

AENEAS OF GAZA ON THE SOUL

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Classical learning in fields including rhetoric, poetry, literary criticism and biology blossomed in the late-fifth century schools in Gaza.¹ Aeneas of Gaza (fl. 480 AD) ventured into philosophy, possibly after philosophical studies under Hierocles in Alexandria.² In his *Theophrastus*, a philosophical dialogue about the pre-existence of the soul and the eternity of the world, Aeneas attacked philosophy as a threat to Christian teaching.³ Yet he was also prepared to employ its methods of argument and pick from it anything that might be useful. In this paper, I investigate the extent of Aeneas' knowledge of contemporary Neoplatonism by analyzing his arguments about the soul, particularly surrounding the central problem of transmigration of souls (μετενσωμάτωσης, μετεμψύχωσης, μεταγγισμός ψυχῶν). I argue that Aeneas had accurate knowledge of contemporary and historical Platonism, but that his specific engagement with Neoplatonists is limited by his larger intra-Christian aims. Among these, I suggest that emerging forms of Origenism in the Gazan monasteries provide one interpretive frame for Aeneas' dialogue.

Zacharias Scholasticus, (whose *Ammonius* is deeply indebted to Aeneas) has Aeneas explain that:

Often, if I came across some problem in a certain place concerning a word from Plato, Aristotle or Plotinus, and I could not find a solution to it among those who teach and interpret their opinions, I would ask [Abba Isaiah] to make their intention and purpose clear to me as to what they wanted to say, and he would illumine and reveal the meaning and purpose of the passage, and he would not only redress its error but also reinforce the truth of Christian teaching. (*Life of Isaiah* 8)⁴

While this is clearly an apologetic statement in the hagiographic tradition, where the saint demonstrates that Christian 'philosophy' out-shines the pagan versions, it is also evidence that Neoplatonic philosophy was of interest to sophists connected to late-antique Gaza.⁵

Yet the extent of Aeneas' knowledge of contemporary Neoplatonism has been controversial. Hadot argued that Aeneas' dialogue is a 'point by point' refutation of Hierocles' *de Providentia*.⁶ Aujoulat has rightly cast serious doubt on this claim, but the degree of Aeneas' engagement with other Neoplatonists remains an open question.⁷ Where a Christian writer fails to engage with the detail of a philosopher's argument, he may be said to be ignorant or merely more interested in other questions.

¹ For these schools, see Downey (1958); Seitz (1892). A detailed reconsideration of these schools is a desideratum. For those associated with the schools, see Kaster (1988) and Szbat (2007) 212ff.

² Praise for Hierocles in his dialogue is usually taken as an autobiographical hint (*Theophrastus* 2.9-10) (References to the *Theophrastus* throughout will be to page and line number). Aeneas' fellow Gazan, Zacharias Scholasticus, also wrote a philosophical-theological dialogue. There is controversy about whether Aeneas' contemporary in the Gazan schools, Procopius, directly attacked Proclus. For *pro* and *contra*, see Westerink (1942) and Stiglmayer (1899).

³ For Aeneas' *Theophrastus*, see the edition by Minniti-Colonna (1958).

⁴ Translations throughout are my own. In this case, the translation is from the Latin rendering of the transmitted Syriac *Life* by Brooks (1907).

⁵ For the topos of the strength of Christian 'philosophy' in hagiography, see e.g. Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 72-80. For Zacharias' philosophical sources, see Minniti-Colonna (1973) 46-49, 51-55 (her *index locorum* should be used with particular care).

⁶ See Hadot (1978) 20.

⁷ Aujoulat (1987) sees general acquaintance with Hierocles but concludes that detailed engagement with Hierocles' ideas, at least in the *de Prov.* cannot be demonstrated (81). In Aujoulat's view, closer knowledge of Proclus is more easily demonstrated (79).

