

Redating Bessarion's *Against the Slanderer of Plato*: His Defense of Plato and Platonic Politics

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THE CONTROVERSY between George of Trebizond and Bessarion over Plato has long fascinated scholars as a defining moment in the Renaissance and the translation of Plato from Byzantium to the West.¹ In 1458, George's *Comparison of the Two Philosophers Aristotle and Plato* had attacked Plato as fundamentally incompatible both doctrinally and politically with Christianity, claiming that Platonists such as Bessarion's neopagan teacher George Gemistos Plethon had caused the loss of Byzantium and would soon cause the fall of the West.² In response, Bessarion had worked for more than a decade to write his *Against the Slanderer of Plato (ASP)*, in which he presented Plato as an invaluable spiritual and political aid to Christendom. Printed on the printing press, the book soon had a wide cir-

¹ On the controversy in general, John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden 1976) 201–229; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance I* (Leiden 1991) 163–263; Gianmario Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini, Niccolò Perotti e la controversia platonico-aristotelica nel Quattrocento* (Berlin 2020) xi–lix.

² John Monfasani, *Vindictio Aristotelis: Two Works of George of Trebizond in the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the Fifteenth Century* (Tempe 2021). On Plethon and his politics see C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford 1986); Brigitte Tambrun, *Pléthon: le retour de Platon* (Paris 2006); Niketas Siniosoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon* (Cambridge 2011); Vojtěch Hladký, *The Philosophy of Gemistos Plethon: Platonism in Late Byzantium, between Hellenism and Orthodoxy* (Burlington 2014).

culation and was reprinted.³

As John Monfasani has emphasized, the book underwent a long gestational period from its genesis in Greek in 1459/60 until its publication in Latin in summer 1469.⁴ Over the last fifty years, Monfasani among others has brilliantly labored to document and establish a chronology for this controversy and in particular the *ASP* itself, uncovering and publishing key documents in the controversy. Without yet going too deeply into the technical details of how each text has been dated, the established chronology of the controversy is:

1458: George publishes his *Comparison of the Two Philosophers*.⁵

1459/60: Shortly after reading George's *Comparison*, Bessarion wrote U (*Marc.gr.* 199), the first Greek draft of his subsequently titled *ASP*, a work consisting of three books and an appendix of corrections to

George's translation of Plato's *Laws*: Books 1, 2, 3 (later 4), 4 (later 5).⁶

ca. 1460: Gaza sends Bessarion a long letter (*Marc.gr.* IV.52, coll. 1366) in response to this draft of the *ASP*.⁷ His autograph additions in U date from this time.⁸

³ Maury Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism: Renaissance Humanism and Two Early Printers' Choice of Texts," in Cynthia Pyle (ed.), *Printing and Humanism in Renaissance Italy: Essays on the Revival of the Pagan Gods* (Rome 2015) 65–118; Hankins, *Plato* I 214.

⁴ John Monfasani, "A Tale of Two Books: Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis* and George of Trebizond's *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*," *Renaissance Studies* 22 (2008) 1–15, at 4.

⁵ Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 166.

⁶ Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 166.

⁷ A sample of the text is published by Lotte Minne Labowsky, "An Unknown Treatise by Theodorus Gaza," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1968) 173–198. For the date, Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 166; David Speranzi, *Omero, i cardinali e gli esuli. Copisti greci di un manoscritto di Stoccarda* (Madrid 2016) 84. For a new edition of Bessarion's letter to Gaza requesting help, Gianmario Cattaneo, *Le lettere greche del cardinal Bessarione* (Rome 2021) 115–128.

⁸ John Monfasani, "Cardinal Bessarion's Greek and Latin Sources in the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the 15th Century and Nicholas of Cusa's Relation to the Controversy," in Andreas Speer et al. (eds.), *Knotenpunkt Byzanz: Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen* (Berlin 2012) 469–480, at 471–

Before November 1465 or 1466: MS. U and its corrections are used to produce the first Latin draft *Marc. lat.* 230 (Q), redaction α .⁹

November 1465–November 1466: November 1466 Bessarion sends a three-book redaction to his confidant Niccolò Perotti, then governor of Viterbo.¹⁰ Bessarion sends to Pietro Foscarini Berlin Staatsbibl.

Hamilton 76, a representative of redaction β .¹¹

November 1465/6–fall 1469: Bessarion withdraws *Hamilton* 76 and writes over defective passages in it to produce redaction γ .¹²

Late 1466–summer 1469: Bessarion commissions Giovanni Gatti to write a Latin scholastic takedown of George’s arguments, which he transforms into Book 3 of the *ASP*.¹³ He adds Books 5 and 6.¹⁴

1466–October 1467: Bessarion’s associate Fernando de Cordoba publishes a list of passages from the Latin scholastic tradition largely

473. Reprinted in John Monfasani, “The Pre- and Post-History of Cardinal Bessarion’s 1469 *In Calumniatorem Platonis*,” in C. Märtl et al. (eds.), *Inter Graecos Latinissimus, Inter Latinos Graecissimus* (Berlin 2013) 347–366, at 354; Speranzi, *Omero* 86–87; Fabio Pagani, “Philology in/of a Byzantine Quarrel: Bessarion v. George of Trebizond,” in S. Mariev (ed.), *Bessarion’s Treasure: Editing, Translating and Interpreting Bessarion’s Literary Heritage* (Leipzig 2020) 126; Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* xxxiv and *Le lettere* 119.

⁹ John Monfasani, “Cardinal Bessarion’s Own Translation of the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*,” *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficini* 14 (2012) 7–21, at 11. He reiterates this position in *Inter Graecos Latinissimus* 355; *Ioannis Gatti Notata, seu Tractatus qui erat fons Libri III Operis Bessarionis in Calumniatorem Platonis adversus Georgium Trapezuntium* (Turnhout 2021) xix; “Cardinal Bessarion and the Latins,” in *Bessarion’s Treasure* 5–22, at 11; “Cardinal Bessarion as a Translator of Plato, Aristotle, and Other Prose Authors in the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*,” in P. Athanasopoulos (ed.), *Translation Activity in Late Byzantine World: Contexts, Authors, and Texts* (Berlin 2022) 465–474, at 465. Reprinted in Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* xxxv, *Le lettere* 118; Pagani, in *Bessarion’s Treasure* 127.

¹⁰ John Monfasani, “Il Perotti e la controversia tra platonici ed aristotelici,” in *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy* (Aldershot 1995), I 195–231, at 198; and *Accademia* 14 (2012) 11–13.

¹¹ Monfasani, *Accademia* 14 (2012) 13.

¹² Monfasani, *Accademia* 14 (2012) 13.

¹³ See now Monfasani, *Ioannis Gatti*.

¹⁴ Book 6 has been published by Mariev. Book 5 will shortly appear. Book 6’s later addition is mentioned by Perotti in a letter of 1469/70: Lotte Minne Labowsky, “An Autograph of Niccolò Perotti in the Biblioteca Marciana,” *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1968) 199–205, at 204.

in defense of Bessarion's positions, which is answered by Niccolò Palmieri who accuses Cordoba of heresy for, among other things, comparing Plato's birth to that of Christ.¹⁵

Spring 1468–summer 1469: After resigning as governor of Viterbo, Perotti corrects and reworks the Latin to produce the final version.¹⁶
 Summer 1469: The *ASP* is published on the printing press by Andrea Giovanni Bussi.¹⁷

Monfasani's chronology has largely been accepted and built upon by other scholars, whose footnotes are replete with references to Monfasani, as seen in the notes above. However, new manuscript discoveries call into question this chronology. In this article, I redate a number of key moments in the *ASP*'s development and publication based on new manuscript findings. Section 1 questions the commonly-accepted dating of the earliest surviving Greek redaction, MS. U, arguing that it must actually date from after February 1467, not 1459/60. Section 2 builds upon this finding to demonstrate that the earliest Latin redaction (Q) must date from after February 1467. In this light, section 3 shows that the entire later development of the *ASP* in Greek and Latin can be condensed to a relatively short period between February 1467 and summer 1469 rather than the extended earlier window between 1459/60 and 1469.

By redating the surviving *ASP*'s manuscripts to this relatively short time frame, I raise two main issues concerning how we think about the defense of Plato (section 4). First, my findings show that the earliest surviving Greek redaction does not represent the earliest redaction of the text as is commonly believed. A scholar interested in the development of Bessarion's Platonism

¹⁵ Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 217–218, “Fernando of Cordova. A Biographical and Intellectual Profile,” *TAPhS* 82 (1992) 1–116, at 24–25, and “A Theologian at the Roman Curia in the Mid-Quattrocento: A Bio-Bibliographical Study of Niccolò Palmieri, O.S.A.,” *Analecta Augustiniana* 54 (1991) 321–381, at 366. Reprinted by Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* xxvii–xxxii.

¹⁶ John Monfasani, “Niccolò Perotti and Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*,” *Renaissanceforum* 7 (2011) 181–216.

¹⁷ Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 219.

will need to reconstruct the text of the earliest redaction from Theodore Gaza's discussion of it in his mostly unpublished letter to Bessarion. A philologist interested in re-editing Bessarion's text will need to reconstruct what Bessarion's original draft might have looked like. My findings are not untimely, as Monfasani has recently published an edition of the Latin text of Books 1, 2, and 4 of the *ASP*,¹⁸ while Sergei Mariev is planning to publish Book 5 shortly with De Gruyter.¹⁹ From a historical perspective, this new timeframe more importantly allows scholars to see how, even though Bessarion wrote an early refutation of George, the real impetus to finish the work was George of Trebizond's attempt to send his *Comparison* to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (r. 1451–1481) in summer 1466. After George was arrested for attempting to send that work, among others, the *Comparison* would gain a wider circulation. Its attacks on the Platonic politics of resistance to the Turks preached by Bessarion and his teacher Plethon would require Bessarion to respond and justify their Platonism.

