern period, in antiquity gods and all other god-related elements pertaining to the domain of the religious lend themselves to various interpretations and perceptions. Atheism and agnosticism are established intellectual options at least from the fifth century BC onwards, often combined with accounts of gods and their worship as a purely human cultural phenomenon, reducible to non-religious roots such as fear, acknowledgement of the natural phenomena that sustain human life, law-enforcing stratagems or the exaltation of powerful humans.[28] Besides atheism and reductionism, since the sixth century BC Greek philosophers engage in the critique of traditional conceptions of the divine or practices of worship from the vantage-point of their own theology. This entails reconceptualisations of the divine as well as the reinterpretation of myths and cults, not least through allegory. Going beyond critique and re-evaluation: already at the graspable beginning of Greek literature in Homer the gods of myth and cult appear as characters of literary works, which places them between fiction and reality. As literary characters, the gods can even be mocked on stage in comedy as in fifth-century Athens in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Thus, depending on the context or on the vantage-point of the

[25] Cf. Tanaseanu-Döbler / Döbler 2012, 2.

[26] Cf. also Schilbrack 2017, 834, who elegantly points out other correspondences between ancient terms and modern 'religion' from within the analysis of Barton / Boyarin.

[27] An aspect which is not developed in this volume but must be kept in mind for a deeper-going reconstruction of the ancient ideas of religion as the field of interaction between gods and men would be the notion of divinely sanctioned and required behaviour in all fields of life, especially existential relationships and situations, that stands at the core of the semantic of the term *hosios* / *hosiotes* (see Peels 2016).

[28] For atheism, agnosticism and reductionist theories of religion see Whitmarsh 2015; Roubekas 2020; for a wider approach centred on religious doubt in the ancient world Hartmann / Naether 2021, esp. Hartmann 2021; Soneira Martínez 2021; Roubekas 2021.

speaker, different attitudes towards gods and cults are possible in the ancient world. Gods can be accepted as real superhuman beings without further problematisation or perceived aesthetically as characters of literary fictions or *sujets* for sculptural or pictorial mastery. They can be rejected as human projections, with or without an alternative idea of the divine in the background. They can be interpreted as auratisations of cultural heroes, allegorised as divine forces in the cosmos or demoted to the rank of *daimones*. This spectrum of perceptions and framings of the *datum* at the core of ancient religion is readily taken up by Jews and Christians in order to integrate knowledge about Greek and Roman religion into their own systems of knowledge – euhemerism or physical allegory become standard approaches used to diminish or effectively delete the religious aura of certain gods, myths or cults. Any attempt to discuss the distinction between religious and non-religious aspects in a given field of Antiquity must therefore do justice to the plurality of possible ancient attitudes and approaches to gods and cult by taking into account the social context of the god, sanctuary, object or practice under discussion as well as their perceptions and categorisations by the actors involved. To sketch three possible stances: a given practice or divine figure can be relevant for a person's existential outlook or behaviour towards what he considers to be divine; in other words, the actor in case takes it seriously as religious. Said divine figure or practice might be taken seriously as such by an individual or group whom an observer or antagonist describes or criticises – here, still, the observer would qualify the god or practice in case as relevant to religion, namely that of the 'others'. Thirdly, said divine figure or cultic practice may be part of a fictional or conventional setting commonly understood by social convention to fall outside what the actors concerned take seriously as divine reality and the avenues of exchange and communication with it. In this case, we might categorise the fact as irrelevant with respect to religion for the respective social group. This framing can shift, e.g. in changed religious contexts: a standard apologetic topos in Christian literature, on which Gabriela Ryser's contribution touches, is the treatment of the ancient myths as if they documented the serious religious beliefs of 'the' pagans.

The totalising religious auratisation of education: 'religionising by association'

In an enquiry about knowledge repositories, the same attention to situatedness and context must be paid to the relationship between education and religion in antiquity, and the religious auratisation of books and knowledge. Especially in philosophical contexts, education can be conceived as a long existential road purifying the soul and leading it to the encounter with the divine. This can be extended beyond the philosophical curriculum to cover the whole of education, as Philippe Hoffmann describes in this volume.[29] Thus, a dynamic that could be termed 'religionising by association' can draw social fields, which in everyday practice are separated from religion, at least

[29] For other examples see Tanaseanu-Döbler 2012.

ideally, at a conceptual and normative level, into the wider sphere of religion. This discrepancy between perspectives is comparable to what Claire Sotinel has described for the multiple conceptualisation of one and the same space as neutral with regard to religion, i. e. 'profane', or religious or sacred.[30] 'Religionising by association' makes a claim that can be contested by adversaries who espouse other educational ideals or religious agendas. This claim can remain at the level of metaphor or the abstract articulation of an educational ideal, in practice leaving the field of education as a neutral ground with regard to religion. It can, however, also entail practical consequences. An example from the fourth century AD would be the emperor Julian's emphasis on the existential and religious value of Hellenic education that prompts him to regulate the teaching of literature and rhetoric by establishing the proper religious affiliation as a criterium the teacher must meet. His pagan admirer Libanius praises him rhetorically for having realised that cult and literature are siblings, accepting the religionising of literature in theory; in everyday life Libanius cultivates, however, a circle of friends and students linked by the practice of rhetoric which includes Christians. Julian's claim causes a scathing reaction from the Christian intellectual and bishop Gregory Nazianzen, who counters with the claim that Hellenism and *logoi* belong to the domain of learning and language, not religion.[31] When discussing the religious dimensions of libraries and texts, we must therefore take into account such generic ascriptions of religious valence to culture and books and be aware that they may but need not entail concrete effects on the practice of teaching and learning.

Sacred – profane versus religious – non-religious

The focus on the pair 'religious – non-religious' opts for a wider approach, including, but not restricted to the opposition between 'sacred' and 'profane'. For Antiquity, the possibilities of distinguishing the 'profane' or 'secular' from the sacred or religious domain and the ancient terms and conceptual frameworks have been variously discussed in research, which has pointed out the situationality and also the fuzzy borders between the 'profane' or 'secular' and the religious.[32] The sacred and its changing definitions from paganism to Christianity[33] are one avenue of approaching repositories of knowledge, explored here by Gaelle Coqueugniot, Lilian Balensiefen or Marietta Horster. But the sacred does not exhaust the religious. Sanctuaries are complex heterogeneous spaces which, although *in toto* regarded as the property of a deity and in this sense sacred, are marked by an amalgam of functions, ranging from the direct interaction with the divine to social interaction, entertainment or political and civic

[30] Sotinel 2010.

[31] Jul. ep. 61c Bidez; *Contra Galilaeos* frg. 55 Masaracchia; Lib. or. 18,157 (Ὁ δὲ νομίζων ἀδελφὰ λόγους τε καὶ θεῶν ἱερὰ; cf. also or. 13,1–2. Greg. Naz. or. 4 and 5; Elm 2012. For Libanius' network and his relationship to Julian, see e. g. Cribiore 2007 and 2013.

