

# Middle Platonism and its Literary Reflections

3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**Organisers:** Ben Cartlidge (Liverpool) Leonardo Costantini (Freiburg)

## Conference Program

**\*N.B.:** Time is given according to Freiburg time zone (UTC + 01:00)

### DAY 1

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> July

**10:15-10:30** 'welcomes' (Ben Cartlidge/Leonardo Costantini)

#### **SESSION 1 (chair: H.-G. Nesselrath)**

**10:30-11** M. Trapp (KCL), 'What becomes of Platonic myths?'

**11-11:30** T. Kondo (Hokkaido University), 'Plato's *Laws* in Musonius Rufus and Clement of Alexandria'

#### **BREAK**

#### **SESSION 2 (chair: J. Mossman)**

**12-12:30** C. Flaig (Freie Universität Berlin), '*Cibus ad virtutem non pertinet?* Philosophical ramifications of food metaphors in the first century CE'

**12:30-13** B. Cartlidge (Liverpool), 'Middle Platonic themes in Athenaeus, or What the *Deipnosophists* owes to Plato's *Phaedo*'

#### **LUNCH BREAK**

#### **SESSION 3 (chair: M. Trapp)**

**2:30-3** C. Mársico (Buenos Aires), 'Aelius Aristides and Maximus of Tyre as sources of Socratic philosophies and their impact in epistolography'

**3-3:30** L. Costantini (Freiburg), 'Platonising traits in Fronto's *Letters*'

**3:30-4** H.-G. Nesselrath (Göttingen), 'Middle Platonists in Lucian'

## DAY 2

4<sup>th</sup> July

### SESSION 4 (chair: L. Costantini)

**10:30-11** E. Ramsey (Wellington College), 'Cosmology in the New Academy: Cicero's translation of the *Timaeus*'

**11-11:30** L. Pasetti (Bologna), 'A Middle Platonic allegorical reading of Homer's *Odyssey* as a key for the closure of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*'

### BREAK

### SESSION 5 (chair: B. Cartlidge)

**12-12:30** J. Mossman (Coventry), 'Plutarch, Etymology and Plato's *Cratylus*'

**12:30-13** A. Zadorozhnyy (Liverpool), 'From the horse's mouth: Plato's vocabulary and authority in Pollux's *Onomasticon*'

### LUNCH BREAK

### SESSION 6 (chair: A. Zadorozhnyy)

**2:30-3** D. Dundua (Oxford), 'Ways of seeing and ways of knowing: Some Platonic themes in Philostratus and Maximus of Tyre'

**3-3:30** C. Hilton (Bryn Mawr), 'Maximus of Tyre and Middle Platonic approaches to Platonic myth'

**3:30-5** Round-table discussion (for speakers)

## Conference Abstracts

### **Middle Platonic themes in Athenaeus, or What the *Deipnosophists* owes to Plato's *Phaedo***

Ben Cartlidge  
University of Liverpool

That the *Deipnosophists* owes much to the *Phaedo* was already known to the Byzantine Epitomator. This paper resumes the agenda set in 2000 by Trapp's study of Platonic reminiscences in Athenaeus. It argues that Athenaeus' use of the *Phaedo* is influenced by the interest the dialogue enjoyed among the Middle Platonists (as well as other schools) in the second century; the evidence for this is briefly reviewed (particularly examining Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* and the relevant fragments of Harpocration of Argos). Furthermore, specific doctrines of the *Phaedo* are shown to have had especial importance for Athenaeus' project, particularly the doctrine of *Anamnesis*. Thus, the reception of Plato in literary dialogue at the end of the second century has both doctrinal and stylistic components. Furthermore, Athenaeus is raised above the status of a merely derivative and compilatory writer. He is engaged in a project deeply indebted to intellectual currents of the time – philosophical as well as linguistic, lexical, and cultural historical.

### **Platonising traits in the *Correspondence* between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius**

Leonardo Costantini  
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

Increasing attention has been devoted to the cultural and literary relevance of the *Correspondence* of Fronto, the renowned rhetorician and tutor of the future emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Yet, a critically underresearched aspect of Fronto's letters remains his debt to contemporary Platonism, especially on a stylistic level. Regardless of Fronto's own philosophical views, Plato is held in high regard (e.g. *laud. fum.* 4: *ille diuinus philosophus*), and references to Platonic writings serve to enrich the literary patina of Fronto's letters. This same appreciation can be noted in some of the letters by Marcus Aurelius transmitted in Fronto's corpus, as well as in Marcus Aurelius' own *Meditations*.

