

Introduction

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Plato came after all these: sent to us from the gods so that
philosophy could through him be seen in its organic integrity.
He left nothing out and perfected everything,
neither falling short in what was necessary,
nor carried away into anything useless
(Atticus, fr. 1, trans. 1A BS)

If one had to provide a formal account of what ‘being a Platonist’ means, it would be tempting to refer to the broad idea that a Platonist is, in general, a follower of Plato, which implies a commitment to Plato’s authority. After all, this would be a reasonable description for all heirs of Plato, from the Academics – the scholars of the Academy were in any case the successors of Plato, and claimed for themselves the privilege of this relationship – to late-antique Platonists, who regarded themselves as exegetes and interpreters of Plato’s thought. Things are not that easy, however, for once one examines such a general account in detail a series of serious questions emerge. A first – and clearer – puzzle is related to the discontinuity of the tradition: while on the one hand one can say that there is a continuous stream of heirs of Plato from the Early Academy to late Neoplatonism, on the other it is quite obvious that, even admitting a strong continuity between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, the philosophical history of the ‘Platonist tradition’ from the Early Academy to the early Imperial Age hardly constitutes a unified whole. As a consequence, just stating that all followers of Plato were committed to his authority would amount to an empty and uninformative statement: the more one generalises the notion in order to make it comprehensive, the less it is specific and able to really include the distinguishing features of each stage of the tradition. So, the only way to make sense of this description is to systematically specify it on a case-by-case basis by asking when and in what form the idea of Plato’s authority was produced, and what transformations it underwent throughout the tradition. Furthermore, notwithstanding the fact that all those who

regarded themselves as Plato's heirs were committed to Plato's authority to some extent, this authority could either leave room for other important authorities or not, which in turn was crucial in order to shape specific conceptions of Plato's authority. In other words, the fact that Plato is an authority does not imply that, at each stage of the tradition, there is a single conception of authority, or that just one thinker – namely, Plato – is regarded as an authority. Finally, and most importantly, the fact that a thinker commits himself to the authority of Plato tells us nothing about the reasons why he did so, the function of this commitment, and the arguments (if any) he employed to sustain this claim. All in all, therefore, it emerges that if one wishes to really exploit the notion of authority as a way to access different stages of the Platonist tradition, specificity must be preferred to sensitivity, discontinuity to continuity, anomaly to homogeneity, debate to agreement. Such an enquiry into the notion of authority in the Platonist tradition has never been carried out, and the present volume fills this gap: it takes the aforementioned points as methodological boundaries and aims to produce a new narrative of the Platonist tradition by observing the different notions of authority and the different uses of authoritative texts which shaped it.

The narrative which this book develops is located within a well-established stream of studies. On the one hand, the Platonist tradition has been progressively made the object of extensive research concerning all periods of its development, from the Early Academy to late Neoplatonism, both in wide-ranging collections of papers (see, most recently, Tarrant et al. 2018) and editorial projects (especially the German *Der Platonismus in der Antike*), as well as in more focused, but still extensive, monographs. Indeed, studies on the philosophy of the Early Academy (e.g. Dillon 2003), the Hellenistic Academy (e.g. Brittain 2001 and Bonazzi 2003), Middle Platonism (Dillon 1977, and now Boys-Stones 2018a), and Neoplatonism (e.g. most recently, Gerson 2013 and d'Hoine & Martijn 2016) have highlighted specific, fundamental aspects of these philosophical movements. To put it briefly, the history of Platonism is currently a field of study in continuous expansion. On the other hand, scholarship has been progressively taking authority as a notion deserving a specific enquiry, both for its historical significance and its potentialities in revealing the commitments of intellectual movements or important authors. In this sense, authority proves a boundary-crossing notion, which can be examined both in itself, as an epistemological issue, or in relation to different fields of thought (see, most recently, Graßhoff & Meyer 2016 and König & Woolf 2017). In the latter case, it has proven particularly important in the

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consideration of ancient philosophical movements (see the papers collected in Bryan et al. 2018).