[32] Bremmer 1998, 28–31, Markus 1970 or 1985; Blok 2010; Rebillard / Sotinel 2010.

[33] Gemeinhardt / Heyden 2012.

representation. Classifying the pictorial or sculptural representations of deities in library complexes as sacred would also blind us to the plethora of perceptions and functions between art and cult that can be assigned to them by the beholder. The same applies to the complexity of monastic spaces or manuscripts: not everything they contain is regarded as sacred. Theology can be pursued as a sacred science or an ascent to the divine, but it can also be treated as a matter of knowledge, without a sacred aura. Systematic treatises on religious matters, whether on the gods, on sacrifices, on piety or on statues, to name some common topics and titles in ancient discourse, also do not fall into the scope of the sacred, nor do plays, poetry or novels. The presence of religious content on the shelves of a physical or in the pages of a virtual library thus goes beyond the narrow category of the sacred.

Consequences: a multi-dimensional analysis of selected instances

The above considerations point both to the possibility to meaningfully distinguish between religious and non-religious aspects of physical and virtual libraries, and to the need to do justice to the situatedness and complexity of the religious. We have to take into account a variety of perspectives on stories, objects and practices connected with the divine that may coexist in one and the same person, perhaps simultaneously, perhaps situationally shifting, if we think e. g. of the oscillation between a aesthetic or religious approach to the gods of Homer in the mind of Greco-Roman *pepaideumenos*. Enquiring into the religious aspects of libraries and textual knowledge repositories means therefore conducting, as far as the extant sources allow, a multi-dimensional analysis that takes into consideration not only the libraries, books and texts but also the overall architecture of knowledge that informs them, the contexts in which they are embedded, the various actors involved, such as authors, founders or donors with their religious stances, agendas and ideals, but also readers and users, finally, the valences and functions assigned by these actors to knowledge, books and libraries. The case studies in this volume attempt such a multi-dimensional analysis for selected knowledge repositories, asking the questions that the material allows them to explore and pointing out also what aspects must remain in the dark due to the state of our sources.

3. The contributions: overview and first reflections

Sacralised books and spaces? Public libraries in the Hellenistic world and in Rome

The volume opens with two articles on public libraries in the Hellenistic and Roman world. Gaelle Coqueugniot focuses on the status of their book collections. Analysing mainly epigraphic material, she underscores that the donation of books to such libraries is often designated by the verb *anatithēmi*, frequently used to denote votive

offerings. This links the gift of books to libraries to the phenomenon of books deposited as votives in sanctuaries. The incriptions she presents record books often alongside other elements such as ornaments or money; sometimes the mere fact of book donations is recorded, sometimes the quantity, never the titles. In this light, books appear as valuable objects that form a constitutive element of a specific act of euergetism.[34] In the inscriptions which Gaelle Coqueugniot discusses, *anatithēmi* and its cognates are used sometimes without the specification of a recipient, sometimes with the reference to the library as the place of destination of the books, sometimes also with the mention of recipients. In a number of cases, these recipients are deities, but other instances feature cities or, as in the case of the library of Tiberius Flavius Pantaenus, a deity (Athena Polias), an emperor (Trajan) and a city (Athens) at once. This raises an important issue for the topic of the volume: whereas the strong religious connotation of *anatithēmi* is clearly at the fore in the inscriptions that mention deities or that juxtapose book donations with offerings to deities, the cases where explicit references to gods are missing are more ambiguous. Pointing furthermore to repeated instances where taking books out of the library is forbidden, Gaelle Coqueugniot carefully argues that the books are assigned a quasi sacred status ("statut quasi sacré", p. 36), that of votive offerings restricted to the library premises, which in turn impacts on the library space, making it not a mere repository, but a place of study and encounter. This corresponds to the "caractère sacré plus ou moins explicite" frequently graspable for Hellenistic and Roman public libraries (p. 39).

Lilian Balensiefen discusses three prominent Roman libraries in cultic contexts: that of the temple of Apollo, founded by Augustus close to his residence on the Palatine, the library in Vespasian's *templum Pacis* and the library included by Trajan in his new forum, in close proximity to the column standing above Trajan's own tomb. All three complexes conspicuously shape the urban landscape and are carefully designed to convey a specific political message centering on Rome's greatness and empire and the pivotal role of the respective founder in achieving it. Lilian Balensiefen points out that the libraries are integrated into the sacred space and are spoken of as the property of the god or the deceased emperor. This is one element linking the libraries to the sphere of the religious. Furthermore, she points out that in all three cases, the library is part of the core religious area, connected architecturally to the temple and altar in the first two cases, to the column over the tomb of Trajan in the third. The cults housed in these spaces commemorate military victories as moments inaugurating a golden age of peace and stability and honour the powers which enabled these exploits and thus secured Rome's greatness. The nature of the three cult recipients epitomises the issue of multiple, sometimes conflicting perceptions signalled above in the discussion of the religious. As Lilian Balensiefen points out, the cult of Pax as a Roman goddess developed as part of the agendas of imperial representation pursued by Octavian and Vespasian. At the core of this figure, therefore,

[34] Cf. also Johnstone 2014, 353–356.

Index of Ancient and Medieval Sources

Biblical passages

Gen 49 320
Eccl 38:1 290
Acts 7:22 256
Rom 1:21–22 280
2 Cor 10:3 275

Ancient and medieval literary sources

Aelius Aristides

Or. 3,663 144

Alcinous

Didaskalikos
1 102 n. 44
8–26 184
8,1 184 n. 33
9,3 211
10 224 n. 178
11,3 184 n. 33

Alciphron

1,25 = 2,4 121 n. 144

Alcuin

Didascalica II seu De rhetorica et virtutibus
PL 101,947–948 289 n. 9

Carmina
carmen 26 299

Epistulae
ep. 8 299

Aldhelm of Malmesbury

De virginitate (Ehwald)
277,3–6 289 n. 8

Ambrose

Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam
7,222 320

Ammonius

De interpretatione (Busse)
1,11 144 n. 50
23,10–15 146 n. 59

Apuleius

De Platone et eius dogmate
1,5. 11 224 n. 178
1,5–18 184

Aratus

Phaenomena
2–3 196 n. 83
1–9 193
10–13 194
1–16 195
10–15 195
13–15 195 n. 79

Aristotle

De caelo
B 293a18 116 n. 120

De anima
411a7 196 n. 83

Metaphysica
6,1026a 278

Ethica Nicomachea
10,8, 1178b 204

Περὶ τῶν Πυθαγορείων
frg. 13 Ross 143 n. 47

Ps.-Aristotle

De mundo
7 121 n. 144
391b13 116 n. 120
397b22 105 n. 60
400b6–8 218
400b6–401b27 198
400b6–401a27 198, 215
401b8–26 198
401b9 119 n. 137
401a27–401b7 198
400b6–401a27 215
400b6–8 218