This paper aims to explore Fronto's literary refashioning of Plato and later Platonic pseudepigrapha. Particular attention will be paid to the so-called *Ἐρωτικός*, a letter in Greek addressed to Marcus Aurelius and modelled on Lysias' discourse on love in the *Phaedrus*. This Platonic dialogue is not only the most popular point of reference for second-sophistic literature in Greek (cf. Trapp 1990; Fleury 2007), but is also frequently referenced and alluded to in the works of Gellius, Apuleius, and throughout Fronto's *Correspondence*. This paper will, therefore, enable us to gain a better understanding of the most respected Latin rhetorician of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD, showing how Fronto's literary appreciation of Plato goes beyond the apparent contrast which Fronto draws between the Greek world, connected with dishonourable philosophy and dialectic, and the Roman world, associated with decent life and eloquence.

**Literary aspects in Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*: the description of the wise man in  
Apul. *Plat.* 2,247-255**

Elisa Dal Chiele

Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

The paper's objective is to show that Apuleius' writing style in the treatise *De Platone et eius dogmate* is monotone only in appearance. By examining a case-study, i.e. the description of the wise man found in Apul. *Plat.* 2,247-255, it aims at shedding light on the different literary devices employed by the author in this work. First of all, the purposeful elevation of the writing style achieved through rare words (e.g. archaisms, poetic expressions, rare lexemes or constructions). Secondly, the paper deals with the intertextual relationship between this passage of the *De Platone* and other literary works by Apuleius (mainly the *Metamorphoses*) and other Latin authors, especially Plautus and Vergil. Finally, it will investigate the intratextual relationship between the Plato's biography included in the opening of this work (*Plat.* 1,180-189) and the description of the *sapiens* which constitutes the starting point for the analysis. The portrayal of the *sapiens* is influenced by Stoicism and Platonic ideas in the choice of themes and vocabulary employed. Some ordinary platonic metaphors are reproduced in a standard fashion (e.g. the image of the *oculi animi*). Some, however, are repurposed in an innovative way through the mediation of Latin literary models. For example, in referring to the body as a 'prison of the soul' – a traditional platonic image –, Apuleius uses the verb *remigro*, which appears in Plautus with a psychic meaning. The verb is connected with the idea of 'return': this image is used in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in the context of retro-transformation. Another compound of *migro*, *inmigro*, is used by Cicero to explain the transfer of the soul into the body. The description of the otherworldly realm of the *beati* (Apul. *Plat.* 2,255) alludes to Vergil's description of the Elysium, which is also used as a model for Apul. *met.* 4,2.

**Ways of seeing and ways of knowing. Some Platonic themes in Philostratus and Maximus of Tyre**

Dmitry Dundua

University of Oxford

Even on a superficial reading, the prologue of Philostratus' *Imagines* has a distinctively Platonic ring. Its opening line, through a direct juxtaposition of painting (ζωγραφία) and wisdom of the poets (σοφία, ὀπόση ἐς ποιητὰς ἦκει) on the one hand, and truth (ἀλήθεια) on the other, presents a rather explicit defence of art, both verbal and visual, against the usual Platonic charges. Given its wide circulation in the Imperial period which gave rise to the recurrent analogy between the artist and the Demiurge found elsewhere in Imperial Greek literature, the *Timaeus* is a likely background for the image of the Seasons painting the meadows in the prologue, as well as for the (ironic) reference to God as ζωγράφος in the *Life of Apollonius* II.22. Plato continues to figure as an important intertext in the *Imagines*, whether by explicit reference or by liberal recasting of Platonic motifs.

With the *Imagines* as a starting point, I will aim to assess these elements of Philostratus' imagery against the larger background of 'philosophical' topics prominent in his work, focusing specifically on visual art and sense-perception. In particular, I will address Philostratus' novel use of the notions of μίμησις and φαντασία. Next, I will take a look at the passages in Maximus of Tyre which deal with perception and its relation to knowledge (in *Orations* 6, 9 and 11), hoping to show that in both authors we can trace a view that takes sense-perception in general, and perception of visual art in particular, to

be an important way of acquiring truth, both about the sensible world and the divine. ‘Perceptual faith’ of this kind does not fit well with the ‘orthodox’ picture that we find in the *Republic*. Taking leads from the rather vast literature on these subjects, I will suggest that the starting point for both Philostratus and Maximus is rather the *Timaeus*, with Aristotle (esp. *De Anima*) playing an important role for Maximus and the Stoics being an influence for Philostratus. Finally, I will point at ways in which this — indeed, eclectic — picture foreshadows the much more developed and systematic view found in later Platonism, in Plotinus and Iamblichus in particular.

