

Plato, Byzantium and the Italian Renaissance

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The ideas of the Athenian philosopher, Plato (429-347 BC), encapsulated in the form of dialogues, have exerted such an abiding influence on western philosophy and political thought that it is easy to forget that for many centuries, between about 500 and 1400, his works were almost unknown in western Europe. This was partly because very few people in Medieval Europe knew enough Greek to read Plato and even if they had, copies of the Dialogues were almost impossible to obtain, with only the *Timaeus* available in Latin translation. Scholars were therefore largely dependent on earlier Latin authors such as Cicero and St Augustine for a second-hand knowledge of Plato's ideas.¹ It was the rediscovery of the Dialogues in the original during the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century that set western thought off on new paths, a rediscovery that was made possible by the preservation and transmission of Plato's work by scholars in another part of the Christian world, the Byzantine empire or Byzantium.

In Byzantium, the literary language was not Latin but Greek, and therefore classical Greek literature continued to be studied and read throughout the medieval period. In the empire's capital city of Constantinople, the works of the ancient Greek poets, historians, dramatists and philosophers were taught in a traditional course of higher education that trained laymen for the imperial civil service.² Plato was by no means the most popular author on the higher education curriculum, however, for there were several aspects of his thought which were extremely difficult to reconcile with Christian doctrine. In the Dialogue known in English as the *Republic*, for example, Plato described the transmigration of souls (*metempsychosis*), the idea that souls of the

dead await a new body in which to be reborn, something completely at odds with the Christian teaching that souls await only resurrection and judgment. Plato also advocated the sharing of wives which is hardly compatible with the Christian ideal of marriage.³ Consequently, in 529 the Emperor Justinian (527-565) had closed the Platonic Academy in Athens and thereafter showing too much enthusiasm for Plato's writings could incur the disapproval of the Church.⁴

There were, however, courageous individuals who were prepared to run the risk. One poet described Plato as the 'teacher of immortality' and the statesman Michael Psellos (c.1022-c.1080) openly expressed his admiration for Platonic thought in his memoirs. He may even have espoused aspects of Plato's political thought and applied it to the situation in his own day.⁵ Another Byzantine Platonist was George Gemistos Plethon (c.1360-1452) who went so far as to incorporate elements of Plato's philosophy into letters of advice sent to members of the Byzantine royal family.⁶ Both men aroused the suspicion of the ecclesiastical authorities. Psellos was on one occasion called to justify himself before the ecclesiastical synod while Plethon was exiled from Constantinople to Mistra in the Peloponnese on suspicion of holding heretical views. Yet the study of Plato did not always lead to accusations of doctrinal deviance. Even the emperor responsible for exiling Plethon, Manuel II Palaeologos (1391-1425), a man renowned for his piety, saw nothing wrong with choosing a copy of the works of Plato as a gift for an old friend.⁷

It is likely, however, that Manuel II had much weightier matters on his mind than Platonic philosophy, for by the time he became emperor in 1391, the Byzantine empire was in a state of terminal decline. Its territories had slowly been eaten away by the remorseless advance of the Ottoman Turks. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, Constantinople was surrounded and under siege, and it seemed that it would only be a matter of time before the city fell. Manuel II and

his advisers fell back on the only policy that now seemed open to them: they decided to appeal for help to their co-religionists in western Europe.⁸ The transmission of Plato to the West was to be a by-product of this decision.

To negotiate western aid, a number of ambassadors were despatched, including Manuel Chrysoloras (c.1350-1415), a personal friend of Manuel II and a product of the Byzantine system of higher education. Although his mission was primarily diplomatic, Chrysoloras supplemented his income while in Venice in 1394 by giving some lessons in ancient Greek to a Florentine gentleman called Roberto Rossi. On his return to his native city, Rossi passed an enthusiastic account of his teacher to Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), the Chancellor of Florence. So impressed was Salutati that he decided to secure Chrysoloras's services, and in 1396 invited him to teach grammar and Greek literature at the University of Florence. Chrysoloras duly came and had a tremendous impact. His lectures were thronged with eager learners and among his pupils were numbered some of the foremost Italian intellectuals of the day, such as Guarino da Verona (1374-1460) and Pallas Strozzi (1372-1462). Such was the enthusiasm with which his presence was greeted that the contemporary writer Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) claimed that Chrysoloras had restored to the Italians a knowledge of classical Greek, which had been lost for seven hundred years.⁹

