

He claims throughout that he is focusing on the 'now' but, as is inevitable, that means significant references to the intervening centuries. The Romans, as we know, were in thrall to Greek thought (e.g. Stoicism) and elements of entertainment (re-enactments of sea battles such as Salamis and drama and poetry based on Greek myth). To take examples of a more recent kind, there was the Spartan idealism of Nazi Germany and the Periclean instincts of Boris Johnson (ancient history now?).

Chapter 3 begins with a striking sentence – 'Ancient Greeks were fascinated by male genitalia!' This intriguingly leads to a discussion on 'ethnic distinctions' (the link being a vase painting depicting a circumcised Egyptian and an uncircumcised Greek). To give an example of the range of citations within just this one chapter, the following all get a mention: Naomi Campbell, J. Paul Getty, P.D. James' Adam Dalgliesh, the American plantation owner William J. Grayson, *Dungeons and Dragons* and Cleopatra.

There follows a chapter on sex. Did you know that in 2018 3,000–4,000 gay women visited the island of Lesbos? The next chapter covers the plethora (a good Greek word!) of Greek words in English and the power of Greek rhetoric (Pericles inspires Lincoln at Gettysburg). There is an intriguing chapter entitled 'Facts and Alternative Facts'. How 'true' is Thucydides' history? Can you believe Herodotus (with a nice sideline on *The English Patient*)? The links to 'fake news' are clear.

'Poetry Matters' concentrates on Homer where it is obvious that his influence stretches to all kinds of societies and media. Amongst the more recent evidence Spawthorp cites 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, the video game *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*.

Greek statues have a chapter to themselves. Nazi ideology and modern American white supremacists figure prominently. They lead on to an interesting discussion on the colour(s) of the statues. Colour is also discussed in a chapter on buildings. Among the advocates of classical architecture are King Charles III and, perhaps slightly more surprisingly, Donald Trump. It is probably difficult in small town America to find a courthouse or town hall that does not have a Greek temple-style frontage!

It won't be a surprise that the author has plenty to say about the cinema and the small screen. Many will not be too familiar with the 1910 *The Death of Socrates* or the 1911 *The Fall of Troy* but will (along with children of today) have been delighted by the 1973 *Jason and the Argonauts*. Spawforth has some fun with the 'inaccuracies' of *Alexander* but is quite impressed by the 'visual stylishness' of 300.

And so to the Olympics, via the Much Wenlock games with its wheelbarrow race! Details discussed include nudity, female participation, amateurism and the abiding 'obsession' with games in most British and American schools.

The final chapter looks at the stage. It starts with no less than six pages on Isadora Duncan. The author goes on to point out that the

catharsis element of tragedy and the sort of messaging inherent in, for example, *Frogs* and *Lysistrata*, make Greek plays a continuing choice for modern-day producers.

This is an excellent book full of detail and analysis coupled with humour and anecdote. It seems suitable for all ages and for those whose knowledge of the ancient world is limited or even non-existent. There are 23 pages of notes and a page of bibliography, but both can safely be ignored by most readers.

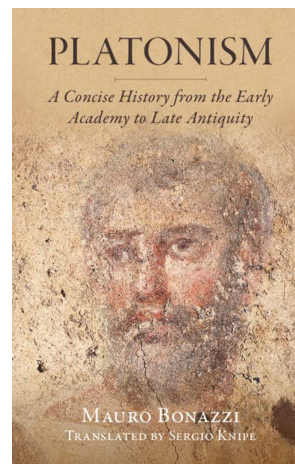
doi:[10.1017/S2058631023000818](https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631023000818)

Platonism: A Concise History from the Early Academy to Late Antiquity

Bonazzi (M.), Pp. xvi+233. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £30. ISBN: 978-1-009-25342-0.

John Godwin

Independent scholar, UK
drjohngodwin187@gmail.com



This short book undertakes the large task of showing how Platonism fared for the first thousand years of its existence. The book covers four main eras in four chapters: Plato's times, the Hellenistic era, the development of Platonic thought under the Roman Empire, and the Neoplatonists.

Bonazzi reminds us throughout that Plato was not the dogmatic founder of a school expecting fidelity to his teachings. It thus makes little sense to see one 'Platonism' but rather a whole bunch of Platonisms all assisting

the great man's enterprise rather than insisting on following his ideas to the letter. Running through this book is the constant tension between the dialogues as transmitted to us and the 'unwritten doctrines' (of the Monad and the Dyad, for example) which we hear of in Plato's successors but which Plato himself did not commit to writing. Can we be sure what Platonism was even before the Platonists got their philosophical hands on it?

The second chapter takes this theme further in looking at how Platonism encountered Scepticism. Plato was no stranger to sceptical thought – remember Socrates's dictum that he only knew his own ignorance and the aporetic conclusion to many of the dialogues. The imagery of the cave in the *Republic* should also alert us to the fact that (for Plato) full knowledge of the truth was not freely given without massive effort and would ultimately remain beyond our grasp. Different thinkers took the quest for truth in different directions, and Bonazzi spends a fair amount of space on Stoicism but much less on Epicureanism and Cynicism, even though Epicurean epistemology claimed to have solved the

problem of knowledge which Plato had identified and the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope was clearly living what he saw as a Socratic life in accordance with nature: Juvenal later (13.122) described the Cynics as 'Stoics without tunics'. The splitting of the Platonic tradition and the tensions between the different schools of Scepticism, Platonism and Stoicism is well shown in the career and work of Antiochus of Ascalon, with whom this chapter closes.