All this, however, represents more of a starting point for new research than a stable foundation. The point is *not only* that a comprehensive enquiry into the notion of authority in the Platonist tradition is still lacking, but that the notion of authority and its relation with those texts playing an important role in the Platonist tradition can shed light on the nature both of each stage in the tradition and of the tradition as a whole (only quite focused, yet fundamental, enquiries have appeared on specific stages of the tradition: see e.g. Sedley 1997, Ferrari 2001, Petrucci 2018: 146–97, Erler 2018, Boys-Stones 2018b; Opsomer & Ulacco 2016 represents a very intriguing attempt at defining epistemic authority with respect to social and historical dimensions, within the framework of a research project on the theme based at KU Leuven). More specifically, the assumption that a follower of Plato regards Plato as an authority potentially has the (much more promising) implication that, by discovering each follower's conception of Plato's authority, his or her strategies in relating Plato's authority to that of other thinkers, and the way in which these very conceptions and relations play an argumentative and constructive role in his or her thought, one is in a position to really understand crucial aspects of discontinuity and specificity within the Platonist tradition. In other words, if the focus is not on whether a follower of Plato is committed to Plato's authority, but rather on the real import of this commitment, its grounds and function, and the potential room left to other authorities, then it is possible to answer the following questions: What is the relationship between the representation of Plato's authority at a certain stage of the tradition and the philosophy characterising this particular stage? How is Plato's authority affected and reshaped by debates between the followers of Plato and other philosophies? Or, again, to what extent does the treatment of Plato's texts mirror a specific conception of the master's authority? The papers collected in this volume will answer these and related questions, thereby unravelling a new 'discontinuous' narrative of the Platonist tradition: paradoxically, the very fact of appealing to Plato's authority will prove a crucial and substantial element highlighting the philosophical peculiarities of different stages in the Platonist tradition.

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It is often assumed that a 'Platonist tradition' – as opposed, or at least contrasted, to the Academy – only really emerged in the early Imperial

Age. This might be correct from the point of view either of doctrines (i.e. the doctrines we usually identify as ‘Platonist’) or of self-representation (as is widely known, Plato’s heirs usually called themselves ‘Academics’ until the first century BC, and even beyond). If, however, one rather refers to the idea that followers of Plato regarded *Plato himself* as philosophical authority, then it can be argued that Platonism was founded within the Early Academy. Indeed, David Sedley’s twin papers on the Early Academy establish that a clear and well-defined notion of Plato’s authority had already emerged in the Early Academy, namely under Xenocrates (Chapters 1–2). Yet this cannot be taken just as an unqualified notion, or a generic statement. Rather, Plato’s authority was first established by Xenocrates in the specific sense that the second scholarch, going far beyond Plato’s intentions and at the same time addressing some of Speusippus’ views, reshaped Plato’s philosophy around a highly selective canon of dialogues, representing the core of Plato’s thought: these key texts are the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. Sedley shows that, in spite of its high degree of selectivity and partiality, such a choice ensures at least two fundamental pay-offs: first, Xenocrates was able to reduce Plato’s dialogical thought to a system of doctrines with strong textual bases in these dialogues, once their reciprocal consistency was shown; second, by appealing to these dialogues, Xenocrates was able to challenge and dismiss some of Speusippus’ views, or to incorporate them in his version of dogmatic Platonism. All this leads Sedley to regard Xenocrates as the founder of Plato’s authority, in the sense that he was the first to conceive Plato’s authority as the result of a dogmatic organisation of Plato’s thought through the establishment of a way of organising his writings; but he was also the first to address the issue of Plato’s authority by taking into account the contributions of other thinkers (namely, Speusippus) as well. To put it briefly, Xenocrates sought to be the first *true* faithful heir of Plato, the one deserving philosophical supremacy even within the school of Plato’s heirs. Moreover, it is likely that Xenocrates succeeded in this attempt, as Sedley’s iconographic interpretation of the ‘Mosaic of the Philosophers’ shows. By strongly supplementing recent interpretations and by discovering a subtle and elegant interplay of symbols and allusions, Sedley makes a scenario of investiture emerge out of the Mosaic: while Speusippus and Aristotle are represented as deviating from Plato’s teaching – and in turn as being ignored by Plato – Plato himself symbolically ensured Xenocrates’ authoritative legacy by teaching the latter’s cosmological doctrine, and in such a way Xenocrates himself gained the role of an authority as Plato’s heir. The Mosaic, then, represents a vivid picture of the

emergence of Plato's authority, and in turn highlights the fact that Platonism was born with Xenocrates *because* a very specific notion of Plato's legacy arose with him.