Asterius

Homiliae in psalmos
20,14 320

Astronomus

Vita Hludowici
28 299
62–63 300 n. 65

Athenaeus

1,3A 29 n. 11

Athenagoras

Legatio
7,2 280 n. 61
23,9–10 203 n. 113

Augustine

Confessiones
1,16,25 73
1,18,28 71 n. 2
1,13,20–22 71 n. 2

De civitate Dei
8,1 274 n. 40
8,1–4 270 n. 23
8,2 272 n. 33
8,10 270 n. 23, 274 n. 42
11,25 270 n. 23, 274 n. 42
14,7 272 n. 34
15,20 272 n. 34
18,41 272 n. 33

De doctrina christiana
2,55 271 n. 27
2,139. 144–146 72–73

De quantitate animae
26,51 270 n. 23

De trinitate
14,1,2 272 n. 33

Enarrationes in psalmos
73,25 272 n. 34

Aulus Gellius

5,21,9 51 n. 35
6,17,1–2 29 n. 11
7,17 2 n. 4
11,17,1 54 n. 42
16,8,2 51 n. 36

Ausonius

Commemoratio professorum Burdigalensium
3,21–24 97 n. 22

Basil of Caesarea

Ad adolescentes
4,1–2 73
2,8 73
3,2 73 n. 11

Benedicti Regula
36 290

Bede

De temporum ratione
29 318

Boethius

In isagogen Porphyrii
ed. 2, lib. 1,4 271 n. 25

Cassiodorus

Institutiones
1 *praef.* 1 239, 240 n. 21, 242 n. 29
1 *praef.* 2. 238 n. 11, 255
1 *praef.* 2–5 24 n. 21
1 *praef.* 3 250 n. 52, 254
1 *praef.* 3–4 242 n. 29
1 *praef.* 4 245
1 *praef.* 7 238 n. 11
1 *praef.* 9 245–246, 248, 250 n. 52
1,1 249 n. 50
1,1–9. 12–14 249 n. 50
1,1,1–2 247 n. 43
1,1,8 257–258
1,1,8–9 257
1,1,9 248 n. 45
1,1,10 248 n. 46
1,2,2 257
1,2,12 240 n. 20, 247 n. 43, 253
1,2,13 246, 248 n. 46
1,3,1 243–244
1,3,2–6 244 n. 33
1,3,3 257
1,3,6 253 n. 63
1,5 249 n. 50
1,5,2 242 n. 29, 246, 247 nn. 43–44
1,5,4 240 n. 20, 242 n. 29, 247 nn. 43–44, 257
1,5,5 256 n. 73
1,5,6 243
1,6,5 240 n. 20, 246, 247 n. 43, 248 n. 46
1,7,1 240 n. 20, 246, 247 n. 43
1,8,3 248 n. 44
1,8,6 247 n. 44
1,8,12 247 n. 43, 257
1,8,14 242 n. 29
1,9 249 n. 50
1,9,5 243 n. 29
1,10,1–2 242 n. 29
1,11,1 257 n. 74
1,11,2 248 n. 44
1,12,1 246, 250 n. 52
1,12,2 246 n. 40
1,12,3 249 n. 50
1,12,4 243
1,14,2 249 n. 50
1,14,4–5 245 n. 37
1,15,1–11 249 n. 51
1,15,1–16 245 n. 37
1,15,8 256 n. 73
1,15,12 248 n. 47, 251 n. 55
1,17,1 247–248 nn. 43–44, 256 n. 73
1,17,1–2 247 n. 43
1,21,1 244
1,21,2 244 n. 35, 248–249, 252
1,22 245 n. 37
1,22,1 238 n. 11
1,24,1 242 n. 29
1,26,1 242 n. 27
1,26,1–2 246 n. 40
1,27,1–2 254–255
1,28,2 255
1,28,4 256
1,30,1 242
1,30,2 238 n. 14, 247 n. 43
1,31,1–2 290
1,31,2 240 n. 20, 256 n. 72
2,1 239 n. 14
2,1,1 245 n. 37, 251
2,1,2 248 n. 47
2,2,3 247
2,2,10 240 n. 20, 254 n. 67, 256 n. 73
2,2,11 247
2,3,1 251
2,3,2 251
2,3,2–3 270 n. 22
2,3,4 247
2,3,4–7 270 n. 23, 277 n. 49
2,3,5 275
2,3,8 251, 270 n. 24
2,3,8–9 251
2,3,9 247 n. 42
2,3,9–10 271 n. 25
2,3,11 251 n. 56, 256 n. 72, 271 n. 26
2,3,12 282 n. 68
2,3,12–14 271 n. 27
2,3,14 271 n. 28
2,3,15–17 271 n. 29
2,3,18 240 n. 20, 256 n. 72, 270 n. 24
2,3,20 253 n. 63

2,3,22 250–251, 256 n. 73
2,4,3–6 247
2,4,7 256 n. 72
2,5 236 n. 3, 248 n. 44
2 *concl.* 1 252

De orthographia
praef. 10 237 n. 8

Variae
12,15,1 240 n. 22

Cassius Dio

53,1,3 48 n. 24, 56 n. 49, 61 n. 70

Cicero

De divinatione
1,55 119 n. 137, 121 n. 144
1,125 121 n. 144

De natura deorum
1,15,41 197
2,60 11

De officiis
1,43,153 272 n. 33

De oratore
1,49,212 272 n. 33
1,212 273 n. 38

Epistulae ad familiares
9.21.1 253

Topica
2 271 n. 29

Tusculanae disputationes
4,26,57 272 n. 33

Clement of Alexandria

Stromateis
4,22–24 194 n. 76
5,14,101,2–4 195
5,14,102,4 205
5,14,122,2 197
5,14,128,3 197
6,5,24 194 n. 76

Protrepticus
7,73,2 195 n. 79
11,114,4 195 n. 79

Excerpta ex Theodoto
25,2 320 n. 64

Ps.-Clement

Homiliae 2,23 320

Recognitiones
2,8 320
4,35 320

Cornutus

De natura deorum
3 111 n. 92
3–4 116
7 112 n. 94
13 119 n. 137
14 154 n. 100
19 116
28 116
32 117, 166 n. 152
34 117 n. 121

Cyril of Alexandria

Contra Iulianum (Riedweg / Kinzig / Brüggemann)
4,423,25 205
8,28,560–570 205

Damascius

In Platonis Parmenidem (Westerink / Combès)
2,100,7–21 144
3,70. 82 196 n. 87

In Platonis Phaedonem (Westerink)
1,149–151 204
1,275–292 154 n. 102
1,282 154 n. 101
1,540 196
1,548 221 n. 176
2,28 154–155 nn. 101.102

Vita Isidori (Zintzen)
frg. 16 144 n. 51
frg. *33–*41 140 n. 26
frg. 37 140 n. 27
frg. 80 140 n. 27
frg. *124 159 n. 126
frg. 160–161 140 n. 27
frg. 249 144 n. 53
frg. 287 140 n. 26