1. On the later composition of Marc.gr. 199

The manuscript *Marc.gr.* 199 (U) has long been recognized to represent one of the earliest stages in the composition of the *ASP*. In his preface to his edition of the *ASP*, Mohler writes, “U obviously presents the oldest version of the text, apparently also the first copy from the draft.”²⁰ As to U's date, Monfasani has dated the most primordial form of the text to late 1459/early 1460 on the basis of a letter written by Bessarion to Gaza asking for assistance with the *ASP*. After dating the letter to 1459/60 in the

¹⁸ John Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum Contra Obiectiones in Platonem: Cardinal Bessarion's Own Latin Translation of His Greek Defense of Plato against George of Trebizond* (Berlin 2023).

¹⁹ A ‘prolegomenon’ to this edition is published in Sergei Mariev, “Tracking Changes and Corrections in Bessarion's Manuscripts,” in *Il libro di Bessarione in difesa di Platone: vicende testuali e percorsi intellettuali* (Venice 2022) 65–76.

²⁰ Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann II* (Paderborn 1927) vii: “U stellt offenbar die älteste Fassung der Textes dar, augenscheinlich sogar die erste Abschrift aus dem Konzept.”

1970's,²¹ Monfasani later noticed that U included corrections and marginalia in Gaza's hand, and so logically concluded that Gaza had responded to Bessarion's request: "We can now see for the first time from the margins of U that Gaza actually did help with the revision of the first draft."²² The implications of Monfasani's words have not been lost on scholars, such as David Speranzi, who date U to 1459/60 because of Gaza's corrections.²³ Speranzi's and Monfasani's conclusions have been re-pressed by later scholars.²⁴ The database of Greek manuscripts, *Pinakes*, dates the manuscript to ca. 1459 based on Speranzi's work.²⁵

However, this date is demonstrably too early: U could not have been put together earlier than February 1467. The evidence for this contention lies amidst the unpublished folia of Fernando de Cordoba's *On the Praises of Plato (De Laudibus Platonis)* dedicated to Bessarion, which survives in a single manuscript of the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome (I.22), dated 27 January 1467, with autograph corrections of the author.²⁶ Bessarion had tasked Cordoba with combing through Augustine and the Church Fathers for quotations that supported his assertions in the *ASP*. As Cordoba writes, "Only a few days have passed since

²¹ Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 166.

²² Monfasani, in *Knotenpunkt Byzanz* 471–473.

²³ Speranzi, *Omero* 86–87; reiterated in his "Scritture, libri e uomini all'ombra di Bessarione" *Rinascimento* SER. II 57 (2017) 137–197, at 170, and 58 (2018) 193–237, at 223–225; Speranzi and Ciro Giacomelli, "Dispersi e ritrovati: gli Oracoli caldaici, Marsilio Ficino e Gregorio (iero)monaco," *Scripta* 12 (2019) 113–142, at 123, 134; Speranzi, "Le mani del cardinale: note sulla scrittura greca di Bessarione," in A. Rigo et al. (eds.), *I libri di Bessarione* (Turnhout 2021) 17–32, at 21.

²⁴ E.g. Pagani, in *Bessarion's Treasure* 126; Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* xxxiv, *Le lettere* 119.

²⁵ <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/69670/>.

²⁶ The manuscript and its date are discussed in Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 217–218, and *TAPhS* 82 (1992) 24–25; Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* xxvii–xxxi.

I eagerly received your commands and began to excerpt testimonies from sacred interpreters, and especially, as you ordered, Augustine in praise of divine Plato.”²⁷ Cordoba, a longtime collaborator of Bessarion, exceeded his request and collected testimonies aimed at proving forty-four truths concerning Plato, drawing on a range of Latin authors such as Augustine, Jerome, Macrobius, Seneca, Cicero, and Pliny. Many of his truths deal with issues such as Plato’s style or why Augustine preferred Plato to other pagan philosophers,²⁸ but a number included rather radical assertions such as that Plato’s birth from a virgin resembled that of Christ, that portents foreshadowed his pre-eminence as they did Christ, and that Plato had anticipated monastic practices like the mortification of the flesh.²⁹ Because of its radical assertions, the text earned the censure of Pope Paul II (1464–1471), who tasked Niccolò Palmieri with reviewing it. Palmieri (d. 1467) was horrified by Cordoba’s attempts to make Plato’s life resemble that of Christ. For example, if Plato’s virgin birth foreshadowed Christ’s own, that meant that Christ’s “conception should not be extolled with great praises and preached,” as it was not all that extraordinary.³⁰ In 1469, George of Trebi-

²⁷ *Valllicelliana* I.22 1r: “Pauci admodum dies sunt priusquam tua iussa capessens instituerim excerptere de sacris interpretibus testimonia praesertim ut iniuxeras Augustino in laudes divi Platonis.” I consulted this MS. through cell-phone images kindly taken for me by Dan Wolf. I transcribe the text of the manuscript as it appears.

²⁸ *Valllicelliana* I.22 3v: “Trigesima quarta veritas de gloria Platonis in eloquentia”; 2v: “Decima septima veritas cur Augustinus Platonem pretulit omnibus philosophis.”

²⁹ *Valllicelliana* I.22 2r: “Tertia veritas est sanctos affirmavisse Platonem ex matre virgine ortum neque de genito verbo cum evangelico sensisse solum sed et ortum esse ad modum incarnati verbi ... Sexta veritas ad modum somnii Joseph de Christi ortu ferunt de Platone Socratem somniasse”; 2v: “Duodecima veritas summa industria ferunt repressisse carnis libidinem, quam repressionem religiosi vocabulo suo mortificationem carnis appellunt et id vocabulum ex Platone habuisse ortum.”

³⁰ Montserrat, Biblioteca del Monestir de Montserrat 882 2v–3r: “Laudes

zond would remember the publication of Cordoba's treatise as the moment when Plato was preached at Rome as an evangelist and so God punished Christendom by allowing the destruction of the Albanian resistance to the Turks under Skanderbeg in summer 1467.³¹

While Cordoba's text has long been known to scholars, its unpublished state has discouraged work on it. In proving his truths, Cordoba assembled numerous useful passages illustrating Plato's importance to the Latin tradition. However, Cordoba was not the most meticulous compiler of passages and often summarized or paraphrased. When we compare Bessarion's Greek draft U with Cordoba's Latin citations and the text of his actual sources, it becomes clear that U is indebted to Cordoba. Take, for example, Bessarion's discussion of Augustine's esteem for Plato in Book 1 of U. Here, in the body of the text and not the margins, Bessarion includes citations from Augustine that bear a striking resemblance to Cordoba's citations and not that of his sources.

I cite U, which I consulted via digital reproductions, followed by the not entirely reliable text of Mohler. Hereafter, manuscript citations followed by (=) means that Mohler matches U, while (cf.) means that the text does not match Mohler's printed text.

U 13 ^{r-v} (Mohler II 26)	<i>Vallicelliana</i> I.22	Augustine
Π 26.8–10: καὶ Αὐγου- στίνος δὲ ὁ θειότατος ἐν πολλοῖς τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων τὰ αὐτὰ Κικέρωνι φησὶ περὶ	5 ^r : Iure igitur divus Au- gustinus significantius non potuit Platonem omnes pretergressum fuisse per eruditionem	<i>Against Julian</i> 4.76 (<i>PL</i> 44.777–778): Maximeque ipse Plato, quem Cicero appellare non

conceptionis Platonis conceptioni Christi equipperantur. Ex quo sequitur quod ~~Christ~~ Christi conceptio non est tam magnis laudibus extollenda et predicanda.” I consulted the MS. online: https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/nicolai-ortani-amp-alfonsi-palentini-scripta-manuscrit--0/html/005a2dd0-82b2-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html.

³¹ John Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond* (Binghamton 1983) 172.

<p>Πλάτωνος καὶ ἐαυτοῖς³² σχεδὸν ῥήμασι. “δικαίως, γάρ φησι, Κικέρων τὸν Πλάτωνα θεὸν ἐν φιλοσόφοις καλεῖ πάντας φιλοσόφους καὶ εὐφυῖα καὶ σοφία ὑπερβαλόντα.</p>	<p>philosophos quam nomine deitatis in genere philosophorum, cum eum dicat philosophorum deum: ait enim in 2^o libro contra Julianum id quod ex Cicerone accepit in 2^o de Natura Deorum Cicero iure vocat Platonem omnium philosophorum deum, omnibus enim philosophis prestitit et ingenio et sapientia.</p>	<p>dubitat pene philosophorum deum; cuius nec tu nomen praeterire potuisti, cum de naturalibus, non de moralibus philosophorum nobis dogmata inferres sive praeferes, qui corporis voluptates vere et graviter dixisse perhibetur illecebras atque escas malorum.</p>
<p>Π.26 10–12: καὶ ἄλλα- χοῦ· “τῶν ἐν Ἀθήναις εὐπατρίδων ὁ Πλάτων γενόμενος εὐφυῖα τοὺς συμμαθητὰς ὑπερ- εβάλετο πάντας καὶ μακρὰς ἐπὶ κτήσει σοφίας ἀπεδήμησεν ἀποδημίας.”³³</p>	<p>5^v: Ex Augustini sententia 8 de Civitate Dei quem constat ita locutum inter discipulos Socratis non quidem immerito excellentissima gloria claruit que omnino ceteros obscuraret qui cum esset Atheniensis honesto apud eos loco natus et ingenioque mirabili longe suos condiscipulos anteiret operum tamen putans perficiendae philosophiae sufficere se ipsum ac Socraticam disciplinam, quam longe ac</p>	<p><i>City of God</i> 8.4: Sed inter discipulos Socratis, non quidem immerito, excellentissima gloria claruit, qua omnino ceteros obscuraret, Plato. Qui cum esset Atheniensis honesto apud suos loco natus et ingenio mirabili longe suos condiscipulos anteiret, parum tamen putans perficiendae philosophiae sufficere se ipsum ac Socraticam</p>

³² αὐτοῖς Mohler.