This representation brings out some crucial aspects grounding the emergence of the notion of Plato's authority, such as the attempt to reconstruct a dogmatic doctrine based, on the one hand, on the selection of a canon of Platonic texts and, on the other, on the use of such texts in order to claim a specific relation with the master, one which is stricter than that ascribable to other heirs of his. A continuous and flattening idea of authority might be taken to exclude that the very notion of authority played any significant role after Arcesilaus' sceptical shift. Anna Maria Ioppolo's paper (Chapter 3) shows that this is not the case, and sheds light on the way in which authority was used as an argument by Arcesilaus. As a matter of fact, it is recognised nowadays that Arcesilaus made a significant effort to lay claim to Plato and Socrates' legacy: albeit within the new framework of Arcesilaus' sceptical stance, the founder of the school was still regarded as an eminent authoritative figure. As Ioppolo argues, however, this is only a part of the story, for Arcesilaus' polemic against the Stoics was also based on the appeal to other philosophical authorities and their connection with Plato. Rather than merely establishing Socrates and Plato as the founders of a sceptical tradition, Arcesilaus also appropriated the authority of Heraclitus, which the Stoics claimed for themselves. This move had a crucial pay-off: on the one hand, it undermined the Stoic appeal to Heraclitus as an authoritative ancestor for their psychological doctrine; on the other, given the role Heraclitean doctrines play in Plato's *Theaetetus*, Arcesilaus' affirmation of Heraclitus' authority is in any case strictly bound to Plato's. All this means that affirming the authority of certain philosophical ancestors is a strategic move which in itself transcends the commitment to a system, and can rather be conceived of as an argument aimed at undermining rival positions and establishing a sceptical philosophical identity.

Also in this case, one might wonder whether there is any substantial link between Arcesilaus' scepticism and this 'formal' use of authority as an argument: the chapters on the first century BC show that this is not the case. As Federico M. Petrucci shows (Chapter 4), one can really place Antiochus in the Platonist tradition and understand his role therein by avoiding any commitment to the fact that his doctrines are either Platonist or Stoic. Rather, Antiochus' contribution to the history of Platonism relies on the (re-)discovery of a notion of dogmatic authority which is substantially anterior and primary with respect to the content of the system which

this notion frames: Antiochus wanted to build up a *formal* argument for Plato's authority ensuring both the possibility that the latter may have construed a positive system and his supremacy over other Hellenistic thinkers. This construction also serves a crucial function against specific adversaries, namely the Academic sceptics: paradoxically, Antiochus turned against the sceptics an argument, that of the authority of eminent ancestors, which – as we have seen – they used against the Stoics. At the same time, however, there is one aspect of Antiochus' conception of Plato's authority which is key and peculiar: by implicitly recovering and rethinking a nuance in Xenocrates' operation – as described by David Sedley in Chapters 1–2 – Antiochus stressed the fact that, in order to establish the authority of the master, one should also be able to effectively account for a *specific* relationship between the master himself and his heirs. Antiochus' solution is based in the possibility of drawing a continuous stream of positive teaching stemming from Plato. This pattern can also be exploited in a different way, as emerges from Eudorus' Pythagorising view of Plato: Plato was not only the founder of the Academy and the one who taught a positive system of doctrines to his students, but also a privileged heir of the Pythagoreans. To put it briefly, authority in first-century Platonism is strictly bound to the existence of a *diadochē*. Interestingly, this is also the intellectual strategy at the basis of the production of a peculiar *corpus* of writings related to the Platonist tradition, namely the *Pseudopythagorica*. As Bruno Centrone shows (Chapter 5), although the logic according to which the fictional authors were selected seems obscure, it is possible to discover very precise reasons why the forgers wanted both Archytas and minor Pythagoreans to be credited with such writings. By reconsidering extant testimonies on Pythagoras and the Pythagorean *diadochē*, Centrone demonstrates that the forgers wanted to ascribe a particular authority to – or, conversely, regarded as authoritative – those Pythagoreans who were directly linked to Pythagoras as *diadochoi* of the 'school' in Iamblichus' *The Pythagorean Life* (265–6). In other words, just as in the case of Antiochus' argument for Plato's authority, the very possibility of establishing a continuous teaching tradition within a school preserves its dogmatic unity, and singles out the founder's authority, but also ensures the transmission of this authority throughout the succession. And it is telling for our narrative that the last name in the Pythagorean *diadochē* – and the fictional author of most of the *Pseudopythagorica* – was Archytas of Tarentum, who was in turn usually associated with Plato. All in all, therefore, a substantial reshaping and argumentative use of the notion of authority was key to the attempt of ensuring the possibility of a positive

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Platonist philosophy at the dawn of the Imperial Age: far from being a somewhat superficial commitment, developing an effective notion of authority, along with a set of specific relevant assumptions, was a fundamental strategic move in the revival of dogmatic philosophy.

