

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Mapping a Late Antique Republic of Letters  
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This is a study of how the letters of Procopius of Gaza, Aeneas of Gaza, Synesius of Cyrene, and Isidore of Pelusium, created circuits of intellectual sociability and exchange transcending the territorial limits of Empire and thereby affirmed their participation in a common culture of Learning. The figurative model of a Republic of Letters provides a useful organizational heuristic that illuminates the social phenomena to which these letters point: intellectual sodality conducted through the medium of a classicizing sociolect regulated by strictures of genteel conduct and the shared perception of the morality of the pursuit of knowledge. Understanding these letters as forming a Republic of Letters, I contribute to the study of social networking in Late Antiquity by elucidating the specific communications mechanisms the letter writers deployed to build ever-shifting networks of friends and colleagues. I explore the topography of identities and affiliations that these long-neglected epistolographers developed through epistolary conversations, and examine how these discursive representations suggest the letter authors' participation in greater rhythms of change and continuity in the Later Empire.

MAPPING A LATE ANTIQUE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

by

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## Preface

Trained carriers of classical rhetorical traditions, and Christians as well, Aeneas, Procopius, and Isidore served as teachers of rhetoric in Late Antique cities of Egypt and Palestine, men who embodied the cultural energy of the classical urban community of the polis and who socialized their students by means of the symbolic capital that was a major signifier of status in Late Antiquity—classical rhetoric. Though not a rhetorician, Synesius, a Neoplatonist landowner of Cyrene in Libya agreed because of loyalty to his native land to serve as bishop of Ptolemais and thus, like the rhetoricians, served as a voice of the polis and a leading figure in provincial communal life. The letters therefore offer the unique opportunity to study moments of provincial sociability in the peripheral zones of the Empire as provincials negotiated between being Roman and being embedded in a local cultural framework.

I first became acquainted with the letters of Synesius as an M.A. student fascinated by the question of his religious identity. As I read the letters, however, I became ever more intrigued by the sorts of social processes to which they hinted. The letters were vehicles of intellectual exchange and vicarious presence, and they also provided discursive spaces for the elaboration of various types of identities, and in particular, the evaluation of communal roles. These sorts of “virtual communities” reminded me of a type of intellectual sodality similar in many defining ways to the Early Modern Republic of Letters.

After this preliminary case study, I sought to find other sorts of underexamined sources that also indicated similar intellectual sociability. In the Fall of 2008, I began reading the challenging letters of Procopius of Gaza, and the slightly easier letters of Aeneas of Gaza, and

was fascinated by their pagan archaizing currency indicating a sort of insider language. These letters shared many of the same markers of intellectual sodality that I had observed in Synesius' letters, and they conveyed in idiosyncratic ways their perceptions of belonging to a broader community of lettered men who identified with a distinctive intellectual culture. The metaphor of a "Republic of Letters" seemed an appropriate shorthand device articulating these phenomena in the letters. During this time, I also turned to look at the letters of Isidore, which shared much in common with the other corpora, yet he did not engage in the Bacchic frenzies of the intellectual comraderie of men like Synesius, Aeneas, and Procopius. He thus became a useful contemporary counterpoint from the same corner of the Greek East.

The objective of this dissertation is to map the characteristics of the intellectual friendships of these epistolographers with attention to their role in the organization of political power in the provinces. For far too long these sources have been overlooked, and this project seeks to give voice to these virtually forgotten corpora. With the exception of Isidore, these sources written in a pagan currency look different from the texts that have traditionally told the story of religious and cultural changes in the later Empire—changes that led to the victories of both Christianity and Islam. This project seeks to make these understudied texts more accessible and offers the first English translation and analysis of many of the letters Procopius, Aeneas, and Isidore. The overriding focus, however, is elucidation of the communication strategies these letter authors deployed to accrete their social capital and their discursive explorations of identities, intellectual enthusiasms, and affiliations. This project aims to fill a void in the historiography through study of intellectual sodality and its relationship to the nature of power in the provinces by means of analysis of underutilized epistolary corpora.

**For Mom and Ariel**

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I am especially indebted to my mentors and colleagues who contributed to my intellectual development and who contributed specifically to the evolution of this project. I wish to express my gratitude to my fellow graduate students in Ancient Mediterranean History at the University

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I would like to extend my warmest gratitude to my Doktorvater, Professor Kenneth Holum. Professor Holum has been instrumental in assisting with the development of the parameters of this topic, and he has provided steadfast guidance and intellectual friendship throughout the various stages of this dissertation. Over the past five years, the highlight of my week has been our lively and fascinating Friday meetings dedicated to reading these long-neglected epistolographers. Additionally, this project would not have been possible without the loving support and companionship of my immediate family, and I would like to thank my mother and Ariel in particular.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BZ: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
- DOP: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
- Lampe: *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Edited by G.W.H. Lampe. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961-1968.
- LRE: A.H.M. Jones, *A History of the Later Roman Empire: a Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*. 2 vols. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.
- LSJ: Liddel, H. G.-R. Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996; 9<sup>th</sup> ed. with revised supplement.
- OCD: *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Simon Hornblower, Anthony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- ODB: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Edited by A.P. Kazhdan. 3 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- PLRE: A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, John Morris, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*.

3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971-1992.

- QAM: *Quod animi mores sequuntur temperamenta corporis*
- RDG: *Rose di Gaza: gli scritti retorico-sofistici e le epistole di Procopio di Gaza*
- RE: Pauly-Wissowa. *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Alfred Druckenmutter, 1894-.
- ZPE: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

## Chapter 1

### Letters and Provincials

The aim of this study is to explore a Republic of Letters, or multiple Republics of Letters, that flowered among epistolographers in one corner of the Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity. The letter writers were Procopius of Gaza, Aeneas of Gaza, Synesius of Cyrene, and Isidore of Pelusium. First we will examine the analytical model I have adopted, which is well-established in scholarship concerning epistolographers in Early Modern Europe.

#### Introduction: Elaborating a Model

##### What was a Republic of Letters?

The oft-cited earliest known appearance of the neo-Latin term *Respublica litteraria* referred to a community of lettered men who collectively rejoiced at Poggio Bracciolini's 1417 discovery of a number of classical texts, including Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* –or so claimed Venetian humanist Francesco Barbaro in his letter to Poggio. F. Barbaro punctuated this and later letters with a variety of terms presuming the existence of a scholarly community transcending territorial boundaries and generations. *Respublica litteraria* may be understood within this context to be synonymous with these terms. Unified by shared erudition, this lettered community offered its gratitude to Poggio on behalf of his work for the common good.<sup>1</sup> It seems

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Fumaroli, "The Republic of Letters," *Diogenes* 36 (1988): 136-137. No other known occurrences appear until 1491 in two *incunabula* printed at Venice and at Nuremberg. The former proposes to furnish students with those elements of grammar which will grant them entrée into the Republic of Letters. In the second text, a work of Saint Bonaventure, the printer responds to his critics by retorting that they themselves never bring any contribution to the Republic of Letters. There are two other mentions of the phrase in the final decade of the fifteenth century: the first in a text published at Augsburg in 1492 containing the text of an encomium addressed to the Bavarian duke Conrad Celtes; the second usage in 1498 in a text dedicated by Johannes Stabius to the flourishing of the Republic of Letters of Ingolstadt. See Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, *La République des Lettres* (Paris; Berlin: De Boeck, 1997), 12. In the opinion of Hans Bots, after the first quarter of the sixteenth century, references to the Republic of Letters appear with greater frequency and the term was henceforth current.

fitting, then, that this study recommending the retrojection of the Republic of Letters to Late Antiquity should begin with an acknowledgment of the term's roots in celebrating the resuscitation of Greco-Roman literary culture.

Over half a millennium later, “Republic of Letters” retains its currency as a theoretical organism that flits across time and space in historical and literary study. This plastic paradigm has found its way into recent scholarship concerning early humanist circles, European intellectual exchange and sociability during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, nineteenth century Jewish Atlantic communications,<sup>2</sup> and a posited world literary sphere.<sup>3</sup> Newly minted sub-species of Republics of Letters have appeared in the forms of religious Republics of Letters<sup>4</sup>

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Instantiations prior to this point are already attested in texts originating across a vast geographical swathe, ranging from Italy, Switzerland, Germanic countries, France, and England. Despite usages, definitions of the Republic of Letters in historical sources are rare, and context clues must often suffice for reconstructing meanings. The semantic field of the term prior to the seventeenth century oscillated between two poles: a vague reference to intellectuals, knowledge, or men of letters versus a designation delineating a particular community of learned men. Beginning by the end of the seventeenth century, the latter sense was developed amply and with precision in dictionary entries. In these entries, the term is sometimes delineated as a political expression denoting a type of universal polity or state. Some historical definitions emphasize the universality of the Republic of Letters—it is worldwide, borderless. The membership of the Republic of Letters is constructed in the sources as constituted according to citizen equality: all scholars ought to regard one another as brothers. It is a multi-confessional association, and lastly, an intellectual community or “république d’esprits.” For overview of the uses of the term “Republic of Letters” in historical sources, see Bots, “Qu’est-ce que la République des Lettres?” in *La République des Lettres*, 11-27.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Kiron, “An Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters?” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 171-211. Kiron argues that in the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Jews located in port cities along the coasts of the Atlantic world forged communities of commerce, communication, and kinship. Atlantic port Jews engaged in these “maritime circulatory systems” published periodicals, pamphlets, and books in the 1840s in order to advance an enlightened Judaism sharing more in common with Sephardic religious culture and history (171). The use of the term Republic of Letters is not simply a theoretical overlay; it is articulated in the publications of these virtual communities in the 1840s (174) and thus reflects a self-consciousness of a particular cultural project (175-76).

<sup>3</sup> See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Casanova projects Republic of Letters onto a postulated “world literary space as a history and a geography; a space constituted by writers who make and actually embody literary history” (4). Seeking to provide at once literary and historical readings of texts, Casanova contends that this “international literary space” originated in the sixteenth century when literature emerged as a source of authority and recognition. As the first European states developed, national rivalries begin to bear on the struggle of authors for influence within this literary universe. In time, the topography of this literary space organized itself into rising capitals of literary authority and marginalized peripheries (11-12).

<sup>4</sup> Constance M. Furey explores the concept of a Religious Republic of Letters in *Erasmus, Contarini, and Religious Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Furey argues that religious

and specifically Puritan Republics of Letters.<sup>5</sup> However, indiscriminate use wears on elasticity. Modern scholars employing the term Republic of Letters in titles often do not concern themselves with the problem of defining it. Moreover, when the term appears in a work's title it often serves no clear analytical purpose<sup>6</sup> or operates merely as a means of avoiding repetition when referring to men of letters or intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, even studies which attempt to define the mechanisms and organization of this social organism rarely address how specific individuals constructed their understandings of this term (either overtly or tacitly) in the sources; individuals classed as "républicains des lettres" are usually not demonstrated to be self-identifying members.<sup>8</sup>

Having registered these preliminary caveats, I shall turn now to scholarly attempts to define the Republic of Letters as it relates to a type of community realized via the communication of learned individuals. To this end, I shall be interested primarily in the use of

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commitments cannot be separated from the communication circles of fifteenth-sixteenth century intellectuals such as Erasmus, Reginald Pole (1500-1558), Gasparo Contarini (1483-1542), and Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547). According to Furey, "the people in this Religious Republic of Letters created affective activist friendships and committed themselves to spiritualize scholarship because in their lives the search for meaning was synonymous with the quest for transcendence, desire for salvation, and the longing for God" (13).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g., Mark A. Peterson, "Theopolis Americana: the City-state of Boston, the Republic of Letters, and the Protestant International, 1689-1739," in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) 329-70. Peterson contrasts the movements of Jonathan Belcher and Cotton Mather within a transatlantic intellectual marketplace between Boston and Germany in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. Peterson charts this intellectual commerce as a Republic of Letters constituting "an intricate web, spun out through a series of transatlantic journeys, mutual friendships, letters exchanged and correspondence networks maintained across the decades" (332).

