

# Another Link in the Golden Chain: Aeneas of Gaza and Zacharias Scholasticus on Plotinus *Enn.* 4.3

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**D**URING the late fifth century and early sixth century, the school of rhetoric in Gaza was an offshoot of the great school of Alexandria, with a prominent Christian membership educated in Platonism.<sup>1</sup> At this time, two noteworthy philosophers emerged from this school: Aeneas, the so-called founder of the school of Gaza and a pupil of Hierocles, and Zacharias, a pupil of Ammonius Hermeiou, who spent little of his life in Gaza, but was immersed in the school of Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> Both exhibit an appropriation of Hellenic thought

<sup>1</sup> I. P. Sheldon-Williams calls this school of Gaza an offshoot of Alexandria as Alexandria had been an offshoot of Athens: “The Reaction Against Proclus,” in A. Armstrong (ed.), *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge 1970) 484. Although in a general sense this is true, Gaza never had the predominance that Alexandria had as a major center of learning. Much of the recent scholarship on the Platonists in Gaza looks to their relationship with the contemporary monastic movement. For a general history of the Hellenic movement in Gaza see Y. Ashkenazi, “Sophists and Priests in Late Antique Gaza according to Choricus the Rhetor,” in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2004) 195–198; cf. R. Van Dam, “From Paganism to Christianity in Late Antique Gaza,” *Viator* 16 (1985) 1–20. For an older but thorough study see G. Downey, “The Christian Schools of Palestine: A Chapter of Literary History,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 12 (1958) 297–319.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Gaza and Alexandria was very close in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Gaza was seen as an outpost of Alexandria and many Gazans, preparing for an academic career, went to Alex-

by Christianity typical of the school of Gaza. However, neither presents arguments in Christian terms, but rather each argues using Platonist principles.<sup>3</sup>

In the thought of Aeneas of Gaza we see evidence of a Christian steeped in Hellenic rhetoric and Platonist thought who was attempting to demonstrate Christian mastery of Hellenic intellectualism. In the thought of Zacharias Scholasticus a new trend emerges, that of the *philoponos*, or Christian layman who served as a link between the intellectual circle of Christian monastic groups and the Alexandrian schools.<sup>4</sup> Such groups of *philoponoi* were formed in order to offset wholly Platonist teachings on important topics, such as the creation and destruction of the universe.<sup>5</sup> These groups met apart from normal school hours, so to speak, in order to solidify Christianity among Christian students who were being trained in non-Christian philosophical teachings.<sup>6</sup> As a result, some Christian

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andria to complete their studies and then returned to Gaza to teach. See G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* (Norman 1963) 108.

<sup>3</sup> Texts: M. E. Colonna: *Enea di Gaza. Teofrasto* (Naples 1958: cited here by page and line numbers) and *Zacaria Scolastico. Ammonio* (Naples 1973: cited by line numbers). Translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Haas describes the *philoponoi* in late antique Alexandria as “zealous students who had little toleration for the paganism of their classmates”: *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore 1997) 239.

<sup>5</sup> On the *philoponoi*, laymen who functioned as a liaison between the bishop and his congregation, see E. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006) 214–223. According to Watts, for the Alexandrian *philoponoi*, the affiliated monastery was Enaton, nine miles outside of Alexandria. The *philoponoi* group of which Zacharias was a member met on Saturday afternoons and every Sunday to read and discuss scripture, as well as the thought of Basil, Gregory, and Cyril. For further discussion of the relationship between Christians in the school of rhetoric in Gaza and Christians in the monastic community see Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Watts makes the point that Zacharias’ group of *philoponoi* met in order to reinforce the Christian values of the members of their circle, as well as to in-

authors, such as Aeneas of Gaza (although not a *philoponos*, but rather a Christian in Gaza whose work circulated in Alexandria)<sup>7</sup> and Zacharias of Gaza (a *philoponos* in Alexandria in the 480s)<sup>8</sup> frequently use Hellenic literary and philosophical allusions, partly to assure audiences of their own learning,<sup>9</sup> and partly for polemical purposes.<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is seen in Aeneas' *Theophrastus* and Zacharias' *Ammonius*: both critique Platonist creation via a metaphor found in Plotinus' *Enn.* 4.3.9.

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doctrinate non-Christian members of the Alexandrian schools: Watts, *City and School* 215–216. Ashkenazi, in *Christian Gaza* 197–200, makes a similar point regarding the Christians in the school of rhetoric.

<sup>7</sup> Watts argues that Aeneas was not a *philoponos* and was more interested in presenting himself as an example of a well-educated Christian, knowledgeable in the fields of rhetoric, literature, and philosophy, and hence had little interest in Christian religious language, while his *Theophrastus* is replete with allusions to pre-Socratics, Plotinus, and Proclus: E. Watts, "An Alexandrian Christian Response to Fifth-Century Neoplatonic Influence," in A. Smith (ed.), *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown* (Swansea 2005) 215–229. This is also true of Choricus of Gaza, it seems: Ashkenazi, in *Christian Gaza* 195–208. Cf. Stephanus Sikorski, *De Aenea Gazaeo* (Bresl.Philol.Abh. 9.5 [1909]), listing Aeneas' references to Plato, Plotinus, and Xenophon (I thank Pamela Huby for sending me this lovely book).

<sup>8</sup> Zacharias in his *Life of Severus* (preserved only in Syriac) describes his role as *philoponos*, instructing Severus about Scripture and the texts of Basil and Gregory: D. Kugener, *Zacharias of Mytilene, Vie de Sévère* (Patrologia Orientalis 2 [1907]), with French transl.; Engl. transl. L. Ambjörn, *The Life of Severus by Zachariah of Mytilene* (Piscataway 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Choricus the rhetor (writing ca. 520–540) argues that the qualities of a bishop derive from his educational background which must be steeped in classical education: *Laud.Marc.* 2.7. This is quite unlike Basil, for instance, who does not discourage students from learning the classics but certainly never requires classical education as a requirement for clergymen. On this argument see Ashkenazi, in *Christian Gaza* 197.