I seek to show that, on this topic, Aeneas' knowledge extends from Plato to contemporary Neoplatonism, suggesting that the latter solution is more applicable to Aeneas.⁸ Hence I claim that Aeneas' arguments about the soul position him between contemporary Neoplatonism and emerging Christian doctrinal controversies. Ideas on the soul and resurrection associated with followers of Origen may be read as providing an intra-Christian context for Aeneas' arguments. I propose that Aeneas' attacks on Neoplatonic transmigration may simultaneously be read as rebuttals of Origenist ideas about the resurrection of souls to different levels of being.⁹ But if Aeneas is implicitly engaging with Origenism, a means of transmission to Gaza of such ideas needs to be identified. Hence I go on to suggest that members of the Gazan monasteries helped to mediate Origenism to Aeneas.¹⁰ My paper therefore helps to identify how and where Origenist ideas circulated between the fourth century persecutions of Origenists in Alexandria and the sixth-century condemnation of Origenism under Justinian (553).¹¹

As the later Neoplatonic commentator Olympiodorus argued, belief in the transmigration of the soul arises from two premises: 1) the immortality of the soul and 2) the eternity of the world (*in Phaed.* 10.1, Westerink 136-7). If souls are immortal and the cosmos is eternal, then at any instance the number of ensouled beings will be infinite, contradicting the Aristotelian principle that an actual infinity is impossible (Arist., *Phys.* 3.5, 204a20-30).¹² Aristotle was taken to have denied transmigration by rejecting the principle that the soul is immortal (Olympiodorus *in Phaed.* 10.1, Westerink 138-9; Arist. *De an.* I, 3, 407b22). But since Neoplatonists followed Plato in believing that the soul is immortal and the world is eternal, they felt themselves committed to some form of reincarnation. Aristotle's rejection of the immortality of the soul also made this a live question for Neoplatonists, who tried to make a case for the soul's immortality against Aristotle's view.¹³

In Aeneas' dialogue, the pagan philosopher Theophrastus begins from a collection of earlier philosophical opinions which is extensively dependent on the initial section of Plotinus' *Ennead* on the topic (IV.8.1) (*Theophrastus* 5.10ff). Plotinus sets out possible answers to questions about how souls which have contemplated truth and beauty in the intelligible realm could enter the realm of discursive reasoning, and how such a soul could enter a body. In the *Theophrastus*, the questions are slightly different. The Christian interlocutor asks whether the soul pre-exists, whether it exists after the individual's life on earth, whether it descends repeatedly to life in the terrestrial cosmos and whether such returns are necessary or voluntary. Such questions allow examination of Neoplatonic problems, as will become apparent shortly. But they would also remind Christian readers of Origen's doctrine of the

⁸ It may be that Aeneas both knows about philosophical ideas and is not very philosophically capable. Evaluating this question is beyond the scope of this paper. In brief, I have found few instances where Aeneas' arguments might seriously bother a Neoplatonist. Certainly, Philoponus' rebuttal of Proclus in the next generation shows greater philosophical acumen.

⁹ Gallicet (1978) 141-3 (wrongly, I think) suggests Origenist tendencies in some of Aeneas' views on creation. Wacht (1969) outlines Origen's views on creation in the context of the *Theophrastus* (86-90). For accounts of Origenism in this period, see Guillaumont (1962), Konstantinovskiy (2009), Clark (1992). For Origen's own ideas, see Edwards (2002), Williams (2004).

¹⁰ For the monasteries around Gaza, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (2000, 2004, 2006). Watts (2007) has outlined exchanges between monks and schoolmen around Gaza.

¹¹ See further Hombergen (2001).

¹² On infinity arguments in late antique philosophy, see Sorabji (2004) vol 2, 175-95; Sorabji (1983) Chapter 15.

¹³ E.g. Porphyry, *Against Boethus* (Smith). Karamanolis (2007) 91-109 analyses Porphyry's use of the concept of ἐμψυχία to rebut peripatetic arguments.

necessarily repeated return of souls to life on earth for their continuing ethical purification: rejection of Neoplatonic transmigration of souls could also be read as rejection of the Origenists' theory of multiple resurrections.

I return shortly to such Origenist controversies. First, I investigate the Neoplatonic arguments which Aeneas more obviously uses his dialogue to explore. He begins with the following question: how does a soul come to inhabit a body? Following Plotinus, he reports Heraclitus' views before moving to Empedocles, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. As in Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists, the Presocratic philosophers are passed over quickly. Aristotle's concept of the soul as the activating power of the body is appended briefly to Plotinus' doxography, and only ridiculed in what follows.¹⁴ As in Plotinus, Plato takes centre stage. Theophrastus repeats the view, found in Plotinus and repeated in the later Neoplatonists, that Plato makes his arguments suitable for their immediate dialectical context: dialogue is read as dialogue to avoid attributing confusion to Plato where he seems to say different things in different places (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.8.23-9; *Theophrastus* 6.3-6).¹⁵ Aeneas thus displays knowledge of standard Neoplatonic exegetical principles, although he will soon use the diversity of opinion to cast doubt on Plato's reliability as a source of knowledge, so his sympathies lie elsewhere.