De computo dialogus

PL 90, 647–652 310

Dio Chrysostomus

Or. 12
73–79 200

Or. 36
31–32 123 n. 154
43–47 117 n. 120

Diogenes of Apollonia

64B5 Diels / Kranz 214 n. 150

Diogenes Laertius

2,46 217 n. 162
5,52 35 n. 29
9,6 28

Eigil

Vita Sturmi
25 299 n. 57

Einhard

Vita Karoli Magni
22 299 n. 59, 300 nn. 61–62
30 299 n. 60, 300 n. 63, 301

Ekkehard IV

Casus s. Galli
77–78. 91–92. 97. 123 293 n. 23
123 293 n. 24

Elias (David)

In Aristotelis Categorias (Busse)
119,12–24 144 n. 53

Euripides

frg. 397 190, 194
frg. 941 189, 198, 214
frg. 944 116 n. 120
frg. 1025 190

Eunapius

Vitae sophistarum (Giangrande)
7,5,4 96–97

Eusebius of Caesarea

Historia ecclesiastica
2,2,4 74 n. 16

Praeparatio evangelica
3,7–13 197
3,9,2 196–197
3,9,3–4 198
3,9,6–3,10,12 197–198
11,16,2–3 205 n. 123
11,17,9 205 n. 123
13,12 195 n. 81
13,13 197, 205 n. 123

Flavius Josephus

Bellum Iudaicum
7,158 58

Contra Apionem
1,56 Niese 64 n. 86

De vita sua
361. 363 64 n. 91

Gregory Nazianzen

Or. 4 and 5 8 n. 31

Carmen ad Seleucum
PG 37, 1581 82

Heraclitus

B 36. 77 Diels / Kranz 99 n. 32

Hermias

In Platonis Phaedrum (Lucarini / Moreschini)
52,8–12 162
94,20–95,2 162
95,3–9 161
96,4–9 159
141–142 196
141–143 207 n. 126
142 203 n. 113, 208
142–144 208

Hesiod

Theogonia
2. 23 153n. 97

Opera et dies
765–828 312

Hierocles of Alexandria

In carmen aureum (Köhler)
praef. 5–7 224
1,2–3 225
1–4 224
20,12. 19 224
20,11–19 225

Hippolytus

Refutatio omnium haeresium
4,46–48 195 n. 79
5,16 195 n. 79

Historia Augusta

Hadrianus
19,9 54 n. 43

Homer

Ilias
1,423–425 206–209
1,498–499 206–208
1,534–535 208
5,127–128 153
8,1–27 208
8,3 208
16,112–113 162
20,1–30 208
20,22–23 208
20,22–25 204
20,242–243 193–194

Odyssea
10,275–308 144 n. 53

Horace

Epistulae
ep. 1,3,17 65 n. 95
ep. 2,1,216–217 65 n. 95

Hrabanus Maurus

De universo
15/1, PL 111, 413D 289 n. 9

De institutione clericorum
3,1 298

Iamblichus

De mysteriis
1,1 144 n. 50
1,3 204 n. 120
1,5 114 n. 105
1,7 118 n. 126
1,8–9 116 n. 117
1,17–19 116 nn. 117–118
5,26 124 n. 160
8,2 114 n. 105

De vita pythagorica
16,69–70 160 n. 127
36,267 217 n. 162

De anima (Finamore / Dillon)
frg. 53 127 n. 173

Ps.-Iamblichus

Theologoumena Arithmeticae (de Falco)
77,4 161 n. 131
79–80 158 n. 118

Isidore of Seville

Differentiae
2,39 289

Etymologiae
2,22–31 270–272
2,24,1 266 n. 2, 273
2,24,1–2 275
2,24,3 273–274
2,24,4–7 276
2,24,8 281
2,24,9 275
2,24,10–16 276–277
2,24,11 278 n. 52
2,24,12 278 n. 53
2,24,12–13 282 n. 66
2,25–30 268
2,28,22 282 n. 67
6,3. 5–6 1
6,5,2 61 n. 70
8,1–10 272
8,3,1–3 278 n. 54
8,5 281
8,6 266, 270–272, 278, 282–284
8,6,1 273–274
8,6,3–6 274
8,6,6 278
8,6,7–17 279–280 n. 56
8,6,13 282 n. 69
8,6,18 278
8,6,18–20 279 n. 55, 280 n. 57
8,6,19 280
8,6,20–21 280 n. 58
8,6,22 281 n. 62
8,6,23 281 n. 63

Jerome

De viris illustribus
53 74

Epistulae
ep. 30,1 281 n. 64
ep. 34,1 2 n. 5

Ps.-Jerome

Indiculus de haeresibus Iudaeorum
24–25. 27–28 272 n. 34

John Lydus

De mensibus
2,12 217 n. 163

John Philoponus

De aeternitate mundi (Rabe)
6,18,179 198

Julian

Consolatio
252a6–b5 96

Contra Cynicos
184d–185a 93 n. 8

Contra Heraclium
217b–c 111 n. 88

Contra Galilaeos (Masaracchia)
frg. 55 8 n. 31

In Matrem deorum
161c1–4 98
161c3–8 98
165b3–c4 98
165b6–c1 98
165c6–166a1 99
165d4–166a1 98
166a2–d1 99
167c6–d4 99
168a2–168c2 98
168c1–2 98
168c3–169d6 99
168d4 99
169c1–d1 99
169d7–170a1 98
170a1–170c1 98
171a1 98
171c2–6 99
173a4–d4 99
175b7–177d2 100
177c2–3 100

Epistulae
ep. 61c Bidez =ep. 36 Wright 8 n. 31, 74

Lactantius

Divinae institutiones
3,3,1. 4 270 n. 23
3,15,20 272 n. 34

De opificio Dei
2,10 272 n. 34

Libanius

or. 13,1–2 8 n. 31
or. 18,157 8 n. 31

Lucian

Iuppiter Confutatus 3 121 n. 144
Alexander 60 121 n. 144

Macrobius

Saturnalia
1,23,1–3. 5 208

In somnium Scipionis
2,10,11–12 209 n. 131

Marcellus Empiricus

De medicamentis liber (Niedermann)
15,101–102 296

Marinus

Vita Procli (Saffrey / Segonds)
3,44–60 159–160 n. 127
13,1–10 150 n. 73
15,21–35 148 n. 66
22,29–37 138 n. 12
22,31–32 143 n. 47
22,34–37 141 n. 35
23,23–29 141 n. 34
27,1–19 139 n. 21
27,13–14 141 n. 31
28,34–35 144 n. 53
29,31–39 136 n. 5
30,4–11 141 n. 33

Marius Victorinus

De definitionibus (Stangl)
23,1 271 n. 28
24, 26. 28 270 n. 24
25,19–21 270 n. 24
37,3 271 n. 28
38,10 271 n. 28
39,22 271 n. 28