The third chapter looks at Platonism in the Imperial Age and the competing influences of Pythagoreanism and Stoicism – as well as the influence of Aristotle in an age when philosophy became 'a commentary on authoritative texts' (p. 87), although this textual exegesis in no way inhibited the development of original thought. Platonism moved its focus towards theology and the three principles of God, the Forms and matter. 'Live according to nature' became 'assimilate oneself to God' (p. 101). There are some fascinating points here concerning the problems of Fate and determinism: some Platonists coined the idea of 'conditional fate' (rather like the Stoic Zeno who used this argument to a thieving slave who protested that he was fated to steal: 'and to get flogged' was his reply (Diogenes Laertius 7.23)). 'Pythagorizing Platonists' brought their own (mathematical) take on Platonic thought in general (and the *Timaeus* in particular) and sought to establish an 'ecumenical' theology which would create a single system out of the many paths by which men seek God.

The final chapter looks at Neoplatonism in the 3rd century AD. Plotinus seems to have united the first principle as Good and God and the One, although his concept of the One had already been contested in the 'third man argument' found in Plato's *Parmenides* which shows how a transcendent being cannot generate a multiplicity of *realia*. Bonazzi neatly summarises Plotinus' answer to this dilemma (pp. 140–142) and shows that the Forms (which were divine thoughts for the middle Platonists) were the object and the subject of divine cognition for Plotinus. The human soul remains a mystery: Iamblichus thought we are our souls and that our souls unite us with the world of Forms, but also that we are 'fallen souls' and that the aim of human life is to rediscover our true divine nature, to rid ourselves of passions and to 'be god' by the exercise of contemplative virtues.

The book ends with two appendices: one on Platonism and politics, looking at Cicero and Julian – but oddly not at the tyrannicide Brutus who was an adherent of Antiochus of Ascalon (see on this Sedley *JRS* 87 (1997)) – and one on Platonism and Christianity, showing how the tensions between these dominant world-views ended up in a philosophical rapprochement in thinkers such as Boethius. The book has a generous bibliography and a brief general index.

The book is not an easy read, and the translator clearly lacks a full idiomatic grasp of English, making what is already difficult unnecessarily so. Sentences ramble on and jargon (e.g. 'the eidetic paradigm' p. 108) is used without explanation. The book is not aimed at students unacquainted with the technical language of ancient philosophy, as is shown in a sentence such as: 'Longinus drew on the well-known Stoic theory of *lekta*, which entailed a distinction between the act of thinking and the propositional content of thought, which is self-subsistent' (p. 93). No native English speaker would have written sentences such as: 'is he (Antiochus) the last representative of the great Hellenistic season . . . ?' (p. 66) or 'These are not trifle variations' (p. 9n.20) or the bizarre and misplaced use of 'too' in 'the very possibility of considering matter too to be a principle' (p. 94), and so on. The translator does not know that Anglophone scholars call L. Cornelius Sulla 'Sulla' while Italians call him 'Silla' – so here he

is called 'Silla' three times in two pages (75–6). It is a great pity that such an important, stimulating and authoritative book has been let down by its publishers.

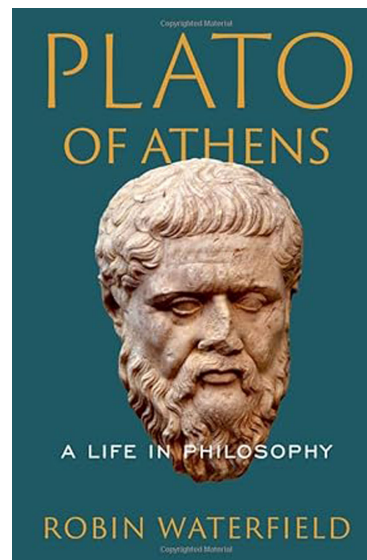
doi:[10.1017/S2058631023000788](https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631023000788)

Plato of Athens: A Life in Philosophy

Waterfield (R.), Pp. xxvi + 255, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Cased, £21.99, US\$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-756475-2.

John Godwin

Independent Scholar, UK
drjohngodwin187@gmail.com



Nobody is better qualified to write this book than Robin Waterfield. He has published excellent translations of many of Plato's dialogues; and as the author of some wonderfully accessible books on Greek history he also has the knack of setting the work inside the life inside the times. He does not talk down to the reader, but neither does he assume any prior knowledge (of Greek, Greek History or Philosophy). The voluminous bibliography at the end of this book suggests that the

book could have been ten times the length; and it is to the author's great credit that he wears his immense scholarship so lightly. Problems in reading and interpreting this (sometimes difficult) author are made part of the excitement of studying him.

Plato certainly lived in 'interesting times'. His life straddled seven decades of traumatic history as Greece went through the terrors of war and revolution. It is easy to see why Plato devoted so much energy to writing about politics when everything in the political arena seemed to be up for grabs and where empires could rise and fall within a heartbeat. The steamy world of Sicilian politics (as encountered by Plato in his three visits to the island) is vividly recreated here as Waterfield narrates the philosopher's fraught attempts to inject philosophy into Syracusan politics. Waterfield deals sensibly and briskly with some of the legends about the man which have accumulated – was 'Plato' a nickname? (No). Was he gay? (No more than any other man of his class at the time). Did Plato have to run into hiding abroad after the execution of Socrates in 399? (No). Did Chaerephon go to the Delphic oracle to ask if Socrates was the wisest of men? (Probably not). Pythagoras, we learn, did not even invent Pythagoras' theorem (p. 113).