How can all this enthusiasm be accounted for? There can be no doubt that there was real hunger in Italy for a knowledge of ancient Greek. The movement that has come to be known as the Renaissance developed during the later fourteenth century as scholars and artists rediscovered the 'humanist' values of Roman literature and classical art. Yet these early Renaissance scholars were painfully aware that they were only getting half the picture. Roman authors such as Cicero and Seneca constantly referred to Greek authors but for these writers the Italians either had no texts or if

they had, they could not read them. This was the predicament faced by the Florentine poet Francesco Petrarca or Petrarch (1304-1374). Although he acquired a manuscript of the works of Homer in 1348, despite all his efforts, he was never able to learn enough Greek to be able to read it.¹⁰ Chrysoloras created a sensation in Florence because of his teaching methods. He pioneered a way of simplifying Greek grammar in his textbook, the *Erotemata* or 'Questions' and so provided a way out of the difficulty faced by Petrarch.

Chrysoloras only occupied the post at Florence between 1397 and 1400 when he left and moved on to Pavia and Milan, before travelling extensively throughout Europe in his quest for aid for beleaguered Constantinople.¹¹ During this time he became involved in another activity that was to have great long-term significance. Realising that there were many who wanted to gain access to the ideas contained in ancient Greek literature who, like Petrarch, would never learn Greek, he gave his assistance to the Milanese scholar, Uberto Decembrio (d.1427), in his efforts to produce a Latin translation of a Greek text. Translations from Greek to Latin had been made before but they had followed a word for word approach which made them turgid to read. Chrysoloras and Decembrio instead adopted a technique which conveyed the spirit of the text in a Latin of some literary merit.¹² Even more radical than Chrysoloras and Decembrio's method, however, was their choice of text. Rather than going for something purely literary, they decided to translate Plato's *Republic*.

Why they should make this choice is not entirely clear but a possible reason is found in Decembrio's introduction to the translation where it is suggested that Plato's authority could be cited against republican liberty.¹³ Traditionally, the Italian city-states had embraced in theory an Aristotelian and Ciceronian ideal, that man was 'a political animal' and that it was in his nature and his duty to participate in the political life of his city.¹⁴ While not democracies in the strict sense,

these city-states usually had some mechanism whereby the citizen body could gather in the main piazza and express its approval or disapproval of decisions taken by the city government. By the later Middle Ages, however, some intellectuals were questioning whether wide participation in the political process really provided the best protection for liberty or whether it merely gave rise to factionalism detrimental to the best interests of the state. Politics, it was coming to be argued, should be left rather to those who were best qualified to pursue them, a wise and enlightened elite, who had the wealth and education to devote to matters of state. A life of contemplative withdrawal and disengagement from political life, formerly seen as reprehensible, was now coming to be regarded as praiseworthy.

All this was not merely a matter of philosophical speculation, for it mirrored changes that were taking place in the way that the Italian city states were governed and of which the result was usually to place the political process under the control of an upper class of nobles. In Venice, the aristocratic Great Council and the Council of Ten had come to dominate decision-making, leaving the General Assembly of the citizens as merely a rubber stamp. Florence, after 1382, was dominated by conservative patricians, with power concentrated in fewer hands, providing a government that was less representative but probably much more stable and efficient.¹⁵

In this climate, Plato's ideas, especially those outlined in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, were extremely attractive to Florentine and other Italian intellectuals, most of whom were part of the new governing elite. In the *Republic*, Plato argued that the only way to secure the stability of the state and the wealth and happiness of its citizens was to entrust government to an elite, the Guardians or philosopher kings.¹⁶ States organised along other lines failed to secure these goals because the citizens were divided into groups which were in competition with each other. Democracy was no

answer because in that type of state the rulers do not consider the common good, but tend to give the people what they want which is by no means the same thing. The Guardians of Plato's state would be specially educated from childhood for their role and would be morally incorruptible because they would have no families or private property. Above all, they would be philosophers and so able to discern how to achieve the absolute highest good of the state.¹⁷ Thus the *Republic* and other Dialogues provided a reasoned justification for a less directly representative form of government.