It is very telling that, while from the point of view of doctrines the first century BC could hardly be regarded as having set the standards for post-Hellenistic Platonism, the chapters on the Middle Platonists Numenius and Plutarch show that its notion of authority proved seminal. This emerges clearly in Alexandra Michalewski's paper on Numenius (Chapter 6). Numenius' attempt to challenge the Academic interpretation of Plato is closely intertwined with the search for a specific doctrinal identity for post-Hellenistic Platonism: in both respects, as Michalewski shows by focusing on Numenius' theology, the affirmation of an ancestor's authority plays a crucial role in Numenius' strategy. Indeed, on the one hand he identified Pythagoras as the holder of ancestral and pure wisdom, whose core had been inherited by Plato; on the other, and unexpectedly, he also wanted Socrates to be the coiner of Plato's theology. In this way Numenius was able to *create* a unique pedigree for Plato's philosophy, at once rejecting all possible sceptical interpretations of his thought based on Socrates' teaching and placing Plato within a tradition of ancient lore. Rather than merely representing a superficial fiction, then, Numenius' construction of the authority of Plato's 'masters' was a way to secure, in turn, the authority of a specific version of Plato's philosophy, namely a dogmatic and Pythagorising one. It is not by chance that, as Michalewski shows, when Proclus came to attack Numenius' demiurgy he also – and first – had to dismiss Numenius' specific narrative of Plato's authority. All this led Numenius to regard Plato's authority not as a fideistic commitment, but as an argumentative weapon, or a notion to be shaped on the basis of specific exigencies – the intriguing implication being that the very idea of Plato's authority could not be regarded as a blind dogma. But could one go so far as to claim that Plato's authority was provisional, or hypothetical? This is the challenging view which George Boys-Stones discusses in his paper on Plutarch (Chapter 7). By taking the overall structure of the *De E apud Delphos* as a manifesto of Plutarch's Platonism, Boys-Stones reveals that Plato's primacy is not taken for granted as such by Plutarch, but is rather bound to the fact that Plato is an authority inasmuch as he was acquainted with the truth. Accordingly, a scenario in which people other than Plato reach the truth, and hence are as authoritative as Plato, is entirely possible to envisage. This view has two crucial consequences. First, within a framework in which authority is a topic of

debate and may involve several philosophers, Plutarch makes a further actor enter the stage, namely each person who practises philosophy: Plato's authority is a sort of working hypothesis, which is fundamental until one becomes oneself a philosopher, who is able to grasp the truth autonomously. Second, while admitting the priority of Plato as a teacher, Plutarch's view of philosophical authority represents a theoretical model justifying the possibility of *multiple* epistemic authorities.

At this point, the Platonist debate has reached the boundary between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, and post-Hellenistic Platonism can be regarded as contributing at least two key ideas related to the notion of authority. First, and more generally, Plato's authority is an argumentative tool, or a working hypothesis, rather than a blind commitment. Second, Plato's role as an authority is not isolated, but dialectical: the establishment of Plato's authority must be framed within a wider scenario, in which other thinkers can play important roles for specific exigencies. These ideas will still prove fundamental in later Platonism, which however, as it emerges in Chapters 8–11, develops them in a very different way, and on the basis of profoundly different philosophical needs. This is of particular importance, for the issue of the continuity of the Platonist tradition from the post-Hellenistic Age to Late Antiquity is a much-debated one, and some scholars have proposed to simply abolish it (see, most recently, Catana 2013). By contrast, the papers concerning Neoplatonism testify to an actual shift, starting from Riccardo Chiaradonna's contribution on the authority of Aristotle in Plotinus and Porphyry (Chapter 8). By studying the reception of Aristotle's *Physics* as a test-case, Chiaradonna argues that this text has a pivotal position in Plotinus' metaphysics and physics, but also that Plotinus' attitude towards it was generally critical. In this sense, Porphyry takes Plotinus' attitude one step further, since he not only regards Aristotle's *Physics* as a fundamental text, but also makes it *authoritative for his Platonist physics* by establishing a close interaction between it and Plato's *Timaeus*. The point is that we are far from any vague appeal to Peripatetic notions (see already Petrucci 2018: 104–27, for the Middle Platonist background). Indeed, from Plotinus onwards, *Aristotle's authority* and the use of some of his writings *as authoritative texts* become central, albeit with significant nuances: while Plotinus is ready to acknowledge Aristotle's role as an 'authoritative' polemical target by specifically dealing with his texts and carefully appropriating some of his philosophical claims, Porphyry starts regarding Aristotle's philosophy and texts as unavoidable Platonist devices. In other words, the attempt to conceptualise Aristotle's authority and to adapt it to a Platonist perspective is the framework within

