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# EXPLAINING THE COSMOS

*Creation and Cultural Interaction in Late-Antique Gaza*



MICHAEL W. CHAMPION

# *Explaining the Cosmos*

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## Preface

In one of his letters, Aeneas of Gaza claimed that ‘the Academy and the Lyceum are among us’. Three thinkers associated with Gaza—Aeneas, Procopius, and Zacharias—provide a case study for the appropriation, adaptation, and transformation of classical philosophy in Christian late antiquity, as well as for cultural transitions more generally in the city. The three Gazans mix in a range of social groups in the city and beyond and are interesting for the history of ideas in their own right, for the reception of Neoplatonic ideas, especially those of Proclus, and for the light they cast on later debates between thinkers such as Philoponus and Simplicius.

Aeneas’ dialogue and that of Zacharias is self-consciously Platonic and both thinkers, along with Procopius in his *Commentary on Genesis*, respond to the contemporary Neoplatonic claim, put cogently by Proclus in the fifth century, that the world is eternal. This would undermine the Christian belief that God will ultimately bring in a new creation and make the cosmos perfect. The Gazans do not match the philosophical sophistication of Philoponus, although they do on occasions offer arguments that might give Neoplatonists pause for thought. Their arguments are more often governed by Christian problems, and they set out a version of the divine plan of salvation that moves their thought from physics to ethics and on to soteriology. Analysis of the dialogues simultaneously yields rich information about the cultural dynamics of the Gazan schools, on relationships between Christians and Neoplatonists in the schools, and on interactions between the schools and local monasteries. The book therefore maps the local cultures that constituted educated elite society in Gaza. My emphasis on local cultures aims to counteract the tendency to talk of Christianity as a unified monolith and goes beyond approaches which pluralize Christianity in terms of different doctrinal readings or ‘heresies’. It also provides a model of cultural



groups as heterogeneous and open, moving away from paradigms of cultural analysis that privilege conflict in explaining cultural identity formation.

Throughout, my aim is that intellectual history will support cultural analysis and exploration of power dynamics, and that cultural problems encoded in their texts will help to situate the Gazans' ideas. As such, the book is an attempt to bring intellectual and cultural history closely together. The book is inherently interdisciplinary. Scholars of early Christianity will recognize many of the Christian arguments, scholars of ancient philosophy will recall the main outline of the Neoplatonic debates, and scholars of late-antique history will find familiar cultural traces left by the texts, although the Gazans provide surprises in all these areas. Putting these different disciplines in closer dialogue with each other is intended to enrich each.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the many scholars who have helped me along the way. The book began its life as a London doctorate, and much of the research was completed in London, supported by a King's College London Research Studentship, in the libraries of the Institute for Classical Studies, Warburg Institute, and British Library. I am very grateful to staff there and at the Dalton-McCaughey Library in Melbourne. My Ph.D. supervisors Peter Adamson, Judith Herrin, and Charlotte Roueché all provided critical advice and encouragement in shaping the present volume. My examiners, Isabella Sandwell and Richard Sorabji, both offered copious suggestions for improvement and greatly helped refine my ideas, as did the two anonymous readers for the Press. In Melbourne, the example and advice of the late Eric Osborn was very influential, and I have learned much from discussion with David Runia and Roger Scott (who supervised my earlier work on creation and Zacharias). I have enjoyed the support of colleagues at the University of Western Australia as I have drafted this book. I also benefit greatly from the support and criticism of family and friends and happily record my deep gratitude to Gaye, Neil, Benita, Matthew, Miranda, Philippa, Martin, and Hilary. A final word of thanks to my wife Sarah Gador-Whyte, for her love, intelligent criticism, and practical help, and to Samuel, who will one day learn what all the fuss was about.

St George's College, University of Western Australia  
May 2013

# Abbreviations

Journal titles are abbreviated in accordance with *l'année philologique*.

Titles of classical historical and literary texts and standard reference works are abbreviated in accordance with the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition, ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (Oxford, 2012).

Works of ancient philosophy are abbreviated in accordance with the series *The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London and Ithaca, NY), for which see *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD*, Volume 1 (New York, 2005), 415f.

Citation systems for Greek texts usually follow those used in the *TLG*. For full bibliographic details of ancient sources, see the bibliography.

In addition, the following abbreviations or citation conventions are employed:

For citing Aeneas' and Zacharias' dialogues, line numbers in Minniti-Colonna's editions are used without noting the title (*Theophrastus* or *Ammonius*), unless this leads to ambiguity. See Aeneas, *Teofrasto*, ed. M. Minniti-Colonna (Naples, 1958); Zacharias, *Ammonio. Introduzione, Testo Critico, Traduzione, Commentario* (Naples, 1973).

Procopius' commentary is referred to without title where this is unambiguous. In this context, (37A) refers to Procopius' commentary, PG 87.1, column 37A.