³³ The earliest Latin version of the *ASP* had recourse to Cordoba’s text. *Marc. lat.* 230 f. 11^v reads: Cum esset Atheniensis honesto apud eos loco natus ingenioque mirabili longe suos condiscipulos praeciret, opere pretium tamen esse putans se philosophicis disciplinis excellere, idque sibi sufficere se ipsum simul et Socraticam disciplinam deferens versus omnem oram, cuius phama alicuius nobilis scientiae percipiendae eum compraehebat, quam longe lateque potuit peregrinatus est (consulted through digital reproductions).

	late potuit peregrinatus est, quaquauersum eum alicuius nobilitatae scientiae percipiendae fama rapiebat.	disciplinam, quam longe ac late potuit peregrinatus est, quaquauersum eum alicuius nobilitatae scientiae percipiendae fama rapiebat.
Π.26 12–15: καὶ αὐ· “οὐκ ἄνευ λόγου τοῦς Πλατωνικοῦς ἐξελεξάμην φιλοσόφους, πρὸς οὓς περὶ τῶν ἡμῖν προκειμένων διαλεξαίμην, διὰ τὸ τὸν Πλάτωνα δηλαδὴ καὶ περὶ τῶν (<i>corr.</i> τοῦ) ἐσχάτου ἀνθρωπίνου τέλους καὶ περὶ τῆς θείου γνώσεως ἄριστα τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων φιλοσοφῆσαι.”	10 ^r : Quid autem cause sit quod Augustinus eum omnibus pretulisset philosophis ipsum Augustinum causas adhibuisse constat 8 de Civitate his verbis: Nunc satis sit commemorasse Platonem determinasse finem boni esse secundum virtutem vivere et ei soli evenire posse qui notitiam dei habeat et imitationem, non esse ab aliam causam beatum. Ideo non dubitat hoc esse philosophari: amare deum, propter quod verum et summum bonum Plato dicit esse deum. Deinde subicit XI c ^o nunc inquam, non immerito me philosophos Platonicos elegisse cum quibus agam in questione de qua agitur et ideo hunc potissime elegi et cetera que ibi secuntur.	8.8: Nunc satis sit commemorare Platonem determinasse finem boni esse secundum uirtutem uiuere et ei soli euenire posse, qui notitiam Dei habeat et imitationem nec esse aliam ob causam beatum; ideoque non dubitat hoc esse philosophari, amare Deum. 8.12: nunc non immerito me Platonicos philosophos elegisse cum quibus agam, quod in ista quaestione, quam modo suscepimus, agitur de naturali theologia, utrum propter felicitatem, quae post mortem futura est, uni Deo an pluribus sacra facere oporteat, satis, ut existimo, exposui. Ideo quippe hos potissimum elegi.
Π.26 16–17: καὶ ἄλλα· “τοῦ νομοθέτου	11 ^v : Sententia autem Labeonis iuris consulti	2.14: Hunc Platonem Labeo inter

<p>Λαβεῶνος γνώμη ἡμίθεον τὸν Πλάτωνα καλεῖ, θεῶν μὲν ἥττονα, ἀνθρώπων δὲ μείζονα.”</p>	<p>constat Platonem maiorem homine fuisse, minorem deo... De hoc Augustinus 2^o de Civitate Dei c. 14 hunc Platonem Labeo inter semideos connumerandum putavit.</p>	<p>semideos commemorandum putavit, sicut Herculem, sicut Romulum. Semideos autem heroibus antepōnit; sed utrosque inter numina conlocat. Verum tamen istum, quem appellat semideum, non heroibus tantum, sed etiam diis ipsis praefendum esse non dubito. Cf. 8.13.</p>
<p>Π.26 17–19: καὶ ἀῤῥθις· “Ἀριστοτέλης, φοιτητῆς Πλάτωνος, εὐφυΐας γέγονεν ἄκρας, Πλάτωνος μέντοι σοφία καταδεέστερος”</p>	<p>16^v: Eius autem Augustini auctoritate 8 de Civitate exploratum est Aristotelem et ingenio et eloquentia fuisse Platoni imparem. Nam ait ibi Aristoteles Platoni discipulus vir fuit excellentis ingenii et eloquii Platoni impar</p>	<p>8.12: cum Aristoteles Platoni discipulus, vir excellentis ingenii et eloquio Platoni quidem impar</p>

As should be clear from the table, Bessarion quotes Augustine, but his citations are in fact translations or abbreviations of what Cordoba wrote. For example, Cordoba only paraphrased the first quotation from *Against Julian*. Bessarion then translated his paraphrase into Latin as if that were what Augustine himself wrote. Similarly, the quotation from Labeo puts words in Labeo’s mouth. Labeo never said Plato was less than the gods but more than men. His point as quoted by Augustine is about how Plato like Hercules would be greater than heroes but less than the gods. Indeed, in the same section quoted by Cordoba, Augustine (*City of God* 2.14) calls Plato less than even the least Christian man. Bessarion is clearly following Cordoba in his account of Labeo’s esteem for Plato. Similarly, Bessarion follows

Cordoba in deliberately misreading Augustine. Even though Augustine says that Aristotle was a smart man but inferior in eloquence, Cordoba and then Bessarion add that Aristotle was “more lacking than Plato in eloquence and wisdom.” Even though Cordoba provided Augustine’s exact words, Bessarion followed Cordoba in making Augustine show explicit disdain for Aristotle’s wisdom. Finally, it should not escape our notice that Bessarion’s quotations from Augustine follow the same order as they are listed in Cordoba. Clearly, Bessarion or someone working for him read Cordoba’s work and listed the quotations, which Bessarion then translated.

The other major passage where we can easily detect Cordoba’s influence is Bessarion’s discussion of the virtuous life of Plato according to Latin and Greek sources (Mohler II 438.21–442.28). This section likely began as a report of what Greek sources said about Plato. The latter part of the discussion (II 440.32–442.13) about Plato never laughing excessively as a youth, refusing to whip slaves when angry, disliking sleep and lethargy, etc., is clearly paraphrased from Diogenes Laertius’ life of Plato.³⁴ Bessarion later embellished this section with Latin sources. His quotations here are almost entirely due to Cordoba except for an allusion to Augustine’s *On the True Religion* added later in the margin of U.³⁵ His debt to Cordoba is clearest in his discussion of Plato’s contempt for the flesh. Cordoba wrote a chapter arguing that Plato’s position was the origin of the monastic practice of mortification, which Bessarion adapted for the *ASP*.³⁶ As before, all the Latin quotations are translated into Greek and included in the text of U, not in the margins:

³⁴ Laughter (440.32–33) cf. Diog. Laert. 3.26; whipping slaves (440.35–442.1) cf. 3.38; sleep (442.6–11) cf. 3.39.

³⁵ Mohler II 440.13–31 (= U 106^r) from *On the True Religion*. This was later incorporated in Q 84^v = Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 126.17–34.

³⁶ So the chapter title, *Valllicelliana* I.22 2^v, “Duodecima” etc. (quoted n.29 above).

U 105 ^v –106 ^r (Mohler II 438)	<i>Vallicelliana</i> I.22	Authors
<p>Π 438.35–39: πρὸς ἄλλοις ἀνάγνωθι καὶ τὸν ἱερὸν Ἰερώνυμον ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰοβιανοῦ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ διίσχυριζόμενον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸν οἰκῆσαι νοσῶδές τε καὶ λοιμῶδες χαρίων λέγοντα, ἵνα τὰς τῆς μανίας ὀρμὰς ἀναστείλῃ καὶ παθῶν κρείττων αὐτός τε γένηται καὶ τοὺς μαθητὰς ἀπεργάσῃται μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ ἢ φιλοσοφία σχολάζοντα.</p>	<p>8^v: Unde est illud Ieronymi adversus Iovianum Plato inquit cum esset dives pro tempore et conditione eiusque thoros Diogenes luctatis pedibus conculcaret. Elegit Achademiam, ut posset vacare philosophie villam ab urbe procul, non solum desertam, sed et pestilentem: ut cura et assiduitate morborum, libidinis impetus frangeretur: discipulique sui nullam aliam sentirent voluptatem, nisi earum rerum quas discerent.</p>	<p>Jerome, <i>Against Jovinian</i> 2.9 (<i>PL</i> 23.298): lutatis pedibus conculcaret: ut posset vacare philosophiae, elegit Academiam villam ab urbe procul, non solum desertam, sed et pestilentem: ut cura et assiduitate morborum, libidinis impetus frangeretur: discipulique sui nullam aliam sentirent voluptatem, nisi earum rerum quas discerent</p>
<p>Π 438.39–440 l. 6: πρὸς ὃ καὶ τὸν φιλοσοφίας ὀρισμὸν φέρειν τῷ Πλάτωνι κατὰ τε Ἑλληνας, κατὰ τε Λατίνους αὐτούς. τὸ γὰρ μελέτην αὐτὴν εἶναι θανάτου καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον, ὡς ἐν Φαίδωνί φησι, δεῖν θανάτων οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τοῦτο βούλεσθαι, οὐ τῆς μετὰ τοῦ σώματος δηλαδὴ κοινωνίας τῆν ψυχὴν ἀπολύειν—τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ κεκάλυπται καὶ οὐ δεῖ ἐαυτὸν ἐξάγειν, ὑπ' αὐτοῦ διδασκόμεθα—ἀλλὰ τῶν σωματικῶν παθῶν τούτων τὴν ψυχὴν</p>	<p>8^v: Est enim via omnibus proclivia disciplinis. Si comes Sapientie sobrietas ammovetur, quam utique tenere non possunt qui clamitant sunt dura etiam proposita. Unde et ipse Plato dicit philosophiam esse meditationem moriendi.</p>	<p>Macrobius, <i>Dream of Scipio</i> 1.13.5: Haec secta et praecipio Platonis est, qui in Phaedone definit homini non esse sua sponte moriendum. Sed in eodem tamen dialogo idem dicit mortem philosophantibus appetendam et ipsam philosophiam meditationem esse moriendi. Haec sibi ergo contraria videntur, sed non ita est.</p>