The chief Platonic arguments for why the soul descends into bodies are all found in Plotinus' doxography, although the arguments from the *Phaedo* are explicitly identified by Aeneas, where in Plotinus the reader is left to infer their providence. From the *Phaedo*, Theophrastus reports Socrates' view that the earth and body are imperfect, and that therefore the body is a sort of prison for the soul (Plotinus *Enn.* IV.8.1.33, cf IV.8.3.1-7; *Theophrastus* 6.5-9). This view is extended in the *Republic*, where, in Theophrastus' view, the release of the soul from the body is analogous to escape from the cave (Plotinus *Enn.* IV.8.1.35-7; *Theophrastus* 6.10-12). Theophrastus then moves to the *Phaedrus*, with a reference to the famous image of the winged souls borne down by force by the horse of evil (Plotinus *Enn.* IV.8.1.38-40; *Theophrastus* 6.12-19). He concludes with reference to the *Timaeus*, in which Plato offers a more positive evaluation of the cosmos, calling it a blessed god, and arguing that the soul is made part of the cosmos to ensure that it is intelligent. In Platonic terms reported by Plotinus and Theophrastus, the cosmos is necessarily possessed of intellect, which would be impossible if it did not have a soul. The soul of each entity is its connection to the intelligible world. It makes the created order perfect. Souls therefore willingly enter the physical world in accordance with the plan of the demiurge for the perfection of the cosmos (Plotinus *Enn.* IV.8.1.42-51; *Theophrastus* 7.2-10).¹⁶

The Christian character Euxitheus emphasises four of these opinions (*Theophrastus* 8.3-6). He identifies the options that the soul may return to an imperfect cosmos as a punishment, of necessity or by force (*Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*). By contrast, the *Timaeus* account has the rational soul returning both willingly and for the perfection of a good cosmos. All four options will be rejected on Christian grounds later on. At this point, the possibility of a pre-existent soul

¹⁴ Cf Eusebius *PE* XV.

¹⁵ This approach is taken up explicitly in the extant Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Phaedo*, which reject on these grounds Iamblichus' view that the five arguments given by Plato in the *Phaedo* for the soul's immortality are each intended to prove the immortality of the soul.

¹⁶ The Platonic foundations for these views may be found at *Phaed.* 62B, 67D, *Crat.* 400C; *Rep.* 514A-517B, 619D; *Phaedr.* 246C-249A; *Tim.* 34B.

descending into bodies is provisionally accepted, and the argument turns to the mode of transmigration.

Theophrastus begins by setting out the so-called ‘Egyptian’ belief, picked up by Pythagoreans, that the human soul may return in a beast (*Theophrastus* 10.6-13). This belief finds support in Plato (*Timaeus* 91d-92b; cf *Republic* 620a).¹⁷ Plotinus seems to have understood the account literally; Aeneas’ report is accurate. Greedy men return as raptors, robbers as wolves, and the incontinent and intemperate as donkeys. For Theophrastus, references to Greek mythology also support the possibility of such metamorphoses. When we hear of Thersites being transformed into a monkey, ironic humour and ridicule of this position is surely not too far from the surface. Egyptus, a largely taciturn character in the dialogue who always supports the Christian Euxitheus, ridicules the whole idea as ‘a lot of strange talk’ (Φεῦ τῆς τερατολογίας) and Euxitheus himself calls it a ‘great joke’ (*Theophrastus* 10.15, 11.21). Theophrastus seems to persist with the idea only for the sake of completeness. He acknowledges its inadequacies and reports that Porphyry and Iamblichus rejected it by arguing for human-human transmigration because:

the substance of the rational soul is one kind and that of the irrational soul is another, and [they argued] that they cannot be interchanged, but rather that the substances always remain self-identical, in the same kind as they originally proceeded, since rationality is not an accidental quality of the soul...it is completely impossible that rationality be transformed into irrationality. (*Theophrastus* 12.15-7, 18-19)¹⁸

This matches the report of Iamblichus’ views in the scholium on Nemesius of Emesa’s *De natura hominis*.¹⁹ It is also consistent with Augustine’s account of Porphyry’s views (*City of God* 10.30).²⁰ From these witnesses, we know that both Porphyry and Iamblichus argued that the nature of the soul does not change in transmigrations, but that the form of the body which it inhabits does. Aeneas’ example is taken from the stage. Actors do not change in nature when they play different characters (*Theophrastus* 12.23-5). The example from theatre is interesting in the context of Christian attacks on the mimes, which would be vigorously combated by Aeneas’ younger contemporary, the Christian orator and sophist Choricus.²¹ Such support for the theatre in Gaza parallels to some degree the sophists’ willingness to engage with Neoplatonism, even as they seek to replace its conclusions with Christian ideas.