<sup>10</sup> Here too I accept Watts's thesis that Aeneas' aim in Gaza is to demonstrate Christian learning, while Zacharias of Gaza, thirty years later in Alexandria, must make the polemical arguments of one trying to convince Christian intellectuals educated in a non-Christian environment of the superiority of their own thought: Watts, in *Philosopher and Society* 226.

Here Plotinus uses an example of light, blocked by an object which produces a shadow, to show how the One creates the lower levels without causation or change.<sup>11</sup> Zacharias and Aeneas critique this shadow imagery in order to attribute a beginning to the causal relationship between God and the universe and to counter the Alexandrian view of creation in eternity.<sup>12</sup> Thus, they both exhibit a similar trend among Christians in the late antique schools.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike many other Christian apologists, Aeneas and Zacharias do not make explicitly Christian arguments, but instead prefer to keep within the thought-world of the Platonists. In

<sup>11</sup> The shadow metaphor also makes its way into Christian accounts of the universe's co-eternity with God, as seen in the fourth century in Basil of Caesarea *Hexaemeron* 1.7, where Basil first addresses the attacks of those who say that God creates the universe as an involuntary cause.

<sup>12</sup> While the Platonist line on the creation of the universe was that it was eternal (contrary to Aristotle's understanding of the *Timaeus*), the Athenian and Alexandrian Platonists differed on just what 'eternity' meant. This paper is limited to a general discussion of Aeneas' and Zacharias' use of Plotinus. On debates on the eternity of the world see Luca Obertello, "Proclus, Ammonius of Hermias, and Zacharias Scholasticus: The Search after Eternity and the Meaning of Creation," in M. Treschow et al. (eds.), *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse* (Leiden 2007) 173–189. Obertello outlines the history of this argument, from Plato to Aristotle to Ammonius and Philoponus, in "Ammonius of Hermias, Zacharias Scholasticus and Boethius: Eternity of God and/or Time?" in A. Galonnier (ed.), *Boèce, ou la chaîne des savoirs* (Louvain 2003) 465–479. On Boethius and Zacharias see Ph. Merlan, "Ammonius Hermiae, Zacharias Scholasticus and Boethius," *GRBS* 9 (1968) 198.

<sup>13</sup> L. G. Westerink makes the point that Ammonius was lecturing to a mixed group of Christians and Hellenes, and that the position of the Hellenes had become easier towards 520 than twenty-five years previously: "The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries," in R. Sorabji (ed.), *The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London 1990) 328. Cf. Michael Champion's argument that Aeneas was directing his arguments on the soul to Origenists: "Aeneas of Gaza on the Soul," *Australasian Society for Classical Studies* 32 (2011) 1–11, esp. 6–7. On Origenism in sixth-century Gaza see Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, passim.

this way, the author appears not only educated, but also the master of and corrector to a Hellenic legacy. What is unusual for Aeneas and Zacharias in this respect, then, is the way in which each launches his attack on the Platonist understanding of creation via Plotinus. That is, they critique the Platonist understanding of creation by attacking Plotinus' views rather than directly attacking the philosophical arguments of their Platonist contemporaries. What is more, neither introduces his attack on Plotinus with "Plotinus said": rather they merely present Plotinian imagery with the assumption that all readers recognize it as Plotinus', in the same way that a Platonist might be expected to know Plato and work fluidly within the Platonic corpus, such that no references were needed. This method differs from Aeneas and Zacharias' usual mode of citation, in that both credit other Platonists explicitly, with phrases such as "Atticus said" or "Plutarch said." It seems, thus, that in the late fifth and early sixth century schools, the Christians could be assumed to know Plotinus as well as Plato in their overall education. In this way, the dialogues of Aeneas and Zacharias on creation are interesting for their philosophical content—they argue against Plotinus' concept of extension in creation, as well as his idea that creation takes place co-eternally with the divine, without divine will—but also because they shed light on Christian education in late antiquity. Rather than outside observers on Platonism, Aeneas and Zacharias are fully steeped in not just the philosophical terminology of Platonism, but the literary imagery as well. Thus, while they are meant to be polemical, their dialogues show how just how much Aeneas and Zacharias are a part of the golden chain of the Platonic tradition.

*The lives of Aeneas and Zacharias*

Aeneas and Zacharias both originated in Gaza. Zacharias went on to study in Alexandria with Ammonius, then went to Beirut to study law and then on to Constantinople, where he was appointed bishop of Mytilene and probably wrote the

*Ammonius*. Aeneas (ca. 430–520) was the older of the pair by a good thirty years, and Zacharias (ca. 465/6–536) was a contemporary of Severus of Antioch.<sup>14</sup> While there certainly was a generational gap between the two thinkers, they clearly knew of each other, and Zacharias regarded Aeneas highly among the Gaza Christians.<sup>15</sup> Aeneas, a student of Hierocles,<sup>16</sup> was a professor of rhetoric in Gaza for most of his life,<sup>17</sup> and it has been recently suggested that he may have become bishop of the same city as well.<sup>18</sup> Aeneas' primary work, *Theophrastus*, appeared in the late 480s. In addition to this, his best-known work, he authored twenty-five letters, many of which were written to Platonist teachers.<sup>19</sup> These letters are important evidence for the network joining Christians and Hellenic intellectuals in Alexandria and Gaza.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For biographical information on Aeneas and Zacharias see the extensive introductions to the editions by Colonna; Michael W. Champion, *Culture and Creation in Late Antique Gaza: Christian and Neoplatonic Interactions* (diss. U. London 2010); Downey, *Gaza*; M. Wacht, *Aeneas von Gaza als Apologet. Seine Kosmologie im Verhältnis zum Platonismus* (Bonn 1969); O. J. Stovrick, *Atticism in the Theophrastus of Aeneas of Gaza* (diss. U. Michigan 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Zacharias *V. Isaia* 8 (ed. Brooks), and *V. Severi* 90 (ed. Kugener) where Zacharias cites a letter he brought to Beirut from Aeneas in Gaza.