<p>ἀπαλλάττειν καὶ τῆ τῶν ὄντων θεωρία ἐνασχολεῖσθαι μὴδὲν τοῦ σώματος ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἀνάγκη προσαπτομένην.</p>		
<p>Π 438.7–12: Μακρόβιον ἐν τοῖς Χρονικοῖς ὁ βουλόμενος ἀναγνώτῳ περὶ τοῦ διττοῦ θανάτου διδάσκοντα, τοῦ τε φύσει τοῦ τε κατ' ἀρετὴν, καὶ τὸν κατ' ἀρετὴν ὑπὸ Πλάτωνος προστάττεσθαι λέγοντα. τοῦτον δὲ εἶναι τὸν συνημμένης ἔτι τῷ σώματι τῆς ψυχῆς τὰς σωματικὰς ἡδονὰς διὰ φιλοσοφίας ἀποπτύοντα καὶ πάσης τῶν παθῶν ἐνέδρας ὑπερανέχοντά τε καὶ γεγυμνωμένον.</p>	<p>8^v–9^r: unde pulchre Macrobius ait ex sententia Platonis. Plato inquit duos mentes [read: mortes] hominum novit: unum anime, alterum animalis, sed et ipsius animalis duos afferit mortes quarum unam natura, aliam virtutes perant. Homo enim moritur qui anima corpus relinquit solita lege nature nec mori etiam dicitur tunc, quum anima adhuc in corpore constituta corporeas illecebras philosophia docente contempnit et cupiditatum dulces insidias reliquas quas nature exuit passiones.</p>	<p>Macrobius 1.13.5–6: Nam Plato duas mortes hominis novit. Nec hoc nunc repeto quod superius dictum est, duas esse mortes, unam animae, animalis alteram. Sed ipsius quoque animalis, hoc est hominis, duas adserit mortes, quarum unam natura, uirtutes alteram praestant. Homo enim moritur cum anima corpus relinquit solutum lege naturae. Mori etiam dicitur cum anima, adhuc in corpore constituta, corporeas illecebras philosophia docente contempnit, et cupiditatum dulces insidias reliquasque omnes exuitur passiones.</p>

Seeking to prove Plato's moral superiority, Bessarion here mentions the Academy as a sickly place chosen by the philosopher in order to humble his body and make it obey the rational part of him. From Cordoba, he has taken his quotation from Jerome and the connection between the mortification of

the flesh and from Macrobius on the philosophical death of the body. If this is not enough evidence that Bessarion drew on Cordoba here, there is also the fact that Bessarion misquotes Macrobius. His citation derives from the *Commentary to the Dream of Scipio*, not the *Saturnalia* as he indicates. Cordoba did not fully cite his source, so Bessarion seems to have assumed the passage came from the *Saturnalia*, the only Macrobian work Cordoba elsewhere cites.³⁷

Our final proof of Bessarion's indebtedness to Cordoba comes from Bessarion's closing to his discussion of Latin and Greek interpretations of Plato's life (Mohler II 442.13–25), where he cites a list of Latin authors who attest to Plato's virtuous life: Cicero, Macrobius, Gellius, Apuleius, Quintilian, Seneca, Augustine, and Jerome. While it might be easy to disregard this as just a generic list,³⁸ these are all authors cited by Cordoba.³⁹ In this list, Bessarion gives special focus to Seneca, "a most philosophical, praiseworthy, ethical man adorned by every virtue. You will find wherever in his letters to Lucinus, his treatise *On Anger*, or any of his other works he mentions by chance Plato, he praises him, admires him, and treats him as an archetype of virtue."⁴⁰ The reason for Bessarion's focus on Seneca is Cordoba, who repeatedly cites "our Seneca" (Seneca was also from Cordoba), including texts like *On Anger* in the *On the Praise of*

³⁷ *Valllicelliana* I.22 11r: "Solius autem huius philosophia divinas esse sententias Ciceronem dicere solitum esse, idem in Saturnalibus Macrobius perspici potest."

³⁸ So Monfasani, in *Knotenpunkt Byzanz* 471–472.

³⁹ *Valllicelliana* I.22: Cicero 5r, 5v, 8r, 11r, 12v, 13r, 14r, 16v; Macrobius: 8v, 11r; Gellius 6r, 13v, 15r, 15v; Apuleius 6v; Quintilian, not cited; Seneca 7r, 7v, 8r, 11r, 20v; Augustine 5r, 5v, 10r, 10v, 11v, 12r, 12v, 16r, 16v, 20r; Jerome 5r, 5v, 7r, 8v, 10v, 13v.

⁴⁰ Mohler II 442: ἀνάγνωτε Σενέκαν, ἄνδρα φιλοσοφώτατον, ἄνδρα σπουδαιότατον, ἠθικώτατον, πάση κεκοσμημένον ἀρετῇ εὐρήσετε ὅσα ἐν ταῖς πρὸς Λουκῖνον Ἐπιστολαῖς, ὅσα ἐν τῷ περὶ Ὀργῆς, ὅσα ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις αὐτοῦ μεμνημένος σποράδην τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐπαινῆ αὐτὸν καὶ θαυμάζει καὶ ὡς παραδείγματί τε καὶ ἀρχετύπῳ τῶν ἀρετῶν Πλάτωνι χρῆται.

Plato.⁴¹ While Bessarion decided not to explicitly cite Seneca, he clearly appreciated Seneca's praise of Plato assembled by Cordoba.

As we can see, Bessarion is clearly indebted to Cordoba in Books 1 and 3. Further work, including the full publication of Cordoba's work, might reveal just how much of the *ASP* depends on him. However, the key point here is that U could not have been written before Cordoba's work was finished and circulating in late January 1467, let alone in 1459/60. These Latin quotations are not marginal notes but fully incorporated in U. Clearly, Bessarion used the text he ordered for its Latin learning and incorporated it in an earlier draft before U, just as he would later rely on Giovanni Gatti for Latin scholastic learning.

Now, one might object to this dating that U is a composite manuscript, which Bessarion assembled by piecing together different folia written by his scribes George Trivizias, Athanasios Chalkeopoulos, Gregory the hieromonk, and Bessarion himself.⁴² Parts of it could have been removed to incorporate

⁴¹ *Vallicelliana* I.22 7^r: Antiores animi passiones per virtutem quam represisse presertim iram vulgatissimis constat testimoniis ut est illud Senece 3 li^o De Ira ita locuti"; 7^v: "Testimoniis preterea potest convinci quanta fuerit Plato apud in se beneficos gratitudine et precipue nostri Cordubensis Senece"; 8^r: "Id autem imprimis probari potest auctoritate nostri Senece Cordubensis quem Epistula 71 constat ita locutum fuit"; 11^r: "Gloriosam quoque eius fuisse mortem ait noster Cordubensis Seneca Epistula 61"; 20^v: "Unde noster Cordubensis Seneca in Epistula ad Lucillum ita interpretatus est."

⁴² For the hands, see Speranzi, *Omero*, 115–117. Gregory and Chalkeopoulos are provided by Speranzi and Giacomelli, *Scripta* 12 (2019) 134. All scribes were in Rome in 1467 according to the existing scholarship with the exception of Gregory: Trivizias: Speranzi 143–158, cf. Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, "Per un repertorio dei copisti greci in Ambrosiana," in F. Gallo (ed.), *Miscellanea Graecolatina* I (Rome 2013) 100–153, at 134–135, and Tempesta and Giuseppe De Gregorio, "Verso un repertorio dei copisti greci nelle biblioteche d'Italia," in P. Degni et al. (eds.), *Greek Manuscript Cataloguing: Past, Present, and Future* (Turnhout 2018) 207–220, at 217–220. Chalkeopoulos: M.-H. Laurent and André Guillou, *Le "Liber visitationis" d'Athanasie Chalkeopoulos, 1457–1458: Contribution à l'histoire du monachisme grec en Italie méridionale*

Cordoba's material into the earlier text. However, this does not appear to be the case, as is evident from the watermarks in the manuscript. As part of his important work on the manuscript, David Speranzi has provided a thorough breakdown of the manuscript and its watermarks.⁴³ Here I provide a simplified version of his three-page table:

Copyist	Watermark	Corresponding text in the <i>ASP</i>
George Trivizias (1 ^r –32 ^v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Tour</i> 8 <Andronikos Kallistos>	Book 1 (Mohler II 1–62.27)
Athanasios Chalkeopoulos (33 ^r –51 ^v .6)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Huchet</i> 18 <1461–67> <Kosmas of Trebizond, John Regiomantus>	Books 1–2 (62.28–108.8)
Bessarion (51 ^v .7–56 ^v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Huchet</i> 18 <1461–67> <Kosmas of Trebizond, John Regiomantus>	Book 2 (108.8–120.23)
Bessarion (57 ^r –76 ^v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Colonne</i> 21 (8 January 1471, Venice, John Rhosos)	Book 2 (120.24–176.1)
Gregory the hieromonk (77 ^r –85 ^v .23)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Tour</i> 8 <Andronikos Kallistos>	Book 2 (176.1–198.9)
Bessarion (85 ^v .23–24)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Tour</i> 8 <Andronikos Kallistos>	Book 2 (198.9–10)
Bessarion (86 ^r –v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Arbalète</i> 18 (1487/8, , John Rhosos)	Book 2 (198.10–200.10)
John Sophianos (87 ^r –96 ^v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Flèche</i> 12 (20 March 1468, Venice, John Rhosos)	Book 2 (200.10–216.23)
Bessarion (97 ^r –v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Arbalète</i> 18 (1487/8, John Rhosos)	Books 2–4 (216.26–218.33, 422.1–424.11)

(Vatican City 1960) xxvii–xxviii. Sophianos: Speranzi 25–30. As to Gregory, my chronology is not entirely in contradiction with that sketched by Speranzi and Giacomelli (125–126). Ciro Giacomelli himself has told me that he prefers my dating of U to that used in Speranzi and Giacomelli (personal communication, 24 August 2023).