¹⁷ See Rich (1957) 232-38. For a general overview of Plotinus on the soul, see Blumenthal (1996) 82-104; Smith (2004) 40-73.

¹⁸ ἄλλη μὲν λογικῆς ψυχῆς ἢ οὐσία, ἄλλη δ’ ἀλόγου καὶ ὅτι οὐ μετανίστανται, ἀλλ’ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσιν αἱ οὐσίαι, οἷαι τὸ πρῶτον προῆλθον· οὐ γὰρ τὸ λογικὸν τῇ ψυχῇ συμβεβηκὸς ... καὶ ὅλως ἀδύνατον τὸν λόγον εἰς ἀλογίαν μετατίθεσθαι. Support for human-human transmigration is found in Pl. *Phaedr.* 248d-e, *Meno* 82b-d, *Phaed.* 72e-73b. The same position is found in Hierocles *On Providence* 214.6, 172b (Schibli 334) cf. 251.4, 461b1-5 (Schibli 338-39).

¹⁹ B. Einarson, *Nemesius of Emesa, De natura hominis* sec. 2, lines 595-600: Ἰάμβλιχος δὲ ... κατ’ εἶδος ζῶων ψυχῆς εἶδος εἶναι λέγει, ἥγουν εἶδη διάφορα. γέγραπται γοῦν αὐτῷ μονόβιβλον ἐπίγραφον ὅτι οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων εἰς ζῶα ἄλογα οὐδὲ ἀπὸ ζῶων ἀλόγων εἰς ἀνθρώπους αἱ μετενσωματώσεις γίνονται, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ ζῶων εἰς ζῶα καὶ ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων εἰς ἀνθρώπους.

²⁰ Fr. 300a (Smith). While Fr. 268 is ambiguous, it seems to mean that reincarnated souls of people who have been bestial will not live as beasts, but rather live bestial lives in human flesh.

²¹ Choricus, *Speech on behalf of the mimes*, Oration 8 (Foerster-Richsteig 344-80). Procopius, Choricus’ teacher, linked pantomimes to effeminacy and civic violence, so a positive evaluation of the theatre was not uniform among Gazan sophists. Aeneas’ *Ep.* 7 (Positano 42-3) is ambiguous in its attitude to comedy. See Procopius, *Panegyric to Anastasius* 16 (Matino ed., 2005). On the general question of the mimes in Gaza, see Webb (2008) 147 and Chapter 9.

Yet Iamblichus' version of transmigration also receives short shrift from the Christian interlocutor (*Theophrastus*, 13.1-20). Making an intemperate soul return as an asinine man would only give it greater opportunity for intemperance, and so would not be a punishment at all. Informing this rebuttal is the Christian view that rationality is insufficient for virtue: a person may in fact enjoy his vicious actions, despite being rational. Further, such reincarnation would also be incompatible with a justly ordered cosmos. The demiurge would be like a judge who sentenced a robber to steal from a temple, 'so that he might display his greediness without restraint'.²² Porphyry's and Iamblichus' account would therefore take away our responsibility for our own evil actions.

Theophrastus does not try to come to their aid. Instead, he outlines the views of Proclus and Syrianus, thus bringing his dialogue up to date with the most recent opinions within contemporary Neoplatonism (*Theophrastus* 14.7-17). According to Aeneas, Syrianus and Proclus reject both the idea that the rational soul can migrate into an irrational creature and that it would migrate into a physical form more suitable for it in its particular degeneracy. Instead, they suggest that the punishment is for the rational soul to be attached to the irrational soul of a beast. Thus a greedy man's soul returns condemned to be bound to the soul of a raptor, rather than itself becoming the raptor's soul. Humour is again Euxitheus' response to this refinement. 'Hector will be bound to a wasp, since both are chieftains and most war-like and Cleon will be a frog, for they both cry aloud often' (*Theophrastus* 14.21-23).²³ The ridicule becomes more pointed and explicit as Aeneas reports the views of the more recent philosophers, which may be a marker of the strength of his antipathy towards contemporary, rather than historic, Neoplatonism. An only slightly more serious objection again goes to the potential of such a scheme to overturn established morality. Sacrifice, a cornerstone of pagan morality tied to virtuous civic obligation, will instead be a means of release for bad souls which have been bound to beasts (*Theophrastus* 15.18-24).