<sup>16</sup> Aeneas *Theophr.* 2.9, 20.

<sup>17</sup> On the rise of the rhetorical school of Gaza see C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Oxford 1987) 51 ff., and C. Saliou (ed.), *Gaza dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Salerno 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Ashkenazi, in *Christian Gaza* 200. Ashkenazi notes that there is no mention of Aeneas in the episcopal list of Byzantine Palestine, but points to Choricus' second oration to Marcian where the well-known sophist and bishop mentioned may be Aeneas. This would certainly not have been unheard of, as the bishop Marcian also occupied the chair.

<sup>19</sup> L. M. Positano, *Enea di Gaza, Epistole* (Naples 1961). Brief mention of Aeneas and Zacharias, with reference to Ammonius, in C. Wildberg, "Philosophy in the Age of Justinian," in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2005) 323.

<sup>20</sup> See G. Ruffini, "Late Antique Pagan Networks from Athens to the Thebaid," in W. V. Harris and G. Ruffini (eds.), *Ancient Alexandria between Egypt and Greece* (Leiden 2004) 241–257.

Zacharias, likewise from Gaza, traveled to Alexandria where he studied with Ammonius Hermeiou, the great teacher of Proclus, before eventually leaving for Beirut in 487. Zacharias' *Life of Severus* ends in 512, which also concludes most of our knowledge of the thinker. Sometime after his stay in Beirut, he was elected bishop of Mytilene, having renounced Monophysitism. In Gaza and in Alexandria, Aeneas and Zacharias were trained in Platonist thought, not merely the thought filtered through the writings of Basil and Gregory, of whom the *philopoi* were certainly fond, but they had access to the corpus of Plato and the writings of Plotinus.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in a passage of the *Life of Isaiah*,<sup>22</sup> it is clear that Aeneas read Plotinus, not simply Plotinus filtered through Cappadocian thought: Zacharias reports that Aeneas, a sophist of the city of Gaza, a man most Christian and learned, would often consult Isaiah of Gaza on problems regarding Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus and receive a Christian answer. Zacharias, moreover, further reports that one of Aeneas' students gave him a good report on Aeneas' virtues and learning.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that

<sup>21</sup> There is considerable debate regarding Aeneas' sources. From the evidence of Zacharias' *Life of Isaiah*, it would seem that Aeneas did indeed read Plotinus. For arguments to the contrary see I. Hadot, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius* (Paris 1978) 20. Zacharias' sources are also unclear. While it seems likely that Zacharias was dependent on Aeneas (see Colonna, *Ammonio* 47), he also relied on other Christian sources, especially Theodoret, for access to Platonist writings. Colonna lists seventy-two instances of Zacharias' use of Aeneas in her *index locorum* (237). Her notes, moreover, are heavy with indications of parallel passages between Aeneas and Zacharias, including references to Plato found in parallel passages of Aeneas (e.g. Zacharias 97.12–13: Pl. *Grg.* 447C ap. Aen. *Theophr.* 3.11).

<sup>22</sup> For an account of Isaiah and a history of Zacharias' text see D. Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," *JThS* 22 (1971) 47–72, esp. 60–64 on the relationship between Zacharias, Aeneas, and Isaiah.

<sup>23</sup> Aeneas qui sophista erat Gazae urbis, vir christianissimus et doctissimus, et omni sapientia insignis, ut dixit mihi quidam ex eis qui apud eum assidue errant, dixerit: "Saepe, quando in locis quibusdam de verbis Platonis vel Aristotelis vel Plotini dubito neque apud eos qui illorum

Christians in the schools of both Gaza and Alexandria were reading and commenting upon texts in the late fifth and sixth centuries in the same school mode as Hellenic students and teachers.

*Aeneas of Gaza: Theophrastus*

Although Aeneas is trained in Hellenic philosophy and uses its language, his *Theophrastus* is steeped in criticism of the Athenian and Alexandrian philosophical scenes. The *Theophrastus* is a dialogue between Aegyptus, a Hellenic Alexandrian, Euxitheus, a Christian from Syria, and Theophrastus, an Athenian. The dialogue begins with Euxitheus' discussion with Aegyptus, a fellow student under their shared teacher, Hierocles, before Euxitheus moved on to Syria. Aegyptus laments that the philosophical situation in Alexandria is poor (3.4–8):

For one man doesn't want to learn, though he's enrolled among the students, and another doesn't know how to teach, though he plays the initiator into the mysteries. The theatre and the horse-race are flourishing, but philosophy and the liberal arts have reached a state of dire inactivity.