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Jaumann, "Respublica litteraria/Republic of Letters. Concept and Perspectives of Research," in *Die Europäische Gelehrtenrepublik im Zeitalter des Konfessionalismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Bots, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Bots and Waquet's work presents an exception to this, though their rather slim volume does not aim to study exhaustively discussions and descriptions of the Republic of Letters in the sources. For a modern work focusing on Republic of Letters language in Pierre Bayle see Jean-Michel Gros, "La Place de la 'République des Lettres' dans l'oeuvre de Bayle: de la correspondance au dictionnaire," in *La Raison Corrosive: Études sur la pensée critique de Pierre Bayle* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003), 31-40.



Republic of Letters from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Accordingly, my first concern in this chapter is to explore recent scholarly attempts to define and apply this term. The scholarship is vast and cumbersome, but I select here salient scholarly approaches with an eye to building a model applicable to ancient sources. Secondly, I shall delineate my working model of Republic of Letters as appropriate for Late Antique epistolary corpora. In my view, application of this model will bring into view hitherto unaddressed elements of these largely unexamined letters as snapshots of the social discourse of provincial elites.

Most generally, Republic of Letters describes the existence of international interpenetrating scholarly networks from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries that served the purpose of gathering and exchanging learning.<sup>9</sup> Epistolography served *par excellence* as the device of communication fostering a sort of cosmopolitan polity<sup>10</sup> transcending geographical and political boundaries. In addition to letters, the mechanisms of the pre-modern Republic of Letters included various publications—especially the development of ephemeral media such as

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<sup>9</sup>Scholarly debates regarding the chronology of the Republic of Letters notwithstanding, my focus here will be on the preponderance of scholarship focusing on the Republic of Letters during the fifteenth-late eighteenth centuries. For scholarly opinions regarding “les grandes scansions qui rhythmèrent son histoire,” including a postulated “golden age” (1550-1750) of the Republic of Letters culminating in its death by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Bots, “Le temps de la République des Lettres,” in *République des Lettres*, 29-61. See also L. W.B. Brockliss, *Calvet’s Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 366-37, regarding transitions with the Republic of Letters at the end of the eighteenth century. For an overview of the relationship in recent Anglo-American scholarship between the Republic of Letters and the Enlightenment see Brockliss, 5-15.

<sup>10</sup>Based on extant evidence, the political dimensions of definitions of Republic of Letters emerge in late seventeenth century lexica. As Noel Malcolm notes, the term was “used in many ways, most of which were devoid of political implications. Often the phrase was merely a synonym for *orbis litterarius* (the literary world).” See his “Private and Public Knowledge: Kircher, Esotericism, and the Republic of Letters” in *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, edited by Paula Findlen (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 300.

journals and pamphlets—travel, printing shops, forms of sodality such as salons, libraries, especially private libraries, museums, schools, universities, and academies.<sup>11</sup>

Scholarly attempts to define the Republic of Letters often conceptualize it as metaphor and ideal. Gábor Almási conceptualizes it as “an empowering fiction of a learned community, which functioned both as a source of authority and a source of identity . . . it follows that the fiction of the Republic of Letters cannot represent the sum of the learned networks in Europe.”<sup>12</sup> Other scholars invoke Benedict Anderson and classify it as an “imagined community” or an “invisible community,”<sup>13</sup> but perhaps it may be more precise to term it a “virtual community,” or a group of individuals who share common vocational, political, social, and literary pursuits but are in fact not spatially limited.<sup>14</sup> Herbert Jaumann underlines the normative character of the Republic of Letters as a self-concept or self-description of Early Modern scholarly discourse. In Jaumann’s view, the Republic of Letters does not refer to specific concrete scholarly institutions or even to a specific scholarly mechanism of intellectual communication but rather to a metaphor of a normative ideal with “a few fragmentary realizations scattered through time and space of early modern history.”<sup>15</sup> In a text devoted to defining the Republic of Letters, Hans Bots

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<sup>11</sup> Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Reach of the Republic of Letters: Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* 1 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Gábor Almási, *The Uses of Humanism: Johannes Sambucus (1531-1584), Andreas Dudith (1533-1589), and the Republic of Letters in East Central Europe* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 80.

<sup>13</sup> Marcell Sebók, ed., *Republic of letters, humanism, humanities: selected papers of the workshop held at the Collegium Budapest in cooperation with NIAS between November 25 and 28, 1999* (Budapest: Collegium Budapest, 2005), 2. See also Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “How Germany Left the Republic of Letters” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004): 421.

<sup>14</sup> Julie D. Campbell and Anne Larsen, “Introduction” in *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009) 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jaumann, 16.

classifies it as a way of looking at the world, in which men inscribed their thoughts and actions.<sup>16</sup> Depicted as ideal, the Republic of Letters is often, and perhaps somewhat simplistically, cast in opposition to “the real.” Bots incorporates antinomy at the core of his definition of the Republic of Letters: it exists fully in the constant tension between utopia and reality.<sup>17</sup> In final analysis, study of the Republic of Letters from the modern scholarly perspective becomes a study of the way historical agents attach value to particular practices and discourses.

Scholars frequently conceptualize this normative ideal in spatial terms. In this way, the heuristic dimension of Jürgen Habermas’ public sphere<sup>18</sup> provides an ideal model against which to interrogate the concept at specific historical moments.<sup>19</sup> Dena Goodman defines the Republic of Letters as a type of public space which transcends territorial limits and constitutes the heart of the emergence of the public sphere.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Anthony Grafton employs various spatial analogies, likening the Republic of Letters to a “mosaic of scholarly communities” and an “imaginary land that had few of the distinctive marks by which we usually identify a state,” “a

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<sup>16</sup> Bots, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> According to Elizabeth MacArthur, “the public sphere is a new kind of publicness, argues Habermas, that comes into being at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century in Western Europe. It is defined as private people, not officials of the state, coming together to make a public use of their reason; practices and institutions that fostered it include periodicals, salons, and Masonic Lodges. Perhaps the most crucial of all to the development of the public sphere was the vast expansion of print.” See her “Between the Republic of Virtue and the Republic of Letters: Marie-Jeanne Roland Practices Rousseau,” in Elena Russo, *Exploring the Conversible World: Text and Sociability from the Classical Age to the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 187.

<sup>19</sup> David Norbrook, “Women, the Republic of Letters and the Public Sphere in the Mid-Seventeenth Century” *Criticism* 41 (2004): 223-40, 223.

<sup>20</sup> Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 13; see also 1-2, 14-15, 49.

sort of Pedantic Park,”<sup>21</sup> Daniel Brewer casts the Republic of Letters as an idealized space linked to places such as academies, salons, and publishing networks; writing is the medium that actualizes this space through the ways individuals construct this space in their writing and depict it in communications with others. Additionally, this idealized space actualizes a certain type of subjectivity, operating as a point of reference in relation to which individuals understand themselves.<sup>22</sup>

If the Republic of Letters has a space, one may map its geography. Bots and Waquet contend that the Republic of Letters, presented by its creators and sustainers as a sort of state, accordingly possessed of a territory. Likewise, Robert Mayhew asserts that the notion of a republic “presupposes” a geography. This space has been mapped in a concrete sense by recent studies such as Ultee’s which investigates the spatial spread of Leibniz’s correspondents or Brockliss’ study of the geographical zone of Esprit Calvet’s webbed networks of epistolary communications in eighteenth century Avignon.<sup>23</sup> Bots and Waquet examine the spatial organization which historical participants imposed on the Republic. Based on this reading, the space of the Republic of Letters is conceptualized as a universal or worldwide polity.<sup>24</sup> Like a

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge, MA.; London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6, 9, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Brewer, 174.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Mayhew, “British Geography’s Republic of Letters: Mapping an Imagined Community, 1600-1800,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65(2004): 251-76, at 252. Mayhew likewise sets for himself a topographical task by mapping the circulation of individuals and texts within the “ideal realm” of the Republic of Letters, tracing the works cited of two authors of geography books, Peter Heylyn (author of *Microcosmus*, 1621) and John Pinkerton. Mayhew then investigates the periods in which the cited authors lived, “allowing an analysis of citation patterns meshing time and space into a historical geography” (254).

<sup>24</sup> Bots and Waquet, 64. For example, in 1698 Carolus Fredericus Romanus contended that the Republic of Letters, far from being limited to a specific city or region, spread over the entire globe. Likewise, Christian Loeber in 1708 and Vigneul-Marville in 1700 agreed that the Republic of Letters was a society extending across the world. For discussion of the perimeters and contours of the space of the Republic of Letters according to historical sources, see Françoise Waquet, “L’espace de la République des Lettres” in *République des Lettres*, 63-90.

state, the Republic of Letters had active capitals (those cities with particularly vibrant scholarly activity) which radiated over provincial peripheries at any given point in time. However, this space idealized as fixed, immutable, and homogeneous is one whose contours, capitals, and peripheral zones are in flux.

Alternatively, scholars chart the space of the Republic of Letters in terms of its amorphous and protean instability. April Shelford, for example, has recently pointed out that a focus at the individual level of the Republic of Letters has the advantage of making explicit important features of the Republic often blurred by a scholarly tendency to focus on the universalizing rhetoric offered in historical descriptions. Writ large, the republic existed only as the sum of all members' social gestures and communications. This dynamic organism thus lacked a fixed shape at any single moment because it continually reconfigured its boundaries as individuals established new liaisons or when pressures, internal (such as quarrels) or external (such as war), came to bear. Each individual configured his own Republic of Letters, building a network over time of kindred or, at minimum, useful contacts.<sup>25</sup> For Shelford, the ideal (but unrealizable) strategy of mapping the Republic of Letters would be to diagram the network of contacts of each individual at any single moment.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in his systematic study of the epistolary networks of Avignon-based Esprit de Calvet, Brockliss posits the existence of smaller communication matrices or micro- or mini-Republics of Letters and identifies individuals within mini-Republics who act as conduits linking mini-states to larger Republics of Letters.<sup>27</sup> Drawing

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<sup>25</sup> Brockliss points out that contacts in epistolary networks might not be made always on a voluntary basis, however, 75. Individuals were sought as contacts just as they themselves solicited contacts; epistolary networks were not solely the product of one Republican's pre-meditated design.

<sup>26</sup> April Shelford, *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European intellectual life, 1650-1720* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Brockliss, 69-125.

attention to networks of vernacular learning contemporaneous with the Latin learning networks that frequently dominate scholarly studies of the humanist Republic of Letters, Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch wonder whether these vernacular literary worlds can also be considered part of the Republic of Letters. If so, they wonder how far these Latin and vernacular literary communities interpenetrated each other and if there was “direct personal interplay or indirect cultural exchange between core and /or marginal networks of the Republic of Letters.”<sup>28</sup>

What constitutes membership in the Republic of Letters is a contested issue. According to Anne Goldgar, individuals might participate in the Republic of Letters without writing. An individual could become a man of letters through self-appointment alone.<sup>29</sup> Maarten Ultee sets the threshold for membership at a minimum of scholarly correspondence.<sup>30</sup> For Goldgar, however, an individual’s identification with the community might simply stem from regular reading of publications such as journals. Hence, those who concerned themselves with the communications of the Republic could be identified as members, but an individual’s status within the Republic would likely depend on his contacts with other members, particularly well-known and influential ones.<sup>31</sup> In consequence, scholars point out the emergence of hierarchies of members within the Republic, of big fish and minnows.<sup>32</sup> Susan Dalton points out that in

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<sup>28</sup> Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters 1680-1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Maarten Ultee, “The Republic of Letters: Learned Correspondence, 1680-1720,” *The Seventeenth Century* 2 (1987): 95-112, at 100.

