



Porphyry
Collected Works

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Ancient Classics Series

The Collected Works of

PORPHYRY

(c. 234 - c. 305 AD)



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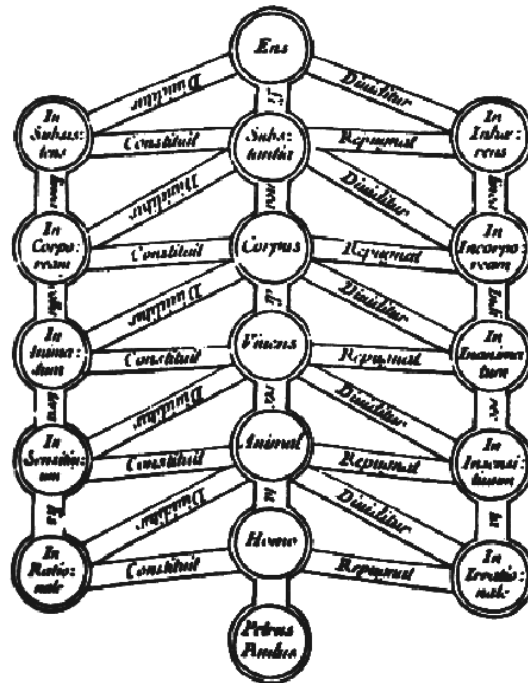
The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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Version 1

The Collected Works of
PORPHYRY OF TYRE



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Collected Works of Porphyry



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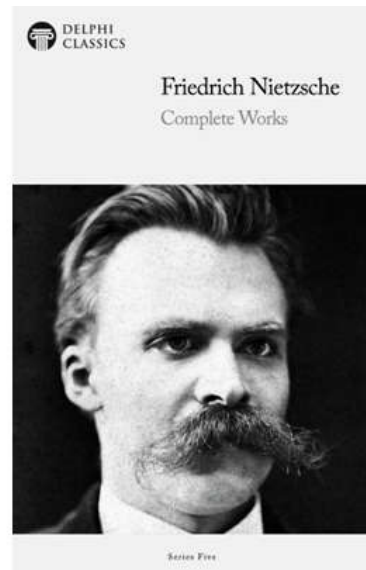
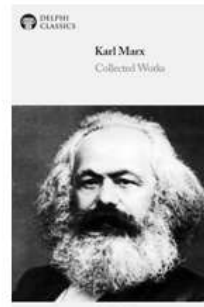
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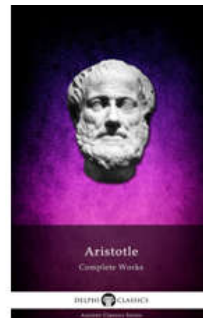
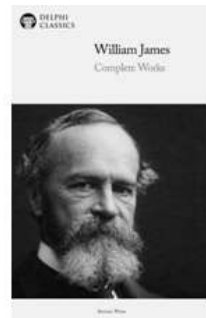
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PHILOSOPHY



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The Translations



Tyre, Lebanon, one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world — Porphyry's birthplace



Archaeological ruins at Tyre

Life of Plotinus



Translated by Stephen MacKenna, 1917

The Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry was born in c. 234 in Tyre, Roman Phoenicia. He wrote original works in Greek on a variety of topics, ranging from music theory to Homer to vegetarianism. His parents named him *Malkos* (Old Aramaic for ‘king’) though he later changed it to “Basileus” (Ancient Greek for ‘king’). In later days he earned the sobriquet “Porphyrius” (Ancient Greek for ‘clad in purple’). As a youth he travelled to Athens, where he studied grammar and rhetoric under Cassius Longinus, while becoming acquainted with Middle Platonism.

In 262 he went to Rome, intrigued by the reputation of Plotinus (c. 204-270 AD), a Hellenistic Platonist philosopher, born and raised in Roman Egypt. Plotinus is regarded by modern scholarship as the founder of Neoplatonism. Historians of the nineteenth century invented the term “neoplatonism”, applying it to Plotinus and his philosophy, which was vastly influential during late antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In his metaphysical writings, Plotinus describes three fundamental principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. The term “neoplatonism” does not encapsulate a set of ideas as much as a series of thinkers. Among the common ideas it maintains is monism, the doctrine that all of reality can be derived from a single principle — “the One”.