Chrysoloras died in 1415 while representing the Byzantine emperor at the Council of Constance but the process of disseminating Plato's thought which he had helped to initiate continued. The *Laws* was translated into Latin in Rome in the 1440s by George of Trebizond, a Greek scholar from Crete in papal service, and although it was heavily criticised for inaccuracy by some contemporaries, it enjoyed wide circulation.¹⁸ Another opportunity for Italian intellectuals to improve their acquaintance with Plato came in 1439, when Constantinople was once more in danger from the Turks and once again the Byzantines hoped that help would come from the West. Unfortunately there was a stumbling block in that the Byzantine and western Churches were in schism, deeply divided by differences on the issues of papal authority and the wording of the Creed. In 1438, therefore, the Emperor John VIII Palaeologos (1425-1448) and a large delegation of clergy and laymen arrived in Italy to attend a church council to resolve these issues with the pope and the cardinals. The Council met first at Ferrara and then in January 1439 moved to Florence, the choice of the latter city being partly dictated by the generous offer of its *de facto* ruler, Cosimo de'Medici (1389-1464), to meet the cost of housing and feeding the delegations.¹⁹

The months went by and the interminable theological debates went on, but many of the

Italian intellectuals soon discovered that there was a much more interesting side to the gathering. Many of the Byzantine delegates were highly educated men, steeped in the literature of ancient Greece about which the Italians were so curious. Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) was delighted to make the acquaintance of Bessarion (1402-1472), archbishop of Nicaea, as he discovered that the archbishop had in his library books that Ambrogio had only heard of but never seen.²⁰ The Byzantine delegate who impressed the Florentines most, however, was Bessarion's teacher, George Gemistos Plethon of Mistra. When a lively debate began on the relative merits of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the Italians were delighted by Plethon's enthusiastic championing of the former. Plethon even wrote down his defence of Plato in the form of a treatise, *On the Differences of Plato and Aristotle*, which he circulated during the council.²¹ Plethon's brief stay in Florence seems to have made a lasting impression. The philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was later to comment that Plethon had brought the spirit of Plato from the Byzantine empire to Italy and the host of the Council of Florence, Cosimo de'Medici, was later to found an academy for the study of Plato just outside the city at Careggi.²²

Another event was to have the side effect of helping the growth of Platonic studies in Florence. In May 1453, Constantinople finally fell to the Ottoman Turks, the long hoped-for help from the West having failed to materialise. A stream of refugees left the city for Italy, including many scholars and intellectuals. Among them was John Argyropoulos (c.1415-1487) who had been one of the Byzantine delegates to Florence in 1439. In 1456 he was offered the chance to follow in the footsteps of Manuel Chrysoloras and teach in Florence with a generous salary of four hundred florins.²³

Argyropoulos enjoyed the same celebrity status in Florence that Chrysoloras had. His public

lectures, given in the mornings, were thronged by eager listeners from all over Europe, while in the afternoons he gave private lessons to some of the most prominent Florentines, including the son of Cosimo de'Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492). He became a leading member of the Academia Fiorentina, a literary club which met in the house of another of his pupil's, Alamanno Rinuccini (1426-1499), and he received Florentine citizenship in 1466.