<sup>31</sup> Goldgar, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Brockliss’ use of the term “minnow” in the epistolary networks of Esprit Calvet in *Calvet’s Web*, 89. See also Goldgar, 115-16 on asymmetric exchanges, such as the correspondence in the early 1740s between Voltaire

practice social networks among members worked to promote communal cohesion but that social networking also tended to promote exclusivity. When members sought and granted favors to acquaintances, friends, and family, they also restricted opportunities for including individuals outside elite circles.<sup>33</sup> Dalton examines in particular the work of salonnière Jeanne Julie Éléonore de Lespisse, who reinforced elitism in the Republic through her promotion of the work of friends.<sup>34</sup>

Despite difficulties in determining membership, the composition of members was marked by scholars with diverse interests and specialties that became interlinked through shared enthusiasms.<sup>35</sup> Scholarly interlocutors appear to have almost effortlessly combined philological skill in reading ancient texts with devotion to developing techniques of scientific exploration. The educational training of pre-modern European scholars was designed to produce generalists: “even the most gifted mathematicians studied Greek, Latin, and history in school, and logic and philosophy in college, before they turned to numbers.”<sup>36</sup> Outstanding Republican Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637) discovered in 1610 the first nebula ever observed in the constellation Orion,<sup>37</sup> was one of the earliest pioneers of Coptic studies in Early Modern

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and Huguenot minister César de Missy. Voltaire condescended to communicate with relative minnow Missy due to the strictures of *politesse* operative in the Republic. This and similar examples do much to undermine the ideal erected by the eighteenth century scholars touting equality among members in the Republic of Letters.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Dalton, *Engendering the Republic of Letters: Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Montreal & Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Dalton, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Brockliss, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Grafton, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc’s Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 2.

Europe,<sup>38</sup> and amended sailing maps of the Mediterranean by means of eclipse observations employed to compute longitudes.<sup>39</sup> Peiresc's correspondence network included associate scholar Athanasius Kircher, whose complex writings ranging through most arts and sciences were preserved in massive illustrated Latin folios. Kircher seems to have known more languages than any of his contemporary scholars, writing in Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Hebrew, Armenian, Arabic, and Coptic.<sup>40</sup> Some of Kircher's other eclectic achievements included clambering into the crater of Vesuvius to study volcanoes, assisting Bernini in drafting the Fountain of the Four Rivers, and offering impious speculations about heliocentric astronomy and the ancient history of Egypt and China.<sup>41</sup>

The Early Modern Republic of Letters also collected people together through the enterprise of collecting objects. Such pursuits highlight the antiquarian concerns of republicans and their backward-looking gaze (which is not to say, however, that such a gaze did not serve present interests). Case studies of republican collectors illuminate the social and often interdependent nature of the collecting enterprise. Brockliss charts with precision the creation of Esprit Calvet's antiquities collection—the centerpiece of which was 12,000 coins, especially large imperial bronzes—as the sum product of collective endeavors of friends, neighbors, patients, and professional colleagues. On the whole, the collection appears to have been the product of gifts, exchanges, and purchase. Calvet's example also informs us about mentoring

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<sup>38</sup> Peter N. Miller, "Copts and Scholars: Athanasius Kircher in Peiresc's Republic of Letters" in Paula Findlen, ed., *Athanasius Kircher: the Last Man who Knew Everything*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Peiresc's Europe*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Malcolm, 297. Kircher probably read others in addition to this list.

<sup>41</sup> Grafton, 14.



relationships among antiquarians, since Calvet corresponded with neophyte collectors whose fledgling collections he augmented by passing along his own unwanted coins.

Other scholars locate the Republic of Letters in a set of moral understandings and social practices. In this approach, the Republic is conceptualized as a type of “culture in practice” created by *litterati*,<sup>42</sup> and the emphasis is on the social rather than the intellectual component of learned communities.<sup>43</sup> For Anne Goldgar, “the Republic of Letters was not located—for example—in the *Société Royale des Sciences* in Berlin, but in the relations among its members and among other scholars, the quarrels, gossip, dinners, lending of books and sharing of information.”<sup>44</sup> Likewise Peter Miller asserts that the Republic of Letters was “a laboratory in which ideas of civility were elaborated and lived.”<sup>45</sup> Goldgar locates the Republic in the values and mentalities that informed members’ conduct and inculcated within them this unique conception of community. Personal relationships were the foundation of communications in the Republic. These relationships were informed by value systems providing regular protocol regarding correct comportment.<sup>46</sup> Reciprocity and a sense of obligation among members emerge as a sort of cooperative code which facilitated the exchange of services and benefits as well as fortifying the communal identity of the Republic of Letters.<sup>47</sup> A significant element of this “culture in practice” was a normative understanding of the moral dimension of learning;

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<sup>42</sup> Sebök, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Goldgar, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, *Peiresc’s Europe*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-19.

intellectual endeavor was constructed as morally edifying in these communities of lettered individuals.<sup>48</sup>

Idealized friendship featured as a component of the moral system among Republic members, engendering a sense of equality in organizing relations among group members and thereby facilitating collaborative intellectual endeavor. In April Shelford's words, "friendship was the Republic of Letters' emotional infrastructure."<sup>49</sup> The shared love of knowledge and love among citizens enabled the circulation of knowledge. Part of the normative language of the Republic of Letters was the conception of friendship as a relationship into which men freely entered as equals and whose responsibilities were accepted with enthusiasm. Friendship ties made Republicans, in the words of seventeenth century Huguenot philosopher Pierre Bayle, "of as good a lineage . . . all equal . . . all brothers, like the children of Apollo."<sup>50</sup> Ideals of friendship undergirding conceptions of the Republic of Letters must also be set, however, within the context of other Early Modern theories of friendship and its role in the pursuit of knowledge.

Other scholars focus on the devices that individuals employed to realize the ideal of the Republic of Letters. The core communications mechanism actualizing this society was epistolography.<sup>51</sup> One of main functions of letters was to provide opportunities for research and to link intellectuals with scholarly opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Letters also serve as a mode of sociability in

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<sup>48</sup> Shelford, 110.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> The letter as a writing genre in the pre-modern world is an unstable, mutating form—transmogrifying into other writing genres such as the epistolary novel, and an example of another communications mechanism of the Republic, the scientific journal article.

<sup>52</sup> Goldgar, 15.

the sense of promoting not only intellectual exchange but also a means of vicarious conversation.<sup>53</sup> Via correspondence, members in this community transcended geographical distances that would have otherwise hindered rewarding discussions and exchange of ideas. Distance and the formalities of epistolography fostered amicable relations while reducing direct confrontation and enabling debate.<sup>54</sup> Letter-writing was an obligation binding on all members. In his study of seventeenth century examples, Paul Dibon contends that “it was the strict duty of each citizen of the *Respublica literaria* to establish, maintain, and encourage communication, primarily by personal correspondence or contact.”<sup>55</sup>

Like letter-writing in antiquity, letters in the Early Modern world were not casual exchanges but frequently carefully-wrought literary creations designed to be shared, circulated, treasured, and collected.<sup>56</sup> Letter collections of notable members of epistolary networks that appeared in published volumes enshrined the cherished art of letter-writing, and by the 1430s such publications confirmed the stature of the letter author as veritable scholar.<sup>57</sup> Early Modern letters were instruments of self-creation as well as instruments of mentoring and friendship. Carol Pal has recently studied the formation of intellectual families or “familles d’alliance” as modes of mentorship in epistolary networks. Pal cites the earliest known use of this term in 1588 when Michel de Montaigne extended an offer of “fille d’alliance” or adoptive intellectual daughter to Marie de Gournay. Such mentoring relationships functioned as emotional bonds as

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Ultee, 101.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth May McCahill, “Finding a Job as a Humanist: the Epistolary Collection of Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger” *Renaissance Quarterly* 57 (2004), 1308.

<sup>57</sup> Almási, 91; May McCahill, 1309.

well as strategies for female scholars in particular to strengthen their position in the Republic of Letters.<sup>58</sup> Friendship language in epistolary networks included love language as well as nagging friends about their obligations to respond with a letter, scolding friends for not writing sooner, and preemptive introductions in letters justifying late responses.<sup>59</sup>

Given the large volume of surviving Early Modern letters and the sheer complexity of the interlocking epistolary networks which they contain, systematic exploration of the letters of the Republic may seem unrealizable or, at best, hopelessly confusing.<sup>60</sup> Even scholars who make strong arguments for the role of letters in forging the Republic of Letters do not investigate specific letter collections systematically.<sup>61</sup> However, other scholars such as Brockliss have turned their attention to exclusive study of the epistolary correspondence of individuals in order to reconstruct the geographical spread, social backgrounds, and intellectual interests of the scholarly networks of micro-states of the Republic of Letters in action.<sup>62</sup> In her study of Pierre Huet's letters, April Shelford charts the mechanics of epistolary networks in terms of "gatekeepers" or savants who furthered a friend's project by introducing him to useful contacts. The role of gatekeeper, asserts Shelford, was one that virtually every citizen performed. Shelford provides a map of the gatekeepers who enabled Huet's entrée into the Republic of

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<sup>58</sup> Carol Pal, "Forming familles d'alliance: Intellectual Kinship in the Republic of Letters," in *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, 254.

<sup>59</sup> Shelford, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Richard G. Maber, *Publishing in the Republic of Letters: the Ménage-Graevius-Wetstein Correspondence, 1679-1692* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 19. See also Peterson's view of the outcome of mapping transatlantic networks between Boston and Germany in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, 332.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Dena Goodman.

<sup>62</sup> Brockliss' study, 79, reveals Calvet's correspondence to be a protean and unstable network with casual, unsustainable epistolary interaction mostly populated by a local circle of Avignon savants.

Letters (early 1650s).<sup>63</sup> Additionally, Shelford depicts the exchange of writings among republicans by means of a flow chart illustrating the circulation of Huet's Ode and Epistle<sup>64</sup> and charts the circulation of Latin poetry (ca. 1658-64) through a subgroup of Huet's Republic of Letters.<sup>65</sup>

Lastly, scholars locate the Republic of Letters in interlocking communications networks and forms of sodality which included but were not necessarily limited to the circulation of ephemeral media such as journals and pamphlets, the nascence of scientific academies, personal libraries as tourist attractions, and salons. The details of these distinctively Early Modern loci of the Republic of Letters are not directly relevant to my present purposes, but suffice it to say that these are mutually reinforcing interlocking springs and mechanisms of an organism of communications. For example, journal articles informed scholars of the latest ideas and publications to which a savant might not have access in terms of local resources. Journal articles offered surrogate access to the great libraries in Europe, as librarians pursued for review in journals books which they were set upon acquiring. Likewise, literary journals offered readers admission to participate in scholarly debates.

Finally, to expand to a synoptic view, Republics of Letters were not isolated virtual communities but were entrenched in the world around them. Scholarly networks might be defined in terms of erudite interlocutors, but such networks were highly dependent upon the symbiotic contributions of a throng of servants and beneficiaries who ensured the safe transport of letters, gifts, antiquities, and writings such as poetry and treatises. Savants within Republics

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<sup>63</sup> Shelford, 32-33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

of Letters might perceive themselves as distinct and superior,<sup>66</sup> yet the technical infrastructure of their intellectual commerce was built upon the work of non-scholars. Additionally, republicans were often burdened by professional obligations, frequently as a means of earning a livelihood to secure time for scholarly leisure. Esprit Calvet habitually complained about the time he had to allocate to his practice of medicine and regarded it as wasted time.<sup>67</sup> Early Modern savants longed for the idleness or *otium* (Greek *scholē*) beloved by the ancients, but they were concerned about how to balance their private intellectual cultivation with engagement in civil life.<sup>68</sup>

### A Late Antique Republic of Letters?

What do I mean by a Late Antique Republic of Letters? Specifically, I mean the intellectual sodality, literally the *res publica* or “public affairs,” of the literati of the Late Antique Greek East and their discursive explorations of identity, examined specifically through the lens of four understudied authors. Their neglected epistolary corpora constitute an entry point for examination of a particular culture of provincial sociability. This study represents the testimony of those voices who have not traditionally told the story of provincial life in the Later Empire. These underexamined letters can be put to use in elucidating social and intellectual exchange as well as the nature of the exercise of power in the provinces.

In this project, I adduce the model of a Republic of Letters as an organizing apparatus for reading the selected epistolary corpora. This model serves as both interpretative vehicle and metaphor. The Republic of Letters operates in this project as a useful shorthand means of

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<sup>66</sup> Goldgar, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Brockliss, 125, Goldgar, 3. Brockliss’ study reveals that most of Calvet’s correspondents also depended on professional work to earn a living—this seems particularly true of men specializing in medicine—and had limited time to devote to hobbies. Many of the nobles, however, were able to live off pensions and rents. 78.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Peiresc’s Europe*, 61.

conceptualizing the type of intellectual exchange and shared culture of erudition characterizing these epistolographers. It lends thematic cohesion to my study because it unites and brings into focus a particular set of interconnected dimensions of the letters. This model articulates and synthesizes how the selected authors, who, convinced of the moral dimension of learning, engaged in a mode of intellectual sociability regulated by a code of genteel interaction. I will elaborate here the specific dimensions of the figurative model of a Late Antique Republic of Letters.