Euxitheus notes that he hopes he can find “any wise man left among the Athenians” (3.11). Theophrastus, who happens to be visiting with Aegyptus at the time, is recommended by his friend as being one of the wisest of the Athenians. Theophrastus, in turn, does little to recommend Athenian philosophy; after Euxitheus tells Theophrastus that he is interested in philosophy, Theophrastus responds, “Truly Euxitheus is a very old friend to me, if indeed he is a lover of philosophy. For this is a fine and rare event, since even among the Athenians, where philosophy was most manifest, it has been wholly banished and

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sententias docent et interpretantur solutiones eorum invenio, eum interrogo, et mentem illorum mihi claram et manifestam facit, et quid dicere voluerint, necnon et quomodo talis error redarguatur, et veritas doctrinarum christianarum confirmetur”: E. W. Brooks, *Vitae virorum apud monophysitas celeberrimorum* (CSCO SER. III 25 *Versio* [1907]) 8.21–29. I would like to thank Ed Watts for this reference.



set at naught.” (4.5–7). Thus, Aeneas’ *Theophrastus* begins by discounting the philosophical movements in both Athens and Alexandria as past their prime, which is ironic given that thirty years later Zacharias traveled to Alexandria to study, rather than remain in Gaza to study with the Christian teachers there. This comprehensive dismissal of Hellenic centers of learning is key to understanding Aeneas’ interpretation of his Hellenic predecessors and contemporaries; underpinning Aeneas’ writings is the thought that while the Hellenes were once interested in philosophy, now they are not, and it is high time that their philosophy be adapted and corrected to fit Aeneas’ (Christian) understanding of the universe.

While the bulk of the dialogue is concerned with the immortality of the soul, a discussion on whether the universe was created and subject to destruction arises in 39.11 ff., on which Aeneas continues until he turns back to the soul in section 51.25 ff. It is here that Aeneas critiques Plotinus’ metaphor of creation that meant to show that the One creates in the same way as an object casts a shadow.

*Plotinus and Aeneas on the metaphor of the shadow*

Rather than attacking his contemporaries on the topic, Aeneas uses Plotinus’ metaphor of the shadow to attack Platonist ideas of creation. For instance, Aeneas treats *Enn.* 4.3.9.43–51 (transl. Armstrong):

And soul’s nature is so great, just because it has no size, as to contain the whole of body in one and the same grasp; wherever body extends, there soul is. If body did not exist, it would make no difference to soul as regards size; for it is what it is. The universe extends as far as soul goes; its limit of extension is the point to which in going forth it has soul to keep it in being. The shadow is as large as the rational formative principle which comes from soul; and the formative principle is of such a kind as to make a size as large as the form from which it derives wants to make.

Plotinus uses the metaphor of a body casting a shadow to describe the creation of the universe. The analogy is used to show how the world can be created, and yet coeval with its creator.

For Plotinus, soul projects itself from the One—this projection is the universe so that the universe is a shadow of the soul. For this reason, soul is co-existent with the universe. Plotinus explains soul’s relationship to the universe in terms of extension—the soul acts as a net that expands as far as the sea (the universe.) Plotinus further describes this extension by saying that the universe is a kind of shadow which extends as far as the soul when it goes forth. Thus, Plotinus says that the relationship between soul and universe exhibits a mutual dependence which allows the two to exist simultaneously, but in a logical order (just as the sun and moon exist simultaneously, but hold first and second places.) Soul is placed first, then “the next in order, like the last gleams of the light of a fire; afterwards the first coming from this last gleam is thought of as a shadow of fire, and then this at the same time is thought of as illuminated, so that it is as if a form hovered over what is cast upon soul, which at first was altogether obscure” (4.3.10.5–10) Soul gives a formative principle to the body in order to shape it. The analogy here seems to suggest that soul, as it is contained within a higher formative body, gives formative principles to body. Thus, the light source above soul might be some form of Intellect, without which soul would not be able to cast the shadow, which is the body.

Likewise, in the *Theophrastus*, the Platonist character Theophrastus uses the metaphor of a shadow produced by a body to show how the demiurge creates without intellectual intention or activity;<sup>24</sup> creation, thus, implies no change and is a natural activity for the creator. In this way, the shadow metaphor speaks to the co-eternity of the world with the One, an idea set out by Ammonius, and then refuted by John Philoponus. A second problem introduced by Theophrastus’ statement is

<sup>24</sup> “Those who guide interpretation of Plato say that the phrase ‘has come to be’ does not mean ‘has come to be’ (*gegonen*) [simply], but came to be (*egeneto*) according to a cause, for example, my body is the cause of my shadow, but the body has not produced the shadow, rather the shadow followed upon the body” (45.21–23).

whether a world that is coeternal with its maker is necessary or contingent. If the world's being is natural of the demiurge, a mechanical or necessary effect of its own existence, then the world must, in some way, be divine or at the very least, partake in a similar eternity.

Next, Aeneas has the Christian Euxitheus respond to Theophrastus' use of the shadow metaphor (Plotinus' metaphor), with Plotinus' argument that matter cannot appear simultaneously with the Demiurge. This passage is worth quoting in full, as Aeneas uses Plotinus in a number of ways (46.1–16):

