The influence of Plato on the thought and literature of late antiquity has long been noted; more recently, however, there has been a focus on the impact of Plato on later antiquity. In the last decade or so, the term “Third Sophistic” that is used in the title of this volume has been ventured to refer to later antique literature, sometimes specifying different periods of time or covering various lists of texts. As the Prolegomena to this volume suggests, the term might be helpfully applied to the literature written after the “Third Century Crisis,” when Christianity was taking on an entirely new status within the Empire, up to the point at which the Hellenic παιδεία seems to have been adopted and adapted to a new order and culture at the end of the sixth century. With the application of the term “Third Sophistic” to this period, the hope is that readers of late and later antique texts might take careful note of the remarkable similarities between Christian and non-Christian literature written during the Second Sophistic and this later period. At the same time, we can remain aware of new issues concerning the ownership of urban and religious space, the literary canon and issues of “orthodoxy” (Christian and philosophical), and the full impact of the emerging New Philosophy on Hellenic and Roman identities.

This volume gathers together studies of Christian and non-Christian orators, historians, theologians, and philosophers with the purpose of further documenting the differences as well as emphasizing the similarities in these authors’ concerns, methods of argumentation, and goals as expressed often through their understanding and various uses of Plato and his philosophy within their own works. Our purpose is to argue that these various approaches to Plato are dynamic, subtle, and often idiosyncratic, that each of these authors (and their works) is worth his own detailed study, while they should be understood at the same time to be part of a rich and discernible religious and political landscape.

In Section 1 of this volume, which focuses on non-Christian Platonist philosophers, the first three contributors qualify—and in a sense correct—common views of those writing under the banner of Platonism during the fourth and fifth centuries; in these essays we move from later Neoplatonism through the Athenian school, and on to the so-called last Platonist in Alexandria.

John Finamore discusses Iamblichus’ (c. 245–c. 325 C.E.) De Mysteriis as a rebuttal of what he saw as the false argumentation of his fellow Platonists. Though Iamblichus favored an approach to philosophical enlightenment that depended heavily on ritualistic and religious beliefs, Finamore argues that there is much more rationalism in Iamblichus’ writings than they are given credit for. In fact, Iamblichus is not any more irrational than many of his Platonic predecessors. By exploring two areas that would be referred to by twentieth-century analytic philosophers as “irrational” (demonology and the souls of the dead), Finamore shows that “one person’s irrational is another’s serious philosophical concern.” His analysis explores how Iamblichus’ doctrine not only solves problems within his contemporaries’ and predeces-
 tors’ views, it also is more coherent and more thorough than theirs. In the end, Iamblichus gives a rational explanation for the workings of two pressing issues of his times: that is, the role of daemons and souls of deceased human beings in contemporary religion.

Damian Caluori agrees with other modern studies which suggest that there are reasons to believe that relations between Platonism and rhetoric in Athens during the fifth century CE were rather close: both were major pillars of the Hellenic παιδεία and both were essential elements in paganism’s defense against an increasingly powerful Christianity. Although there is some truth to the view that philosophers and orators were united in their efforts to maintain traditional ways and values, a closer look reveals that the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric was more complicated than at first glance. With an eye on the Platonist schools of Athens and Alexandria, he explores their members’ reactions towards rhetoric, the role that rhetorical texts played in the canonical course of study at the Platonist schools, and the philosophical interest that fifth-century Platonists had in rhetoric. One important notion that emerged at this time was that true rhetoric must reflect an informed understanding regarding the proper way to govern a city, which would only have been available to someone familiar with the noetic realm. Thus, rhetoric for Platonists ideally serves an important function in the political sphere. However, before one has reached the Platonic aim regarding one’s soul, rhetoric might be viewed as nothing more than a distraction. That is, except perhaps in one case: employment. Caluori notes that we are able to explain the existence of Platonist sophists because jobs teaching rhetoric outnumbered opportunities to teach philosophy.

Michael Griffin’s essay offers some reflections on Olympiodorus’ conception of his philosophy and pedagogy. First, Olympiodorus’ “pliable” treatment of pagan doctrines and philosophy for his Christian students reflects his self-portrayal in the classroom “as the master of the syncretic language of Hellenic philosophy which is uniquely able to ‘translate’ between ordinary people, educated people, and different religious traditions.” Second, Olympiodorus’ construction of the “philosopher” distinguishes him from οἱ πολλοί, the γραμματικός, the rhetorician, and the poet. Third, Olympiodorus strives to convince his pupils that philosophers alone—including himself—do not operate at the level of symbols, but in fact teach πράγματα, which are their real referents. As a result, we can understand philosophers as being in a unique position to teach true virtue.

Section 2, which travels up to the end of the fourth century, includes essays about Christian and non-Christian orators who were engaged with Plato’s work and legacy. This section moves us from North Africa to the East, to rest for the moment in Constantinople.