Martianus Capella

4,355–356 271 n. 25

Maximus of Tyre

Or. 10,9 154 n. 101

Numenius

Fragmenta (des Places)
12 203, 211 n. 142
16–17 211

Olympiodorus

In Platonis Gorgiam (Westerink)
46,9 221 n. 176

Origen

Commentarii in evangelium Johannis
2,2,13–2,3,27 223

Commentarii in epistulam ad Romanos
9,1 258 n. 77

Orion

Florilegium
5,6. 13. 16 194
5,14 194

Orphica

Fragmenta orphica (Bernabé)
14F 196
31F 196–198
243F 196–198, 200, 225

Hymni orphici
In Musas
4–6 148 n. 66

Ovid

Fasti
1,1–26 66 n. 100

Tristia
3,1,59–82 63
3,1,68 49 n. 26

Pausanias

9,31,3–5. 28 n. 5

Philo of Alexandria

De specialibus legibus
1,13–19 218

Legatio ad Gaium
290 218

Quaestiones in Exodum
2,109 320

Philolaus

44A16 Diels/Kranz 116 n. 120

Photius

Bibliotheca
cod. 167 181
cod. 167,112a 179, 183, 188
cod. 167, 112b 184
cod. 167, 112b–113a 183
cod. 167, 114a–115b 193 n. 67
cod. 167, 115b 181
cod. 180,125b 181
cod. 239 140 n. 28
cod. 242,243 140 n. 27
cod. 246 138 n. 13

Pindar

Isthmica
7,3 117 n. 124

Plato

Alcibiades maior
108a5–6 161 n. 130
108c7–d8 161 n. 130
108e1–2 161 n. 130
114a1 151

Cratylus
396a 201
402a6 99 n. 31
404d8–406a3 154 n. 99
405d4 165 n. 148
406a3–5 154 n. 100, 157 n. 110

Leges
715e–716a 198
811a 178 n. 4
899d4–907b4 103 n. 48
904c–d 121 n. 144

Phaedo
61a3–4 158 n. 120
72e3–77a5 154

Phaedrus
237a 162
239b 14 n. 38
245a1–3 149 n. 69
245a1–8 149 n. 68
245a3 149
246d6–248a5 127 n. 173
246e 202 n. 109, 203 n. 113, 208
246e4–248c2 165
246e–247a 205 n. 121
248d2–4 161 n. 129
265b4–5 165 n. 147

Respublica
364e3 140 n. 27
364e3–365a3 150 n. 75
379b1–380c10 102
380d1–383a6 102
435a–445e 123 n. 153
475d–480a 102 n. 44
475e5 102 n. 44
493e–494a 103 n. 49
504a–509b 114 n. 105
506e3–4 141 n. 35
507a3 141 n. 35

508b12–13 141 n. 35
509a3 141 n. 31
546a1–547a5 162
547b2–c4 162
580c–588a 123 n. 153
587b 123 n. 154
613e5–632d3 126 n. 171
617b 117 n. 123, 163
617b–c 163 n. 135
619c 121 n. 144

Theaetetus
176b1–3 102
191d3–4 154 n. 101

Timaeus
27c1–d4 102 n. 46
28c 203
31b1. 3 157 n. 113
34a 206
37d5–7 158 n. 117
38d 117 n. 122
39e7–40a2 163
41a 117 n. 122
43a2 157 n. 112
53d7–e8 163
54d2–55c6 163
90c7–d5 156 n. 106, 158 nn. 121–122

Ps.-Plato

ep. 6, 323c–d 205–206, 212

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia
1, *praef.* 64
18,75 312
35,9–10 61
36,38 47 n. 17

Plotinus

1,3,1,7–10. 19–35 161 n. 129
2,1,2 99 n. 31
3,1,5,51–59 120 n. 140
3,1,7 126 n. 167
3,1,8 122 n. 148
3,1,9–10 120 n. 141
3,5,9,24–29 109 n. 80
3,6,4,41–52 158 n. 116
4,2,1 126 n. 170
4,4,10 207 n. 126
4,4,27 116 n. 120
4,7,12–15 106 n. 65
4,7,13–14 122 n. 149
4,8,4. 7 127 n. 172
4,8,5,13 127 n. 175
4,8,8 122 n. 149, 123 n. 150
5,1,8 205 n. 123
6,9 114 n. 105

Plutarch

Moralia

Amatorius
748E–749C 139 n. 23

De animae procreatione in Timaeo
1209 C–D 163 n. 137

De communibus notitiis adversus Stoicos
1074E 197

De defectu oraculorum
413 C. 433 D–E. 434 F 166 n. 152

De E apud Delphos
386B 166 n. 152
388D–E. 389C–D 158 n. 118

De liberis educandis
9D 154 n. 101

De Pythiae oraculis
400D 166 n. 152
402 C–E 163 n. 135
405B 194 n. 74

Symposiaca
644A–B 154 n. 101
675B 28
744B 154 n. 101
745B. 746A 139 n. 23
745B–C 163 n. 135
743C–747A 154 n. 101

Vitae parallelae

Marcus Antonius
58,5 35–36 n. 30

Fragmenta (Sandbach)
194 (a) 139 n. 23
215–217 155 n. 102

Ps.-Plutarch

De fato
568E 121 n. 144

De placitis philosophorum
880D–881D 188, 210 n. 137
881D–F 210
889F 194

Porphyry

De abstinentia
2,34,4 124 n. 161

De simulacris (Smith)
354F 196–197
355–357F 125
359F21–23 139 n. 23

Sententiae
18 157–158 n. 116

Vita Plotini
22 155

Proclus

Elementatio theologica
5. 11. 21 114 n. 107
65 155 n. 104

Hymni
1,18–19 152 n. 91
1,33 147 n. 63
1,40 147 n. 64
2,14 147 n. 63
3 145–152
3,4 154
3,13 153 n. 97
4,5–7 153
4,6 147 n. 64
4,13 147 n. 63
5,12 147 n. 63
7,23 153
7,31. 33 147 n. 64

In Platonis Alcibiadem (Creuzer)
204,9–206,14 160–161
208,6–10 161

In Platonis Cratylum (Pasquali)
166 159 n. 124
174 155, 159 n. 127
174–176 154
176 139, 155–158, 166 n. 151
177 156, 158

In Platonis Parmenidem (Cousin)
1,617,1–618,16 145
1,618,8–10 144 n. 52
1,618,14 147 n. 63

In Platonis rempublicam (Kroll)
1,166–167 208 n. 128
1,180,10–186, 21 149 n. 68
1,180,19–23 156 n. 108
1,181,12–17 149 n. 70
1,181,17–29 149
2,1,4 152 n. 88
2,4,11–22 162–163 n. 135
2,4,20–22 161 n. 131
2,35,9 161 n. 131
2,68,3–16 163–164
2,80,21–26 161 n. 131
2,204,12–14 139 n. 23

In Platonis Timaeum (Diehl)
1,61,4–5. 29 203 n. 114
1,151,12–18 143 n. 47
1,209,13–213,7 151
1,211,8–13 151
1,313 196 n. 87
1,313–315 207 n. 126
1,315,1–2 139 n. 21
2,208,7–20 163
2,208,9–14 163 n. 137
2,210,25–28 163 n. 137
2,215,19–20 161–162 n. 131
2,236,17–20 143 n. 47
3,190–191 207 n. 126
3,227,17–28 203–204