So far, the Christian character has granted the possibility of pre-existence for the sake of the argument, then cast doubt on all the different possible accounts of pre-existence on the basis of their conflict with traditional morality. This strategy is again employed when the possibility of pre-existence itself is questioned. The Neoplatonic commentary tradition took the argument that learning is recollection as proof of the pre-existence of the soul. Aeneas focuses his rebuttal of pre-existence on this argument (Olympiodorus, *in Phaed* 11-12, Damascius I, 253-310; Damascius II, 4-28). His rebuttal again seeks to show the bad consequences for morality, providence and personal responsibility if recollection is accepted as a proof of the pre-existence of the soul. He grants that a pre-existent soul might remember the good, but he wonders why it would not also remember evils of earlier terrestrial lives (he ridicules Pythagoras' reported belief that he remembered his earlier lives, claiming that such stories are like the babbling of an old woman) (*Theophrastus* 19.8-9). Yet if souls cannot remember the sufferings of their earlier existences (as Plato and Socrates suggest), then there can be no providential purpose in suffering (*Theophrastus* 17.1-14). This would undermine divine providence, which works in part by punishing humans with evils in order to correct their errors. Furthermore, the idea that the descent of the soul is a punishment would lead to valid accusations of unfairness

²² This is a traditional Christian argument against transmigration, ironically (in the light of later condemnation of Origenists) to be found in Origen himself. See his *Commentary on Romans* 7.8, vol. 2, (Bammel 502-3). See also the discussion at Edwards (2002) 97-98.

²³ σφηκὶ δὲ ὁ Ἔκτωρ συνδέδεται, κορυθαίολω γὰρ ἄμφω καὶ μαχιμωτάτω, ὁ δὲ δὴ βάτραχος καὶ κλέων ἦν, θαμὰ γὰρ βοῶσιν ἀμφοτέρω.

against Providence. For if you cannot remember the sins you have committed, you have no way of knowing what they were and hence cannot understand the justice of your situation or learn from previous mistakes: ‘Readily and justly one despises the judge if, despite knowing no crime in oneself, one undergoes punishment’ (*Theophrastus* 17.13-14).²⁴ Presumably a Neoplatonist would respond that you could infer your earlier actions from your current situation, at least to a high degree of probability. But Aeneas pushes the critique one stage further. Memory, which is essential to the formation of a coherent self, would be erased by reincarnation. A reincarnated being would ‘forget [his] very self’, and would not be able to remember his proper characteristics (*Theophrastus* 17.14-24).

Theophrastus has no reply to this argument that reincarnation is incompatible with a coherent account of the self. Aeneas does not seem aware of (or does not think relevant to his claims about memory) Plotinus’ extended argument about a soul having knowledge of its fixed identity in the world of the forms (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.7).²⁵ Instead, he makes the pagan character attempt to rebut Euxitheus’ claim that pre-existence of the soul is incompatible with conventional morality. The details of Theophrastus’ rebuttal are beyond the scope of this paper. For present purposes, I want to draw attention to the speed with which arguments about psychology and ontology move to ethics. Both interlocutors aim to rebut each other’s arguments about the nature of the soul by attempting to show that their views are immoral. If Aeneas’ main purpose in the sections of the dialogue which relate to the eternity of the world is to show that only the Christian concept of a finite cosmos is compatible with the claim that God is good, the same move is made repeatedly in his arguments about the soul. Attempting to provide a coherent account of the problem of human evil is one factor which links him to contemporary Neoplatonism. A common concern to explain and understand evil emerges from the debate and may be taken as one defining characteristic of late-antique (Christian and non-Christian) thought.