ACO	<i>Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum</i> . Edited under the direction of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1984– ).
CAG	<i>Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca</i> . Edited under the direction of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 23 vols. (Berlin, 1882–1909).
CPGV X.10	Hierocles' <i>Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses</i> , Chapter X and section 10 of the text edited by

	F. G. Köhler, <i>Hierocles in aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius</i> (Stuttgart, 1974).
CSCO	<i>Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium</i>
Prov.	214.3.172a Photius' <i>Bibliotheca</i> codex 214 (where a summary of Hierocles' <i>De Providentia</i> is found), paragraph 3 in Schibli's translation, section 172a in Henry's edition of the <i>Bibliotheca</i> . See <i>Bibliothèque</i> , ed. R. Henry (Paris, 1959– : vol. 3 for codex 214, 1962; vol. 7 for codex 251, 1974); H. Schibli, <i>Hierocles of Alexandria</i> (Oxford, 2002), for translations of this work, and for CPGV.
Q&A	600 Letter 600 in the collection <i>Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza</i> SC 426–27, 450–51, 468 (Paris, 1997– ).
SC	Sources chretiennes.
VSev	<i>Life of Severus</i> . Other Lives are abbreviated analogously.

# *Explaining the Cosmos*



## Introduction

EUXITHEUS ... Come, tell me, do you still have people among you who display the mysteries of philosophy, as Hierocles, our teacher, did? And do fine and noble young men, such as my contemporary Protagoras the Lycian, who was pre-eminent in virtue and character, still attend a school?

EGYPTUS There were noble things long ago, but now they have departed and are destroyed. This man does not want to learn, enlisted into the [group of] students; that man who pretends to give instruction does not have the knowledge to teach. The theatre and the hippodrome flourish, while philosophy and the Muses fall into terrible neglect.

—(Aeneas, *Theophrastus*)

A. You seem to me sufficiently initiated into the mysteries of philosophy, and not an uncultured man, uninitiated in his soul about either such sacred rites or such oral teachings. In addition, you also want to be a public figure... But tell me, sir, how is the interpreter of the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, who has left Athens, but came from [Proclus], the philosopher who is especially deficient in philosophy and wisdom? [This philosopher] now boasts that he is wise in the city of Alexander, and professes to make others wise harmoniously...

B. You seem to me to be inquiring about Ammonius, dear sir. With such words you are accustomed to jeer at him.

A. ...Mortal fear holds me in agony in case he fill the young men with his idle talk. For that man craftily corrupts the young men's souls, renouncing both God and the truth as he does.

—(Zacharias, *Ammonius*)

Just like a teacher of children, [God] introduced the first elements to them, knowing that once they had learned them, other teachers would come, who would teach and transmit the more perfect knowledge.

—(Procopius, *Commentary on Genesis*)

THESE WORKS BY AENEAS, ZACHARIAS, AND PROCOPIUS, THINKERS associated with Gazan rhetorical schools from the late fifth century, appear to tell standard stories. Aeneas esteems ancient knowledge, including the Neoplatonism of Hierocles (fl. 440). The *Theophrastus* is the earliest of the three works, written after 484 and before c. 490, when Zacharias began composing his work with a copy of Aeneas' dialogue on his desk. The dialogue sets itself clearly in the Platonic tradition by recalling Plato's Protagoras, the 'wisest of his generation' (σοφωτάτω μὲν δῆπου τῶν γε νῦν) (*Prot.* 309d). Aeneas uses classical clichés to bemoan the fact that the sacred mysteries of classical philosophy are being taught badly to apathetic youth. Classical knowledge defines a virtuous public life, but the signs of demise are apparent as Philosophia's charges frequent

the theatre and hippodrome instead of her school. In his *Ammonius*, Zacharias considers some of the same themes, and elsewhere similarly claims Platonic lineage, setting his dialogues in a place suitable for philosophy (*Ammonius* 47 ff.; cf. *Phaedr.* 227a–229b). But Zacharias ridicules *Philosophia*, who is characterized as a threat. Those who want to be Christian citizens may be corrupted by her, particularly by her representative in Alexandria, Ammonius (435/445–517/526), or still worse, by Proclus (411–485) and his successors in Athens. For Zacharias, Christian identity is constructed by emphasizing conflict and difference. In the third extract, Procopius, Zacharias' contemporary who was probably writing in the early years of the sixth century, has left philosophy behind, basing his work on divine revelation. The world has moved from paganism to Christianity, from the classical world to the early medieval era, from governors to bishops, from students to disciples.

Yet such a neat picture of progressive departure from the classical world through a process of cultural and intellectual conflict is much too simple. Interactions between diverse groups in the Gazan schools and wider cultural trends at the turn of the sixth century make for a richer picture of cultural and intellectual collaboration, and for appropriation and adaptation of ideas, beliefs, and practices. At Gaza in the late sixth century, we are fortunate to have a diverse range of evidence from rhetorical and philosophical schools, monasteries, and the archaeological record, alongside philosophical, theological, rhetorical, and poetic writings, and much comparative material from other late-antique cities, which allow us to construct a picture of a society undergoing a process of transition.<sup>1</sup> This book aims to elucidate this transition by exploring the writings of Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius on the subject of the creation and eternity of the world. Through an analysis of how these writers seek to effect change in their local cultures, I aim to explain the distinctive features of late-antique Gazan society and intellectual culture. Throughout, I offer a dual focus on cultural history sensitive to ideas and on intellectual history as culturally situated ideas. Cultural and intellectual history are richer if practised together, so while Part One (Chapters 2–3) focuses on cultural history and Part Two (Chapters 4–6) emphasizes intellectual problems, I aim to enrich both by placing them in dialogue.