***Cibus ad virtutem non pertinet?* Philosophical ramifications of food metaphors in the first century CE**

Carsten Flaig  
Freie Universität Berlin

Seneca’s claim that food has nothing to do with virtue is representative of a condescending view on food by philosophers in the first century CE. This view, which expressed a critical stance on the Roman high culture of his time, however, stands in apparent contrast with an extended use of food metaphors in his own philosophical writings (see Richardson-Hay 2009). A comparable puzzle can be observed in Philo of Alexandria’s writings, who also did not take food to be philosophically significant while at the same time using food metaphors in central passages of his writings (see esp. Lewy 1929).

This paper reads food metaphors in central passages of philosophical and programmatic poetic works, especially in middle-platonic and stoic writings in the first century CE, as representative of a philosophical concern with the unsettled question of the relationship between body and mind. While the mind is understood as categorically distinct from the body, literary accounts of it seem to be bound to the sensual and, hence, the material realm. Taking different examples of authors who deal with the embodied references within their literary texts, food metaphors can be used as a key to understand accounts of this contested relationship between body and mind. The *topos* of food for the soul as knowledge is already present in Plato’s *Politeia* (book 9) and was then refashioned in different ways. Texts from Philo, Seneca, but also Persius, will be read as dealing with the problem of the material traces in their conceptions of knowledge acquisition via the literary trope of food metaphors. It will be shown that especially in ethical terms, food metaphors for knowledge acquisition have proven to be a powerful literary device.

**Maximus of Tyre’s approach to Platonic myth**

Collin Hilton  
Bryn Mawr College

The question of how to approach Plato’s different forms of expression becomes a crucial hermeneutical problem in ancient Platonism (e.g. *apud* Stobaeus II.7.3f), but especially in the case of myth. By the time of Proclus, such speculation has become explicit, elaborate, and systematic (e.g. *Plat. Th.* I.4), but it begins at least in the early Empire. Plutarch, in the opening of *Quomod. adul.*, describes prose myths in general, including “ideas about the soul,” as a sort of poetry (14e); but in the preface to the *Quaest. conv.*, he elucidates the impact of the mythic form in the Diotima myth of Plato’s *Symposium*: it is pleasurable and appropriate for a certain audience, while still reaching the height of metaphysical truth (614c-d).

Numenius, however, argues that myths are best understood as pious coverings that keep the sacred truth from being profaned by the masses, as in the mysteries (frg. 55).

In this paper, I examine Maximus of Tyre's treatments of this issue and suggest that it has affinities with both. Maximus periodically quotes from Platonic myths (e.g. XLI.5)—but he also approaches the mythic form more theoretically in the fourth *Dialexis*. Like Plutarch, Maximus treats Plato's prose myths as poetry (§4), while unlike him, the Tyrian goes to great lengths to conciliate Plato and Homer (esp. XXVII.3-5), as perhaps Numenius does as well, given Porphyry's terse citations (*De Antr.* §22). Maximus, moreover, argues that myths are a fitting way to piously signify philosophical truth by comparison to the mysteries, like Numenius (§5). Maximus nevertheless also attends to the aesthetic quality of myths, and compares the bareness of dialectical argumentation (§7), not unlike Plutarch. Maximus' treatment of the form of Platonic myth is complex, which reflects both the Tyrian's seriousness as an interpreter and the prominence of these hermeneutical questions in Middle Platonism.

### **Plato's *Laws* in Musonius Rufus and Clement of Alexandria**

Tomohiko Kondo  
Hokkaido University

Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus*, a treatise on practical ethics for the Christian, contains many allusions to and paraphrases of Plato's texts, especially the *Laws*. Meanwhile, although it goes too far to claim, as Wendland (1886) did, that the most part of Books II and III of Clement's *Paedagogus* is just a copy of the lost *Discourses* of Musonius Rufus, we may safely assume that the former draws some of its material from the latter. This paper will argue that some of the references to Plato's *Laws* in Clement's *Paedagogus*, especially the implicit ones, can be traced back to Musonius, thereby exploring a peripheral route through which Plato's texts and ideas are transmitted in the period of Middle Platonism.

First, we find an almost verbatim quotation from Plato's *Laws* 660E in Clement's *Paedagogus* 3.34, a passage which provided the basis for Wendland's reconstruction of Musonius' 'fragment', with its clear Musonian resonance. Another example is Clement's teaching on house furnishing (2.35–36), which includes an allusion to Plato's *Laws* 955E in close connection with Musonian ideas on the criteria for the correct evaluation of furnishings (fr. XX). Both of their sexual ethics as well, the similarity between which has been observed by scholars, rely on Plato's *Laws*, most specifically the notorious condemnation of same-sex intercourse as 'contrary to nature'.