Kristina Meinking explores the moments at which the Christian apologist Lactantius appears to engage with Plato or the philosophical traditions he associated with Plato—Socrates, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. Her list follows Lactantius’ own philosophical doxography, while echoing the combinations of previous philosophers in the treatise itself. Lactantius’ lumping together of all philosophers from Socrates
through Seneca in his *De ira Dei* is pragmatic, but is also, importantly, structural. Meinking shows that Lactantius engages with Greek philosophers in strategic ways, but by focusing on the *De ira Dei*, she is able to show that the work is surprising not only because of its less common theory of divine wrath, but also for the particular way Lactantius uses various philosophical figures and ideas. Despite his general dissatisfaction with philosophers, Lactantius’ use of key philosophical tenets means that Plato and the Platonic tradition survive in this text, albeit through restrained expressions. And it is because of this discernible Platonic expression that Lactantius merits study alongside other authors of the early Third Sophistic—for example, Methodius and Porphyry. Finally, Meinking argues that the particular ways in which Platonism exists in Lactantius’ texts can help illuminate by the way of contrast how Greek authors of this time period responded to Platonic philosophy.

“Over the work of the sophist Libanius,” Bernard Schouler writes, “hovers the great shadow of Plato.” This presence does not, however, involve any allegiance to a particular type of Platonism: Plato is invoked in solemn or familiar moments, not as a spiritual guide, but as an undisputed master of Greek style. But at a time when Plato’s theology was attracting attention, Libanius remains separate from that movement, despite his personal ties to contemporary philosophers. For this interest, Schouler writes, we should not blame his commitment as a sophist, per se, nor should we infer any aversion to the religious and deliberately mystical nature of Neoplatonism, since he did not avoid religion or piety. Instead, Libanius is a man of tradition, and his religiosity reflects his inherited, traditional Hellenic worship. Schouler’s examination shows that in his use of Plato, Libanius brings Socrates into his own century. But far from yielding to any pressure from contemporary Neoplatonism, as has often been claimed, Libanius was working to separate Socrates from Plato, in that Socrates taught true life lessons. The charm emanating from Plato’s works seduced Libanius, as—alongside Demosthenes and Thucydides—examples of the height of Greek prose.

Michael Schramm investigates why Julian, after he became Emperor in 362 CE, did not include Themistius in his strategy for political reform, despite the fact that his former teacher was one of the leading pagan orators and philosophers of the second half of the fourth century CE. And though Themistius’ career didn’t seem to suffer irrevocably from the oversight, several reasons account for the distance between the former student and his teacher. Schramm shows that Themistius diverges from Julian in his theory of kingship and above all in the role that piety plays for the king. It is not surprising, then, that Julian sought philosophical advice from Maximus of Ephesus and Priscus who, in the tradition of Iamblichus, taught the connection between theurgy and philosophy, and who supported Julian’s preference for divination and other ritual practices. As a result of his tolerant paganism, Themistius would not have been taken into consideration as an advisor and educator, even if Julian may still have valued him as a former teacher. In point of fact, despite their partial agreement, the distance between the leading panegyrist of the second half of the fourth century CE and the last pagan emperor seems mutually acceptable.
Taking a different approach, Robert Penella writes that Themistius, though a pagan philosopher and a teacher of philosophy, proves himself a master rhetorician; it emerges from his orations that rhetoric was also an important tool for him. What is more, we see that in the wide range of canonical authors found within his public and private orations, Plato holds a place of honor. In fact, Plato’s only serious competitor for first place in Themistius’ orations is Homer. In this study, Penella significantly adds to our understanding of the relationship between Themistius and Plato by first distinguishing between two different uses of Platonic material in his orations. Second, he looks at how Plato is presented in the orations in the company of other authorities—not all of them philosophical. Plato emerges as a special case among the authors Themistius displays in his orations: he belongs to a philosophical canon, but because of his extraordinary linguistic and stylistic credentials, Plato also belongs to a literary canon. In his examples, Penella shows that when Themistius juxtaposes the philosophical Plato with literary figures, we might read this comparison as displaying the literary Plato among his own kind.

Section 3 includes discussions of the historian and exegete Eusebius and the Cappadocian Fathers, which moves us from Themistius and Constantinople, down through the Cappadocian plateaus, to Eusebius’ Caesarea.

George Karamanolis writes that because Eusebius was living in an age of transition, he aims to justify Christianity not only by showing its superiority to pagan culture and philosophy, but also by demonstrating that the best part of paganism is in agreement with Christianity (and indeed anticipated a number of its elements). According to Karamanolis, this relationship is most clear in the philosophy of Plato, whom Eusebius praises as the best philosopher—or, rather, the best pagan philosopher. The question Karamanolis raises is how Eusebius’ pronouncement of Plato as the best of all pagan philosophers should in fact be understood. In the end, Karamanolis envisions Eusebius as a Platonist of a certain sort, completely different from Plotinus or Porphyry.