The intellectual contributions of the three Gazans within the history of ideas are significant and their writings have been largely overlooked.<sup>2</sup> Their dialogues

1. For a broad view of Christianization from Constantine to Justinian, see Trombley (1993). For Gaza particularly, see Van Dam (1985).

2. This is an appropriate time to provide a detailed analysis of these works, as an English translation of Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus* with Zacharias of Mytilene *Ammonius* has recently appeared in

cast new light on a long-running and influential late-antique philosophical debate about the creation and eternity of the world. Earlier in the fifth century, the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus of Athens had published his *Eighteen Arguments on the Eternity of the World*. His magisterial *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, with its five pages for every lemma of Plato's original, also brought questions about the creation and eternity of the world to new prominence in late-antique philosophy. Such questions had long been debated, and much of Proclus' work is an analysis and synthesis of earlier opinions. But his works gave the problem new philosophical precision and intellectual momentum. Whether or not Proclus was himself motivated to write these works because of impertinent Christians in the Athenian schools, his works were a major stimulus, directly and indirectly, for the later treatment of the topic by pagan and Christian philosophers in the fifth- and sixth-century schools.<sup>3</sup> The intellectual background to the Gazans' contribution (within Neoplatonism and Christianity) is the subject of Chapter 4.

The three Gazans contribute to an intermediary stage in the debate, responding in part to Proclus as well as considering problems generated from within Christianity. The creation debates thus place Gaza on the intellectual map of late antiquity, demonstrating that Gaza was well integrated into networks of late-antique education without being itself a major centre of Neoplatonic thought. The distinctiveness of the Gazans' intellectual contribution therefore helps to identify unique aspects of Gazan society (Chapters 5 and 6). Gazan thinkers contributed in distinctive ways to debates more commonly associated with Alexandria and Athens. The Gazan debates are also significant for the history of ideas partly because of the framework they provide for the later more narrowly Neoplatonic arguments in the sixth century. In this episode, John Philoponus' Christian-Neoplatonist treatise against Proclus' *Eighteen Arguments*, published in the year Justinian closed the Academy in Athens, was attacked by the Neoplatonist Simplicius as well as in the idiosyncratic contributions of the Egyptian merchant and monk, Cosmas Indicopleustes. Chapter 7 concludes the book with an analysis of the distinctiveness of the Gazan contribution when compared to these later debates.

The Gazans use Neoplatonic categories to argue that only the persons of the Trinity can be coeternal, and they reject the Neoplatonic idea that the world is

the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle series (Gertz, Dillon, and Russell 2012). I have consulted this translation against my original translations of the texts.

3. For the question of stimulus for Proclus' views, see the contrasting positions of Saffrey (1975) and Lang and Macro (2001), with the judicious review of Baltzly (2002).



eternal (and central Neoplatonic concepts of creation by emanation and return) in the process. A key element for all the thinkers analysed in the debate is how to use the doctrine of creation to elucidate the question of divine and human freedom, and so to explore the related problem of evil. For each thinker, physics moves to ethics, and eschatology becomes the foundation of soteriology. The emphasis on eschatology expands the Neoplatonic focus on arguments about the temporal finitude or infinity of the world from the beginning to considerations of a possible end-point of the universe. Neoplatonists and Christians differ in how they configure these categories, but a common concern about explaining and understanding evil emerges from the debate and may be taken as characteristic of late-antique thought.

These arguments, and their relation to earlier and later debates between Christians and Neoplatonists, are the subject of the second part of this book. In the first part, I set the Gazan writings in their broader cultural context and ask how they sought to reconfigure their local cultures through their respective writings. In Chapter 2, I sketch the contours of the local cultures which gave Gazan society its distinctive characteristics at the turn of the sixth century, and I explore ways in which these local cultures formed their identities in creative interactions. The creation and maintenance of power imbalances between these groups through the construction of difference is just one component of their social interactions. The porous boundaries of the monasteries, rhetorical schools, and their members' religious and philosophical affiliations are evidence for more dynamic ways in which the local cultures formed their identities. This theme of dynamic and fluid identity formation continues in Chapter 3, where I examine how Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius perceived their local cultures and outline their attempts to make others accept their worldview. Since ideas are always culturally situated and not mere epiphenomena of power relations or material conditions, exploring the logic of the Christian and Neoplatonic arguments helps to define what was distinctive about different groups within the Gazan schools, and thus to characterize more precisely late-antique Gazan society as a whole. Thus, the chapters on the intellectual history of the creation debates in the second half of the book add finer details to the construction of cultures analysed in Part One.