If Musonius is a Stoic, which is most probable, although recently contested by Inwood (2017), his implicit reference to Plato likely reflects a long-standing history of appropriating the *Laws*, possibly starting with the early Stoics – Zeno, Persaeus and others – with some twists added by later Stoics, such as Panaetius. This paper will briefly discuss how this (most probably Stoic) tradition of making use of Plato's texts merges, or does not merge, with (various strands of) 'Middle Platonic' reception of Plato in Clement.

**Aelius Aristides and Maximus of Tyre as sources of Socratic philosophies and their impact in epistolography**

Claudia Mársico

Universidad de Buenos Aires

The Socratic circle had an unequal transmission. Successful philosophies of that time like those of the Megarics, Cyrenaics, Antisthenes, Phaedo of Elis or Aeschines, were reduced to fragments, while others, such as Platonism, did not stop accumulating attention. Indeed, an integral understanding of this period requires to reconstruct the contributions of these silenced lines and their polemic background. Now, our knowledge of these philosophies and the phenomenon of the *sokratikoi logoi* depends largely on complex mechanisms of the intermediate tradition that reframed the surviving material. The present work seeks to examine a fundamental point of this process associated with the testimonies of Aelius Aristides and Maximus of Tyre on the Socratic circle, paying attention to two aspects. On the one hand, the characterisation of their historiographical views taking into account the mixture between aesthetic and philosophical criteria, and on the other, the description of their perspectives as sources in theoretical issues including thematic selection and main ideas.

This inquiry will allow us to characterise the common points of both approaches and their value in transmission. On that basis, we will assess the impact of their viewpoints on epistolographic material, especially in the *Socratic Letters*. To do so, we will examine two topics. First, the figure of Aeschines analysing, on the one hand, the construction of a positive variant of his biography and his contributions, against another current that accuses him of being corrupt and plagiarist. Second, the peculiar view on Alcibiades and the interpretation of his relationship with Socrates. This review will illuminate the relationship between the production of the Middle Platonism in Aelius Aristides and Maximus of Tyre and their cultural environment, also shedding light on the transmission processes that influence our knowledge of the whole range of ancient philosophies.

**Plutarch, Etymology, and Plato's *Cratylus***

Judith Mossman

University of Coventry

Ancient etymology is not beloved of modern philologists, and Plato's *Cratylus* is still dismissed by some as a peculiar joke. This paper looks at the use Plutarch makes of Cratylean etymology in the Delphic dialogue *On the E*, and argues that for Plutarch, etymology was a serious matter.

**Middle Platonists in Lucian**

Heinz-Günther Nesselrath

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

In a number of Lucianic writings (*Vitarum Auctio*, *Hermotimus*, *Philopseudeis*, *Symposium*, *Nigrinus*), Platonic philosophers appear in a contemporary setting (i.e. mid-second century AD). The paper will discuss their characteristic traits and try to determine to what extent Lucian reflects or distorts “typical” features of Middle Platonism.

**A Middle Platonic allegorical reading of Homer's *Odyssey* as a key for the closure of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses***

Lucia Pasetti

Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

Evidence for a Middle Platonic allegoresis of the *Odyssey* is largely indirect, deriving from a heterogeneous mix of sources: Neo-Platonic works, such as Porphyry's *De antro nympharum*; the philosophical writings of Numenius; the gnostic tale *The Exegesis of the Soul* and the works of the Second Sophistic such as those of Maximus of Tyre and Apuleius himself, who is, according to Lambertson, the sole witness in Latin to a Middle Platonic allegorical reading of Homer.

According to this allegorical reading of the *Odyssey*, Ulysses no longer represents the Stoic *sapiens*, with his monolithic interiority; rather, he is the image of the soul struggling against the rough seas of the sublunar world in order to reach a 'safe harbour', that is, a higher and calmer level of existence.

The summary of Ulysses' adventures in Apul. *Socr.* 24 is consistent with this perspective: succeeding in his exploits only with the help of Athena, the hero symbolises an interiority now open to transcendence. This interpretation proves valid also for the closure of Apuleius' novel: the arrival of Lucius on the beach at Cenchreae has been convincingly compared with the arrival of Ulysses in Ithaca, in *Odyssey* XIII. Both episodes mark the end of navigation—a metaphorical one for Lucius, a real one for Ulysses. In fact, the metaphor of the sea storm often occurs in the last book of the *Metamorphoses* with reference to the travails of the protagonist, while the image of the harbour returns insistently in connection with Lucius' final transformation.