The Demiurge, then, is not a creator unless he creates what he has made by wishing to do so. But this universe is uncaused if it has not come to be. A body, when it stands opposite the sun, does not permit the light to come from behind it, and this is its shadow. Wherefore, as is the body, such is the shadow marked out. The Demiurge, however, is immaterial, limitless, being the light itself. How or whence has the shadow resulted? How, then, would he be better and truly the Demiurge, if he himself makes and fits things together as he wished or if the shadow followed of necessity? Who would wish to adorn and purge his own shadow? Therefore the logic of the unintelligent has also destroyed Providence <along with it>. For there could be no concern for a shadow. Furthermore, a shadow appears along with the body. But it is impossible to admit matter along with the Demiurge. And this Plotinus declared quite clearly beforehand when he investigated matter, and he ridiculed Anaxagoras because he did not say it beforehand but introduced the Demiurge and matter together. It is impossible [to introduce them] together, for it is necessary that the maker be older than the made.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> οὐκ ἄρα δημιουργὸς ὁ Δημιουργός, εἰ μὴ βουλόμενος ὃ πεποίηκεν δημιουργεῖ· ἀλλ' αὐτόματον τόδε τὸ πᾶν, εἰ μὴ γέγονεν. ἀνιστατοῦν γὰρ τῷ ἡλίῳ τὸ σῶμα οὐ συγχωρεῖ κατόπιν γενέσθαι τὴν λαμπηδόνα καὶ τοῦτο ἡ σκιά· ὅθεν οἷον τὸ σῶμα, τοιαύτη διαγράφεται. ὁ δὲ Δημιουργὸς ἀσώματος, ἀόριστος, αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ὑπάρχων. πῶς οὖν ἢ πόθεν συμβέβηκεν ἡ σκιά; πῶς δὲ ἀμείνων ἦν καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς Δημιουργός, αὐτὸς ποιῶν καὶ συναρμόζων ἢ βούλοιο ἢ σκιᾶς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐπομένης; τίς δ' ἂν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σκιὰν κοσμεῖν ἢ καθαίρειν βούλοιο; οὐκοῦν καὶ τὴν Πρόνοιαν ὁ τῶν ἀνοήτων λόγος

Here Euxitheus points to the intentionality and rationality of the creator at the time of creation; the demiurge firstly is superior to its creation as its intentional maker, and secondly, the demiurge cares for its creation. This passage parallels the aforementioned passage from the *Enneads* as both speak of size and extension. Euxitheus further points to the incompleteness of the metaphor; while a body produces a shadow because, as a material entity, it blocks light, the demiurge is immaterial. Most interesting, moreover, is Aeneas' use of Plotinus as a philosopher who would not "admit matter with the demiurge," that is, connect matter directly with the demiurge. Aeneas, thus, corrects Plotinus' metaphor to insist that the demiurge be the light that falls upon the body that, in turn, causes the shadow. This light, moreover, must be intelligible and intentional.

Also interesting is Aeneas' frequent mention of Atticus, the Middle Platonist, to argue against Plotinian creation. Atticus argues that the *Timaeus* (likely *Ti.* 27D–29) shows that the world, as something visible and tangible, must have been created by the demiurge, and thus was not eternal, but arranged by a primal God (46.16–47.2):<sup>26</sup>

συνανειλέν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιτο σκιᾶς ἐπιμέλεια. ἔτι δὲ ἅμα τῷ σώματι σκιὰ παραφαίνεται· ἀλλ' ἀδύνατον ἅμα τῷ Δημιουργῷ παραλαμβάνειν τὴν ὕλην. καὶ τοῦτο Πλωτίνος περιεργαζόμενος τὴν ὕλην σαφῶς πάνυ προλέγει καὶ τὸν Ἀναξαγόραν κωμῶδει ὅτι μὴ προλέγει, ἀλλ' ἅμα τὸν Δημιουργὸν καὶ τὴν ὕλην εἰσήγαγεν· ἀδύνατον δὲ ἅμα, δεῖ γὰρ εἶναι πρεσβύτερον τοῦ ποιήματος τὸν ποιητὴν.

<sup>26</sup> ὁ δὲ πολὺς Ἀττικὸς, ὁ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐραστής, τὰ τῷ ἐρωμένῳ δοκοῦντα διεξιὼν, ἔφη πού τοῦ κόσμου τὴν φύσιν καὶ τάξιν ἐπιζητεῖν, τοιοῦτον δ' αὐτὸν ὄντα οὐκ ἀγέννητον οὐδ' αἰδίου εἶναι, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τοῦ μείζονος τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τελειότερου, θεοῦ τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου καὶ νοητοῦ γεγονέναι· ὁρατὸν γὰρ ὄντα καὶ ἄπτὸν καὶ πάντη σωματοειδῆ, ἀμήχανον ἦν ἀγέννητον εἶναι· ὧν γὰρ ἡ οὐσία βοηθείας δεῖται τῆς παρ' ἐτέρου πρὸς τὸ εἶναι. πῶς ταῦτα μὴ ὁμολογοῦμεν γεγονέναι τε καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιήσαντος διασφύζεσθαι; τὸν δὲ Ἀριστοτέλη καὶ γελοῖον ἀποκαλεῖ, ὁμολογοῦντα μὲν τότε τὸ πᾶν ὁρατὸν εἶναι καὶ ἄπτὸν καὶ σωματοειδές, ἀγέννητον δὲ καὶ ἄφθαρτον εἶναι φιλονεικοῦντα.

The great Atticus, a lover of Plato, when explaining the thoughts of his beloved, said, somewhere, that he was seeking the nature and arrangement of the world, and that being such a thing, it was not ungenerated nor eternal, but it had come into being under the power of the more powerful and more perfect [source], God, the eldest and noetic [source]. Because [the world] was visible, perceptible, in every way corporeal, it was impossible for it to be ungenerated. For it belongs to the things the existence of which needs assistance from another in order to be. How then do we not agree that these things have come into being and are preserved by the one who made them? He will even call Aristotle ridiculous because, while agreeing that the universe was visible and touchable and corporeal, he contended in his love for argument that it was ungenerated and incorruptible.