Theologia Platonis (Saffrey / Westerink)
1,5–8. 10–12 14 n. 39
1,14–16 145 n. 48
1,25,113 14 n. 38
3,1–6 118 n. 132
3,21,74 205 n. 123
4,23,69,12 138 n. 17
4,26,77,9–19 151 n. 80
4,29,87,5–19 158 n. 122
4,34,102,1–20 158 n. 22
5,16,54 205 n. 123
5,33–35,121,2–131,10 151
6,12,56,2–65,3 166
6,12,58,27–59,25 166 n. 151
6,12,62,6–8 166 n. 151
6,22,98,14–24 165
6,22,98,22–24 147 n. 64

Propertius

2,31,7–8 48
2,31,5–6 48
2,31,12–14 56
3,11 65 n. 93
4,6 65 n. 93

Quintilian

Institutio oratoria
10,1,91–92 64, nn. 87. 90

Sallustius

De deis et mundo
1 95 n. 14, 102, 110 n. 83
3 98, 110–111
4 98–100, 111–113
5 92, 100, 103, 114
6 115–116, 119
7 101, 105–106, 115, 118
8 98 n. 26, 114–115, 118, 122, 126
9 93 n. 8, 101, 119–120, 123 nn. 152. 154, 125, 127
10 101, 122–123
11 123
12 101, 105, 108 n. 75, 114 n. 109, 119
13 95, 101, 103, 105, 115–116, 119
14 119 n. 135, 124
14–16 101, 123
15 124
16 124
17 101, 105–107
18 125–126
18–21 101
19 119 n. 135, 126
20 119 n. 135, 126
21 127

Sextus Empiricus

Adversus mathematicos
7,149 121 n. 144

Sidonius Apollinaris

Epistulae
ep. 2,9,4 84, 253 n. 66

Simplicius

In Aristotelis Categorias (Kalbfleisch)
1,3–3,17 141 n. 37
5,13–15 144 n. 53
12,25–13,4 149–150
438,33–36 150

In Aristotelis De caelo (Heiberg)
731,25–29 150

Solinus

1,17–18 48 n. 24

Sophocles

Electra
86 147 n. 64

Triptolemos
frg. 558 116 n. 120

Statius

1,1 65 n. 94

Stobaeus

1,1 (*varii loci*) 177–227
1,1,35 121 n. 145, 215
1,5,17–18 121 n. 145
1,24,4 194
2,8,44–48 121 n. 145

Stoicorum veterum fragmenta
1,502 166 n. 152
1,527 193 n. 69
1,539 197 n. 90
2,912. 914. 918 119 n. 137
2,933 121 n. 144
2,968 121 n. 144

Suda
A79 159 n. 126
M198 159 n. 126
M1291 154 n. 100
Σ 116 140 n. 26
Σ 1662 138 n. 16, 139 n. 21
Π 2473 138 n. 16, 139 n. 24, 140 n. 28

Suetonius

De grammaticis 20 49 n. 25

De vita Caesarum
Augustus
29,3 56 n. 49, 61 n. 70
80–82 300 n. 62
Caesar 44,2 61 n. 70
Tiberius 68,4 299 n. 59
Titus 8,2 300 n. 62
Vespasianus 23 11 n. 36

Synesius

De insomniis
1,2–4 207 n. 126
8,5 207 n. 126

Epistulae
ep. 136 152 n. 88

Tertullian

Ad nationes
2,2,8 272 n. 35
2,2,19–20 272 n. 35

Apologeticum
3,6 272 n. 34
47,5 272 n. 35, 280 n. 60

De idololatria
1,5 75–76 nn. 21–22
10,1–6 76–77
10,4 72, 81
10,5–7 80–81
10,6 71, 77 n. 24
15,7–8 79 n. 32
16,1–2. 5 79, 81–82
18,3 82 n. 45
18,7 76 n. 21
20,2 79
20,4 79–80
22,1 78
22,4 78

De praescriptione haereticorum
7,3–5 272 n. 36

Themistius

or. 7, 99d 97

Theodoretus of Cyrrhus

Curatio affectionum graecarum
2,71 205–206

Theophilus of Antiochia

Ad Autolycum
2,8 193–194, 280 n. 61
3,7 214 n. 151

Tibullus

2,5 65 n. 93

Traditio apostolica
16 80

Translatio s. Viti
32 298

Vergil

Aeneis
1,257–296 57 n. 59
8,671–728. 57 n. 59
8,704–713 56

Georgica
1,276–290 312

Vita III s. Liudgeri (Diekamp)

2,34 298

Vitruvius

De architectura
6,4,1 36

Ancient inscriptions and papyri

(for the medieval manuscripts see the lists at the end of the respective contributions)

Agora I 848 36, 38
Agora I 2729 36
IAph 12.27, ii, l. 14–18 33
IDelos
1400, l. 5–7 28
1409, B, a, l. 39). 28 n. 9
IEph. 5113, l. 1–6 31
IG II^{2}, 1009, l. 30–32 32
IG IV^{2}, 1, 456 31
IG XII,4 2:433 30
TAM II, 910, l. 17–21 33
POxy. 3,412 47 n. 17
POxy. 2435v 49 n. 26, 62 n. 76

Index of Names

Alcaeus 28
Apollo 13–14, 28, 31, 48, 56–57, 59–60, 62, 65 n. 95, 66–67, 154–158, 164–167
Apuleius 184, 224, 282–283
Asclepius 31, 33
Athena / Minerva 10, 39, 76, 78, 117
Attis 98–100, 112–113
Aratus 193, 195–196, 214, 222
Aristomache of Erythraea 28
Aristotle 94 n. 11, 138, 141–142, 150, 177 n. 3, 179, 185, 210, 247 n. 42, 251, 256 n. 72–73, 270, 276, 278 n. 51, 282, 317
Augustine 71 n. 2, 72–73, 84, 182, 237, 242 n. 26, 245 n. 37, 246, 249, 253, 255–257, 270–272, 274

Basil of Caesarea 73–74, 245, 247 n. 43
Benedict 241, 242 n. 26, 290, 302
Boethius 237, 251 n. 56, 256 n. 72, 271, 283

Caesar 44, 61 n. 70
Cassiodorus 235–258, 270–271, 275–277, 282–283, 2288, 290, 294, 302
Cicero 11, 92 n. 5, 197, 251, 254, 256 nn. 72–73, 271–273, 279, 283
Clement of Alexandria 194 n. 76, 195, 197, 205, 221, 225, 245
Cornutus 116–117
Chrysippus 61, 121 n. 144, 197, 200–201, 216

Damascius 136, 139, 144, 154, 159 n. 126, 196 n. 87, 204, 221
Demeter 32, 34, 99, 117, 165, 211
Domitian 64–65

Galen 256 n. 72, 290, 292 n. 21
Germanicus 63, 66 n. 100
Gregory Nazianzen 8, 82, 245