This possibility of an allegorical reading does not mean that the ending of the *Metamorphoses* is pure philosophical allegory; rather, it shows the novel permeated with Middle Platonic imagery. More than a philosophical novel, the *Metamorphoses* is the novel of a philosopher, who was sensitive to the demands of a diverse audience, including non-specialist readers attracted to Middle Platonic imagery.

**Cosmology in the New Academy: Cicero's translation of the *Timaeus***

Emma Ramsey

Wellington College

The importance of Plato's *Timaeus* for the formation of the Middle Platonic doctrine of metaphysics has been well-documented.

Cicero's interest in Plato is manifested mainly through his own philosophical dialogues. His treatment of the *Timaeus* stands out among these; its format as a straight translation makes it a valuable resource for understanding his interpretation of Plato's thought through his direct handling of Plato's language which we do not get from the dialogues in the same way. I argue that, based on evidence from these other philosophical works, Cicero's reason for translating this passage of the *Timaeus* (up to 47b3) is that he considers it to be the best treatise, not only on cosmology, but also on philosophical method since the method of exposition in this part of the dialogue relies on likely hypotheses. This puts it in line with the philosophical method of the New Academy, of which Cicero was an adherent.

The use of the *Timaeus* as the received doctrine on metaphysics continues to be prevalent in the time of Apuleius, who presents it in the form of a dogmatic handbook. Just as his literary format is different, he introduces a new set of terms for presenting this topic and uses them freely. This is in contrast to Cicero who is frequently apologetic for coining new Latin philosophical terms. This paper



aims to explore the extent to which Cicero's word choice and literary format caused him to deviate from or develop Plato's original message and, where appropriate, will compare the way in which Apuleius presents the same material.

### **What becomes of Platonic myths?**

Michael Trapp  
King's College London

The myths of Plato's dialogues are a notoriously ambivalent element in their author's communicative repertoire, and present themselves to subsequent generations both as possible models for imitation and as *loca* for theoretical reflection on issues of communication, expressibility, belief and truth. In the rich history of their reception we find them, in various literary critical and philosophical contexts, both constituted as a problem in the evaluation of Plato's competence as writer and suitability as literary model, and (in the transition from Plato to Platonism) squeezed for their potential contribution to a systematic account of Plato's doctrines.

Against this background, this paper asks how the major myths play out as material for creative redeployment and development in writing of the first two centuries AD. Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom and Apuleius will occupy centre stage, but Aelius Aristides, Lucian and (subject to availability) a novelist or two can be expected to make guest appearances.

### **From the horse's mouth: Plato's vocabulary and authority in the *Onomasticon***

Alexei V. Zadorozhnyy  
University of Liverpool

In recent scholarship, the *Onomasticon* by Julius Pollux (Polydeuces) is increasingly given justice as a rich panorama of the cultural assets and anxieties of the Second Sophistic. The relationship between Pollux's ambitious lexicographical project and the contemporary philosophical intellectualism, notably Platonism, has not yet been seriously explored. The paper aims to tease out and piece together from across Pollux's word-hoard his response to Plato, which can be, in turn, contextualized against the discussion of Plato's diction and style in Middle Platonic literature.

While references to Plato's vocabulary are numerous in the *Onomasticon*, Pollux sometimes cites Platonic words and expressions that are loaded with bona fide philosophical significance (2.5; 2.56; 4.121; 5.169); there are also a few instances where Pollux recalls the contents of Plato's teaching (2.226) or comes close to glossing Plato's text (9.111). Quite often Pollux behaves as a strict and even sarcastic critic of Plato's verbal choices (3.133; 6.144; 7.33; 8.152; 9.134; 9.137), but there is also a tendency for stylistic experiments that are backed up with Plato's authority (3.56; 7.5; ironically framed in 2.112). Pollux's comment on Plato's terminology for *tekhnai* (7.206 "whether he used these words seriously or not") echoes the imperial Platonists' concern with establishing the right balance between the Plato's literary style and his philosophical meaning (e.g., Plutarch, *Quaes. conv.* 740B, *De prof. virt.* 79D; Longinus fr. 49 Männlein-Robert). More globally, it is interesting to read Pollux in the light of the Middle-Platonic reflection on language and specifically on lexical validity (Alcinous, *Didask.* 6).

Against the backdrop of Middle Platonism, Pollux's stance vis-à-vis Plato emerges as a mixture of deference and quizzical combativeness. As a case study of how Pollux deals with a famous Platonic

text that was held dear by the imperial *pepaideumenoi*, I will analyse his handling of the epithets found in Plato's description of the two horses in the Chariot Allegory (*Phaedr.* 253d-e).