⁴³ Speranzi, *Omero* 115–117.

Gregory the hieromonk (98 ^r –224 ^v)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Huchet</i> 18 <1461–67> <Kosmas of Trebizond, John Regiomantus>	Book 4 (424.11–end. Book 5 not yet published)
Bessarion (225 ^r)	Similar to Harlfinger <i>Huchet</i> 18 <1461–67> <Kosmas of Trebizond, John Regiomantus>	Book 5 (not yet published)

Using this table, we can determine that there appears to have been a single, original copy transcribed by George Trivizias, Athanasios Chalkeopoulos, Bessarion, and Gregory the hieromonk on two types of paper. The parts copied by Trivizias (1–32^v) and Gregory (77^r–85^v) exhibit the same watermark (Harlfinger *Tour* 8), while those copied by Chalkeopoulos (33^r–51^v.6), Bessarion (51^v.6–56^v), and Gregory (98^r–224^v) exhibit the same watermark (Harlfinger *Huchet* 18). The quotations taken from Cordoba appear in the main body of the text in the folia copied by Trivizias (13^{r-v}) and Gregory (105^v–106^v) on paper with both watermarks. Therefore, all of Books 1, 5, nearly all of 4, and a significant part of 2 (the introduction, the chapters on God, fate, and a large part of the chapter on the Trinity) must have been copied after Bessarion received Cordoba’s treatise in early 1467.

Now, it is entirely possible that the remaining portions of Book 2 could have been copied earlier. Take for example the final chapters of Book 2 arguing that Aristotle agreed with Plato, Melissus, and Parmenides on first principles in fact even if he did not always agree in word.⁴⁴ This section fulfills Bessarion’s own suggestion for how to resolve the quarrel about the general and the particular that raged between his teacher Plethon, Theodore Gaza, Michael Apostoles, and Andronikos Kallistos from the late 1450’s to 1462.⁴⁵ Bessarion’s own take on the quarrel was that one should try to show that Aristotle agreed with Plato and

⁴⁴ Mohler II 198–218. On this section see Eva Del Soldato, *Early Modern Aristotle: On the Making and Unmaking of Authority* (Philadelphia 2020) 29.

⁴⁵ On the quarrel see now Georgios Steiris, “Michael Apostolis on Substance,” in *Bessarion’s Treasure* 211–236.

therefore with Plethon.⁴⁶ It is entirely possible that Bessarion ultimately decided to fulfill this suggestion and wrote a separate treatise, which was revised to become these chapters. However, it must be pointed out that these chapters were not a part of the *ASP* until after 1467. As is evident from folio 85^v of U, Book 2 was originally supposed to end here after a discussion of fate in Plato,⁴⁷ but Bessarion erased half a line from his original ending and added a transition on this folio and the following (86^{r-v}) in order to add this discussion of the concordance of Aristotle and Plato copied by John Sophianos (87^r–96^v).⁴⁸ He then wrote a new conclusion to this discussion and rewrote the beginning of Book 4 (97^{r-v}). The text copied by Sophianos was thus sandwiched between material Bessarion wrote on the same paper (Harlfinger *Huchet* 18).

The reason why Bessarion made this addition seems to have been the realization that he needed to be more conciliatory toward Aristotle than he was in the original draft of U. As Hankins has recognized, a major undertone of the *ASP* is to show Aristotle's incompatibility with the Christian faith, exactly what Bessarion's teacher Plethon had been accused of doing.⁴⁹ Bessarion himself was well aware of this problem in U, protesting in Book 2 that George's work "forced us to show that Plato had better opinions and Aristotle adopted worse ones, and so we seem to thus condemn Aristotle and be ungrateful to him, which is far from our intent, as we praise the man now and will for all time and we would never be driven to such sophistry as to speak ill of him while advocating for the other."⁵⁰ But while he pro-

⁴⁶ Mohler III 150.

⁴⁷ Mohler II 180–198.

⁴⁸ U 85^v–86^r: ἐνταῦθα τὸν δεύτερον καταπαύσομεν λόγον, ἐν ἔτι προσθέντες οὐδενὸς τῶν πρότερον εἰρημένων ἦτρον ὄν ἀναγκαῖον, ἵνα μὴ εἰσαυθῆς πράγματα ἔχομεν πλειστάκις τὰ αὐτὰ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν λέγοντες (Mohler II 198.9–11); underlined is Bessarion's addition.

⁴⁹ Hankins, *Plato* I 255–257, esp. n.237.

⁵⁰ U 41^v: ἀναγκάσειεν ἂν καὶ ἡμᾶς τοῦναντίον δεικνύοντας, Πλάτωνι μὲν τῶν

tested his love for Aristotle, Bessarion, as we have seen, deliberately misquoted Augustine, citing Cordoba's interpretation that Augustine thought Plato was greater in wisdom and eloquence, rather than Augustine's actual words. In U itself, it is evident that while not explicitly hostile to Aristotle, Bessarion is also nowhere as conciliatory as he appears in the final Latin. For example, dealing with Aristotle's rejection of Plato's infamous community of marriage, Bessarion states bluntly in U, "we reject the most wise Aristotle and approve Plato's argument for this."⁵¹ In the margins of U, he would add additional passages trying to show that Aristotle shared more of Plato's views.⁵² Similarly, in U he would bluntly state that unlike Plato Aristotle had no notions of the Christian God: "Aristotle, if he said something like this concerning such matters, his own writings will show. Although we have read all his writings, we have never encountered such things. Nonetheless, we do not condemn him for this."⁵³ In the margins of U, Bessarion would walk this back slightly, adding Aristotle's statements on God in the *Metaphysics*.⁵⁴ In the later Greek revision of *Vat.gr.* 1435 (B), he would soften this even more, adding in a more conciliatory fashion, "in as much as Aristotle spoke about these things, he spoke imitating his teacher Plato."⁵⁵ This final revision reflects the primary argument of the

δοξῶν τὰς βελτίους. Ἀριστοτέλει δὲ εἰσποιησαὶ τὰς χείρους, καὶ οὕτω δοκεῖν Ἀριστοτέλους καταψηφίζεσθαι καὶ ἀγνώμονας εἶναι δοκεῖν, ὃ πόρρω που τῆς ἡμῶν ἐστὶ διανοίας. εὐφημία γὰρ ἡμῖν γε ἐστὶ τε καὶ ἔσται ἐς πάντα τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον καὶ τὰ γε εἰς τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρα, καὶ μὴ ἂν ποτε εἰς τὸσαύτην δοξοσοφίαν ἐλάσαιμεν, ὡς κακῶς ἐκεῖνον εἰπεῖν θατέρῳ συνηγοροῦντας (Mohler II 80.3–9).

⁵¹ U 126^r: παραιτούμεθα μὲν Ἀριστοτέλη ἄνδρα σοφώτατον, ἐγκρίνομεν δὲ τὸν ὑπὲρ τούτου λόγον τοῦ Πλάτωνος. Cf. Mohler II 496.

⁵² E.g. Mohler II 508.30–510.3.

⁵³ U 44^v: Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον περὶ τούτων εἶρηκεν, αὐτὰ αὐτοῦ τὰ συγγράμματα δεῖξει. Ἡμεῖς γοῦν οὐδαμοῦ αὐτοῖς τοιοῦτοις γε ἐνετύχομεν, καίτοι πάντα γε τὰ αὐτοῦ ἀναγνόντες. Οὐ μὲν τοιγε παρὰ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ καταψηφιζόμεθα. Cf. Mohler II 90.37.

⁵⁴ See the apparatus criticus at Mohler II 90.

⁵⁵ B 27^v: Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ ἅτε περὶ τούτων εἶρηκεν, Πλάτωνα τὸν καθηγεμόνα μιμησάμενος εἶρηκεν (Mohler II 90.37–92.1).

material added in Sophianos' hand at the end of Book 2, namely to show that Aristotle agreed with Plato on first principles in fact even if he did not always agree in words.⁵⁶ Therefore, this material at the end of Book 2 seems to represent a later stage in the revision process when Bessarion realized that he needed to be more generous and conciliatory toward Aristotle in order to avoid censure.