Epistolary speech offered vicarious shared presence transcending the geographical and political divisions of Empire. Late Antique letter authors shared the perception that a person's *logoi* offered access to his soul.<sup>69</sup> We will explore testimony to this phenomenon later in the chapter and subsequent chapters. There is a sense in which *logoi* create visibility. Like the Early Modern Republic of Letters, Late Antique epistles thus offered surrogate presence and companionship.

The letters were conduits of intellectual sociability. The epistolary corpora of Procopius, Aeneas, Synesius, and Isidore point to the existence of scholarly networks that gathered and exchanged learning. Epistolography provided a space for intellectual exchange among Late Antique literati. By means of letters, epistolographers shared and discussed books, treatises, and literary writings. They circulated, commented upon, and assessed copies of their speeches, poetry, and disquisitions. Literati sometimes served as gatekeepers or brokers introducing associates and friends to one another. Through vicarious conversation, letters provided access to

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<sup>69</sup> This was a *topos* of Late Antique and Byzantine letters. See A.R. Littlewood, "An 'Ikon of the Soul': the Byzantine letter," *Visible Language* 10 (1996): 197-226.

materials, intellectual exchange, and contacts beyond an epistolographer's limited local resources.

Late Antique literati shared and broadcast their diverse intellectual enthusiasms through letters. The selected authors indicate that the epistolary currency of Late Antiquity encompassed not only facility in classicizing and Atticizing speech but also knowledge of scientific and medical traditions, as well as enthusiasm for technical devices. Epistolographers employed letters as open forums exploring diverse topics including the interpretation of scripture; gadgets such as waterwheels, astrolabes, and hydrometers; the relationship between body and soul, and cosmology. These provincials defined and distinguished themselves through polymathy, an encyclical devotion to knowledge enthusiastically endorsed in the intellectual communities of Alexandria, in which the selected epistolographers were all most likely educated.

The letters—the premier form of social media in the Later Empire—suggest nodes of provincial sociability. They were designed to be shared, circulated, and re-read among interlinked persons. They are thus devices of lateral address and point to horizontal audiences of literati.<sup>70</sup> Through the copying and dissemination of letters, literati “re-tweeted” letters for the entertainment of their friends and associates.<sup>71</sup> Constructed for the lateral audience, these texts likely indicate the interests, values, and practices of a larger subset of educated provincials in the Greek East. Epistolary language across our authors indicates that the letters were shared at

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<sup>70</sup> I must credit Philip Rousseau for coining this term. He used it during a seminar presentation I offered at Catholic University on 4/19/2012 entitled, “Aeneas and a Waterwheel.”

<sup>71</sup>The idea of the re-circulation of letters as re-tweets is derived from a Tom Standage's recent popular book *Writing on the Wall: Social Media, the First Two-Thousand Years* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). See also Paul Krugman's review: “Poetry and Blogging,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2013.



public gatherings of literati in various locations in the city. The letters also point to the role of dining as another locus of intellectual sociability among urban literati.

Like the Early Modern republicans, Late Antique epistolographers engaged in a specific type of sociability in which only a select group of men with keenly-trained linguistic practices could participate. Yet these letter writers relied upon the world around them in order to actualize this sodality. A host of beneficiaries supported the technical infrastructure of letter exchange. Letter authors relied upon the efforts of a diverse number of individuals from various social locations to ferry letters and convey messages, ranging from skippers and sailors, to men on horseback, to students, to individuals seeking legal aid, to traveling friends. The humble and unlettered often enabled the ethereal and lofty communications of literati patrons.

Late Antique letter writers pursued intellectual commerce perceived as morally beneficial by means of a cooperative code of idealized genteel behavior. Similar to the Early Modern savant, Late Antique scholars also shared the Classical view that the life of the mind was morally edifying. These men would have agreed with Peter Miller's claim that "learning shapes the soul and prepares it for good and moral living."<sup>72</sup> Like the Early Modern Republic of Letters, the Late Antique epistolography of lettered provincials elaborated a distinctive ethic that facilitated exchange and mitigated personal discord. As we will see below, the strictures of Late Antique epistolography encoded a specific protocol delineating genteel interaction. These conventions promoted reciprocity and intellectual friendship.

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<sup>72</sup>Peter Miller, *Peiresc's Europe*, 159.

## Modern Scholarship

I have elaborated above a preliminary model in order to characterize my approach to study of the selected epistolographers. In this section, I will provide an overview of the contemporary scholarship concerning Late Antique letters and the selected authors in particular in order to situate my project within the context of the historical scholarship. Late Antique epistolary corpora as a genre have been studied previously by scholars such as Ray Van Dam and Peter Brown in terms of their function in power brokerage between provincial elites and imperial officials.<sup>73</sup> In this view, epistolary conventions characteristic of elite letters, such as shared *paideia*, friendship, and formulaic gestures of politeness and cordiality yoked together the formidable distances of the Empire and facilitated relations between elites of asymmetrical status. Classical culture, formulaic polite address, and expressions of friendship provided a means for instant rapport and intimacy in lieu of personal familiarity.<sup>74</sup> The protocol punctuating Late Antique letters also structures the epistolary sociability of the letters of Synesius, Isidore, Procopius and Aeneas.

My study is influenced in part by recent scholarship on the Late Antique letter as a mode of friendship among lettered men. In *Families and Friends in late Roman Cappadocia*,<sup>75</sup> Raymond Van Dam provides useful analytical models for the study of social and cultural history of Late Antique epistolary corpora, particularly ecclesiastical texts. Exploring the letters of Basil

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<sup>73</sup> See Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> Van Dam, 80-83.

<sup>75</sup> Raymond Van Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, Van Dam investigates how letters perpetuated friendship and functioned as an activity of *philia* providing a means for interlocutors to evaluate their conceptions of friendship and search for self-consistency and self-understanding in the midst of changing and sometimes vanishing friendships. Thus, epistolary friendship serves as a vehicle for self-discovery. Letters in Van Dam's view provided moments of vicarious shared experience.

Recent work on Late Antique letters from Gaza includes Jennifer Hevelone-Harper's monograph on two holy men of Gaza, Barsanuphius and John.<sup>76</sup> As in Van Dam's project to study ecclesiastical texts from the perspective of social and cultural history, Hevelone-Harper interrogates the collected correspondence of Barsanuphius and John for data concerning how letters functioned to maintain spiritual authority at the monastery at Tawatha and to provide a forum for these secluded monks for engaging the concerns of lay petitioners, thereby providing guidance on matters both spiritual and mundane. Thus, the correspondence between these monks and petitioners representing a broad cross-section of Late Antique society provided a conduit connecting persons of various social situations to monastic and spiritual leaders during the twilight of Greco-Roman Gaza. Letters provided the vehicle for the monks' continued involvement in the polis of Gaza.

Modern scholars have awarded scant attention to the epistolary corpora of Synesius, Isidore of Pelusium, Procopius of Gaza and Aeneas of Gaza. In the case of Synesius, the skill and precision of French scholar Denis Roques has contributed greatly to our understanding of the specific chronological details, interlocutors, geo-political context, and the philological themes of

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<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Synesius' letters.<sup>77</sup> In two of the four volumes of the Belles Lettres edition of Synesius' works, Roques has provided rich annotation to Garzya's critical edition of the letters (cf. p. 32).<sup>78</sup> Scholarly debate among specialists has tended to focus on the question of Synesius' religious identity.<sup>79</sup> This self-proclaimed philosopher agreed to serve as bishop of Ptolemaïs in 410 despite his documented doubts about Orthodox Christianity conveyed in *Letter 105* to his brother. The two most recent discussions of this issue include Jay Bregman's monograph *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher Bishop*, and Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long's chapter in *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*.<sup>80</sup> In Bregman's view, Synesius' highest religious identity was service of philosophy and he considered Neoplatonism the means to salvation. Cameron and Long, on the other hand, contend that Synesius' Hellenism was solely a cultural identity. In their view, Synesius was wary about accepting the episcopate not because of religious objections but because he was concerned about the demands it would place on his time.

Extant scholarship dwindles as one turns to study of Isidore of Pelusium, Procopius of Gaza, and Aeneas of Gaza. The authenticity of the letters of Isidore and even his existence have been doubted by modern scholarship. Based on prosopographical analysis of the names and

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<sup>77</sup> Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène et la Cyrénaïque du Bas-Empire* (Paris: Presses du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, diffusion: 1987); idem, *Etudes sur la correspondance de Synésios de Cyrène* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène: Correspondance*, vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978).

<sup>79</sup> Modern scholars have envisaged various models of Synesius' religious identity. Wilamowitz judged Synesius to be more of a political than a religious convert who never deserted his devotion to Neoplatonic philosophy. Augustine Fitzgerald, translator of Synesius' written corpus, viewed Synesius as a practical mind, as opposed to a "mystic" like the other Neoplatonists: Synesius was more a man of action than a thinker. Lacombrade approached Synesius' religious development as a sort of slow-moving "pilgrim's progress." For Lacombrade, Synesius moved systematically toward Christianity but died before full conversion could take place. For an overview of both ancient and modern perspectives, see Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher Bishop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 5-8.

<sup>80</sup> Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

titles used in Isidore's epistolary corpus, Pierre Évieux has argued persuasively that Isidore did in fact exist and that the letters are authentic.<sup>81</sup> Drawing from the 2,000-odd extant letters, Évieux is concerned to sketch Isidore's inner development. For Évieux, Isidore underwent a series of stages in a progressive spiritual transformation which was marked by changing relations with his social community. Isidore's journey from appointment as sophist in Pelusium to priest and spiritual teacher to monk in a mountain retreat represented a quest for spiritual perfection and fusion of lived experience and the spoken word.<sup>82</sup>

A recent blossoming of scholarly examination of Greco-Roman Gaza in Late Antiquity has enriched contemporary understandings of the historical context of Procopius and Aeneas.<sup>83</sup> A small number of Italian scholars have contributed enormously to the study of the written corpus of Procopius of Gaza within the past decade although this scholarship remains neglected by Anglo-American scholars. This circle is comprised chiefly of Eugenio Amato, Federica Ciccolella, Giuseppina Matino, and Aldo Corcella.<sup>84</sup> The most prolific of these, Eugenio Amato, has both edited and contributed selections to a reference collection of essays, texts, and translations concerning Procopius of Gaza, entitled *Rose di Gaza: gli scritti retorico-sofistici e le epistole di Procopio di Gaza*. This magisterial volume is comprised of a first unit of essays ranging from biographical discussion of Procopius, including discussions regarding his literary

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<sup>81</sup> Pierre Évieux, *Isidore de Péluse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995); idem, ed., *Isidore of Pelusium, Lettres: Correspondence French and Greek* 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 9-10.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Évieux, "From Rhetoric to Monasticism: The Personal Itinerary of Isidore of Pelusium" in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* ed. Pauline Allen, et al. Eastern Mennonite University Hartzler Library (Brisbane, Australia: Watson Ferguson & Company, 2000), 143-57.

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., the essays collected by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Arveh Kofsky, eds., *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) and Catherine Saliou, *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive: archéologie, rhétorique, et histoire* (Salerno: Helios, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> See the bibliography in *RDG*, 619-72.

and rhetorical corpus, to study of his panegyric to Emperor Anastasius, an essay concerning the letters written by Federica Ciccolella, and discussion of the editions and translations of the letters and the rhetorical writings. The second unit is comprised of richly annotated texts and Ciccolella's translation of Procopius' entire epistolary corpus into Italian with notes, as well as texts and translations of the sophistical works, and it includes annotated translations in Italian of Procopius' *ekphrasis* on the waterclock at Gaza as well as his Panegyric of Anastasius.<sup>85</sup> An appendix includes Aldo Corcella's essay and Italian translation of Choricius' Funeral Oration of Procopius as well as two essays concerning the *ekphraseis* (as on p. 27).