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which the well-known Neoplatonist harmonisation of Plato and Aristotle must be set. This does not imply, however, that after Porphyry one must envisage a flat and homogeneous scenario: rather, the specific issue of how to appropriate Aristotle's doctrine and, consequently, of how to square Plato's and Aristotle's authority, becomes crucial in itself in later Neoplatonism, as Saskia Aerts shows (Chapter 9). As a matter of fact, the project of harmonising Aristotle and Plato and of regarding them *both* as authorities – albeit to different extents – also implies dealing with all those texts and doctrines which seem to sharply contradict one another, and this requires the production of exegetical strategies and ways to balance them. This clearly emerges from Hermias' and Simplicius' treatment of the doctrine of the self-moving soul, a core Platonic doctrine which was severely criticised by Aristotle. Aerts shows to what extent the commitment to the joint authority of both Plato and Aristotle can lead Platonists to exegetical twists and extreme harmonising strategies: moving along the broad lines of the Middle Platonist opening to several authoritative figures, by focusing on Aristotle's role and elevating him to a very high status these authors had to produce a new ideological framework for the management of the issue of multiple authorities.

This is only a part of the story, however, for the Neoplatonists also felt the need to develop and discuss an issue which had already emerged at the dawn of the tradition, with Xenocrates, and had proved important in Middle Platonism, namely the sense in which everyone doing philosophy should conceive his or her own relationship with Plato as an authority. Interestingly, as Christian Tornau shows by focusing on Proclus and Simplicius (Chapter 10), Plato's authority in Neoplatonist schools is not experienced as a direct relationship, but requires mediator-teachers, or *kathēgemones*, ensuring access to Plato's authoritative texts and doctrines and hence becoming, because of this role, authorities themselves, although at a remarkably lower level than Plato. This is not just an extrinsic construction, for the triadic pattern which emerges from this conception (Plato, teacher, student of philosophy) is in turn grounded in Neoplatonist metaphysics, and hence in Plato's dialogues. In other words, the Neoplatonists provided their school activity and learning of Platonism with a formal conception of philosophical teaching based on Plato's texts: the Neoplatonist theory of the *kathēgemōn* as a mediator highlights the importance of oral guidance for anyone seeking to become acquainted with Plato's texts, each level entailing a specific kind of authority. Of course, this also meant exploiting to some extent the way in which doing philosophy is presented in Plato's dialogues: this is a very intriguing issue,

for apparently the dialogue form could discourage the formation of any system, and any insistence on this literary aspect could be regarded as dangerous for Neoplatonists. But, as Anne Sheppard shows (Chapter 11), the opposite is the case. By focusing her enquiry on Proclus, Olympiodorus, and the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*, Sheppard highlights the way in which later Neoplatonists of the fifth and sixth centuries AD conceived of Plato's dialogues as a very specific form of *drama*, namely one that turned the lively personalities found in the pages of Plato into metaphysical abstractions. In this sense, Plato's dialogues became authoritative not only as bearers of doctrines, but also as metaphysically unique pieces of philosophical literature, and in turn the very literary analysis of the dialogues became a way to *demonstrate* Plato's authority.

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This volume narrates the emergence and metamorphoses of the notion of authority from the very beginning of the Platonist tradition to Late Antiquity, with no significant gaps: highlighting the complex discontinuity, multiple shifts, and several reformulations and applications which the notion of authority progressively underwent is one of the pay-offs of the diachronic structure we have opted for. This does not imply, however, that the Platonist tradition developed views about Plato's authority in a radically episodic way. On the contrary, there are other hidden paths within this volume which point to the persistence of issues throughout the tradition and which, more generally, reveal a synchronic dialogue within it. For instance, a fundamental point related to Plato's authority is the treatment of thinkers other than Plato, who can be challenged through specific conceptions of authority or, on the opposite side of the spectrum, can in turn be viewed as authorities: the very beginning of the Platonist tradition coincides with Xenocrates' response to his predecessor Speusippus; the combination of Plato's authority with that of other thinkers plays a fundamental role both in Arcesilaus' polemics against the Stoics and in the Middle Platonist polemic against Arcesilaus himself; and the squaring of Plato's authority with Aristotle's is a crucial issue in Neoplatonism. Similarly, the issue of the correct way to appeal to, and use, Plato's dialogues as authoritative texts is constantly at stake. As a matter of fact, the birth of Plato's authority is bound to the selective use of some dialogues by Xenocrates, namely the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*, while Arcesilaus construed his narrative of the authority of Plato and