Given Aeneas’ accurate reporting of Platonic and Neoplatonic positions up to Proclus, the fact that he does not engage in rigorous argument, instead often having recourse to irony and sarcasm, suggests not so much ignorance of Neoplatonism as a different set of aims. One possible intra-Christian focus is counteracting re-emerging Origenist views about the soul. Origenist ideas became popular enough to warrant official condemnation in the middle of the sixth century. In the first quarter of the sixth century, letters between a monk and his spiritual advisor witness to the circulation of Origenist ideas in the Gazan monasteries (John and Barsanuphius, *Letters* 600-607). A large minority of monks at Gaza were drawn from the same social class as members of the rhetorical schools, and we can trace a number of key figures in the monasteries who had received classical rhetorical education in Gaza and Alexandria alongside Aeneas and his contemporaries.²⁶ There is evidence that a monastic library was one of the communal buildings of at least one Gazan

²⁴ ῥαδίως τε καὶ δικαίως κακίζει τὸν δικαστὴν ἐκεῖνος, εἰ φαῦλον μηδὲν αὐτὸς αὐτῷ συνειδῶς ὑπομένει τὴν τιμωρίαν.

²⁵ Porphyry argues that the soul gains self knowledge in its return to the intelligible world, where it can contemplate the intellect which eternally abides there as its changeless paradigm (fr. 275.20 Smith). See further Blumenthal (1996) and Edwards (2002) 117 nn. 57-58.

²⁶ For example, Hilarion, his disciples Hesychas and Epiphanius, and a key figure in the next generation, Sivanus, all studied in Alexandria. For Silvanus, see Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* VI,32. For further Alexandrian connections, including those of John Rufus, Severus, Peter the Iberian and Abba Isaiah, see Zacharias, *Life of Severus* and *Life of Isaiah* and John Rufus’ *Life of Peter*. For further discussion, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (2000), 26, 28-29, 43ff.

monastery.²⁷ There were many interactions between monks and townsfolk, and monks could travel between the monastery and the city.²⁸ So it is plausible that Aeneas' dialogue would have interested Gazan monks, and that the monasteries were, in Aeneas' time, a locus for re-emerging Origenist ideas. This supposition may be strengthened by the fact that the Gazan monasteries were in part founded by monks from Alexandria who had been exiled for their Origenist beliefs in the late fourth century.²⁹

'Origenism' was a motley collection of doctrines by the sixth century. It is difficult to reach beyond the official condemnations of the doctrines to beliefs held by Origenists themselves and often futile to try to tie their beliefs precisely to those of Origen himself. However, later sections of Aeneas' dialogue seem partly directed at Origenist cosmology, particularly the doctrine that there is a rational, incorporeal and immaterial creation unified with Christ the Logos, and Aeneas also rejects the view that intelligible beings are infinite in number (*Theophrastus* 37-42). The final section of the dialogue emphasizes the reality of individual, unique and recognizable bodily resurrection, a criticism plausibly directed against Origenists who were condemned for believing that the perfect resurrection body was a spherical incorporeal entity, but which is a debate entirely foreign to Neoplatonism (*Theophrastus* 51ff).³⁰ Each of these views would later be anathematised by the second council of Constantinople in 553 (*ACO* 4.1, 248-9).

The first article of those anathemas is most pertinent for our immediate purposes: 'If anyone maintains the fabled pre-existence of souls and the monstrous restoration which follows from it: let him be anathema' (Εἴ τις τὴν μυθώδη προὔπαρξιν τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τὴν ταύτηι ἐπομένην τερατώδη ἀποκατάστασιν πρεσβεύει, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω) (*ACO* 4.1, 248,3-4).³¹ Aeneas' arguments against pre-existence and transmigration, although more directly aimed at Neoplatonists, would also resonate in this intra-Christian context. Justinian's imperial edict against Origenists has slightly different wording, but again picks out elements rejected by Aeneas. Justinian condemns anyone who 'says or holds that the souls of men pre-existed' (λέγει ἢ ἔχει προὔπαρχειν τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχὰς) and goes on to argue that the descent of the soul into bodies is not a punishment (Justinian, *Edict contra Origen*, Anathema 1). Aeneas also explicitly rejects the idea that the descent of the soul into bodies is a punishment of pre-existent but fallen souls, arguing instead that God individually implants a soul into every human as the divine mark of rationality (*Theophrastus* 38.4-7).

²⁷ See Hevelone-Harper (2005) 24-25. Perrone (2004) 133 characterises the Thawatha monastery near Gaza as a 'school'.

²⁸ For such interactions, see e.g. Barsanuphius and John, *Epp* 620-25, 667-73, 681-82, 712-18, 727-29, 736-42, 749-56, 764-74). See further Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (2006) Chapter 10, especially 200-12.