Federica Ciccolella's essay on Procopius' letters in *Rose di Gaza* contains a trenchant overview of many of the themes of the letters, including discussion of the professionals populating Procopius' network, and the relationship between the Procopius' extant letters and epistolographic conventions of his context.<sup>86</sup> I will draw upon this essay in subsequent chapters, but here I draw attention to salient introductory issues pertaining to the letters. Ciccolella reminds us that the modern scholar must confront the suggestion Kilian Seitz expressed in his 1892 dissertation on the School of Gaza that the letters of Procopius could simply have been model exercises (*Probenstücke*) composed by Procopius for his students.<sup>87</sup> According to Seitz, even the fact that the letters are addressed to real individuals does not confirm their authenticity, especially if one considers the practice among sophists of writing fictional letters to historical figures and famous personalities.<sup>88</sup> Against these objections, however, Seitz emphasizes the

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<sup>85</sup> Amato provides Italian translation and notes for the letters between Procopius and Megethios (*Letters* 166, 169-172); occasionally he also provides supplementary suggestions to Ciccolella's notes on the other letters.

<sup>86</sup> Ciccolella, "Le Epistole," in *RDG*, 120-50.

<sup>87</sup> Kilian Seitz, "Die Schule von Gaza" (PhD diss., Heidelberg, 1892).

<sup>88</sup> *RDG*, 134-35.

extreme variety and individuality of the letters, arguing for example that it would not have made sense for Procopius to invent completely kinship ties that he claims to have with some of his correspondents.<sup>89</sup>

Acknowledging Seitz's caveats, Ciccolella views the highly artificial and programmed speech of the letters, which include little concrete fact, as reflecting the language and themes typical of the epistolary genre. She contends, however, that the question of the authenticity of the letters should arise from other considerations than those Seitz proposed. It is highly likely that the Procopian corpus did gather some spurious material over the centuries in addition to a core of authentic material. It could also be possible that the surviving letters represent real situations and individuals with names and specific facts eliminated so the texts could be used as classroom models.<sup>90</sup> Ciccolella ultimately asserts that surely some of the political and economic aspects described by Procopius correspond to historical realities.<sup>91</sup> Notwithstanding the conventionality of their content, Procopius' letters demonstrate a great variety of human characters, each with his own individual story.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the letters encode clear expectations of the correct comportment appropriate for various types of specific professionals.<sup>93</sup> They also point to a context of a common cultural heritage uniting epistolary interlocutors who shared in the same aesthetic and moral values.<sup>94</sup> Independently of my construction of a Late

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<sup>89</sup> Seitz, 11-12; *RDG*, 135.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Antique Republic of Letters, Ciccolella comments that Procopius “stands at the center of a ‘Republic of Letters’ formed by individuals who share the same ideas and above all, the same culture.”<sup>95</sup>

Other recent scholarship on Procopius of Gaza has not centered on his letters, but on his manipulation of both classical and Christian genres of writing: the *ekphrasis* and the *catena*. Henry Maguire, for example, has argued on the basis of textual analysis of Procopius’ *Ekphrasis Eikonos* describing a mural painting in Gaza of Phaedra and Hippolytus that Procopius did in fact observe the works of art he discusses and did not use only literary sources. In Maguire’s view there is clear evidence to support the view that the *ekphraseis* of the School of Gaza were created on the basis of first-hand observation as well as literary exemplars.<sup>96</sup> Rina Talgam has recently investigated the perpetuation of classical culture in Byzantine Palestine and Arabia through the testimony of Procopius’ *Ekprasis Eikonos*. Talgam compares the evidence from Procopius’ *ekphrasis* with archaeological evidence from the region in order to understand better how pagan mythological themes were represented in Byzantine secular art.<sup>97</sup>

Bas Ter Haar Romeny has recently studied how Procopius contributed to emerging Christian genres of discourse through analysis of how Procopius related to existing texts in his

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Henry Maguire, “Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 119-20.

<sup>97</sup> Rina Talgam, “The *Ekphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza: The Depiction of Mythological Themes in Palestine and Arabia During the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, 209, 233-34. Cf. D. Carrier, “Ekphrasis and Interpretation: Two Modes of Art History Writing,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 27 (1987): 20-31; L. James and R. Webb, “To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: *Ekphraseis* and Art in Byzantium,” *Art History* 14 (1991): 1-17; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



*Commentary on the Octateuch*.<sup>98</sup> Ter Haar Romeny explores François Petit's contention that Procopius' *Commentary* was dependent upon an earlier *Catena on the Octateuch*. Based on the agreement between the sources of the *Catena on the Octateuch* and those of Procopius in his *Commentary*, Petit suggested that Procopius and the catenist used the same library.<sup>99</sup> Ter Haar Romeny speculates that perhaps this library was that at Gaza but qualifies this hypothesis with a reminder that ancient scholars were more itinerant than modern scholars often imagine. Ter Haar Romeny ultimately argues that the key to understanding Procopius' manipulation of Christian literary genres lies with Procopius' profane works: Procopius followed closely earlier models, whether Classical genres for the benefit of his students or emerging Christian forms of exegetical discourse. Procopius' seemingly paradoxical use of pagan and Christian literary genres stems simply from his conservative adherence to genre conventions.<sup>100</sup> Such an argument, however, does not make use of the other information Procopius provides about himself in his letters. As I shall argue below, I think careful study of the letters will clarify Procopius' relation to what are traditionally classed as Christian and pagan forms of discourse.

Recent scholarly discussion of Aeneas of Gaza has been drawn from his Neoplatonic dialogue entitled *Theophrastus or on the Immortality of Souls and the Resurrection of Bodies* as well as his letters addressed to a teacher of medicine (iatrosophist) named Gesius. Alexander

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<sup>98</sup> Bas Ter Haar Romeny, "Procopius of Gaza and His Library," in Hagit Amirav and Bas Ter Haar Romeny, eds. *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honor of Averil Cameron* (Leuven; Paris; Dudley, MA.: Peeters, 2007), 173-90. Though this work has often been labelled a *catena*, Ter Haar Romeny argues that Procopius' *Commentary* cannot be classified as a *catena* in the strict sense. Procopius' methods differed from those of a catenist. Procopius chose fragments but combined them into a running commentary without attributing the fragments to a source, he sometimes altered slightly or summarized his sources, or conflated the texts of two or more authors into a single text. A *catena* in the strict sense also quotes the biblical text in its entirety, adds Ter Haar Romeny, which Procopius omits, 179-80.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-87. Cf. F. Petit, *La Chaîne sur la Genèse* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-90.

Alexakis has employed the *Theophrastus* to study the fate of discourse concerning the transmigration of souls in Byzantine authors. In the *Theophrastus*, Aeneas summarizes the major Neoplatonic ideas of reincarnation and argues against them in defense of the Christian positions.<sup>101</sup> To judge from post-sixth-century Byzantines, contends Alexakis, little survived from the pagan Greek past on the issue of transmigration of souls. In this view, the work of Aeneas represents a latent attempt to engage this Neoplatonic issue,<sup>102</sup> and later Byzantine authors rarely refer to reincarnation (exceptions include Photius and Psellus) and when they do it is only within broader antipagan or antiheretic diatribes.<sup>103</sup>

Vivian Nutton analyzes the case of Gessius, a dear friend and addressee of the letters of Aeneas and Procopius, to assert that the medical profession still was regarded as a bulwark of paganism and heresy in Late Antiquity.<sup>104</sup> According to Zacharias Scholasticus (ca. 465/6-536),<sup>105</sup> this highly-regarded friend of the two Gaza sophists was reported to have supported the pagan philosopher Heraiscus who endorsed the oracle of Menuthis in response to Christian

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<sup>101</sup> Alexander Alexakis, "Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration" *DOP* 55 (2001): 164.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>104</sup> Vivian Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity" *DOP* 38 (1984): 6. Inherent in this view is the acceptance of a binary split of "pagan" versus "Christian." Modern scholars' adoption of these categories as clear cut and distinct stems largely from tacit acceptance of religious identity presented in certain Late Antique Christian sources (as Isabella Sandwell has skillfully illustrated in the case of Chrysostom in her recent work *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007]). This binary, as I shall argue below, merits problematization. See also E.J. Watts' recent essay on Gesius (which I discuss in Chapter 5): "The Enduring Legacy of the Iatrosophist Gessius," *Journal of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49 (2009): 113-33.

<sup>105</sup> Also known as Zacharias of Mytiline, a bishop of Mytilene and writer who studied rhetoric and philosophy at Alexandria and law at Berytus. Most of his extant works are preserved only in Syriac and include a Syriac epitome of his *Church History* and a biography of his fellow pupil Severus of Antioch, which provides information about student life in Late Antique Alexandria. See *ODB* 3:2218.

criticism. Sophronius of Jerusalem (ca. 560-638)<sup>106</sup> also says that Gessius was not a serious Christian though Gessius self-identified as one.<sup>107</sup> According to John of Ephesus (ca. 507-586/588),<sup>108</sup> Gessius' retribution for denying the divine character of the cures of Saints Cyrus and John was an incurable disease. Fortunately for Gessius, the malady was vulnerable to the power of contrite confession.<sup>109</sup>

In a recent article engaging the question of the audience of John of Gaza's<sup>110</sup> declaimed poems, Federica Ciccolella contributes to scholarly investigation of the intellectual life and culture of Gaza from the fifth to sixth centuries.<sup>111</sup> In Ciccolella's inquiry, the language of John's poetry bears the imprint of the tastes and concerns of the public of Gaza who attended the competitive display of public declamations. John addresses his audience, the literati community of Gaza, as a "choir replete with the wise bee," and a people who, like the bee, tend to the sweetness of intellectual endeavor and beautiful speech and are thus "a sweetly-flowing Muse."<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Ciccolella argues that John's re-evaluation of pagan myths and their

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<sup>106</sup> Sophronius was patriarch of Jerusalem from 634-38, teacher of rhetoric in Damascus, and author of a number of hagiographies, homilies, Anacreontic odes in classical meter, and liturgical texts. Sophronius also witnessed the conquest of Jerusalem by Caliph Umar in 638. See *ODB* 2:1928.

<sup>107</sup> Sources cited in Nutton, 6.

<sup>108</sup> John of Ephesus is a Syriac historian who was a Monophysite leader in Constantinople during the time of Justinian I. He was the author of an ascetical work entitled *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. Of his *Church History*, clearly shaped by his Monophysitism, only the final third survives. Cf. *ODB* 2:1064.

<sup>109</sup> Nutton, 6.

<sup>110</sup> John was a sixth century Christian grammarian. Extant are his 703 hexameter-long *ekphrasis* describing a mural in the winter baths of Gaza or Antioch as well as his six Anacreontic poems, whose topics range from roses and mythology to addresses to local elites. See *ODB* 2:1065.