Hadrian 51, 53–54
Heraclitus of Ephesus 28–29
Hermes 144–145, 150, 165–166
Hermias 159, 161–162, 182, 196 n. 83, 208–209
Herodotus 33
Hesiod 28, 109, 139, 148
Hierocles of Alexandria 224–225
Hippocrates 256 n. 72, 290, 292 n. 21, 301 n. 68
Homer 6, 32–33, 153, 162, 193, 200, 251
– Homer as origin of philosophical doctrine 186
– philosophical interpretation and use of Homer 109, 201, 203–204, 206–209
– sacralisation of Homer 148
Horace 64–66, 84

Iamblichus 111–112, 114 n. 105, 116 nn. 116. 118, 118, 121, 124, 126 n. 169, 127 n. 173, 141 n. 37, 142, 161 n. 131, 182, 186, 203–204, 208, 215, 221, 223, 226,
Isidore of Seville 1–2, 15–16, 21, 23, 267–284, 288, 289, 296, 318

Jerome 74, 243–244, 246, 249, 251, 253, 254, 257, 270, 281, 283, 296
Josephus Flavius 58, 64–65
Julian Apostata 8, 74, 92, 95–100, 109

Macrobius 182, 208–209
Martial 64

Octavian (Augustus) 47, 49 n. 26, 56, 65–67
Onatas 204–205, 215, 217–219
Origen 223, 244 n. 33, 248 n. 45, 257–258
Orion 189, 194–195, 221
Ovid 49 n. 26, 63

Pantaenus (Tiberius Flavius Pantaenus) 10, 30–31, 36–38
Pausanias 28
Philo
Photius 181–184, 188, 225, 227

Pisistratus 1–2
– Pisistratides 29
Plato 14, 100 n. 38, 102, 107, 117, 122–123, 126, 129, 136, 138, 141, 148 n. 67, 150–151, 153–154, 162, 186, 200–202, 210–215, 223, 225–226, 251, 276 n. 47, 279, 283
Pliny the Elder 61, 64, 312
Pliny the Younger 65
Plotinus 105, 106 n. 65, 109, 114, 120 nn. 140–141, 122, 126 nn. 167. 170, 127, 141 n. 31, 161 n. 129, 205, 207, 211–213
Plutarch of Athens 135, 152 n. 88,
Plutarch of Chaeronea 154, 177, 194 nn. 74. 76, 197
Pollio (C. Asinius Pollio) 61
Polycrates 29
Porphyry 98, 109, 117, 124 n. 161, 139 n. 23, 141 n. 37, 142, 155, 157–158 n. 116, 182, 193, 196–201, 206–207, 212–213, 221–224, 226, 247 n. 42, 251, 270, 283, 317
Proclus 14–15, 20 n. 42, 92 n. 3, 103 n. 48, 105, 108 n. 76, 118, 130, 136, 138–139, 141, 143–167, 182, 194 n. 74, 196, 203–205, 208–209, 216,
Propertius 48, 56, 64–66
Prudentius 84
Pythagoras 93 n. 5, 117, 121, 138, 160 n. 127, 210, 217, 279

Quintilian 64, 254

Sallustius (author of *De deis et mundo*) 91–130
Sarapion 140
Sidonius Apollinaris 84
Simplicius 136, 141–142, 143 n. 45, 144 n. 53, 150
Sophocles 61 n. 73
Statius 64–65
Stobaeus 18–19, 21, 91 n. 2, 121, 141 n. 37, 177–226
Suetonius 56, 64, 300

Tertullian 71–84, 272, 280, 283
Tiberius 45, 63
Tibullus 64–66
Titus 57–58, 64–65
Trajan 10, 39, 47, 51, 53–54, 56, 58–59, 64–65, 67–68

Varro 44, 84, 246 n. 38, 251, 280
Vespasian 11, n. 36, 47, 49, 57–58, 64–65
Victorinus 252, 256 n. 72, 270–271
Virgil 56, 64–66, 239, 251, 279, 312
Vitruvius 36, 64

Xenocrates 121 n. 144, 210–213

Zeus 99, 116–117, 121 n. 144, 139 n. 23, 147, 151–152, 157 n. 112, 164–165, 193, 199–209, 216, 221–222

General Index

Alexandria 62
– *Mouseion* 62
ambiguity 10–11, 20, 45
anagogy / ascent (*see also* salvation, education as a journey) 21, 135, 146, 149–152, 163–165, 167
anthology / florilegium 14–15, 19, 21, 91, 177–187, 194–196, 221, 225, 310, 317
apology / apologetic 21, 77, 94–95, 104, 107–108, 113, 122, 129–130
– Christian apologetic (*see also* Augustine, Jerome, Tertullian) 16, 77, 193–197, 201, 205, 209, 283
archive / archival material 46, 63, 65
argumentation (*see also* dialectic) 91, 93–94, 105–108, 129, 215, 247, 271, 274
artes liberales 16, 140, 251–252, 256, 265–266, 269, 284, 288–289
atheism / unbelief 6, 125–126, 151, 220
– catalogue of atheists 188, 210
authority 14–15, 19, 141, 249, 253 n. 64, 288, 297
– authoritative texts / writers 13, 20 n. 41, 109 n. 82, 138, 141–142, 150, 153 n. 97, 209, 213, 242 n. 26, 245, 249, 256–257, 321–322
– distinction between sources and *auctoritates* 141 n. 37
auxiliary texts 14, 16, 91 n. 2, 177–178 n. 3, 238, 243 n. 29, 257, 268–269, 271, 283

Bible / Scripture 80, 238–249, 281, 317–318, 321
bibliothéque de travail / *Handapparat* 141, 148, 180, 226
books (*see also* manuscripts)
– divine / sacred books 135, 138, 140, 153–154
– donations of books to libraries 29–36
– as teachers: *see* teachers
– on display 44, 61–62
– or libraries as votives 18, 20, 28–29, 32–36, 62, 65

commentary (*see also* exegesis) 141–142, 150, 238, 244
compendium / handbook 12–13, 18–19, 21, 91, 94–95, 129, 177–180, 224, 225, 253 n. 63, 295
– medical compendia (*see also* compilations) 287–288 n. 2, 289, 295, 299 n. 60, 310
– Middle Platonic handbooks 92 n. 3, 184, 224
compilation / compiling 14–15, 18–19, 177–180, 198, 209, 236 n. 3, 247 n. 43, 248 n. 44, 250, 256–257, 268, 290, 301
– manuscripts as compilations 240 n. 20, 247 n. 43, 251, 287 n. 2, 288, 289, 293, 296, 314–318, 321
computus 309–322
condensing texts / information 19, 91, 98, 103, 129, 177–178 n. 3, 179, 268–269, 271, 282–283
copying 238, 245
cult 46, 56–60
– philosophy as cult / religion 129, 135, 166–167
curriculum 71–72, 135, 140, 148, 150

dialectic 21, 105–108, 143, 240 n. 20, 247, 251, 254, 269, 270, 276, 283, 284
dihairesis 107, 220
doxography 104, 177, 179, 185–186, 195, 209–214, 226, 269, 279–280