As for the remaining part of Book 2, the material on different paper (57^v–76^v) on the creation of the world, the soul, and providence, it is possible that this could have been written earlier. However, the watermark's similarity to that on paper written in 1471 by John Rhosos, one of Bessarion's scribes,⁵⁷ points to a date closer to 1467 than to 1459/60. It is conceivable that after finishing U in which he wrote on the same paper as Chalkeopoulos, he ultimately decided to revisit and rewrite this section of Book 2. As this is the part of the *ASP* that most deeply engages with Aristotle, Bessarion may have felt that he needed to rework it with Gaza's aid.⁵⁸ Certainly Gaza did provide this kind of assistance to Bessarion with the later Book 6. From a short treatise that Gaza wrote for his benefit, Bessarion would harvest citations from Aristotle.⁵⁹ As noted above, Gaza's assistance is evident elsewhere in U and here in these folia.

Thus the composition of U likely took place almost entirely in 1467, though it may have incorporated in Book 2 folia written earlier. From an earlier draft in which he had added material from Cordoba, Bessarion and his collaborators produced U, which he revised, rewriting a major portion of Book 2. Realizing that his text was still perhaps too hostile toward Aristotle for a Western audience, Bessarion decided that he needed to be more

⁵⁶ Mohler II 210.

⁵⁷ On Rhosos see Kostas S. Staïkos, "Jean Rossos: du livre manuscrit à l'imprimerie," *Études Balkaniques* 24 (2020) 131–144.

⁵⁸ Mohler II 144–146, 164–172.

⁵⁹ John Monfasani, "Testi inediti di Bessarione e Teodoro Gaza," in *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, VII 231–256, at 236.

conciliatory and stress the congruence between the two thinkers. In the margins of U and the final chapters of Book 2, he would slowly begin adopting this approach.

2. *The date of the earliest surviving Latin redaction*

That U was written sometime after 1467 is also confirmed by the earliest surviving Latin redaction α , which survives in *Marc. lat.* 230 (Q). As Monfasani has shown, Bessarion wrote this translation based on the Greek manuscript U and corrections to it.⁶⁰ Close examination of Q further shows that Bessarion took this opportunity to test out personal attacks on George, particularly in the original Book 3 (later 4) on Plato's morality. While most are petty (e.g., George could not speak mellifluously and hardly knew how many fingers he had),⁶¹ some are biographical. On two occasions, Bessarion describes George as recently leaving prison. In the first he writes that George was "a man who many other times and now recently just left prison," alluding to George's previous imprisonment for fighting Poggio Bracciolini and now for allegedly conspiring with the Turks.⁶² In the second, he attacks George for attempting to betray the Church to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II: "Tell us, best men, what our opponent did among the Turks, our enemies! You know full well and you ordered him to be imprisoned after his return ... Now he dares to come into your sight, he greets you, he addresses you when he zealously seeks the destruction of your fatherland by its enemies, the seizure of your wives and children, the profanation of your temples, the destruction of the tombs of your ancestors, and the death of all of you by the enemy's sword!"⁶³ Based on

⁶⁰ Monfasani, *Accademia* 14 (2012) 12–13, and *Liber Defensionum* xviii.

⁶¹ Q 89r: "homo qui loqui nescit sed per praecipita et praerupta fertur." Cf. Mohler II 452–453; Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 133. Q 133r: "vix digytos quot habeat norit." Cf. Mohler II 594–595; Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 206.

⁶² Q 89r: "homo qui sepe alias tum nuper profectus a carcere est." Cf. Mohler II 592–593; Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 132.

⁶³ Q 140r: "Dicite, viri optimi. Nam certo nostis ac eum reversum ad vos

these references, this manuscript cannot have been written earlier than mid-February 1467 when George was released from the Castel Sant'Angelo where he had been imprisoned under the pope's orders for reasons that are not entirely clear. Allegedly, George had whispered secrets to the Turks or he had disparaged the Church in a letter he planned to send the Turk along with his *Comparison* and other texts.⁶⁴ In §4 I will deal more fully with the implications of both the Greek and Latin text of the *ASP* being written in the midst of or directly after George's imprisonment, but here it suffices to point out that dating both early redactions to 1467 means that all the surviving manuscripts of the *ASP* must have been written in February 1467 or later.

3. *Later reworkings of the ASP*

In this article, I do not mean to delve too deeply into the interrelationship between Bessarion's different Greek and Latin redactions of the text, as their interrelationship is very complicated. Monfasani's "tentative" account of the Latin redactions α , β , and γ is more or less accurate.⁶⁵ In his discussion of the Latin redactions, he establishes a major terminus for the Latin redaction β based on revisions to redaction α in Q reflecting Niccolò Perotti's letter to Bessarion.⁶⁶ In this letter written while governor of Viterbo,⁶⁷ Perotti acknowledges his receipt of

trudi in carcerem iussistis ... Tum in vestrum conspectum accedere audet, vos salutatur, vos alloquitur, qui (*marginally* enixe id) agit ut patria vestra ab hostibus diripiatur, uxores, liberi rapiantur (*marginally* aliter violentur), templa vestra (*marginally* profanentur), sepulcra maiorum vestrorum evertantur, vos omnes gladio hostile occumbatis." Cf. Mohler II 618–619; Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 217, who wrongly reports "id enixe."

⁶⁴ The date is securely established by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 193.

⁶⁵ Monfasani, *Accademia* 14 (2012) 11–13.

⁶⁶ Monfasani, in *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, I 198; *Accademia* 14 (2012) 11–13; *Liber Defensionum* xviii–xx.

⁶⁷ De Keyser's edition includes Perotti's title ("provinciae Tusciae gubernatoris") only in the apparatus criticus: Jeroen De Keyser, "Perotti and Friends: Generating Rave Reviews for Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*," *Italia*

Bessarion's three-book Latin text and praises the work while denigrating George. For example, he claims that Bessarion really ought to entitle the work a treasury of philosophy.⁶⁸ The letter is dated to November from Viterbo. In a previous study, Monfasani established the date as November 1465, which the text's most recent editor fully accepts.⁶⁹ In his recent edition of the *ASP*, Monfasani reiterates this terminus.⁷⁰ However, such a date is no longer possible. This leaves us with two possibilities for the letter: November 1467 and November 1468, as Perotti resigned as governor in spring 1469.⁷¹

That the letter must date to November 1467 can be proven based on Andrea Contrario's unpublished *Rebuke or Reprimand of the Slanderer of the Divine Plato* (*Reprehensio sive Obiurgatio in Calumniatorem Divini Platonis*), which survives in *Paris.lat.* 12947.⁷² The work consists of three parts: a dedicatory letter to King Ferdinand of Naples (3^r–10^r), the text itself (10^v–126^r), and a final epilogue praising Bessarion (127^r–145^v). Traditionally, the text has been dated August to December 1471 based on Contrario's letter of 1472 on the birth of Plato where he says that he wrote the *Rebuke* a year before.⁷³ The preface and epilogue un-

medioevale e umanistica 52 (2011) 103–137, at 123. On Perotti as governor see Alessandro Pontecorvi, "Niccolò Perotti governatore del Patrimonio di S. Pietro in Tuscia," *Renaissanceforum* 7 (2011) 73–84; Giovanni Mercati, *Per la cronologia della vita e degli scritti di Niccolò Perotti: Arcivescovo di Siponto* (Vatican City 1925) 55–62.

⁶⁸ De Keyser, *Italia medioevale* 52 (2011) 125.

⁶⁹ Monfasani, in *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, I 196–198; De Keyser, *Italia medioevale* 52 (2011) 117.

⁷⁰ Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* xviii.

⁷¹ For his resignation and movements see Monfasani, in *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, I 197; Pontecorvi, *Renaissanceforum* 7 (2011) 80.

⁷² Consulted online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84470967/>.

⁷³ E.g. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 228; Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini, Niccolò Perotti* l. Contrario's letter: Universitat de València, Biblioteca histórica MS. 375 3^r: "Quom commemorarem anno superior maiore fortassis cura

doubtedly belong to this period, as the epilogue mentions the fall of Euboea in the previous summer (1470).⁷⁴ However, the main treatise was written earlier, for Contrario elsewhere states that George was imprisoned in the prior year (“anno superiori”) and that his *Comparison* was written a decade before, meaning that Contrario wrote these words in 1468.⁷⁵ In his preface, he also tells us that he wrote the work at the end of summer in Tuscany: “Accept, most invincible king, according to your kindness and clemency, what I wrote after a fashion in the relaxation and rest of Tuscany after summer ended.”⁷⁶ The period summer-to-fall 1468 fits perfectly with Bessarion’s movements, for he was with Perotti in Viterbo in Tuscany during the summer of 1468, as is documented by his act of donation of his manuscripts to Venice.⁷⁷ Returning to Perotti’s letter: Contrario says that Bessarion’s work is approved by nearly all and offers Perotti’s assessment of the work in a recent (“nuper”) letter in which “he said it ought to be called a treasury of philosophy,” alluding to

quam ingenio et doctrina in reprehensione sive obiurgatione meo sic enim inscripsi.” Consulted online at https://weblioteca.uv.es/cgi/view.pl?source=uv_ms_0375, as I was unable to obtain Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, “Un’ epistola di Andrea Contrario de Platonis genitura,” *PP* 8 (1953) 62–64.

⁷⁴ *Paris.lat.* 12947 132r: “In horribili nanque miseroque casu Euboeiae superiori aestate quum et publice et privatim sibi lugendum fuerit, non de statu decidit, mestior tamen fuit fortuna publica quam sua.”