<sup>111</sup> Federica Ciccolella, "Swarms of the Wise Bee: Literati and Their Audience in Sixth-Century Gaza," in *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique: Hommages à Jacques Schamp*, Eugenio Amato, ed., avec la collaboration de Alexandre Roduit et Martin Steinruck (Bruxelles: Éditions Latomus, 2006), 80-95.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

allegorical interpretation in his sixth anacreontic poem is consistent with his audience's attitudes toward myth informed by Neoplatonic and Christian thought. The allegorical exegesis of myth is thus a means of preserving pagan literature when addressing a Christian audience with a strong Classical background. This view is certainly not novel, yet Ciccolella's use of the binaries "pagan" and "Christian" in discussion of Late Antique religious identity in Gaza may likely be modified with study of the epistolary discourse of Late Antique men of letters from Gaza, Aeneas and Procopius.<sup>113</sup>

### Texts and Editions

In this section, I will explore the previous critical editions and, as appropriate, the manuscript transmission, of the epistolary corpora of Synesius, Procopius, Aeneas, and Isidore. The purpose of this exploration is to investigate how the major collections were created and how the letters have been preserved in order to evaluate these texts as documents. These letters—as arguably are all texts in Barthesian textuality—are protean texts, texts whose meanings change shape under continual reconstruction by various audiences and preserving hands (or excerpting/excising hands), whether ancient or modern. These letters have meanings which refuse to stay in the same place and form, whose textual meaning has been continually (re)constructed in the interface between text and reader(s), whether the audience be contemporary Late Antique recipients or classrooms, Byzantine collectors or medieval readers gathering *florilegia*. In this project, I am principally concerned with these letters as documents circulating between author and recipient(s), but I shall sketch in broad outline the transmission

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<sup>113</sup> Ciccolella's glib depiction of Late Antique Gaza as "an age of crisis" (95) is a bit Liebeschuetzian.

and collection of these texts across different temporal contexts to indicate the plasticity of these letters as texts.<sup>114</sup>

Synesius' letters have been organized into four significant editions, the most recent being that of Garzya published in 1979.<sup>115</sup> The first collection was produced by the Jesuit scholar Petavius. The third edition of Petavius' collection, published in 1633, was reprinted by J.-P. Migne in *Patrologia Graeca*, volume 66. Hercher's collection of Synesius' letters in the *Epistolographi Graeci* (1873) constitutes a third edition. Over a hundred years later, A. Garzya published a new critical edition which has key advantages over previous collections. Garzya's edition is the first to be based on a comprehensive examination of the manuscript tradition in its entirety. In his collection Garzya endeavors to assist the reader in her understanding of the text as well as the context of Synesius' epistolary communication.<sup>116</sup>

This relatively modest collection was apparently a best-seller throughout the Byzantine period, but Synesius himself made no efforts to preserve his letters as far as Garzya can tell.<sup>117</sup>

According to Garzya, there are no fewer than 260 manuscripts, of which 55, dating from the

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<sup>114</sup> This view of the letters is adapted in part based on Maxine Grossman's essay, "Roland Barthes and the Teacher of Righteousness: The Death of the Author of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Timothy Lim and John Collins, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 709-22. Cf. also Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-48; Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* ed. Josué V. Havari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 73-81.

<sup>115</sup> Antonio Garzya, ed., *Synesii Cyrenensis epistolae* (Roma: Instituto Polygraphico e Zecca della Stato, 1979).

<sup>116</sup> David T. Runia, "Review: [Untitled]" *Vigiliae christianae* 40 (1986): 87.

<sup>117</sup> Runia, 87. As his letters to his mentor Hypatia attest (10, 16, 81 Garzya), Synesius' last days were characterized by great personal distress and he probably did not undertake a project to collect and preserve the letters. There does not appear to be any clear rationale behind the extant collection according to Garzya. The letters which survive probably were found after his death in the form of a pell-mell and disordered pile of Synesius' various literary endeavors.

eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, contain 120 or more of the 156 letters.<sup>118</sup> Garzya dates the archetype to the tenth century, about a century earlier than our oldest manuscript.<sup>119</sup> Garzya hypothesizes two main groups of manuscripts as well as a number of subgroups along with much contamination.<sup>120</sup> To simplify the half a dozen types of numbering systems applied to Synesius' epistolary corpus, Garzya employs the canonical numbering system used in the majority of the manuscripts.<sup>121</sup>

The collection of Isidore of Pelusium's 2,000-odd letters was first edited in stages in the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The first edition of part of the letters was published in three volumes by J. de Billy and J. Chatard (1585). C. Rittershuys added a fourth book drawn from the manuscript collection (1605), and A. Schott added a fifth book of the rest of the letters to complete the collection (1623). In the nineteenth century, Migne published 569 letters in volume 78 of his *Patrologia Graeca*. Pierre Évieux has created a relatively recent collection of letters 1214-2000. According to Évieux, the original order of the manuscripts had been disrupted and Évieux elected to begin at 1214, where the manuscript order had been upset.<sup>122</sup>

The study of Isidore's epistolary corpus can be grouped into three stages: medieval study of *catenae* and *florilegia*, sixteenth and seventeenth century publication of a rudimentary historical account of Isidore worked out from the letters as well as better-known *testimonia*, and modern study. There were originally some 3,000 letters in the corpus, and by the first quarter of

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>122</sup> Évieux 1:5.

the sixth century these were known in both Egypt and Syria.<sup>123</sup> According to the hypothesis of D. A. Schmid, texts related to the Monophysite controversy had already been interpolated in the collection. These texts in turn were corrupted so that some texts contained Monophysite formulae and others Chalcedonian. The Sleepless Monks of Constantinople collected 2,000 letters in four codices. It is uncertain how this collection compared to the original 3,000 letters, but this collection was the archetype for some of the principal Greek manuscripts preserved in Western Europe and served as the Greek text from which the ancient Latin translation of the letters was derived. Among the Greek manuscripts there are two main types: those in which the letters are in the order they had in the Constantinopolitan original, and another which deviates from this order.<sup>124</sup> Behind the larger collections of his letters, however, must have been the original efforts of Isidore himself or his cooperation with others to preserve his letters. Isidore may have sent copies of letters to friends, or filed away copies, and eventually must have decided to publish a volume of such letters or they would not have survived.<sup>125</sup>

The first edition of the letters of Procopius was the Aldine edition, printed at Venice by Marc Musurus in 1499. This edition contained 61 Procopian letters inserted between Aeneas of Gaza and Dionysius of Antioch. The Aldine text was reprinted by Jacques Cujas (Cujacius) in his edition published in 1606. There was no subsequent work on the Procopian epistolary corpus until the eighteenth century. In *L'Encyclopédie philologique* [Venice 1741] Jean Patuse republished 25 letters from the Aldine edition. In the following century, Cardinal Angelo Mai discovered the Vaticanus V manuscripts and made these the basis of a new edition published in

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<sup>123</sup> Morton Smith, "The Manuscript Tradition of Isidore of Pelusium," *The Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954): 205.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-8.

1831 of 104 letters. This edition had the merit of drawing attention to letters formerly ignored in the corpus of Procopius' letters.<sup>126</sup> Migne (1860) reproduced this text in volume 87 in his *Patrologia Graeca* (1860) and added a Latin translation.<sup>127</sup>

In 1873 in his *Epistolographi Graeci*, Rudolf Hercher reprinted both the Aldine texts and those of cardinal Mai and also enriched his edition through inclusion of several other letters extracted from the Laurentianus F. Beyond this, Hercher employed the Laurentianus M and the Vaticanus Vat; he introduced a number of corrections to the text, drafted for the first time a critical apparatus, furnished modifications to the previous Latin translations, and created his own translation of the letters discovered by Angelo Mai and the authors published for the first time in his edition. With Hercher the number of letters had reached 163. This number was augmented by Nicola Festa, who in 1900 published three new letters extracted from Vindobonensis W (*Letters* 100, 105, and 109). At the beginning of the twentieth century preparatory yet incomplete efforts were published by Luigi Galante with a view to creating a critical edition.<sup>128</sup> R.J. Loenertz and A. Garzya edited the most recent edition of the letters in 1963 which built upon the work done by Luigi Galante. Loenertz and Garzya provide a lengthy introduction listing in full the manuscript collections and discussion of the manuscript transmission history, replete with a stemma. They provided a list of thirty manuscripts, the oldest of which, *Ambr.gr.* 81, dated to the tenth century. The text of the letters, 166 letters total, is followed by the Greek text of seven extant declamations and two indices. Garzya and Loenertz trace a stemma of three branches derived from one archetype, in turn copied from an original into manuscripts containing

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<sup>126</sup> Antonio Garzya and R.J. Loenertz, eds., *Procopius of Gaza: Epistulae et Declamationes* (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverl, 1963), xiii.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*



glosses and various readings.<sup>129</sup> The most recent edition of the letters, replete with dense annotation appears in *Rose di Gaza*; Federica Ciccolella provides the lucid Italian translations and notes for all letters except for *Letters* 166, and 169-72, which Amato supplies. This edition marks the first translation of the letters into a modern language.

Recent discoveries demonstrate that knowledge of the epistolography of Procopius is ever in flux. In 1967 Leendert Westerink published a letter from the codex *Oxon. Barocc.* 131, to which Enrico Maltese added in 1984 a letter preserved in the manuscript *Scor. Φ.III.* 15.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile in 1976 Garzya discovered a new codex of Procopius' letter at Bucharest (*Bucurest.gr.* 535, 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries).<sup>131</sup> In 2005 Eugenio Amato discovered the Venetian codex *Marc. gr.* 521 preserving six letters of a conversation between Procopius and the rhetor Megethios (four written by Megethios, and two by Procopius).<sup>132</sup>

The number of the letters contained in each manuscript collection varies greatly, and no collection contains all known letters. In general, the letters were transmitted along with other

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<sup>129</sup> *RDG*, 153 and 153 n. 11; see Garzya and Loenertz, XVIII-XXIII and P. Speck, "rec. di Garzya-Loenoertz, Procopii," *BZ* 59 (1966): 115-22; see esp. 116-18.

<sup>130</sup> See L.G. Westerink, "Ein unbekannter Brief des Prokopios von Gaza" *BZ* 60 (1967): 1-2; E.V. Maltese, "Un'epistola inedita di Procopio di Gaza," *La Parola del passato : rivista di studi antichi* vol. 39 (1984): 53-55; *RDG*, 152 and 152n8.

<sup>131</sup> *RDG*, 152 and 152n9; see A. Garzya, "Per la storia della tradizione delle epistole di Procopio di Gaza," *Bolletino dei classici* 62 (1976): 60-63.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 152 and 152-53n10. For publications of these letters preceding *RDG* see Eugenio Amato, "Sei epistole mutuae ineditae di Procopio di Gaza ed il retore Megezio," *BZ* 98 (2005): 31-72; *idem* and G. Ventrella, eds., *Procopius Gazaenus: Opuscula rhetorica et oratoria* (Berolini-Novae Eboraci: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). For Italian translation and commentary on these texts, see Eugenio Amato and Aldo Corcella, "Lo scambio epistolare di Procopio di Gaza ed il retore Megezio: proposta di traduzione e saggio di commento," *Medioevo greco: rivista di storia e filologia bizantina* 7 (2007): 1-12; Amato, "Πήτωρ vs. σοφιστήρ in un inedito scambio epistolare del V/VI secolo in P. Lawrence, F. Guillaumont, eds., *Epistulae antiquae. Actes du IVe colloque international "L'épistolaire et ses prolongements européens (Université François-Rabelais, Tours 1er-2-3 décembre 2004)* (Louvain; Dudley, MA, 2006), 269-81.

Late Antique and Byzantine letters and rhetorical works.<sup>133</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the origin and genesis of the hypothetical original corpus of the letters. Possibly Procopius collected his own letters or his pupil and Gazan rhetor Choricus collected them after his mentor's death in order to supply students in the classroom with rhetorical models for emulation. As in the majority of ancient collections, the order of the letters is not chronological but it is also possible to reconstruct some of the themes motivating letter sequence.<sup>134</sup> The thematic and/or linguistic units discernible in the manuscript order may have been highly useful in the classroom context. Garzya and Loenertz hypothesized that the grammarian, rhetor, poet, and theologian Nicephorus Basilakes (1115-1182), responsible for a rediscovery of Late Antique rhetoric, may well have been responsible for the survival of Procopius' letters.<sup>135</sup> The principal manuscripts of Procopius' letters were transmitted with the *Progymnasmata* of Nicephorus Basilakes.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, the insertion of copies of Procopius' letters into epistolary collections, such as those surviving in the *codex Ambrosianus* (10<sup>th</sup> c.), highlights the significance attributed to the letters in Byzantium and represents the reduced number and form in which they were read and imitated in the golden age of Byzantine literature—that of the Paleologan dynasty (1259-1453).<sup>137</sup> The letters next became available to the Humanists with the publication of the Aldine edition in 1499.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *RDG*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>135</sup> See Garzya and Loenertz, XXIV and *RDG*, 154, and 154n15.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *RDG*, 154 and 154n17.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

Aeneas of Gaza's epistolary corpus has been edited in a total of three editions. The first was edited by Musurus for the Aldine *Epistolae Diversorum Philosophorum Oratorum Rhetorum* in 1499, and the second was Hercher's text in *Epistolographi Graeci* (1873). Hercher's text was that of Musurus plus Hercher's own conjectures, because he considered the only manuscript known to him to be an apograph of the Aldine edition. Maria Positano's critical edition of the letters (1950) represented an improvement on the earlier editions in that it provided a critical text based on all of the evidence and an Italian translation and commentary, as well as an *index verborum* and a lengthy introduction. Positano bases her text on the two manuscripts used by Hercher and Musurus as well as one she discovered herself, *cod. Matrit.gr.LXIII(4693)s.XV(S)*.<sup>139</sup> Like the letters of Procopius, Aeneas' letters were likely originally preserved before or shortly after his death for use as classroom models.