In setting the works of Aeneas, Procopius, and Zacharias at the heart of my analysis, I do not claim that their works are strikingly original (although they have unique and original contributions to make). But unlike the eccentric geniuses who are often the subject of histories of ideas, they can be taken as representative of generally accepted norms of thought and practice among their contemporaries in educated Gazan society. When they seek to reconfigure power relations in their local cultures, we should read them as identifying real

cultural problems that exercised the attention of a range of Christian thinkers in the Gazan schools. And when they engage with Neoplatonic ideas and seek to rebut them, we can assume that the intellectual problems they identify, and the argument strategies they employ, were more generally relevant in Gazan society.

In the remainder of this introduction I set out briefly the methods and analytical categories by which I interpret the texts. A continuing, if largely subterranean, argument of the book is that cultural and intellectual history can best illumine and support each other through the method of elucidation of problems set out below. I also contribute to recent studies which move beyond a paradigm of conflict in reconstructing late-antique culture. The chapter concludes with short biographical introductions to Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius.

### 1.1 CULTURE AND IDEAS, CONFLICT AND IDENTITY

A central analytical category throughout this book is the concept of a 'local culture'. By this I mean a social group within a society, which shares many of the assumptions, beliefs, and practices of the society as a whole, and hence its members accept allegiance to that society, but which also shares a set of characteristics which give it a distinctive identity and may sometimes bring it into tension with the general society or other local cultures. Such a culture is a complex of shared symbols and practices which is contingent on the actions of agents, changeable and time-dependent, interactive and non-discrete, and heterogeneous and contested.<sup>4</sup> It is always richly steeped in time—events leave their mark on the trajectory of people's lives, and structures of meaning are created and changed as people perform meaningful acts in meaningful lives. Societies are not totalizing but are instead made up of many different local cultures, themselves the product of internal disagreements and negotiations and external interactions. Culture is a product of internal coherences, disagreements, and negotiations. It does consolidate groups, but it may also provide the means for its own subversion.<sup>5</sup> The particular historical setting of Gaza, and the experiences of each of the thinkers I analyse, as well as how they seek to use the resources available to them—intellectual, geographical, institutional, economic, and symbolic—are central to my argument. On the side of intellectual history, this emphasis on local cultures helps to produce a more refined account of differences within Christianity which does not reduce to the identification of doctrinal conflict or heresy hunting. It counteracts the tendency to characterize Christianity as a unified monolith. Similarly

4. This view of culture is consistent with that offered by Sewell (2005), 10. For Sewell, culture is fateful, contingent, complex, eventful, and heterogeneous.

5. Compare e.g. Geertz (1975) with Geertz (1983).

in the case of cultural history, I paint a picture of tensions and exchanges within and between distinct and overlapping local cultures, and thereby reconstruct some culturally binding shared assumptions in Gazan society, considered as a complex of overlapping local cultures.

A performance metaphor may usefully encapsulate much of this conceptualization of culture and identity. The metaphor takes seriously agency, temporal and spatial setting, the symbols people can employ, the particular, historically contingent material and institutional situations in which they are placed, and the actions they perform. The concept of culture I work with accounts for the virtuosity and improvisations of the performers (agency), the sets they have (the institutions and built environment of Gaza, Alexandria, and Berytus), the props they use (material resources), the languages they can speak (predominantly Greek), the dialogues they participate in (different local communities such as the monks, the students, the lay public, the philosophers) and the audiences they address (Christians of various types, Neoplatonists).<sup>6</sup>

In providing a detailed description of the characteristics of different local cultures and the ways in which they interacted, I offer an account of how individuals and groups go about forming their ideas and identities. Personal and cultural beliefs and identity are not simply the sum of attempts to differentiate oneself or one's local culture from another. Such a model, like its related sister-model of cultural and intellectual interaction as conflict which has also been popular in late-antique studies, requires modification. Individuals and local cultures do try to distinguish themselves intellectually and socially from others by emphasizing real and imagined differences or conflicts, but my claim is that both individuals and groups are more heterogeneous, open, and inconsistent than such models assume, so that conflict or the construction of difference is too blunt a model by which to seek to understand cultural and interpersonal interactions and the personal and social changes these interactions bring about. Sandwell has recently argued that 'discourse [of any sort is] particularly suited to constructing identities because of [its] use of clear-cut categories and contrasting oppositions to create meaning and structure'; yet few authors always make their categories perfectly clear and meaning and structure can be created through means other than contrasts.<sup>7</sup> The openness of texts is partly an index of the heterogeneity of the cultures by which they are generated, to say nothing of the complexities, inconsistencies, and fallibility of their

6. This metaphor values the linguistic model for culture while allowing for symbolic systems which are not merely linguistically mediated. This metaphor, if read as implying a unified cultural plot, rather than one that shows thin coherence, would be misleading, but performances may be improvised. Dougherty and Kurke (2003), 8 rightly emphasize narrative and thin coherence.

7. Sandwell (2007), 13.

authors. Intellectual and cultural formation is as much about appropriating and adapting valued characteristics of other people and groups as it is about marking boundaries between people and cultures.