In this passage, Atticus, an anti-Aristotelian commentator (fl. 176–180), links creation and Providence; he says that the world must have had a beginning because clearly there is a God which governs it.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Atticus also counters Aristotle, *De caelo* 1.12, 282a31 ff., that whatever is indestructible must be ungenerated and whatever is generated must be destructible. Furthermore, Proclus in the lemma on *Timaeus* 28A (*In Ti.* I 276.31 ff. Diehl) refers to Atticus' assertion that the universe in an unordered state has no beginning, but that time existed before the cosmos:<sup>28</sup>

[Plutarch of Chaeroneia] and Atticus grasp eagerly at these words, as bearing out their claim that the cosmos has its coming-

<sup>27</sup> J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca 1977) 252–253, who cites Atticus fr.4: “First of all, in considering the question of the creation of the world, and thinking it necessary to pursue this mighty and widely useful doctrine of Providence in all its ramifications, and reckoning that that which never came into being has no need of any creator or any guardian to ensure its proper existence, in order that he might not deprive the world of Providence, he removed from it the epithet ‘uncreated’” (from Eus. *Praep. Ev.*, PG 21.1314). There is certainly the possibility that Aeneas could be reading Atticus through Eusebius.

<sup>28</sup> Proclus *In Ti.* I 381.26 ff.; transl. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* 252.

into-being in Time, and they say that unordered Matter pre-existed the creation, and that there also pre-existed the Maleficent Soul which moved this disordered mass. For whence could motion come if not from soul? And if the motion was disorderly, then it must stem from a disorderly soul.

Aeneas' citation of Atticus concludes this section by differing from Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the universe in *Physics* 8.1, where Aristotle says that movement and time are not generated, but eternal. Aeneas cites this criticism of Aristotle as from Atticus, directly after he discusses Atticus, who posits a Demiurge as his supreme God, identified with the Good. Atticus attacks Aristotle, accusing him of severing this good Demiurge from active intervention in the world (fr.3).<sup>29</sup> This passage is noteworthy because it sheds light on Aeneas' understanding of creation and his method of argumentation. Here we see him use a Platonist, Atticus, in support of his own Christian thesis. Moreover, he cites Atticus by name, in contrast to his reference to Plotinus, whose shadow imagery he critiques without mentioning Plotinus' name.

In the final part of the speech, Euxitheus addresses the idea that God may accomplish many things at once, even when he chooses to do only one thing at a particular moment; as a corollary to this, he argues that God is a creator, even when he is not creating (47.11–19):<sup>30</sup>

For all things are not in fact [placed side by side] at the same time. Now the summer season is in fact adorning plants with

<sup>29</sup> Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* 252.

<sup>30</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἅμα δὴ πάντα· νῦν τοῦ θέρους ἡ ὥρα καὶ τὰ φυτὰ τοῖς καρποῖς ἐγκαλλωπίζεται, οὐπω δὲ χειμῶν καταρρήγνυται· ἄρ' οὖν τοῦ μὲν θέρους ἐστὶ ποιητῆς ὁ ποιητῆς, τοῦ δὲ χειμῶνος οὐκέτι; οὐδ' αὐτὸς ὕει, οὐδ' εἰς καρπογονίαν προευτρεπίζει τὴν γῆν, ὅτι μὴ τὸ θέρους ἅμα τῷ χειμῶνι συμφέρεται; ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀσθενείας οὐδ' ἀταξίας, ἀλλὰ τάξεως καὶ δυνάμεως τοῦτο σημεῖον. ἡ σιωπὴ τοῦ Πυθαγόρου τὸ δόγμα, ἀλλ' ὅμως λογικὸν ἦν, εἰ καὶ τότε σιωπᾶν ἐγνώκει· ἡ δὲ ἀγαλματοποιία τοῦ Φειδίου τέχνη, ἀλλ' ὅμως δημιουργὸς ἦν, εἰ καὶ μὴ πω τὸ ἐν Ἀκροπόλει καὶ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ πεποίηκεν ἄγαλμα.

fruit, but winter has not yet burst forth. Is the creator, then, creator of summer, but not yet winter? Does he himself send neither rain nor prepare the earth for bearing fruit because summer is not brought along with winter? But this is a sign not of weakness and disorder, but rather of order and power. Silence was a teaching of Pythagoras, but nevertheless the teaching was suitable for speech, even if at that time he resolved to keep silent. The statuary art of Phidias was a craft, but nevertheless he was a craftsman, even if he has not yet made statues on the Acropolis and in Olympia.

Here Aeneas disputes the Platonist understanding of the eternally-produced universe.<sup>31</sup> This is another point against the Platonist concept of the One creating without will. John Philoponus' understanding of Proclus was that God as creator must be always be making the cosmos, as the creator must always be the same and unchanging.<sup>32</sup> Philoponus counters this claim with an argument based on capacity: God actually creates at a particular time, but he always has the capacity or is potentially able to create at any time. Zacharias makes a similar argument (*Ammonius* 369 ff.): that God creates when he wills, but is always a creator (after Gessius' attack on how the creator can be called creator if he is not always creating). Aeneas and Zacharias, however, do not address the philosophical issue regarding potentiality which would be problematic to any Platonist—namely, that in God there cannot be any potentiality.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 225.6 Rabe; extensively treated at 605.11 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Philoponus *De aeternitate mundi* 606.5 ff. See also a discussion of Ammonius on this doctrine: E. Tempelis, *The School of Ammonius, Son of Hermias, on Knowledge of the Divine* (Athens 1998) 135.

<sup>33</sup> Philoponus, on the other hand, does address this problem. See 616.15 ff., where he says that in God's case capacity and activity do not differ because the creative power of God is simple and the same, although at one time he wills some things to come into being, and at other times he wills the same things to perish.