⁷⁵ *Paris.lat.* 12947 72v: “Cum esses anno superiori traditus custodiae publicae accusatus capitali crimine quia accusatio partes omnes plene exhibebat ac defensionis praesidia fide invalida videbantur”; 80v: “Ita tu supra decennium adversus Platonem magnum opus scribere aggressus, ubi in lucem prodiit, explosa et repudiata superstitione tua anili universis et singulis ridiculus apparuisti.”

⁷⁶ *Paris.lat.* 12947 9r: “Accipe igitur, rex invictissime, pro tua mansuetudine et clementia, quae quodammodo in Tusculani otio ac requie exacta aestate a me scripta sunt.”

⁷⁷ Lotte Labowsky, *Bessarion’s Library and the Biblioteca Marciana* (Rome 1979) 147–156.

Perotti's alternative title for the work.⁷⁸ As Contrario was writing in early fall 1468, this must mean that Perotti's letter to Bessarion dates to November 1467.

Written in fall 1468, Contrario's *Rebuke* also attests to how far along the development of the *ASP* had come between fall 1467 and fall 1468. He refers to Book 5's corrections of George's translation of Plato's *Laws*. He also praises Bessarion for what he has recently been writing.⁷⁹ That he refers to a five-book *ASP* shows that Bessarion had already added the third book, in which he refutes George with scholastic authorities.⁸⁰ Thus by fall 1468, Bessarion had already ordered his new Book 3 from Giovanni Gatti and rewritten it to better fit his own style. By fall 1468, the *ASP* was a five-volume work. In the year that remained before the publication of the work in 1469, Bessarion added the final sixth book and had Perotti polish his Latin and give it a humanist sheen.⁸¹

Based on the evidence I have presented, a new chronology of the *ASP*'s publication process emerges:

Winter 1459/ Spring 1460	Bessarion finishes his first draft of the <i>ASP</i> and sends it to Gaza.
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⁷⁸ *Paris.lat.* 12947 54r: "Nuper Nicolaus pontifex Sipontinus omnis humanitatis specimen, scite, ut multa, philosophiae thesaurum quadam in epistola appellandum esse dixit." Cf. De Keyser, *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 52 (2011) 125 lines 69–71.

⁷⁹ *Paris.lat.* 12947 94r: "Argumento fit conversio tua, conversio dico, immo vero perversio in libris de legibus ubi non facile dixerim utrum maior fit ignoratio tua in verbis utriusque lingue an circa res et sententias ipsas, quae, bone vir, si vis cognoscere quam saepissime ibidem lapsus sis, non imperitia Graii sermonis, nunc ignoratione liberalium disciplinarum volve quintum defensionum librum"; 89v: "Igitur si nescis, bone magister, quae superioribus diebus Bessario erudite, accurate, cogitateque scripsit pro Platonis defensione, ea eloquentissimorum hominum iudicio sic probari video ut ad veterum philosophorum atque oratorum pervenirent."

⁸⁰ For the development of Book 3 see now Monfasani, *Ioannis Gatti*.

⁸¹ See n.16 above.

1460–fall 1466	Bessarion revises the <i>ASP</i> with Gaza's input.
Summer 1466	George plans to send the <i>Comparison</i> to Mehmet but is arrested instead.
Winter 1466/7	Bessarion commissions Fernando de Cordoba to assemble Latin citations proving his arguments.
Spring–Fall 1467	Bessarion adds the material obtained from Cordoba into U's predecessor. He assembles U, adding material in the margins with the help of Gaza.
Spring–Fall 1467	After George's release from prison, U is translated into Latin and Q (redaction α) is copied.
Spring–Fall 1467	Cordoba's work causes controversy. The Greek <i>Vat.gr.</i> 1435 is written. The Latin <i>Marc.lat.</i> 227, <i>Marc.lat.</i> VI 60, <i>Marc.lat.</i> 226, Berlin Staatsbibl. <i>Hamilton</i> 76 are written.
Fall 1467	Bessarion sends the three-book Latin redaction β to Perotti.
November 1467	Perotti sends a letter praising the <i>ASP</i> .
Winter 1467– Fall 1468	Bessarion adds Books 3 and 5 to the <i>ASP</i> . Redaction γ of the original three books is produced.
Fall 1468	Contrario completes his <i>Rebuke</i> .
Fall 1468– Summer 1469	Bessarion adds Book 6, while Perotti gives the work a Latin sheen before it goes to press.
Summer 1469	The <i>ASP</i> is printed.

4. Implications of the new dating schema

This article has shown that all the surviving draft manuscripts of the *ASP* were written in a short window between February 1467 and summer 1469. This new dating is not inconsequential, for it affects how we interpret Bessarion, his circle, and the broader politics of the time.

For example, this new dating schema makes it very difficult to trace the development of Bessarion's philosophical thought in-

dependently of that of his intellectual lieutenants. We do not possess his earliest draft of the text, written in 1459/60 before he wrote to Theodore Gaza asking for help with Book 2. Before, it was possible to imagine that U represented Bessarion's thought before Gaza intervened in the manuscript and actually to trace how Gaza influenced Bessarion's text. We can certainly use these same marginalia to see how Gaza intervened in 1467. At this time, Gaza was actively involved in the revision process in both Greek and Latin. Q includes at least one autograph intervention in Book 2.⁸² However, the earliest surviving Greek text of U must represent a later stage after the initial interventions of Gaza. For the purpose of reconstructing Bessarion's thought, Gaza's unpublished letter to Bessarion written after reading the 1459/60 version is now of paramount importance, as it summarizes and responds to some of Bessarion's arguments. Similarly, Cordoba's short treatise on Plato also becomes a document of prime importance as the second-earliest testimony to Bessarion's ideas before U was written.

More broadly, this redating also has consequences for how we think about the afterlife of Plethon and Bessarion's Platonic politics in Western Europe. All our draft manuscripts of the *ASP* date from after George's arrest in 1466. Something about this event lit a fire in Bessarion and impelled him to finish the work. As the details of George's arrest have been amply detailed elsewhere, there is no need to refer to them at length here.⁸³ But what we can say is that Bessarion had a large hand in ensuring George's arrest. It must have enraged Bessarion that George planned to send the Turk his *Comparison*, whose final chapters condemned Platonists for corrupting the Church with homosexuality and warned Westerners that Platonists would destroy the West just as they (i.e. Plethon and Bessarion) had destroyed

⁸² A slip of paper in his Greek handwriting was added at 49^v. His Latin handwriting is detectable throughout (e.g. 63^v–64^v, 69^r).

⁸³ On George's imprisonment the fundamental account is Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 192–194.

Byzantium.⁸⁴ The copy of the *Comparison* that George planned to send to the Turk abbreviated or omitted these chapters.⁸⁵ But as Pope Paul and other members of the papal curia investigated whether George was guilty of the charges against him, they would have read the text, especially after a cardinal (Bessarion?) had demanded that George be prosecuted during a consistorium of cardinals.⁸⁶ Whereas George's *Comparison* had circulated throughout the curia after its publication in 1458 in a limited way,⁸⁷ now it was circulating among the principal men of the Church.

When George was released from prison and his criticisms of Plato were circulating more widely than ever, Bessarion was humiliated and recognized that he needed to respond to the charges against Plato and Platonists which the papal curia had just read. He would not only show Westerners that Plato was in accord with their faith, but also that Plato's political views were workable and had not caused the destruction of societies, as George had claimed in the final chapters of his *Comparison*. Perhaps Niccolò Palmieri's 1467 refutation of Cordoba best gets at the issues at stake for Bessarion. Even though no one in Greece or Turkey was following Plato's laws, Palmieri claims, "many in the East affirm that it is necessary to live according to Plato's precepts, and that makes a man holy and blessed; nothing

⁸⁴ Monfasani, *Vindictio Aristotelis* 912–928.

⁸⁵ Our evidence of the later redaction of the *Comparison* comes from Perotti's response to George's *Annotations*, a lost response to Bessarion's *ASP*, in which he mentions George's later version in which insults to the clergy were removed: Cattaneo, *Domizio Calderini* 96–98. As Monfasani notes, manuscript Y may reflect these changes in its table of contents: *Vindictio Aristotelis* 424.

⁸⁶ So the account of the Milanese ambassador: Luigi Fumi, "Eretici in Boemia e fraticelli in Roma nel 1466 (lettere da Roma nell'Archivio di Stato di Milano)," *Archivio della Società Romana di storia patria* 34 (1911) 117–130, at 127.

⁸⁷ On its circulation see now Monfasani, *Vindictio Aristotelis* 424.

contrary is ordered by Christ in the Gospels.”⁸⁸ Bessarion and his circle are clearly the target here. Cordoba had compared Plato’s life to that of Christ, while Bessarion made no secret of his Platonic politics as a way to create the best possible society free from the Turks. In his 1444–1448 letter to the despot of Mistra, the future Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1449–1453), Bessarion had urged the implementation of Platonic politics in Byzantium along the lines previously proposed by his neopagan teacher George Gemistos Plethon, such as banishing gold and silver from the guardian class, in order to save the state from the Turks.⁸⁹ During his tenure as papal legate to Bologna (1451–1455), Bessarion would actually implement parts of those politics by restricting the wearing of gold and silver, a sumptuary law written in March 1453 as the Turkish storm cloud gathered around Constantinople.⁹⁰

But, to return to Palmieri, his point is that Platonic politics was

⁸⁸ *Montserrat* 882 7v: “Unde plures in partibus orientis affirmant quod preceptis Platonice vivere necessarium est, et illud utique sanctum et beatum facit hominem, nec aliud a Christo in Evangelica lege mandatur.”