As David Bradshaw shows, the work of the Cappadocian Fathers represents some of the finest literary output to emerge from Christianity as it continued to develop in later antiquity. Bradshaw argues that the quality and richness of their work was due to, among other things, the Cappadocians’ “Janus-faced attitude toward pagan culture.” Their classical educations allowed them to draw freely upon pagan models for both philosophical content and literary style, while at the same time being fully aware that with Christianity something new had entered the world. This orientation—looking around them as well as back to the Hellenic past—was reflected acutely in their attitudes toward Plato. The Cappadocians occasionally mention Plato with respect, and of course there are many unacknowledged borrowings throughout their work which Bradshaw draws our attention to; however, the Cappadocians’ evident appreciation for Plato does not prevent them from also being sharply critical. Bradshaw focuses on what seem to be the most important thematic resonances between Plato and the Cappadocians; through adoption and reworking, they subtly transformed Platonic ideas. According to Bradshaw’s analysis, the Cappado-
cians’ view of life as iconic is, among other things, humble. It is natural, then, that Plato, as perhaps the most capacious and modest philosopher in his approach, was for the Cappadocians a reliable ally and guide.

In her contribution, Ilaria Ramelli analyses Plato’s impact on Origen’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s protology and eschatology. She shows that what was important for Origen was, first, the role of Plato’s myths in his conception of the ἀρχή and the τέλος, and, second, his correction of some aspects of Plato’s doctrine of creation and eschatology. Ramelli is able to detail a remarkable convergence between Plato and Origen within their uses of mytho-allegorical discourse. In addition, Ramelli examines the reception of Plato in Gregory’s protology and eschatology as deeply inspired by Origen. By illustrating Gregory’s own conception of the ἀρχή and the τέλος, which far from counters Origen’s (as is often maintained), Ramelli surprisingly shows that Gregory’s approach to the beginning of Genesis is in line with Origen’s, while his approach to Revelation is significantly different.

Moving to Gaza in our last section (Section 4), we include one discussion of the sophist and rhetorician Choricius, and a discussion of the Gazan authors Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius. Though there has recently been increased interest in the literature of fifth- and sixth-century Gaza, all of these authors deserve much more attention.

Though the Platonic influence on the style and contents of Choricius’ prose has long been recognized, Claudia Greco’s contribution shows that his selection of material and elaboration of Platonic passages display an extensive knowledge of the dialogues. As well, his discussions show independent reflection concerning Plato’s discussions about poetic creation, questions that Choricius himself also dealt with. Greco reviews the many allusions to theoretical principles found in the Dialexeis, as well as their concrete literary realization and conceptual foundation. According to her analysis, Choricius’ Muse emerges as a synthesis of all that is beautiful and good—a spell for the soul, which, through the sweetness of speech and word, reaches philosophical truths. That said, Choricius is not primarily an abstract thinker, and so he applies these considerations to the more concrete events of a life well lived. Greco’s discussion shows that the selection of lexical formulae and the adoption of specific terminology do not reflect thoughtless formal adherence to a set repertoire, but are the result of serious reflection and dialogue.

Also in Section 4, Michael Champion describes the Gazans Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius as all stimulated by a renewed challenge from the Neoplatonists, transforming the Platonic tradition as they constructed their own Academies. Earlier in the fifth century, the Athenian Neoplatonist Proclus had published his Eighteen Arguments for the Eternity of the World as well as his Commentary on the Timaeus, and both works acted as a catalyst for renewed Christian and Neoplatonic thinking about the creation and eternity of the cosmos. The debates of the Gazan authors bridge the space between Proclus and their own sixth-century disputes, and are evidence of Christian thinking about the doctrine of creation, the social dynamics within these rhetorical schools, and the activities of their teachers.
Yet while these Gazan authors seek to turn Plato and Platonism against their Neoplatonic opponents, they also appropriate the Platonic tradition in order to communicate both with their contemporary opponents as well as with their Christian audience. As a result, the Gazan use of Platonism is not simply destructive; Champion’s analysis suggests that Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius each believed that Greek philosophy could be useful in the formation of Christian ideas, as they simultaneously argued for the continued use of philosophy and at the same time rejected connections between philosophy and heterodox religious practices in the schools of late antiquity. As a result, a century of Christian and pagan philosophers and rhetors in the early Byzantine East contributed to the tradition of the Third Sophistic; careful study of the arguments from Gaza help to cast light on these late antique activities.

In a number of ways, Champion’s discussion of the simultaneous use and rejection of Plato in the literature of Gaza is a fitting way to end a volume exploring the use of Plato during the Third Sophistic. Christianity’s complicated and diverse responses to Hellenism in general, and specifically to Plato, show a kind of repulsion coupled with a dependency. Although one would not always immediately sense it by reading individual works by the ancient authors in this volume, it is now nearly impossible to imagine late antique Christianity or rhetoric without Plato: as an enemy, a source, an inspiration, or an accomplice—at times, it seems that Plato can be all of these things simultaneously. Individually and collectively, the essays in this volume demonstrate the degree to which Plato is the touchstone with which we can evaluate our own understanding of thematic and ideological trajectories in late antique literature.