

# Review of J.C. Thom (ed.): Cosmic Order and Divine Power. Pseudo- Aristotle, "On the Cosmos"

---

**Gregorić, Pavel**

*Source / Izvornik:* **Classical Review, 2015, 66, 68 - 70**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:261:035166>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-25**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

Thom (J.C.) (ed.) *Cosmic Order and Divine Power. Pseudo-Aristotle, On the Cosmos*. (Sapere 23.) Pp. x + 230. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. Cased, €49 ISBN: 978-3-16-152809-5.

The short treatise *On the Cosmos* (Περὶ κόσμου, *De mundo*), transmitted with the Aristotelian corpus, is a learned combination of a handbook of natural philosophy and a protreptic to philosophy, advocating a distinctly Aristotelian conception of god and the cosmos. The treatise is of uncertain authorship and date and it seems to be gaining traction in recent years. This timely and superbly produced volume, edited by Johan C. Thom, demonstrates that the treatise has a lot to offer to a whole range of scholars, from classical philologists and philosophers to historians of ideas and specialists in Arabic.

The volume can be divided into two main parts, one centred around the Greek text and Thom's English translation of *De mundo*, the other comprising eight essays dedicated to various topics: three essays focus on points of content and language, five deal mainly with questions of reception.

The first part consists of the editor's succinct but very helpful introduction to the text of the *De mundo* (pp. 3-17), overviewing the questions of authorship, dating, doctrines, style, sources, and intended readership of the text. The introduction also gives a helpful chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the contents of *De mundo*, and it can serve as a reliable guide to the extensive bibliography. Thom's view, sound and based on different considerations, is that *De mundo* was most likely written by an unknown author from the Peripatetic tradition at the turn of the eras, though Thom admits that an earlier date (but not earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) cannot be ruled out.

Pages 20-66 contain the Greek text, translation and notes. The text is that of Lorimer from the 1933 Budé edition, with only five departures defended in the notes. However, there is no critical apparatus nor are major manuscript variants discussed in the notes. The facing English translation by Thom is both accurate and elegant, and represents an improvement on

Furley's fine translation in the Loeb edition. The notes that accompany the translation are mostly short and clarificatory.

The second part of this volume is written by eight scholars from different disciplines, focusing on different aspects of the text. C. Chandler (pp. 69-87) shows that the language and style of *De mundo* are in the service of the complex objectives of the text: to summarize a large body of knowledge of the physical world, to convince the reader in the cogency of the Peripatetic conception of the divine, and to spark a lasting interest in philosophy. R. Burri (pp. 89-106) analyses the chapter on geography (Ch. 3 of *De mundo*), its rootedness in the tradition, its idiosyncrasies and the likely references to Eratosthenes, which might be mediated through Strabo.

J.C. Thom's essay on the 'cosmotheology' of *De mundo* (pp. 107-20) is one of the most substantial contributions in the volume. Thom argues that the author's aim, once he has provided a survey of the cosmos and its main structures in chapters, is to explain how the order and preservation of the cosmos can be due to a transcendent god. Actually, god is not outside the cosmos, but at the most dignified place, the highest point of the heavens, from which his causal power spreads to the rest of the cosmos. Thom is right to point out that the author insists on this conception of god and his involvement with the cosmos as 'appropriate' or 'fitting' for a divine being, and that this was most probably meant as a tacit criticism of the Stoic 'immanentist' view, according to which god or *pneuma* is causally efficacious in the world by permeating all things. One of the striking features of *De mundo*, Thom indicates, are the many comparisons used to explain god's involvement with the cosmos. He unpacks some of the comparisons, but does not explore the connections among them. What is truly striking is that the twelve comparisons in fact form one large and skillfully crafted multiple analogy (see G. Betegh and P. Gregoric, 'Multiple Analogy in Ps.-Aristotle *De Mundo* 6', *CQ* 64 [2014], 574-91).

A. Smith explores common themes found in *De mundo* and in some other ancient texts—e.g. the unity of the universe, the harmonious balance of the opposites, the relationship of god to the physical world, divine providence—and collects evidence for direct reception by ancient philosophers. Some of this evidence is gathered in the Appendix (201-8). Smith's conclusion is that *De mundo* was a widely read text in late antiquity. The discussion of the parallels between *De mundo* and Maximus of Tyre would have profited from P. van Nuffelen's study (*Rethinking the Gods*, CUP: Cambridge, 2011; pp. 122-46), which is the only highly relevant piece of scholarship, to the best of my knowledge, that is omitted from this volume's bibliography.

In her essay (pp. 133-52), A. Tzvetkova-Glaser looks at the way the author of *De mundo* contrasts god's transcendent *ousia* with his *dunamis* immanent in the cosmos, and argues that his way of contrasting god's *ousia* and *dunamis* has no parallel in the parallel passages from two Alexandrian Jewish authors (Aristobulos and Philo) and four early Christian authors (Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Origen, and Nemesius). I wish the relation between god's *ousia*, *dunamis* and the chain of motions which becomes less regular as it spreads from the heavens to the earth, was more carefully developed. And I am positive that the text of *De mundo* does not warrant the talk of 'God and the created world' (p. 135).

The essay by H. Takahashi (pp. 153-67) provides an overview of the various Syriac and Arabic versions of *De mundo* and their relationship, whereas H. Daiber (pp. 169-80) discusses the few quotations of *De mundo* by Muslim authors and many more possible echoes in Christian Syriac and Arabic texts. J. Krayer (pp. 181-97) reviews the multifaceted discussions of authorship of *De mundo*, with the various evidence adduced for and against the Aristotelian authorship, from antiquity to our times. Krayer lists other proposed candidates for authorship, but opts for the view that it was written 'by an eclectic philosopher around the turn of the first century BCE and CE' (p. 196), praising Heinsius for reaching this conclusion

already in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from Smith's digest of 'Related Texts', given in Greek with accompanying English translation, the Appendix (pp. 201-30) contains an exhaustive bibliography, a selective index fontium, a general index, and a brief note on the contributors.

To conclude, this volume is a must for anyone interested in *De mundo*. Those who approach *De mundo* for the first time will find an excellent introduction to the text and the best available English translation. Scholars working on *De mundo*, or acquainted with it, will find a wealth of well organized material and state-of-the-art discussions on various aspects of the text. Some aspects, however, require more study. For example, the volume does not contain a study of the chapter on meteorology (Ch. 4 of *De mundo*), which is important both for its substance and for the question of its sources. There are philological and philosophical issues that received no attention in the volume or that could profitably be explored in more detail, e.g. the author's use of quotations and allusions to the Presocratic philosophers, his conception of the soul, his ethical and political ideas, the two notions of *pneuma*. However, Thom's volume will be an indispensable chart to navigate the terrain yet to be explored.

*University of Zagreb*

PAVEL GREGORIC  
pgregoric@hrstud.hr