



Theophilus of Alexandria and the First Origenist Controversy: Rhetoric and Power (Oxford Early Christian Studies)

Krastu Banev

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In the age of the Theodosian dynasty and the establishment of Christianity as the only legitimate religion of the Roman Empire, few figures are more pivotal in the power politics of the Christian church than archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412). This work examines the involvement of archbishop Theophilus in the so-called First Origenist Controversy when the famed third-century Greek theologian Origen received, a century and a half after his death, a formal condemnation for heresy. Modern scholars have been successful in removing the majority of the charges which Theophilus laid on Origen as not giving a fair representation of his thought. Yet no sufficient explanation has been offered as to why what to us appears as an obvious miscarriage of justice came to be accepted, or why it was needed in the first place. Krastu Banev offers a sustained argument for the value of a rhetorically informed methodology with which to analyse Theophilus' anti-Origenist Festal Letters. He highlights that the wide circulation and overt rhetorical composition of these letters allow for a new reading of these key documents as a form of 'mass-media' unique for its time. The discussion is built on a detailed examination of two key ingredients in the pastoral polemic of the archbishop - masterly use of late-antique rhetorical conventions, and in-depth knowledge of monastic spirituality - both of which were vital for securing the eventual acceptance of Origen's condemnation. Dr Banev's fresh approach reveals that Theophilus' campaign formed part of a consistent policy aimed at harnessing the intellectual energy of the ascetic movement to serve the wider needs of the church.

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