education
– and monastic life 241
– as a journey (*see also* anagogy) 104, 135, 255
– *paideia* / classical education 73–74, 77, 81, 82–84, 140, 181
– religious education 237, 241
encyclopaedism 91, 129, 136, 179–180, 301
– manuscripts and encyclopaedic compilation 309–310, 314, 321–322

ephebes 31–32
euergetism 30–33, 35
excerpts 13, 15, 18, 93, 113, 177–180, 186, 193–194, 196, 198, 226, 238 n. 14, 244, 247–248, 250, 294 n. 33, 296, 297 n. 44
exegesis / exegete 13–15, 19, 135, 138, 143–144, 150, 165, 196 n. 82, 204, 207–208, 238, 240, 242–243, 257
expert / expertise 13, 19
– mediator 244
– medical experts / expertise 288, 292–294, 295, 300
– religious experts 287, 288, 289, 302
– theological expertise 103, 111

forma urbis Romae 48–50

gnomological material 178 nn. 3–4, 179, 187 n. 53, 192
gymnasia 29, 31–32

harmony 155–162, 181
– (negative) harmony of the Sirenes 163
heresy / heresiology 256, 257, 266, 272, 281, 283
– philosophical *haereses* 278

intellectual religion / *religion savante* 129, 135, 141, 145–146, 167

knowledge 61–62, 65–68, 72, 91
– antiquarian knowledge 267, 284
– marginal knowledge 310
– religious knowledge 71, 265–267, 269
– transmission of knowledge 94, 177, 250

language
– clarity of language 242–244
– language skills / eloquence 240–241, 244, 249, 251, 254–256
– Latin 238, 240, 243–245, 258
– levels of language 252–253
– of God – human language 237–238, 244, 255, 258
libraries (*see also* virtual library)
– at Rome
  of Apollo 47–49, 62–68
  atrium Libertatis 45, 46 n. 17, 61
  of the Pantheon 45 n. 14, 46–47 n. 17
  of *Pax* 49–51, 62, 64–68
  of the *porticus Octaviae* 45 n. 14, 46 n. 17
  of the *templum divi Augusti* 45 n. 14, 46 n. 17
  of Trajan 51–54, 62, 64–68
– of Celsus 30–31, 35, 38–39, 45 n. 15
– of Pantaenus 30, 36–38
– of the Ptolemaeum at Athens 31–32

manuscript (*see also* compilation) 27, 135–137, 139, 142, 288–289
medicine and healing 258, 265, 284, 287–303
– healing charms, blessings, incantations 289, 295–297, 301
– manuscripts as repositories of medical knowledge 294–297
– medical knowledge and computistical manuscripts 310
– miracles and healing 297–298
– prognostics and medicine 295, 302, 310–311, 314, 316–317
memory 142–143
Muses 13–14, 28, 145–167
mysteries / initiations 99, 111
– education / philosophy as a succession of mysteries 13, 135 n. 2, 147–148, 150–151
– mysterisation of knowledge 150
myths 75, 77, 98–100, 108–113

Neoplatonism 94, 107, 114, 118, 129, 135–167, 182, 221
– Neoplatonic libraries 135–137, 140–142

ordering books / texts / knowledge 56, 62, 94, 101, 105, 117, 179–180, 235, 238, 267, 269, 276, 280, 283–284, 302
Oracula Chaldaica 138, 141, 148, 153, 221
Orphica 138–141, 221
– Orphic hymn to the Muses 148
– Orphic hymn to Zeus 193, 196–199

Pax 10–11, 51, 57–59, 62, 65–66, 68
Philosophical Collection 136

philosophy (*see also* Platonism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism)
– definitions of philosophy 265–266, 272–273, 275–278
– division of philosophy 94, 179, 183–184, 247, 272, 274, 276–278, 281
– philosophical education 94, 104
– philosophy in Christian encyclopaedic works 251–252, 265–284
– philosophical school 38, 135–137, 180, 182
Platonism / Platonic (*see also* Neoplatonism) 100, 102, 109, 119, 123, 128, 184, 199–213, 221–225
poets / poetry 28, 33, 64, 71, 109, 147–148, 151, 159, 239, 251, 272, 288, 314
– poetic excerpts in handbooks and florilegia 186, 189, 193–200, 214, 226
– sacred poems 141, 148 (*see also* Homer)
polytheism 100, 114–119, 205, 217–219, 222–223
– hierarchical polytheism 15, 205, 217–219, 223
portraits 14, 19, 61, 64, 66
prognostic 293, 295, 302, 309–322
propaedeutic 92, 94, 100, 103–105, 107, 113–114, 128–130, 140, 180, 183
Providence 119–122, 125, 188, 214–220
(pseudo)Pythagorean 186, 202, 221

reading / reader 29, 38, 140, 145–146, 148–150, 255–256, 258
religionising by association 7–8, 11, 13, 20, 23
rhetoric 71, 75, 77, 140, 247, 251–252, 254–255, 270, 276

salvation 240, 248, 257–258
scribes 143 n. 45, 238, 240–242, 244–246, 248–249, 254, 256–257, 295–296, 315–317, 321–322
secular / secularity 72, 79–81, 84, 252, 254, 256, 258, 287, 322
– secular and divine / Christian studies / knowledge 15–16, 74, 81, 239, 246, 248, 251, 256–257
– secularisation of pagan *paideia* 73–74
selection
– selecting manuscripts 238, 240–241, 246–247, 253–254, 256–258
– selecting texts / knowledge 13, 18, 91, 113, 187, 192, 196, 201, 208, 226, 235, 239–240, 247, 251, 253, 256–258, 267, 269, 314
Sibyl / Sibyllinic books 57, 66, 272
sources 93, 117, 142, 184–186, 267
space
– monastic space 240–241, 257, 290–292
– sanctuaries / shrines / sacred space 28, 36, 39, 46–56, 297–298
– urban space 44, 47
statues (associated with libraries) 31, 33–35, 38–39, 43–44, 67
– of Apollo 48, 56–57, 67
– of *Pax* 51
– of Trajan 53, 58–59
Stoicism / Stoic 94, 186, 188, 193, 197, 199–201, 212–213, 216–217, 221–222, 273–274
– Stoic allegoresis 116–117

teacher 74, 76–80, 83, 140–141, 149–150, 239–240
– books / libraries as teachers / teaching devices 236, 244, 254
teaching (*see also* visualisation) 135–145, 149–150, 240
theology 9, 12–16, 21, 94, 145, 148, 150–152, 166–167, 180, 188, 192, 220–226
– philosophy as theology 135, 141
– philosophical theology 100, 108–119, 154–166, 196–197, 201–208, 217–219, 224–225, 278, 280–281
– theologisation 94–95, 103, 108–128
tombs 38, 53–55, 58–59

virtual
– library 2–3, 9, 12, 14–15, 17, 19, 22, 72, 84, 142–143, 179–181, 201, 226, 240, 253, 256, 258, 265, 322
– teacher 236
visualisation as didactic device 243, 246–247, 254
votives: *see* books

war spoils and libraries 2, 57, 59–60
worldview 94, 103–104, 107, 128–130