Argyropoulos's popularity was probably due, at least in part, to two aspects of his teaching method. The first was the importance which he attached to speculative philosophy as an essential part of the curriculum, rather than adhering solely to rhetoric, the traditional mainstay of humanist education. Secondly, there was his choice of philosopher. Although personally an Aristotelian who accepted the traditional, scholastic interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy, in his private teaching Argyropoulos gave instruction in the works of Plato. His exposition proved to be so effective that many of his students, including Rinuccini, transferred their interest from rhetoric to Plato's metaphysical philosophy.²⁴

Yet just when it seemed that the future of Platonic studies in Italy was secure, the old suspicion of the incompatibility of Plato's philosophy with Christianity once more made itself felt. In 1458, George of Trebizond, apparently having repented of translating the *Laws*, published a strongly worded denunciation of Plato, entitled *Comparisons of Aristotle and Plato*. In this book he claimed that Plato's ideas led inevitably to immorality and heresy, and denounced any attempt to reconcile Platonism with Christianity. To prove his point, he cited George Gemistos Plethon, who he claimed had been led by reading Plato to abjure Christianity and to turn to the worship of the old Olympian gods.²⁵

The debate on the legitimacy of studying Plato raged on during the 1450s and 1460s,

centred mainly in Rome at the house of Bessarion, who was by now a cardinal and had come a long way since his days as archbishop of Nicaea. Several émigré Byzantine scholars penned replies to George of Trebizond, but the most effective was that written by Bessarion himself, his *Against the Calumniator of Plato* which he published in 1469. In this work, Bessarion sought to defend Plato by stressing those areas of his thought which were reconcilable with Christianity. Those which were not, like Plato's ideal state, with its communal sharing of property and wives, he presented as ideals, unattainable in a fallen world. His championship of Plato proved to be extremely successful. By expounding Plato's thought clearly and in Latin, *Against the Calumniator* made it accessible to a much wider readership and, by stressing the points of agreement both with Aristotle and with Christian doctrine, it helped to make its study respectable.²⁶ The controversy did not die down for another ten years, with George of Trebizond being joined by his son, Andreas (d.1496) in his attack on the Platonists. Ultimately, however, it was Bessarion's view which gained ground among the Italian humanists, leaving George of Trebizond increasingly isolated.

Italian intellectuals were now free to use Plato to frame their new vision of man and the state. He was cited endlessly, and not always accurately, in support of whatever position the author was in favour of. The stability and longevity of the Venetian republic was attributed to its founding fathers having read Plato's *Laws* and put its precepts into practice in the constitution.²⁷ In Florence, Platonic arguments were used to justify the dominance of the Medici with Lorenzo the Magnificent portrayed as the ideal philosopher king, and Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) framing his thoughts on the city's government in the form of dialogues.²⁸ It could even be argued that the influence of his ideas can be seen the works of the most famous Florentine thinker, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). It is often pointed out that Machiavelli only mentioned Plato

once in his writings and that was to say that the Greek philosopher had merely succeeded in conjuring up a vision of an ideal state which he was incapable of putting into practice.²⁹ Nevertheless, there are certain parallels between their ideas. Both considered that for a well-ordered state to be created or renewed, the citizens would have to subject themselves completely to one prudent, virtuous individual.³⁰ So important was the role of this lawgiver, statesman or prince, argued Machiavelli that though he must still appear to be good and moral in the traditional sense, in order to avoid unpopularity with his subjects, yet he could not afford to adhere to that morality in matters of state and must be prepared to abandon it to achieve the common good.³¹ Plato never goes as far as that but he does assert that his Guardians should promote morality fables that they know to be untrue because these would make people more willing to serve the state, the so-called 'noble lie'.³² Whether Machiavelli was inspired by Plato or not here, this is the type of interpretation that has sparked the continuing debate as to whether the Greek philosopher was a champion of good government, justice and individual freedom or a sinister precursor of twentieth century totalitarianism.³³

Whatever one's views of Plato's ideas, however, one point is clear: in its dying years, Byzantium bequeathed the works of this philosopher to western Europe. Moreover, he is by no means the only author whose preservation we owe to the Byzantines. We only have the works of Homer, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Euripides and other classical Greek authors today because the Byzantines preserved them and because manuscripts of their works were taken from Constantinople to Italy during the fifteenth century. It is a formidable legacy and one which should entitle Byzantium to wider exposure in universities and schools than it currently enjoys.