Of course, there are many individuals and groups within society which are aggressive in defining themselves through conflict with others. And many of the sources available to us for the study of late antiquity may easily be interpreted as fitting this more clear-cut model. Sandwell helpfully argues that some discourses seek to become totalizing, thus acting as an ideology which sets 'its agenda and masks the fact that its representation both has an agenda and that there could be other representations and agendas'.<sup>8</sup> A 'fluid' approach to religious identity, which understands religion mainly as a support for valued social practices or civic life and otherwise minimizes its importance in many public settings, has raised the ire of some types of Christians in all ages, and at times their corresponding totalization of religious identity in the face of such apparent accommodation with the surrounding culture may indeed amount to 'ideological and rule-bound impositions of religious identity'.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of late-antique Gaza, Aeneas, Procopius, and Zacharias all seek to construct exclusive religious allegiances and this construction is achieved partly by constructing a discursive conflict between themselves and others in the schools. Some of their least appealing arguments are designed to marginalize their opponents by painting pagan religion as politically subversive. In these arguments, the Gazans invoke and help to strengthen increasing imperial suppression of religious difference. Yet other voices speak through these apparently aggressive texts. While the Gazans thus partly construct their arguments and preferred religious identity through conflict and opposition, we also find them quietly borrowing and adapting ideas or proudly claiming other identities they share with their non-Christian neighbours. Careful examination of their works reveals elements of Gazan society more open to difference and supports a model which takes conflict as just one element in the construction of ideas and associated cultural practices and personal identities.

The method of elucidation of problems, which seeks to interrogate and explain the cultural and intellectual problems faced by a historical actor is expansive enough to account for culture as I have conceptualized it and moves beyond models of identity construction based on ideological construction of difference. Elucidation of problems asks: 'What problems are particular people trying to

8. Perkins (1995), 2 in Sandwell (2007), 27–28. I would include ideology in the category of discourse.

9. Sandwell (2007), 20 argues that this is true of John Chrysostom, as, in the pagan case, for the emperor Julian. See also *ibid.* 22, drawing on Wöhrle (1995), 76–82.

solve through this particular act?’<sup>10</sup> An advantage of this method is that it is equally useful for ‘cultural’ and ‘intellectual’ histories. It provides mechanisms for ‘historians of ideas’ to ‘learn to think the thoughts of others, as a philosopher must learn to think his own,’<sup>11</sup> based on the principle that understanding thinkers means thinking ‘as they thought and [seeing] things in their way.’<sup>12</sup> While ‘cultural’ historians have not used it explicitly, the method is appropriate, since it is consistent with a rich understanding of the concept of culture. Elucidation of problems allows so-called intellectual historians to reconstruct symbols and practices employed by thinkers in their arguments. Analogously, cultural historians can use the method to analyse how symbols and practices are applied in other domains of social action. Hence, this method can be useful for helping intellectual and cultural historians work together profitably. The application of a method of elucidation of problems is designed to facilitate careful attention both to the standards of rationality which govern the arguments as well as to the social and cultural conventions and practices which give them shape.

## 1.2 INTRODUCING AENEAS, ZACHARIAS, AND PROCOPIUS

It remains to introduce Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius. Given that I am largely concerned with cultural specificity, my use of the adjective ‘Gazan’ to describe three thinkers with considerably different associations with the city requires explanation. We hear of ‘Gaza schools’ (rhetorical or monastic) and ‘Gazan monasticism,’ and we read that Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius are ‘Gazan thinkers.’<sup>13</sup> Each of these labels elides differences. Browning has drawn attention to stylistic differences between Aeneas and Procopius; each thinker writes different sorts of works; each spends different amounts of time in Gaza.<sup>14</sup> Each studied in Gaza, but while Aeneas and Procopius made their homes there,

10. Passmore (1965) defined this method from the perspective of the history of philosophy. He set the method against ‘doxographic’ history, which hunts sources without providing a framework for understanding the new synthesis, retrospective history, which writes the history of philosophy from some privileged moment (for instance, the early church councils) and so omits material which is not relevant to the privileged idea, and polemic history, which seeks to prove that an idea was right or wrong, and so often misses complexity or, like retrospective history, is guilty of conceptual parochialism. Problematic elucidation shows how sources are used, sets the ideas in their own context, and identifies what the thinker thought was logical, thus incorporating the best elements of the other methods while escaping their pitfalls. See also Levine (2005); Osler (2002); Watson (2002).

11. Edwards (2002), 114.

12. Skinner (1988a), 252.

13. See most recently the treatment of Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (2006); Kofsky and Bitton-Ashkelony (2004).

14. Browning (1963).

Zacharias only briefly returned to his birthplace, Gaza's port-town, after studying in Alexandria and Berytus, before making his career elsewhere. The geographical label also masks diversity: Gaza can be used to refer to the town of Gaza as well as its port-town, Maiuma, which had significantly different social profiles.<sup>15</sup> What is the value of the term?

