When the Georgian poet, Rustaveli, visited Jerusalem in 1192, he recorded seeing on the frescoes of the Monastery of the Holy Cross, alongside Christian saints, portraits of the Greek sages “such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cheilon, Thucydides, and Plutarch, just as they are to be found in our monastery on Athos.”

One of the great religious and philosophical aspects of late antiquity was monotheism. In the second century the only really well-known monotheistic religious groups were the Jews and Christians. Jews and Judaism were

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**PLUTARCH AND “PAGAN MONOTHEISM”**

Frederick E. Brenk
discredited by many because of the Jewish revolts, and many of their communities were in disarray or had been destroyed, including some of the most ancient ones. Christians were still a relatively small group, with their origin in Judaism probably seen as a disadvantage by many Graeco-Romans, and at times persecuted by the authorities. By the sixth century, however, mainly because of Christianity, monotheism had spread to most of the Roman Empire. A few centuries later, the Islamic conquests extended monotheism even beyond the borders of the Roman Empire.

Monotheism, though, was not relegated to religion. Already in early Platonism, but particularly after the advent of Middle-Platonism, the nature of God, His or its relationship to the Platonic Good, to Being, or to the One, whether Plato’s God was literally the creator of the universe, and whether there was an aloof First God and a Second God involved with the world was a matter of great discussion. For centuries Stoicism, which was popular in Rome, had been promoting its own form of a kind of spiritual/material monotheism. In traditional scholarship the formulation runs: the divine, God, the *Logos* or Intelligence of the universe, is intrinsic to the universe, with a light material body, and this God is contrasted with matter. In reality, the Stoic God is always composed of both mind and body (the *pneuma*), but one can intellectually abstract it into intellect (*Logos*) and matter (the *pneuma* [a hot gas]). However, recently this formulation has been challenged. In the new view both matter and God are bodies, but they form an indivisible pair. God uses the *pneuma* to shape and maintain the universe in existence. Zeno’s innovations to previous philosophy would be the corporeality of God, His not creating the world from intellectual models (*paradeigmata*), and his creation from within matter, not from without, like the Platonic Demiurge (creator god).

In his recent book, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, J.M. Schott studies the influence of philosophers on the

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