Notes

- ¹ T.F.X. Noble, 'The declining knowledge of Greek in eighth and ninth century Rome', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 78 (1985), 56-62; W.J. Aerts, 'The knowledge of Greek in western Europe at the time of Theophano and the Greek grammar fragment in ms Vindob. 114', in *Byzantium and the Low Countries in the Tenth Century*, ed. V.D. van Aalst and K.N. Ciggaar (Hernen, 1985), pp. 78-102; *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c.350-c.1450*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 336-7; *The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks: the Study of Greek in the West in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M.W. Herren (London, 1988); Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 127-34.
- ² J.M. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire, 867-1185* (London, 1937), pp. 22-36; C.N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries, 1204-c.1310* (Nicosia, 1982), pp. 1-2; N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (2nd ed., London, 1996), pp. 1-27.
- ³ Plato, *Republic*, 449a-451b, 614a-621d.
- ⁴ Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, p. 13; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1990), i. 3-26; idem, 'Humanism and the origins of modern political thought', *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 118-41, at 124; John Monfasani, 'Platonic paganism in the fifteenth century', in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. M.A. di Cesare (Binghampton, New York, 1992), pp. 45-61 and reprinted in John Monfasani, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and Other Émigrés* (Aldershot, 1995), No.X.
- ⁵ Hussey, *Church and Learning*, p. 36; Michael Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, trans. E.R.A.

Sewter (Harmondsworth, 1953), p. 174; Anthony Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos's Chronographia* (Leiden, 1999).

⁶ Ernest Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 196-219; C.M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 92-109.

⁷ Jonathan Harris, *Greek Émigrés in the West, 1400-1520* (Camberley, 1995), p. 119.

⁸ For a narrative of these events see Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1993), pp. 296-317; John W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): a Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1969), pp. 123-99.

⁹ Leonardo Bruni, *Rerum suo Tempore Gestarum Commentarius, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, New Series 19.3 (Città di Castello and Bologna, 1914-26), pp. 407-69, at 431; Kenneth M. Setton, 'The Byzantine background to the Italian Renaissance', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 100 (1956), 1-76, at 57-8, and reprinted in Setton, *Europe and the Levant in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1974), No. I; I. Thomson, 'Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 7(1966), 63-82, at 64, 78-9; N.G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1992), pp. 8-12.

¹⁰ Alison Brown, *The Renaissance* (London, 1988), pp. 17-18; Wilson, *Byzantium to Italy*, p. 2.

¹¹ Thomson, 'Manuel Chrysoloras', 80-1; Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 261-7, 321-2.

¹² Wilson, *Byzantium to Italy*, pp. 11, 20-1.

¹³ Wilson, *Byzantium to Italy*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a1-1253a29; Daniel Waley and Peter Denley, *Later Medieval Europe*,

1250-1520 (3rd ed., London, 2001), pp. 154-5.

¹⁵ P.J. Jones, 'Communes and despots: the city state in Late Medieval Italy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 15 (1965), 71-96; Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (London, 1969), pp. 128, 136; Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: a Maritime Republic* (Baltimore and London, 1973), pp. 109-17; Waley and Denley, *Later Medieval Europe*, pp. 187-90.

¹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 473d.

¹⁷ Terence Irwin, *Classical Thought* (Oxford, 1989), 106-9.

¹⁸ *Collectanea Trapezuntiana. Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George Trebizond*, ed. John Monfasani (Binghamton, New York, 1984), pp. 698-754; Wilson, *Byzantium to Italy*, pp. 76-8.

¹⁹ Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 176-81; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, pp. 352-61.

²⁰ Setton, 'Byzantine background', 70.

²¹ Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 171-214.

²² Setton, 'Byzantine background', 57-8; Alison Brown, 'Platonism in fifteenth century Florence and its contribution to early modern political thought', *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986), 383-413, at 389-90; P.O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. V. Conant (New York, 1943), pp. 15, 27; A. Keller, 'Two Byzantine scholars and their reception in Italy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20 (1957), 363-70, at 363-6; Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1988), pp. 12-13.