### Biographical Information and Writings

In this section, I will sketch the biographical data and writings of Synesius, Procopius, Aeneas, and Isidore. These authors occupied the Levant, Egypt, Cyrenaica—a particular corner of the Mediterranean in a specific period of Late Antiquity (A.D. fourth-sixth centuries). These men were letter writers who hailed not only from a shared time and space in Greco-Roman

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Browning, "Review: The Letters of Aeneas," *The Classical Review* New Series 13: 164-65. Browning contends that the concept of "the School of Gaza" needs to be questioned. Wide differences in perspectives and practices among its members have been ignored. In 1963 Browning threw down the gauntlet, asking for new scholarship on the literati of Gaza in the fifth-sixth century, a challenge which probably can be justifiably reiterated in the early twenty-first century. There survive four manuscripts, each of which preserve 25 letters. The oldest codex is the Ambrosianus 81 B 4 sup. (M) in parchment or vellum (membranaceous) dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century (Positano, 25-26). The other manuscripts are far more recent. The Madritensis LXIII (S) from the National Library of Madrid is a paper text from the 15<sup>th</sup> century written by the hand of Costantino Lascaris and includes the orations and letters of Aeschines and a few other epistolographers (Philostratus, Aeneas, Aelian). The Vaticanus Reginensis 139 (R) is a paper manuscript dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is also a collection of epistolographers.<sup>139</sup> Positano argues that the Aldine text of Musurus, published in 1499, also be considered a manuscript. The differences in spelling and accentuation among the manuscripts tend to derive from the errors of the copyist (Positano, 26). See Positano's discussion of the manuscript tradition, 25-35.

antiquity, but also a shared educational culture. Though Synesius was by far the most affluent of these four men and the only one of confirmed curial status, all were men of letters educated in Classical rhetoric with some knowledge of ancient philosophical traditions.<sup>140</sup> Though my main focus is the epistolary corpora of these four Late Antique individuals, for comparative purposes, I also plan to draw on a broader assortment of Late Antique authors, including Libanius (4<sup>th</sup> c.), Theodoret of Cyrus (5<sup>th</sup> c.), and Choricus of Gaza (6<sup>th</sup> c.). The writings of Choricus, Procopius' student and successor as head of the school of Gaza, provide valuable data regarding the intellectual culture and religious life of Gaza as well as testimony concerning his beloved teacher Procopius.

The dates for Synesius's life remain uncertain. The general consensus is that he was born sometime between 365 and 370.<sup>141</sup> He was a citizen of the city of Cyrene in Cyrenaica, and a member of one of the most prominent families in the city, claiming descent from the original Dorian colonists. He and his brother Euoptius were part of a group of magnates who ran the affairs of the city under the governor of the province of Pentapolis. Cyrene had a city council, and Synesius and his brother were *curiales*.<sup>142</sup> Synesius was educated in Alexandria from 393 to 395; he was tutored by the Alexandrian philosopher Hypatia in these years and became acquainted with Neoplatonic thought.<sup>143</sup> About 399 he went as ambassador from Cyrene to

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<sup>140</sup> Ciccolella postulates that Procopius probably was one of the *proteuontes*, or the first men listed in the bouleutic album of his city. See "Le Epistole," in *RDG*, 131 and 131n28. On the *proteuontes* at Gaza see J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 113, and A. Laniado, *Recherches sur les notables municipaux dans l'empire protobyzantin* (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2002), 201-211.

<sup>141</sup> Bregman, 17.

<sup>142</sup> J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 228.

<sup>143</sup> Bregman, 20.

Constantinople requesting tax reductions and became involved in imperial politics.<sup>144</sup> Synesius was present during the rebellion of the Goths in 399-400. Despite his misgivings about holding the office, in 410 he was elected bishop of Ptolemaïs, one of the five cities comprising the province of Pentapolis in central Roman Cyrenaica, and he probably served until his death around 413-414.<sup>145</sup>

Synesius' written corpus includes letters, hymns, and treatises that reveal a great deal about his intellectual, political, and religious perspectives. The extant writings include 159 letters, ten hymns written in an archaizing Doric dialect, two homilies written during his service as bishop, and a collection of treatises on subjects mainly political and philosophical, including an oration performed before Emperor Arcadius entitled *On Kingship*, and philosophical works such as the *Catastases* and the witty *Eulogy on Baldness*.<sup>146</sup> The letters were most recently translated into English by Augustine Fitzgerald in 1926.

Isidore of Pelusium, roughly contemporaneous with Synesius of Cyrene, was born in Alexandria ca. 360-370, and died sometime after 433. He served as a bishop and presbyter in the Pelusium region of the eastern Nile delta and also lived in a monastery near Pelusium on the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>146</sup> The metered form of the hymns suggests that they were meant to be performed publicly, perhaps at elite gatherings. The conspicuous Neoplatonic language of the homilies suggests that they probably were written more for Synesius' personal edification rather than that of his congregation. Bregman thoughtfully analyzes the multivalent and syncretistic language of the hymns and homilies in *Philosopher-Bishop* (see, e.g., 20, 22-25, 28, 29, 57, and 120-24).

Nile.<sup>147</sup> The fourteenth century writer Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (*PG* 146:1249-53) identifies him as John Chrysostom's student. However, this probably should not be taken literally. The *Suda* (10<sup>th</sup> c.) identifies him as both philosopher and rhetorician, and both Severus of Antioch and the Byzantine scholar and patriarch of Constantinople Photius (ca. 810-893) laud Isidore's orthodoxy, learning, and style.<sup>148</sup> From Isidore's rich epistolary corpus of over 2000 letters it is clear that Isidore was originally a sophist, or teacher of rhetoric, and then became a *didaskalos* (spiritual teacher) in Pelusium. Isidore was selected to be a sophist by the Pelusian *boule* or *curia* and appointed by the imperial administration. As teacher of rhetoric in a busy and prosperous city Isidore was steward to young elites, training and socializing them in key authors of Greek literature.<sup>149</sup>

Isidore was ordained a priest at Pelusium, though it is not clear when this occurred. During this time Isidore was a *didaskalos* to a chorus of disciples whom he guided in interpretation of Biblical verse. However, Isidore complains in several letters about a corrupt and increasingly powerful group of clerics at Pelusium, which may have prompted in part his retreat into the desert to live as a monk.<sup>150</sup> While living in his mountain retreat, Isidore maintained communication with his contacts in Pelusium via letters. From his position of isolation, Isidore asserted *parrhesia* and intervened for his friends by means of letters to high-ranking civil servants in Constantinople, to a praetorian prefect, to prefects of Egypt and even to

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<sup>147</sup>Pierre Éviéux, "From Rhetoric to Monasticism," 143. By the end of the fourth century Pelusium was a thriving city. Located along the major routes leading from Egypt to Palestine, Pelusium provided a weigh-station for commerce as well as civil and military organization, 145.

<sup>148</sup> *ODB* 2:1016.

<sup>149</sup> Pierre Éviéux, "From Rhetoric to Monasticism," 144.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-51.

Emperor Theodosius II. Isidore also corresponded with his disciples who had been friends and teacher successors such as Harpocras and Asclepius, discussing Classical Greek texts and providing feedback on texts of his disciples (such as the *monody* of Harpocras).<sup>151</sup>

Active from the reign of Anastasius to that of Justinian, Procopius of Gaza, (ca. 465-528) was a rhetorician and exegete who was the leading figure at the school of rhetoric at Gaza.<sup>152</sup> As his student Choricus explains in his funeral oration dedicated to his beloved mentor, Procopius demonstrated clear rhetorical talent as a boy, and was sent to study rhetoric in Alexandria.<sup>153</sup> Procopius was invited to study at the rhetorical schools at Antioch, Caesarea, Tyre, and Berytus. According to Choricus, after a brief period in Caesarea, Procopius returned to his native Gaza because of his love for his *polis*.<sup>154</sup> At Gaza Procopius was selected to serve in the official chair of rhetoric and paid at public cost. His responsibilities included delivering orations on public occasions, such as his encomium to Emperor Anastasius in honor of the erection of a statue of the emperor, and supervision of the teaching of rhetoric in Gaza.<sup>155</sup>

Photius states in the *Bibliotheca* that Procopius wrote many works on several topics, and that Procopius made use of a variety of Christian and classical genres, including *catenae* and *ekphraseis*. Procopius wrote an extant commentary on the Octateuch, a commentary on Isaiah,

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 153-54.

<sup>152</sup> Carol A.M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods* B.A.R. International Series 325(Oxford: B.A.R., 1987), 52. By the end of the fifth century Gaza had become a flourishing center of literary and rhetorical study. The school at Gaza cultivated many famous orators and poets and attracted students throughout the eastern Mediterranean. This educational center had connections with the school at Alexandria, and many of the leading figures at the Gaza school had studied in Alexandria. This school was also Christian, and some of the major figures associated with the school, such as Procopius, wrote theological works, *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>153</sup> Choric. *Or. Fun. In Proc.*15; Glucker, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Choric. *Or. Fun, In Proc.* 12-14.

<sup>155</sup> Glucker, 53.

and polemical writings against the Neoplatonist Proclus.<sup>156</sup> Procopius' use of classical genres include his *ekphrasis* in rhythmic prose of two pictures at Gaza depicting the mythological scenes from the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, and an *ekphrasis* of a clock (*horologion*) at Gaza in which a figure of Heracles comes out to perform his twelve labors. *Ekphrasis* was a classical literary genre consisting of extended and elaborate descriptions of objects, both real and imaginary, though most were of works of art.<sup>157</sup> Seven of Procopius' *declamationes* are extant and have been published most recently in the edition of the letters edited by Garzya and Loenertz. Of these writings, two are character drawings, one of Aphrodite and one of Phoenix in Book IX of the *Iliad*. In the other five declamations, mythological themes of Greek gods and heroes abound.<sup>158</sup> No longer extant is his monody on the devastating earthquake in Antioch in 526. Several of his biblical commentaries and other theological writings appear in volume 87 of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* (I-II).<sup>159</sup>

Aeneas of Gaza also flourished during the reign of Anastasius, and studied philosophy at Alexandria with the Neoplatonist Hierocles.<sup>160</sup> Like Procopius, Aeneas also served Gaza as an appointed teacher of rhetoric. In addition to his twenty-five extant letters, he wrote a Platonic dialogue, the *Theophrastus*, in which the philosopher Theophrastus is convinced by Christian

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<sup>156</sup> *ODB* 3:1732.

<sup>157</sup> *OCD*, 515.

<sup>158</sup> Herbert Hunger, "On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature" *DOP* 23 (1969-1970): 20.

<sup>159</sup> Glucker, 53.

<sup>160</sup> According to Joseph Geiger, Aeneas was born about A.D. 430, studied in Alexandria with the sophist Hierocles around 450 and flourished in Gaza in 488. See idem, "Julian of Ascalon," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* vol. 112 (1992): 41. For Aeneas' dates, see E. Legier, "Essai de biographie d'Enée di Gaza" *Oriens Christianus* vol. 7 (1907), 352-53; F. Schemmel, *Die Hochschule von Konstantinopel vom V bis IX jahrhundert* (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1912), 17.



arguments regarding the immortality of the soul and bodily resurrection and subsequently abandons the Academy. This work—dated to A.D. 484 or later—reveals Aeneas’ direct knowledge of Plato, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa, and a second-hand familiarity with other classical texts.<sup>161</sup>

#### Social Networking: Strategic Interaction, Recipient Design, Sociolect

My study contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of social networking in Late Antiquity by elucidating specific communications mechanisms epistolographers deployed in order to build and maintain their social capital via letters. A crop of scholars, including Elizabeth Clark, Catherine Hezser, Margaret Mullett, Giovanni Ruffini, and most recently Adam Schor, have contributed to a fruitful and burgeoning scholarship applying network analysis to the study of the Ancient and Byzantine world.<sup>162</sup> As distinct from many of these studies, my project is not focused upon a quantitative mapping of specific ties and nodes constituting a network of contacts. It is devoted to study of the interactional culture characterizing the epistolary relations of a group of Late Antique provincials. It addresses together provincial sociability and the nature of power in the provinces. As such, my approach makes use of many of the theoretical applications sociologist Paul McLean developed in *The Art of the Network* to elucidate the conversational and discursive strategies by which Renaissance Florentines

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<sup>161</sup> Glanville Downey, “The Christian Schools of Palestine” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 12 (1958): 309.