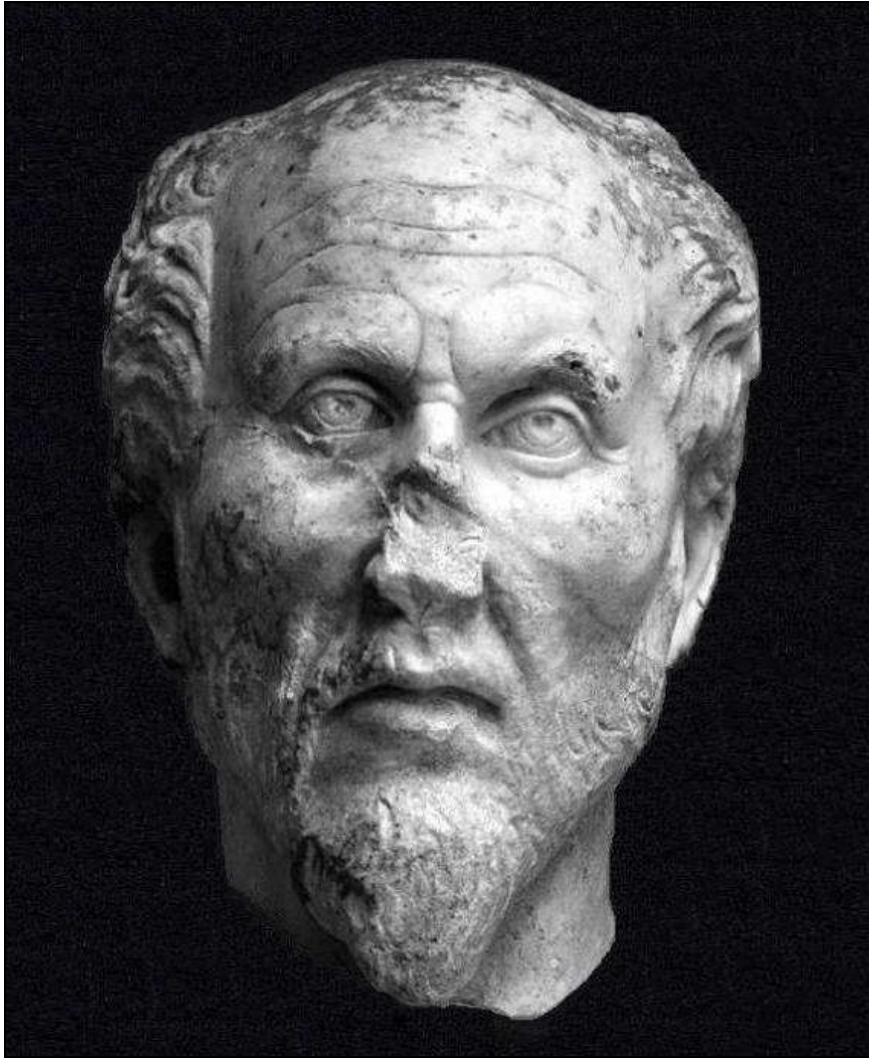
For six years Porphyry devoted himself to the practice of Neoplatonism, during which time he severely modified his diet. At one point he became suicidal and on the advice of Plotinus he went to live in Sicily for five years to recover his mental wellbeing. On returning to Rome, he lectured on philosophy and completed an edition of the writings of Plotinus, who had died in the meantime, together with the following biography on his teacher. It remains our chief source of biographical information on Plotinus.



Ruins at Mendes, Egypt — near Plotinus' birthplace, Lycopolis, an ancient town in the Sebennyitic nome in Lower Egypt, originally founded by a colony of Osirian priests

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Head in white marble attributed to be a depiction of Plotinus, Ostia Antica

1.



PLOTINUS, THE PHILOSOPHER our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body.

So deeply-rooted was this feeling that he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage or his birthplace.

He showed, too, an unconquerable reluctance to sit to a painter or a sculptor, and when Amelius persisted in urging him to allow of a portrait being made he asked him, "Is it not enough to carry about this image in which nature has enclosed us? Do you really think I must also consent to leave, as a desirable spectacle to posterity, an image of the image?"

In view of this determined refusal Amelius brought his friend Carterius, the best artist of the day, to the Conferences, which were open to every comer, and saw to it that by long observation of the philosopher he caught his most striking personal traits. From the impressions thus stored in mind the artist drew a first sketch; Amelius made various suggestions towards bringing out the resemblance, and in this way, without the knowledge of Plotinus, the genius of Carterius gave us a life-like portrait.

2.



PLOTINUS WAS OFTEN distressed by an intestinal complaint, but declined clysters, pronouncing the use of such remedies unbecoming in an elderly man: in the same way he refused such medicaments as contain any substance taken from wild beasts or reptiles: all the more, he remarked, since he could not approve of eating the flesh of animals reared for the table.

He abstained from the use of the bath, contenting himself with a daily massage at home: when the terrible epidemic carried off his masseurs he renounced all such treatment: in a short while he contracted malign diphtheria.

During the time I was about him there was no sign of any such malady, but after I sailed for Sicily the condition grew acute: his intimate, Eustochius, who was with him till his death, told me, on my return to Rome, that he became hoarse, so that his voice quite lost its clear sonorous note, his sight grew dim and ulcers formed on his hands and feet.

As he still insisted on addressing everyone by word of mouth, his condition prompted his friends to withdraw from his society: he therefore left Rome for Campania, retiring to a property which had belonged to Zethos, an old friend of his at this time dead. His wants were provided in part out of Zethos' estate, and for the rest were furnished from Minturnæ, where Castricius' property lay.

Of Plotinus' last moments Eustochius has given me an account.

He himself was staying at Puteoli and was late in arriving: when he at last came, Plotinus said: "I have been a long time waiting for you; I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine in the All." As he spoke a snake crept under the bed on which he lay and slipped away into a hole in the wall: at the same moment Plotinus died.

This was at the end of the second year of the reign of Claudius, and, as Eustochius tells me, Plotinus was then sixty-six. I myself was at Lilybæum at the time, Amelius at Apamea in Syria, Castricius at Rome; only Eustochius was by his side.

Counting sixty-six years back from the second year of Claudius, we can fix Plotinus' birth at the thirteenth year of Severus; but he never disclosed the month or day. This was because he did not desire any birthday sacrifice or feast; yet he himself sacrificed on the traditional birthdays of Plato and of Socrates, afterwards giving a banquet at which every member of the circle who was able was expected to deliver an address.

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