Despite these difficulties, describing the three thinkers as 'Gazan' captures something of the complexity and specificity of their experiences. Apart from particular disputes (e.g. about church governance) between Gaza and Maiuma, the word 'Τάζα' in the ancient sources can refer to an amalgam of these localities. Zacharias, born in Maiuma, can describe a fellow student 'Thomas the Sophist, who loves Christ in everything, and who is, like me, from Gaza' (VSev PO 2.1 23,18–24,1). The interactions between urban, semi-urban, semi-rural, and port-town 'Gazans' help to create the 'Gazan' culture I analyse and elucidate. So one may examine the influence of different local cultures within Gaza, without doing away with the usefulness of the term to describe the sum total of local cultures in this area of Palestina Prima. Thus this difficulty about how to use the term 'Gaza' is an example of the difficulty of conceptualizing culture as, on the one hand, the broad and loosely bound conceptual schemes and practices which unite a society at a macro level, and, on the other hand, as the symbols and practices which bind groups within the wider society at the local level.<sup>16</sup>

Aeneas, a leading Gazan sophist, was the earliest of the three.<sup>17</sup> Born in the first third of the fifth century, he probably did not live to see the sixth. Aeneas may have studied under the Neoplatonic philosopher Hierocles of Alexandria; his dialogue is evidence that he knew Hierocles' works. Zacharias provides evidence for Aeneas' reputation as a philosopher, and also connects him to the monastic communities in Gaza.<sup>18</sup> There was a productive overlap between the monasteries and the schools, which makes late-antique Gaza distinctive (see further Chapter 2).

Zacharias describes Aeneas as 'the grand and wise Christian sophist from the town of Gaza' (VSev PO 2.1 90), yet goes on to speak of Aeneas' philosophical interests. As in earlier generations, sophists in Gaza were more than rhetorical teachers; they had wider theological and philosophical interests.<sup>19</sup> According

15. For territorial definitions of Gaza, see di Segni (2004). For the geographical spread of the monasteries, see Hirshfeld (2004). For the distinction between Gaza and Maiuma in the historical sources, and their respective religious profile, see e.g. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 4.38; Sozomen *Hist. eccl.* 5.3, 9–10, 15.

16. For this distinction, see Sewell (2005), chapter 2.

17. For modern analyses of Aeneas' dating and life, see Aujoulat (1986); Segonds (1989); Seitz (1892); Sikorski (1909); Wacht (1969).

18. The suggestion that Aeneas may have been Bishop of Gaza, based on an eponymous figure listed in Choricus, *Laud. Marc. II* 8 is dubious. Cf. Ashkenazi (2004), 200.

19. On the continuing tradition of philosophical and rhetorical sophists, see the forthcoming volume edited by Ryan Fowler, *Plato in the Third Sophistic*.

to Zacharias' admiring, hagiographic account of Abba Isaiah, a leading Gazan figure in the non-Chalcedonian camp, Aeneas' expertise in philosophy was surpassed by the untrained holy man's. Zacharias 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 restore the truth of Christian teaching. (*VIs* 8; my translation from the Latin)

From Procopius we learn nothing of Aeneas' philosophical accomplishments, but he does praise Aeneas' legal expertise (Procopius of Gaza, *Ep.* 82; cf. Aeneas, *Ep.* 3).<sup>20</sup>

Epiphanius 5 (*PLRE* II), a student of Aeneas and addressee of two letters from him (*Epp* 12, 23), wrote an epigram in praise of his teacher (Εἰς Αἰνεῖαν τὸν Γαζαῖον), which heralds Aeneas in conventional if inflated terms as being 'the most eminent of rhetors in the Attic art'. Aeneas 'excelled both his contemporaries and forefathers in more holy speeches'. Gaza, claims Epiphanius, should take to heart the fact that it was fortunate enough to count such a father among its citizens.<sup>21</sup> These testimonia point to a figure who was socially influential and educated in philosophy, theology, and rhetoric.

Aeneas' extant oeuvre comprises a set of twenty-five letters and the dialogue which is of central interest to this study, the *Theophrastus*.<sup>22</sup> The *Theophrastus* was written after 484 and before Zacharias' dialogue (489/90) (on Zacharias' dating, see further below).<sup>23</sup> Aeneas' letters provide a window into his contexts and those of his correspondents, who include presbyters, rhetoricians, officials, and other intellectuals, and provide useful detail about the social characteristics of Gaza in this period.

Aeneas' dialogue has three characters: Theophrastus, a Greek philosopher, Euxitheus, a Christian who has studied philosophy, and Egyptus, a Christian who plays only a small part in the dialogue. Adverse winds blow Euxitheus' ship off course and he cannot continue his journey, so he settles

20. See Wacht (1969), 16 n. 19.

21. *Anth Gr*, App, *Epigrammata demonstrativa* 176.