*Zacharias Scholasticus: Ammonius*

Likewise, the shadow image is important in Zacharias' description of divine causation in time and the ultimate re-assembly of the world by God. Like Aeneas, Zacharias attacks co-eternity of the world with God as rooted in the Platonist concept that the universe is created without divine will. Again, Zacharias looks specifically to Plotinus, rather than contemporaries, to launch criticisms. Zacharias' work is in dialogue form, with the first conversation (82–350) taking place with Zacharias' Hellenic teacher, the great Ammonius;<sup>34</sup> this conversation addresses the question of whether the universe had a temporal origin and will come to an end.<sup>35</sup> While Aeneas argued against Ammonius' teachings of the eternity of the universe, Zacharias attacks Ammonius personally; in addition to combating Ammonius' arguments, Zacharias portrays him as a braggart, humiliated by Zacharias' own argumentation.<sup>36</sup> Zacharias clearly aims to undermine the great Alexandrian, teacher to Christians, such as himself and Philoponus, and

<sup>34</sup> See D. Blank, "Ammonius Hermeiou and his School," in Lloyd Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2012) 654–666; K. Verrycken, "The Metaphysics of Ammonius son of Hermeias," in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed* (London 1990) 199–232; Tempelis, *The School of Ammonius*.

<sup>35</sup> The second conversation (107.375–125.924) is with the iatrosophist Gessius, a medical doctor, renowned in Christian and Hellenic sources, who taught medicine in Alexandria in the late fifth and early sixth centuries; he appears in Damascius' *V. Isidori* (fr.335–337 Zintzen) and Sophronius' *Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Ioanni* (30). This conversation also concerns whether the universe had a temporal origin and will come to an end. The third conversation (125.938–130.1131), with Ammonius again, concerns the eternity of the cosmos. The fourth (1084–1123), also with Ammonius, concerns various aspects of the Trinity. After the conversations, Zacharias' points are conceded by a young, lapsed Christian (1497).

<sup>36</sup> Watts makes this point excellently in "The Enduring Legacy of the Iatrosophist Gessius," *GRBS* 49 (2009) 121, pointing to lines 19–24, where Ammonius is said to "swagger about in Alexandria, claiming to be wise" and that he was "a clever man who corrupts the souls of youths and takes them away from God and truth" (31–32).



Hellenic pupils; he likewise portrays Gessius as arrogant and foolish (938–940). Thus, Zacharias attacks Ammonius, an intellectual known to Christian students in the 490s, and Gessius, recognized as a Hellenic intellectual in Alexandria in the 520s.<sup>37</sup>

*Zacharias and the metaphor of the shadow*

Zacharias gives his account of the shadow metaphor in a larger discussion of the eternity of the world, specifically, the problem of whether God intends the universe, or instead, whether the universe is a by-product of his being. At the beginning of the discussion, Gessius, a physician who attended Ammonius' courses with Zacharias, insists that he could defend the eternity of the universe better than Ammonius (521–526):<sup>38</sup>

This is not the way it is. And if you wish, I will guide you to a solution by adding an example from the familiar world. For they say that even as a body is the cause of each thing's shadow, but nonetheless the shadow while coeval with the body is not granted the same honor, so this cosmos is a by-product of God, who is the cause of its existence. And it is co-eternal (*sunaidios*) but not also equal in honor.

This is the essential Platonist response; it focuses on the fact that God is still the creator of the universe and superior to the cosmos, even though the cosmos is co-eternal with God. Proclus argues something similar in his *Timaeus* commentary when he says that celestial beings, although permanent, are inferior to the will of the One (III 21.1 ff.). Still, Gessius' response is slightly different from that of Proclus and Ammonius. For the most part, Gessius shows agreement with Proclus in other passages, such as when he makes the argument that if eternity is

<sup>37</sup> Watts, *GRBS* 49 (2009) 122–123.

<sup>38</sup> οὐ ταῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει, ἦ δ' ὅς· καί, εἰ βούλει, παραδείγματί σε τινι τῶν γνωρίμων ξεναγήσω πρὸς τὸ ζητούμενον. φασὶ γὰρ ὅτι, καθάπερ αἴτιον τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἐκάστου σκιᾶς γίνεται, ὁμόχρονος δὲ τῷ σώματι ἡ σκιά καὶ οὐχ ὁμότιμος, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ὅδε ὁ κόσμος παρακολούθημά ἐστι τοῦ θεοῦ, αἰτίου ὄντος αὐτῷ τοῦ εἶναι, καὶ συναίδιός ἐστι τῷ θεῷ, οὐκέτι δὲ καὶ ὁμότιμος.

found in the model, then it should be found in its product.

In the Christian's answer, Zacharias attacks the notion that the universe is an involuntary by-product of God (527–534):<sup>39</sup>

But do you not see the absurdity of what is being said here? First they concoct a God who is the undeliberate and involuntary cause of the constitution of things, assuming that the cosmos is a by-product of him (*hypotopazontes*), even as the shadow is a by-product of the body. For our shadow follows upon us through no action of our will. So thus, without any willing on the part of God, the cosmos would have followed upon him, and it simply subsists co-ordinately with him of its own accord, and it is to no purpose that they declare God to be its cause.

It is important for Zacharias to make clear that God, although constantly creating because he contains the principles for creation within him, deliberately chooses to create at a given time because it is the best time for such a creation—his decision, thus, is a sign of his goodness. Hence, God's activity is unlike a shadow which merely follows as a product of the body, without any decision on the part of the body.<sup>40</sup>

Zacharias rounds off his use of the shadow metaphor in the section that follows the discussion of interceding bodies.<sup>41</sup> Next,

<sup>39</sup> εἶτα οὐ συνορᾶς ὅλως γε, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὴν ἀτοπίαν τῶν λεγομένων. πρῶτον μὲν δὴ ἀπροαίρετον αἰτίαν καὶ ἀβούλητον τῇ συστάσει τῶν ὄντων τὸν θεὸν μυθοπλαστοῦσι, παρακολούθημα τούτου τὸν κόσμον εἶναι ὑποτοπάζοντες, ὡς δὴ καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἡ σκιά τυγχάνει οὕσα παρακολούθημα. οὐ γὰρ δῆπου βουλομένοις ἡμῖν ἡ σκιά παρέπεται. οὐκοῦν, μὴ θέλοντος τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ κόσμος αὐτῷ παρεκολούθησε, καὶ ἀπλῶς ἐκ αὐτομάτου παρπέστη, καὶ τὴν ἄλλως τὸν θεὸν αἰτίον εἶναί φασιν. ἔτι δὲ κάκεῖνο οὐ διασκοποῦνται.