²⁹ See further Rubenson (1995) and (1999).

³⁰ Compare Aujoulat (1987) 81: 'la résurrection des corps et la mutation du monde mortel en un cosmos immortel constituent autant de problèmes inconnus à Hiéroclès, mais bien présents dans le *Théophraste*'.

³¹ ἀποκατάστασις may pick out, somewhat confusedly, the Stoic doctrine of repeated creations and conflagrations, attributing something like it to the Origenists. More likely, it identifies the Origenist ideas that souls are repeatedly resurrected, if they have been virtuous, to successively higher orders of existence. If so, Aeneas' rejection of the views of 'those from the Stoa' on this point may also resonate with critics of Origenism (*Theophrastus* 51.18-23). Aeneas repeatedly emphasises that there is only one act of creation, and that creation will be brought to a single, perfect end.

One of the reasons Origen himself seems to have posited multiple resurrections to successively higher planes of being was to explain how the physical body could be purified, in successive stages, to attain divine perfection.³² Aeneas also believes that the created order is a training ground for mortals (e.g. *Theophrastus* 35.15-36.3). But he repeatedly makes the case that a single life is sufficient for being trained up to heaven. Repeated resurrections are not necessary since ‘the present life is sufficient for our illumination’ (*Theophrastus* 35.17).³³ He argues that the creation provides sufficient signs of truthfulness and goodness in creation, and if necessary, the creator punishes people sufficiently once, rather than subjecting them to repeated punishments. Paradise is the reward for the just; unrepentant sinners are condemned to eternal punishments (*Theophrastus* 35.21-36.3). While these arguments may apply against a Neoplatonic opponent, who argues that a bad life can only be punished if there is punishment in the next descent of the soul, they also strike more deeply against the Origenist scheme, where souls are trained to be suitable for successively higher modes of existence. Such successive refinement, Aeneas implies, is unnecessary, and calls into question the efficacy of divine providence, for if God cannot perfect his creatures once and for all, his salvific power appears limited.

Of course, the main threat in the schools remained the Platonists. In setting Christian ideas against pagan ones, Aeneas needed all the help he could marshal. The need to create alliances with the nearby Christian communities against this immediate social, intellectual and religious problem may be part of the reason why Aeneas did not attack Origenism directly. His oblique approach may also be explained by the relative weakness of Origenist ideas around 485: it would be another six decades before Origenism was formally condemned. Another possible reason for the oblique approach may be friendships formed with the monks over Monophysite disputes.³⁴ Yet Aeneas’ rejection of the pagan idea of the pre-existence and repeated return of the soul, alongside his emphasis on bodily resurrection, can also be read as a rejection of Origenism. If this reading is accepted, the dialogue implicitly attacks Origenists by identifying them with pagans.

The extended collection of philosophical opinions on the soul in the *Theophrastus* demonstrates that Aeneas possessed direct knowledge of contemporary Neoplatonism. He follows the standard methods of contemporary Neoplatonic commentators and sets his own ideas against the background of the golden chain of Platonism accepted by his philosophical contemporaries, whose views he reports accurately. Yet his main concern is to provide a coherent Christian account rather than to correct and improve Neoplatonism. His arguments against the Neoplatonists rarely strike home; mockery, humour, irony and sarcasm often pass for argument. He nevertheless finds Neoplatonic conceptual schemes and philosophical methods useful for Christianity. I have suggested that one way in which Neoplatonism is useful is in his attempt to rebut, albeit obliquely, Origenist ideas. That Aeneas turns to a Neoplatonic conceptual scheme partly in order to clarify intra-Christian arguments witnesses both to Aeneas’ openness towards Neoplatonic philosophy and to the social and intellectual power Neoplatonism still exerted in the rhetorical schools of late-antique Gaza. The implicit rebuttal of Origenist ideas about the soul suggests proximate intellectual communities in which Origenism could gain support. Aeneas’ dialogue is circumstantial evidence that this interest in Origenism should be traced to the Gazan monasteries in the last quarter of the fifth century.

³² See Williams (2004) 132-42.

³³ ἱκανὸς γὰρ ὁ παρῶν βίος πρὸς ἐπίδειξιν.

³⁴ While Aeneas’ dialogue does not display clear evidence of Monophysite tendencies, he was known to monks who were leading Monophysites.

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