22. Aeneas (1962); Aeneas (1958). A projected and still required second edition of the *Theophrastus* never transpired.

23. For dating, see Wacht (1969), 18 n. 17. See also Aujoulat (1986); Segonds (1989), 83.



down to a philosophical conversation with the Greek traveller and philosopher Theophrastus and Euxitheus' associate, Egyptus, on topics including the pre-existence and immortality of the soul, the creation of the cosmos, and the resurrection of bodies. The limited previous scholarship on the dialogue focuses on sources (Christian and philosophical) or, more recently, on what the dialogue may suggest about power conflicts in late-antique schools.<sup>24</sup>

The dialogue form chosen by Aeneas and, later, by Zacharias presents several challenges of interpretation to which we will return. The dialogue genre may reflect social and intellectual conflict and collaboration. The extent to which the dialogues aim to perform or allow real intellectual and cultural polysemy is an open question. Aeneas' choice of dialogue form may be seen as creating a space in which different local cultures can find their voice, yet the author carefully controls what the different characters are allowed to say in the dialogue, and we may often suspect that the genre is being used ideologically, to control what can be imagined in Aeneas' desired society. Analysing these tendencies reveals some of Aeneas' most deeply held commitments, but a concern for providing an intellectually compelling account of Christian doctrine makes such power discourse analyses of the dialogue insufficient. The dialogue also reveals a genuine knowledge about, and positive evaluation of, philosophical argument. Aeneas wants to persuade his philosophically inclined audience partly on the basis of argument, even though his dialogue also functions to disempower them in various ways.

Zacharias Scholasticus (or Zachariah Rhetor) (c. 465–post 536) was perhaps some twenty to thirty years younger than Aeneas, whom he describes as 'a great teacher'. Aeneas' dialogue provides an intellectual model for Zacharias' *Ammonius*.<sup>25</sup> He died some time after attending the Council of Constantinople in 536.<sup>26</sup> Zacharias studied rhetoric under Sopater 3 (*PLRE* II) and philosophy under Ammonius in Alexandria before undertaking legal studies in Berytus. While in Alexandria, he witnessed and recounted the turmoil which arose from Pagan–Christian tensions in the schools (*VSev*). In Berytus, he was a member of the so-called *philoponoi*, a group of students who performed various

24. See Aujoulat (1986, 1987); Gallicet (1978); Wacht (1969); Watts (2005).

25. Some recent authors refer to Zacharias as 'Pseudo-Zacharias'. See, for example, Haarer (2006); Maas (2005). This arises from debate about whether the Zacharias whose church history is preserved in Evagrius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, identified by Evagrius as Zacharias ῥήτωρ (*Hist. eccl.* 2.2), is the same person as the bishop of Mitylene and/or Procopius' brother Zacharias. Frend argues against the grain in modern scholarship for non-identity: Frend (1972), 202f. For the consensus that the writer of the history is the writer of the biographies, see Allen (1980), 471; Honigmann (1953), 194ff. Haarer (2006), 268f. judiciously gathers the arguments and provides further literature. I will refer to Zacharias, not Pseudo-Zacharias.

26. Honigmann (1953), 194ff.



charitable works, and sought to preserve Christian orthodoxy in the school, which Zacharias in his *Life of Severus* depicts as potentially spiritually dangerous.<sup>27</sup> After working as an advocate (*scholasticus*) in Constantinople, he was made (Chalcedonian) bishop of Mitylene.<sup>28</sup> This appointment should caution against reading Zacharias as a strongly committed non-Chalcedonian, although political pressure to change ecclesiastical allegiance could be strong. A letter from the non-Chalcedonian Patriarch Severus, written when he was exiled in around 519–521, may refer to our Zacharias, and states that ‘those without [i.e. the Chalcedonians] are at peace with you.’<sup>29</sup> If so, there is evidence that Zacharias, despite his friendship with Severus, had moved to the Chalcedonian camp by the early years of the reign of Justin and Justinian. Zacharias’ dialogue, the work of most relevance to this study, shows no signs of non-Chalcedonian emphasis.

Zacharias is variously referred to in the manuscripts as ‘Zacharias Scholasticus’, ‘Zacharias Rhetor’, and ‘Zacharias, bishop of Mitylene.’<sup>30</sup> Honigmann’s case that these figures should also be identified with the Zacharias who was an imperial official and a brother of Procopius of Gaza is circumstantial, but persuasive.<sup>31</sup> If the identification of Zacharias Scholasticus, author of the *Ammonius* and future bishop of Mitylene with Zacharias the brother of Procopius is accepted, it places all three Gazan thinkers in an elite stratum of society with strong connections to the imperial court.<sup>32</sup>

27. For the *philoponoi*, see Miller (1985); Watts (2006), 213–19, 251–58.

28. This seems certain, despite Schwartz’s emphatic belief to the contrary, cited in Honigmann (1953), 195: ‘Ihn mit dem Bischof von Mitylene zu identifizieren, der auf der scharf chalcedonischen Synoden von 536 eine aktive Rolle übernehmen musste, ist platterdings unmöglich’ (It is completely impossible to identify him with the Bishop of Mitylene, who must have played an active role in the strongly Chalcedonian Synod of 536). Honigmann uses striking resemblances between passages in the *VSev* and the *Antirrhesis*. The former is ascribed in the MSS to Zacharias Scholasticus; the latter is explicitly attributed to ‘Zacharias, Bishop of Mitylene who was formerly a Scholasticus’. See Honigmann (1953), 197–98, 200–201. For the identification of the figure known in the MSS as Zacharias Rhetor with the figure known as Zacharias Scholasticus, see Honigmann (1953), 197–99.