<sup>40</sup> Philo makes a similar claim in *De prov.* 1.7, when he says that God forms unformed matter immediately through his thinking. See R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and Continuum* (London 1983) 206. Both Plotinus (*Enn.* 6.7.3.7–9) and the Christians Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* 29.7) and Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 2.6) argue that there can be deliberation or reasoning in God.

<sup>41</sup> Zacharias cites the opinion of “one of our wise men,” evidently Aeneas (see 152 above), “that there is another accompanying cause of the shadow, not only the body. This would be light. If this did not exist, the shadow would neither be formed, nor would it accompany the body. It is necessary,

Zacharias issues his critique of this theory, arguing that while the shadow appears alongside the body, it is not of equal dignity.

Zacharias' problem with Plotinus' explanation is that a shadow requires light and a body, whereas God as the creator of the universe requires no subsidiary cause. Dependence on another source would take away God's autonomy, a quality integral to the One's unity for the Platonists. Next, Zacharias, bases his argument on the notion of extension and dimension, which echoes Plotinus' use of extension in *Enn.* 4.3.9: Zacharias says that the shape of a shadow indicates the shape of the body causing the shadow, which he claims is ridiculous, primarily because God has no shape nor does he extend himself.

Last, in the passage above, Zacharias holds that the creator and universe are coeval, which he had expounded upon previously in the dialogue, because God holds the creative formative principles within him from the beginning. The discussion at the beginning of the passage looks to the light which shines on the body to create the shadow and is used in discussion by Ammonius in his *De interpretatione* 7,<sup>42</sup> which deals with the fact that

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then, that there be a light, and a body in between, to create the shadow. But what subsidiary cause will they attach to God, who say that the cause of the universe is a God who is an involuntary and non-willing cause, just as the body is of the shadow, since he himself is intellectual light, and there is no body in the middle from which the shadow might duly follow. 'For the body', says one of our wise men, 'standing in the way of the sun, does not allow its light beyond it'. And this is the (cause of) the shadow. Hence, the shape of this indicates what sort of body it is (that causes it.) But, that these things are absurd and fill the soul with impiety, if contemplated or uttered in relation to God, is clear to anyone with any sort of reasonable mind. Who would not be astonished or even laugh at the example? They say that the shadow is not of equal dignity with the body, and yet they do not consider that it is from another perspective that these things are not of equal dignity. For the body is said to be, and is, three-dimensional, and if one were to call the shadow an image of a body, one would not be wrong; however, it is not in respect of being coeval that there is any difference between them" (536–552).

<sup>42</sup> A. Busse, *Comm. in Arist. Graeca* IV.5 132.25 ff.

the sun illuminates all objects in the world at once, unless some solid bodies block its rays; thus, it is not about shadows per se. Here, moreover, Zacharias quotes Aeneas, *Theophrastus* (46.3). When this analogy is used by Plotinus, Plotinus says that a great light shines from Soul in its resting state, and at the outermost edge of this light is a darkness, which soul enforms using the formative principles within it (4.3.9, 47–50). With this, he then goes into the explanation above, that the soul comes first, like the last gleams of a fire, followed by the shadow of this fire—in the middle is what is illuminated by soul. It is interesting that here Zacharias corrects the views of Gessius on the shadow metaphor by using details given by Plotinus. At the end of the explanation, Zacharias dismisses the entire analogy as ridiculous, because God cannot be compared to such things as bodies creating shadows.

By the end of the dialogue, these and other arguments clearly make their impression on Gessius: at the end of Zacharias' dialogue with Gessius, we hear that Gessius agrees with Zacharias' arguments, a declaration which may be more than rhetorical, as Sophronius reports that Gessius did, indeed, become a Christian.<sup>43</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Aeneas in *Theophrastus* and Zacharias in *Ammonius* both set out their own views of Christian creation through a critique of Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.3.9, 43–51. Aeneas corrects Plotinus' metaphor of the soul's extension creating the universe just as a body creates a shadow, by insisting that the demiurge be the light that falls upon the body. For the most part, Aeneas finds offense with Plotinus' understanding of a creation coeval with the divine with no will or intention involved in creation. Zacharias likewise attacks the passage, arguing that while the shadow appears alongside the body, it is not of equal dignity. Zacharias' problem with Plotinus' explanation is that a shadow requires light and a body, whereas God as the creator of the

<sup>43</sup> Sophronius *Narr. miraculorum SS. Cyri et Ioannis* 30 (PG 87.3 3519D).

universe requires no subsidiary cause.

Moreover, while Aeneas and Zacharias issue interesting philosophical arguments against Platonist views on creation, their dialogues exhibit important tendencies in the use of sources by Christians in late antiquity. Both assume that the reader recognizes *Enn.* 4.3.9, 43–51, without citing it as Plotinian (although they cite other Platonists by name), and they use this section presumably to attack contemporary Platonist views on creation. Thus, one might use Aeneas' *Theophrastus* and Zacharias' *Ammonius* for insight, not just into Christian views of creation in late antiquity, but also for an understanding of contemporary Christian education.<sup>44</sup>

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