²³ Harris, *Greek Émigrés*, pp. 23, 32, 48, 56, 68, 134; Deno J. Geanakoplos, 'The career of the Byzantine humanist professor John Argyropoulos in Florence and Rome (1410-1487): the turn to

metaphysics', in Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1989), pp. 91-113.

²⁴ J. Siegel, 'The teaching of Argyropoulos and the rhetoric of the first humanists', *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison*, ed. T.K. Rabb and J. Siegel (Princeton, New Jersey, 1960), pp. 237-60; Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 107-26.

²⁵ John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 201-29; Hankins, *Plato*, i. 165-92.

²⁶ Setton, 'Byzantine background', 73; Wilson, *Byzantium to Italy*, pp. 57-67; Hankins, *Plato*, i. 217-63.

²⁷ Franco Gaeta, 'Giorgio di Trebizonda, le leggi di Platone e la costituzione di Venezia', *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano* 82 (1970), 479-501; Felix Gilbert, 'The Venetian constitution in Florentine political thought', *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (London, 1968), pp. 463-500.

²⁸ Francesco Guicciardini, *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, trans. Alison Brown (Cambridge, 1994); Brown, 'Platonism', 391-8; Hankins, 'Humanism and modern political thought', pp. 128-31.

²⁹ Leo Strauss, *Interpreting Machiavelli* (Seattle and London, 1958), p. 224; Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1983), pp. 134-5, 143, 151; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998), p. 146.

³⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago and London, 1996), bk. I, ch. 9, p. 29; Plato, *The Statesman. Philebus*, ed. Harold N. Fowler, Loeb

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Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1925), pp. 142-3; Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: the Doctrine of Raison d'État and its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (Boulder, Colorado and London, 1984), p. 58; Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 143-95.

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³¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (5th ed, Harmondsworth, 1999), chs. xv and xviii, pp. 50, 57.

³² Plato, *Republic*, 414b-415d; *Laws*, 663-4.

³³ See Thomas L. Thorson, *Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963); Renford Bambrough, *Plato, Popper and Politics* (Cambridge and New York, 1967).

Italian Renaissance cities. Firstly, Plato's ideas influenced Alberti, who cited both Plato's Atlantis (Critias, 360 bC) and Magnesia. (Laws, 350 bC) into his *Re Aedificatoria*, and incorporated some of Plato's design proposals, as the subdivision of the city into equal sectors each with its own facilities and public spaces (ibid., VII.1), or the optimality of the architecture and the city of Atlantis, that according to Plato had abundant wealth and Gold. Also, the buildings of Plato, Byzantium and the Italian Renaissance. Jonathan Harris. The ideas of Plato (429-347 BC) have exerted such an abiding influence on western philosophy and political thought that it is easy to forget that for many centuries, between about 500 and 1400, his works were almost unknown in western Europe. Plato in the Italian Renaissance/by James Hankins. p., cm. (Columbia studies in the classical tradition. ISSN 0166-1302: V. 17) ISBN 9004091637 (set). Culture after the fall of Byzantium/The In Calumniatore Platoni as a defense of Greek culture/Bessarion's views on the relationship between Greek philosophy and the Christian religion. 217. ALLEN (1984a) = idem, Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, R Q 37 (1984): 555-584. ALLEN (1984b) = idem, The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His *Phaedrus* Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis (Los Angeles, 1984). The philosophy of Plato changed dramatically over the centuries and the general outline of that change is described by categorizing the Platonic tradition into two categories: Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism (meaning "new Platonism"). The most significant and far-reaching innovation of the Middle Platonists was the development of the view that the eternal forms or ideas that underlie the world of appearances are the thoughts of some single god or divinity. For all practical purposes, then, the Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance continues these three traditions. The Neoplatonists inherit the Augustinian and Boethian synthesis of Platonism with Christianity and many are avowed Augustinians. A. Donato (trans.), *Italian Renaissance Utopias: Doni, Patrizi, and Zuccolo* (New York: 2019). E. Nelson, "Utopia Through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006), 1029-57. Comments. Bear 14 July 2020. 342. Robichaud on Renaissance Plato. 343. Jewish Philosophy. 344. Pico della Mirandola.