29. Brooks (1916), PO XII, 269–78, Severus of Antioch, Ep. XXXIV. The letter is cited and discussed in Honigmann (1953), 202–4.

30. See above, note 25.

31. The names of Procopius’ brothers are found in Procopius’ correspondence, and Severus’ letter mentions the names of all these brothers, names one, correctly, as a presbyter, and gives instructions to a ‘Zacharias Scholasticus’. Honigmann (1953), 202; Rist (1998, 2003). *PLRE II* lists two different Zachariases. This paragraph is indebted to Honigmann’s study, 201–4. Procopius wrote thirteen letters to his brother Zacharias, a ‘rhetor’ (Ep. 52) individually: *Epp* 20, 51–52, 58, 69, 80–83, 85, 93, 152, 161. There are also thirteen letters addressed to his brothers Philippus and Zacharias jointly: *Epp* 57, 73, 79, 84, 96–97, 105, 108–10, 143–44, 148. Procopius also wrote nine letters solely to Philippus (6–7, 10, 15, 19, 86, 92, 135, 157) and one letter solely to Victor (74).

32. Rist (2003) argues that our Zacharias had ‘gute Kontakte zum kaiserlichen Hof’ and that his elevation to the episcopate was probably a reward for his imperial service.

Zacharias wrote church history, biography, and dogmatic works.<sup>33</sup> All his writings may be interpreted as polemics, and his lives of key non-Chalcedonian figures are responsible for much of the scholarship which emphasizes religious and social conflict in this period. The biographies justify their heroes against Chalcedonian attack, the ecclesiastical history takes sides on doctrinal disputes, and the titles of the works against the Manichees (Ἀντίρρησις; *Capita adversos Manichaeos*) set the tone for works which conform to the ‘anathema’ genre.<sup>34</sup> Yet while Zacharias’ dialogue resonates with this general enjoyment of polemic and disputation, it also reveals cultural complexity which a focus on conflict misses. Zacharias was a writer who identified problems and tenaciously tried to solve them. This fact, together with the uncertainty surrounding his biography, makes elucidation of problems useful for entering his thought-world, and opens avenues by which to explore cultural adaptations and appropriations.

His dialogue, the *Ammonius*, is the focus of this book.<sup>35</sup> It depicts a Christian teacher strengthening the faith of an Alexandrian student ‘slipping towards paganism’. Zacharias achieves the goal of educating the student by recounting a series of mini-dialogues he claims to have had with Ammonius and the Neoplatonist iatrosophist Gessius (fl. late fifth century). The mini-dialogues investigate creation, resurrection, the eternity of the cosmos and matter, the forms, and the Trinity. The dialogue ends, like the *Theophrastus*, in prayer: the student’s faith is renewed by Zacharias’ teaching. Recent theories positing a mid-sixth-century date for sections of the dialogue are unconvincing.<sup>36</sup> It seems most likely that it should be dated to around 490.<sup>37</sup> Particularly, the idea that

33. See Rist (1998). The life of Severus is extant in Syriac. The lives of Isaiah and Peter the Iberian are much less securely preserved. The (Syriac version of the) *Life of Isaiah* is fragmentary. The *Life of Peter* is both fragmentary and disputed. The Syriac fragment is included in a manuscript among a series of texts by John Rufus concerning Peter. Horn concludes that ‘the existence [of a *Life of Peter* by Zacharias] ... still remains merely a matter of hypothesis’ from the Syriac evidence. See Horn (2006), 46. The Georgian version of the *Life* claims to be a translation of a Syriac life written by Zacharias. Despite this, Honigsmann believed the life to be a revision of John Rufus’ *Vita Petri Iberi*. This view was countered by Lang in an article negatively evaluated by Devros, who supported Honigsmann’s position. See Devros (1950); Honigsmann (1953); Lang (1951). Horn concludes that the Georgian version is not good evidence for a life of Peter by Zacharias either. I therefore exclude this text as a resource for Zacharias’ ideas, despite the common implicit acceptance of the *Life* as a work by Zacharias in some other recent writers, such as Watts (2007). See further Horn (2006), 47–49.

34. For the anti-Manichean works, see Lieu (1983).

35. His non-Chalcedonian histories have received detailed attention but do not touch on the doctrine of creation. Hence, I merely use them where appropriate in forming a picture of Gazan social history in Chapter 2, below. For Zacharias’ non-Chalcedonian biographies and church histories, see Watts (2007); Zacharias (1977); Zacharias (1919–1921).

36. Watts (2005c). The conclusions of this article are incorporated into his recent book, Watts (2006), 228.

37. For which, see Bardy (1950), col. 3677; Segonds (1989), 89; Wacht (1969), 18 n. 17.