⁸⁹ The letter has recently been reedited in Cattaneo, *Le lettere greche* 59–90. On the letter and its relationship with Plethon: Antonis Pardos, “Οι άξονες της ιδεολογίας του νέου Ελληνισμού στην άλλη Κωνσταντινούπολη: η παρακαταθήκη του Βησσαρίωνα: Λάσκαρης και Μουσουρός ανάμεσα στους Ελληνίδες της Βενετίας,” in N. Panayiotakis (ed.), *Ανθη Χαρίτων: μελετήματα εόρτια συγγραφέντα υπό των υποτρόφων του Ελληνικού Ινστιτούτου της Βενετίας* (Venice 1998) 527–568; Christos Baloglou, “Προτάσεις οικονομικής και κοινωνικής πολιτικής από τον Βησσαρίωνα,” *Βυζαντινός Δόμος* 5–6 (1992) 47–67; Agostino Pertusi, “In margine alla questione dell’umanesimo Bizantino: Il pensiero politico del cardinale Bessarione e i suoi rapporti con il pensiero di Giorgio Gemisto Pletone,” *RSBN* 5 (1968) 95–104; Jonathan Harris, “Cardinal Bessarion and the Ideal State,” in E. Konstantinou (ed.), *Der Beitrag der byzantinischen Gelehrten zur abendländischen Renaissance* (Frankfurt 2006) 91–98; Chryssa Maltezu, “Still More on the Political Views of Bessarion,” in *Der Beitrag* 99–106; Lenos Mavrommatis, “Ο καρδινάλιος Βησσαρίων και ο εκσυγχρονισμός της Πελοποννήσου,” *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 9 (1994) 41–50.

⁹⁰ Gianmario Cattaneo, “Recensione” (of V. Hladký, *The Philosophy of Gemistos Plethon*), *Medioevo greco* 15 (2015) 355–362, at 357–358, and *Le lettere greche* 82 n.68.

an oriental practice, something Westerners did not do. George himself kept a list of failures of Platonic politics in Eastern lands, blaming, for example, the failure of the despot of Mistra Constantine Palaiologos in 1448 on Plethon's (and by extension Bessarion's) Platonic politics.⁹¹ Similarly, he would even opine on the career of a former Plethonite Demetrios Rhaoul Kabakes who briefly governed Lemnos and Imbros until roughly 1463/4 under the direction of Constantine's brother Demetrios and the aegis of Mehmet II.⁹² In a 1469 letter to Bessarion, George would stress the failure of Kabakes' Platonic politics: "What about Lesbos? Does it not now lie devastated because it followed Plato through Tralles, an apostle of Gemistos?"⁹³ Through two slips of memory, George confused first the near homophones Lesbos and Lemnos and second misremembered Demetrios' Hellenized version of Rhaoul (Rhalles).

When Bessarion undertook to finish his defense of Plato in early 1467, then, he was responding to the inadequacy of Plato and the Platonic politics of Plethon and Plethonites as perceived in Western circles. George, who was trusted by the Pope, had invalidated a key foundation of Bessarion's philosophical and political beliefs. Worse yet, George had tried to spread his anti-Platonism to Bessarion's sworn enemy, Mehmet II. No friend of the Turks, Bessarion now saw it as his duty to defend Plato and his politics as fundamentally compatible with the Western tradition and not an oriental, Greek aberration. He had Cordoba assemble quotations from Augustine and others for him, which were then reprised in U and translated into Latin. His Book 3, added with the help of Giovanni Gatti, furthered this agenda,

⁹¹ Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana* 171.

⁹² Franco Bacchelli, "La *Considération céleste* et les *Enseignements* de Démétrius Rhaoul Kavàkis (avec deux lettres inédites de Gemistus Plethon)," *Noctua* 3 (2016) 164–238, at 180. The downfall of Demetrios after Mehmet's 1463 Bosnian campaign meant that all his household were scattered: Spyridon Lambros, *Ecthesis Chronica and Chronicon Athenarum* (London 1902) 23–25.

⁹³ Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana* 171: "Quid Lesbos? Nonne per Tralem quendam, Gemisti apostolum, secuta Platonem desolata modo iacet?"

providing a scholastic defense of Plato. In the Latin of Q, he would even respond to George's charge that Plato (and by extension Plethon and Bessarion) had destroyed Byzantium, parrying "If the Greeks of our age had kept these things, I say, which *both* Plato commanded and *all who have ever flourished*, they could not have perished. The Greeks did not fall because of Plato's laws but could have even been saved if they had administered their state according to the intent of these laws."⁹⁴ In the margin of Q, Bessarion ordered his scribe to add the words I have italicized here to the original draft, no doubt in order to echo Plethon. In his memorandum addressed to the Byzantine despot Theodore Palaiologos, Plethon had claimed that his Platonic reforms were based on universally true principles: "a good worthy constitution cannot come about in any other way than the way we have just discussed, which is what well governed cities have especially used throughout all time."⁹⁵ In equating universally successful laws with Plato's ideas, Bessarion covertly alluded to Plethon and asserted that Plato and Plethon's Platonic politics were a universal road to success: the problem had been that no one had taken their intent seriously enough. Andrea Contrario's unpublished *Rebuke* of 1468 perhaps reflects Bessarion's intent to obliquely defend Plethon's politics when it disparages George for attacking the neopagan Plethon, who "devoted himself entirely to the imitation of Plato."⁹⁶ The West needed more Plato, not

⁹⁴ Q 140^v–141^r: "Si haec, inquam, quae quae (*margin.* et) Plato praecipit et (*margin.* et omnes qui unquam claruere seruarunt), apud hos nostrae aetatis Graecos conservarentur nequaquam perire potuissent. Ita non solum propter Platonis leges Graeci non perierunt, sed servari etiam possent, si consilio earum legum (*margin.* suam rem publicam administrarent). Cf. Monfasani, *Liber Defensionum* 218 (misprinting *servati* for *servari*).

⁹⁵ Spyridon Lambros, *Παλαιολόγεια και Πελοποννησιακά* IV (Athens 1930) 130: οὐδ' ἄλλως ἢ γε σπουδαιοτάτη γένοιτ' ἂν πολιτεία ἢ ταύτη ἥπερ ἄρτι διεληλύθαμεν ἢ καὶ αἱ ἐν τῷ παντὶ ἤδη αἰῶνι εὐνομηθεῖσαι πόλεις μάλιστα ἐχρήσαντο.

⁹⁶ *Paris.lat.* 12947 71^r: "Sed neque Gemisto ex Peloponesso viro aetate

less.

As such, George and Bessarion's quarrel over Plato deserves more consideration than it is usually given in discussions of Byzantine-Western humanism, the Papacy, and the Turks.⁹⁷ It also deserves to be added as an epilogue to Plethon's and Bessarion's own proposed political reforms in the Peloponnese. As George attacked their 'failed' political agenda, Bessarion would obliquely defend that very agenda. As a thinker who was serious about making Plato reality, as we have seen, the controversy was in a sense very much about whether their proposed Byzantine reforms would be realized in the fractious cities of Italy. While Plethon had lacked real power, Bessarion would rule Bologna and almost become pope in 1455 and 1471. He could and did try to make the city of Plato's *Republic* an earthly reality.

5. Conclusion

This article has shown how fundamental George's attempt to send the *Comparation* to Mehmet II in 1466 was toward the completion of Bessarion's *ASP*. Written in 1459, the text was slowly worked upon until George's actions and his subsequent release from prison forced Bessarion to defend his Platonism against its alleged weaknesses. Sergei Mariev, the editor of Book 5 of the *ASP*, wonders why Bessarion devoted such attention to attacking George: "Was George of Trebizond really such a formidable opponent, such a major player on the intellectual stage of the second half of the 15th century, or was his *Comparatio* such a threat as to force Bessarion to channel much of the intellectual resources and energy of his entire learned circle into confuting this 'intellectual giant' and the opusculum that he had pro-

nostra et philosophia et eloquentia eminentissimo parcis, sed ei quod laudis, vitio das quod se totum ad imitationem Platonis, quasi tu tinctus litteris infusus non lotus viro consultissimo ulla ex parte esses conferendus." I reserve for elsewhere discussion of the full implications of this passage.

⁹⁷ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia 2006) 211–213, discusses only George's side of the quarrel.

duced?”⁹⁸ He wonders at the sheer intellectual labor devoted by Bessarion to refuting a minor figure like George and rightly suggests that introducing Plato to the West became Bessarion’s goal. While such a noble academic goal was fundamental to the *ASP* from its inception,⁹⁹ it was not the real impetus that finally drove Bessarion to publish the text. Hatred for George and politics were that impetus. After he had moved for George’s imprisonment for allegedly conspiring with the Turks in 1466, George’s release had embarrassed the cardinal. Worse yet, George’s criticisms of Plato, Plethon, and himself were now known by the highest members of the curia. While George’s *Comparison* had not really circulated much initially, now Bessarion felt compelled to defend not only Plato but also his own political Platonism to the West.¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁸ Sergei Mariev, “Bessarion against George of Trebizond on the Soul,” in *Bessarion’s Treasure* 237–280, at 237.

⁹⁹ So Bessarion to Gaza in 1459/60: Cattaneo, *Le lettere greche* 124.

¹⁰⁰ In the writing of this paper, I incurred a number of debts. First and foremost, to Dan Wolf who kindly visited the Biblioteca Vallicelliana during his Roman holiday to look at *Vallicelliana* I.22 for me. I would also like to thank colleagues Fabio Pagani and Cynthia Pyle for reading and discussing the paper with me. Special thanks are due to Ciro Giacomelli for drawing my attention to the issue of the watermarks in *Marc.gr.* 199. Finally, I would like to thank the peer reviewers and editorial staff of *GRBS* for their many sage suggestions and corrections. However, any further infelicities that remain are my own.