<sup>162</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); Margaret Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1997); Giovanni Ruffini, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Adam Schor, *Theodoret’s People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

constructed and sustained their social networks.<sup>163</sup> Like McLean's work, my study focuses specifically upon the cultural work of social networking as evinced by Late Antique letters. It argues that cultural resources played a fundamental role in the strategic behaviors individuals deployed in social interaction and presumes that letter authors strove to aggrandize their social capital.<sup>164</sup>

Epistolographers wrote with a distinct sense of the social horizons of their audiences: the literati of the Late Antique polis. Writing with lateral address in mind, Late Antique letters were public performances through which authors articulated their erudition and sophistication for their peers to verify. Through the use of classical allusions as well as a range of linguistic markers—some of which may not be perceptible to a modern reader—letter writers presented themselves to lettered circles in their own hometowns and in the cities of their friends and contacts in the Greek East, including Alexandria, Constantinople, and Caesarea as well as smaller cities like Elusa and, perhaps, Ascalon.<sup>165</sup> Through demonstration of the symbolic capital of *paideia*, these men defended publicly their belonging to a group of educational elites in the Greek East.

Epistolographer-sophists like Aeneas and Procopius deliberately selected linguistic signs which dramatically underscored their erudition and eloquence and asserted the publically-verifiable role

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<sup>163</sup>Paul McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). In particular, as I will explore below, I adapt McLean's use of the ideas of sociologists Erving Goffman and Harvey Sacks.

<sup>164</sup> McLean offers the following useful definition: "'social capital' signifies a web of cooperative and trusting social relationships (that is, social networks and the norms that inhabit and sustain them) that provide individuals with emotional and/or material support and opportunities and help to coordinate their several actions." See idem, 8. Like McLean, I favor Bourdieu's emphasis on the dynamic accretion of capital and the view that social capital exists not only in social connections, but that it resides in credentialed institutions of rank and prestige; cf. McLean, 11. I agree with Bourdieu that the accumulation of social capital results from strategies and skills that over time give rise to habitual dispositions within social agents. See McLean, 11-12 and Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in J.G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 249.

<sup>165</sup> Aeneas' *Letter 25* addressed to Julian the architect may have been written to Julian of Ascalon, as will be discussed below, Chapter 5.

of the sophist.<sup>166</sup> In this way, epistolary language contributes to a “dramatic realization” whereby letter authors defined themselves in relation to their peers.<sup>167</sup> I would argue that epistolography in Late Antique circles of lettered provincials was likely always strategic in nature.<sup>168</sup> That is, epistolographers, aware that their letters might reach the eyes and/or ears of individuals other than their addressees, crafted letters with careful attention to others’ perceptions of the letter writer’s identity. Letter writers contrived epistolary speech “in light of one’s thoughts about the others’ thoughts about oneself.”<sup>169</sup> Via the authorizing discourses of “eloquent speech,” letter authors asserted their linguistic competence and erudition while continually shaping and reformulating socially-recognizable public identities before their potential audiences.<sup>170</sup>

Alternatively, letter authors also constructed the recipients they desired through epistolary speech. A common feature of Late Antique epistolography is the principle sociologist Harvey Sacks designated “recipient design.”<sup>171</sup> This concept is a product of the technique of

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<sup>166</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 2. Goffman theorizes that “if the individual’s activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express *during the interaction* what he wishes to convey” (30).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>168</sup> McLean, 23. Erving Goffman, *Strategic Interaction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 101.

<sup>169</sup> Goffman, *Strategic Interaction*, 101; McLean 23.

<sup>170</sup> I apply here Ann Mische’s conception of identity articulation as continuous product of communicative interaction; see Ann Mische, “Cross-talk in Movements: Reconceiving the Culture-Network Link,” in Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, eds., *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 258.

<sup>171</sup> Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation* 2 vols. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992). I use here a paraphrase of McLean’s definition in *The Art of the Network*, 26.

“altercasting,” which Weinstein and Deutschberger<sup>172</sup> defined as “projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent to one’s own goals. It is posited as a basic technique of interpersonal control.”<sup>173</sup> Recipient design refers to the myriad strategies communicants deploy to mold favorable recipients and ensure the favorable reception of messages. Flattery and polite address are conspicuous examples of this dimension of strategic interaction, but, as I will demonstrate below, epistolographers devised targeted distillations of classicizing speech that were finely tailored to the interests and tastes of individual recipients.

Deploying their rhetorical repertoire, Late Antique epistolographers jointly constructed a sociolect whose discursive practices united and distinguished the circles of men initiated in *logoi*.<sup>174</sup> For the present purposes, I adopt Walt Wolfram’s definition of sociolect as “a label for the alignment of a set of language structures with the social position of a group in a status hierarchy.”<sup>175</sup> Essential to my approach is the view that the sociolect constructed by lettered epistolographers represents the linguistic competence of a socially-dominant strand of Late Antique provincials. I do not mean to imply that the language structures of lettered provincials were fixed or static; I suggest here an approach to language structures that engages the ever-constructed and protean nature of linguistic practice as a living and negotiated enterprise. As I will demonstrate below, Greek-speaking literati in the Late Antique *polis* participated in meta-linguistic debates in letters about proper rhetorical practices (for example, the Atticizing versus

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<sup>172</sup> Eugene Weinstein and Paul Deutschberger, “Some Dimensions of Altercasting” *Sociometry* 26 (1963): 454-66.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>174</sup> Bernard, 5. I was introduced to the term at a lecture Niels Gaul delivered at the Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on Social Networking on 3/17/2012.

<sup>175</sup> Walt Wolfram, “Social varieties of American English,” in Finegan, Edward and John R. Rickford, eds., *Language in the U.S.A.: Themes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58-75, at 59.

Asianizing debate). At the root level, however, the vigorous sinews of the linguistic competence of these provincials was the cultural toolkit provided by rhetorical training which letter authors deployed strategically in communication with one another.<sup>176</sup>

The letters offered discursive spaces for the exploration of identities. If we conceptualize letters as performances, the building blocks of letters—*logoi*—may be represented as social actions or deeds which are subject to observation and evaluation.<sup>177</sup> As a form of social practice, the language of the letters entails the construction of identity, specifically a type of identity wrought from discourse, or “discourse identity.”<sup>178</sup> The iterations of discursive identity are elaborated “locally” in each “stretch of talk or text that a person produces.”<sup>179</sup> Discursive identity may be viewed as the aftereffect of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interlocutors make “situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others.”<sup>180</sup>

### Letters and Empire

The model of the Republic of Letters represents a useful way of thinking about how the marketplace of political power in the Late Empire worked because it illuminates how decisions

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<sup>176</sup> I employ in this project sociologist Ann Swidler’s representation of culture a set of practices connoted by the terms “repertoire” or “toolkit” that are deployed in personal interaction. See Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>177</sup> Anne Scott, “Language as Convention, Language as Sociolect in Havelok the Dane,” *Studies in Philology*: 92 (1992): 141.

<sup>178</sup> Dorien Van De Mieroop, “An Integrated Approach of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis in the Study of Identity in Speeches” *Discourse & Society* 16 (2005): 107.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>180</sup> R. Baumann, “Language, Identity, and Performance,” *Pragmatics* 10: 1, quoted in Van De Mieroop, 108.

were made among provincial and imperial elites. In this framework, the highly artificial rhetoric of Late Antique epistolography was the normal coin that the ruling elite deployed to assert influence. He who could best wield this rhetorical currency could deliver sacks of gold, rather than silver.

My project thus engages with the issue of the organization of power in the Late Ancient Greek East. It responds in particular to Christopher Kelly's recent contribution *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*.<sup>181</sup> Although he acknowledges the continuing role of influence and connections among provincial notables in accessing the imperial center in Late Antiquity, Kelly is far more interested in emerging tactics of access in this period, such as purchasing offices and the charging of fees by imperial officials.<sup>182</sup> This present study develops the study of *suffragium* (influence) in the provinces through study of underexamined epistolographers. Using the letters of Procopius, Aeneas, Synesius, and Isidore as guides, I will explore how the epistolary corpora of provincial figures offer glimpses into how power was negotiated at the imperial peripheries. Circumventing traditional approaches to empire focused on the imperial center, this study places the provincial margins at its center. In this section, we will examine how the artful construction of letters among provincials undergirded the architectures of imperial power sustaining both center and periphery. In this view, the strategic language of these texts operates to negotiate governance and justice between and among imperial authorities, local magistrates and various types of local leaders (including city-sophists, bishops, and monks), and provincial subjects.

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<sup>181</sup> Christopher Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>182</sup> Kelly offers an instructive discussion, for example at 158-60, of the exercise of *suffragium* through successful networking among associates. In particular, he adduces the example of the role of the correspondence of Libanius in organizing power in the provinces.

Epistolography continued to contribute to the exercise and organization of power in the Late Ancient Mediterranean. Letters thus wove the fabric of provincial communal life, including intellectual sociability and political behavior. These letters testify that city-sophists were local leaders of substance in the Late Antique city who marshaled eloquence to procure aid and services for friends and dependents from powerful interlocutors, including imperial officials and powerful provincial lawyers. Synesius' corpus highlights the significance of epistolography for the emerging provincial power of bishops. The case of Isidore also highlights the powerful role of monastic ascetics in intervening and shaping provincial life from a distance.

Letters could be beautiful bribes. Late Ancient epistolographers understood intimately the function of refined speech in framing requests. Letter authors contrived compact rhetorical gifts resplendent with intricate references to the figures and speech of classical *paideia* wrought in a complex and convoluted syntax framed with flattering address, praise, and related expressions of calculated gentility. The epistolary speech of Procopius, Aeneas, Isidore, and Synesius shared key characteristic features of Late Antique epistolography showcasing a genteel sociability aimed at persuasion and ingratiation. The carefully-calibrated speech of these epistles operates in an analogous way to the gold and sumptuous gifts of tapestries, thrones, curtains, ivory stools, and plaques that Cyril of Alexandria bestowed upon powerful imperial officials and their families, along with all other personages rumored closest to Theodosius II in a campaign to convince the emperor of the error of the Nestorians.<sup>183</sup>

A defining index of the social culture of Late Antique epistolography was its normative protocol concerning correct comportment among interlocutors. Various rhetorical choices reflect

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<sup>183</sup> See, e.g., Kelly, 171-72.

this protocol. Polite address, particularly the use of superlatives, constitutes an ubiquitous component of the cooperative code fostering intellectual exchange as well as exchange of services and benefits. Epistolographers ranging from Isidore to Procopius of Gaza regularly refer to interlocutors with a rich stock of friendship terms such as *beltiste*, *sophe*, *sophōtate*, *phile*, *philestate*, *lōste*, *makarie*, *thaumasie*, and *deinotate*. As in the letters of provincial elites, Synesius exhibited his good breeding and education in his letters with formulaic gestures of polite affability, including complimentary address and blessings for friends and their relations. For instance, in *Letter 47*, Synesius addressed Theotimus, a poet he befriended in Constantinople as the “most resourceful of all men toward noble things.”<sup>184</sup> He addresses Anysius in *Letter 94* as “noblest of men and generals.”<sup>185</sup>

Epistolographers often closed missives with regards for the kin of their interlocutors. Synesius sends his blessing to friends and their families. In *Letter 31* to Aurelian, who served as consul in 400 and praetorian prefect in 399, 402, and 404,<sup>186</sup> Synesius writes, “I salute through the most august voice of his father the young Taurus, the good hope of the Romans.”<sup>187</sup> In *Letter 10* to Hypatia, Synesius bids that she salute her companions for him: “I salute you and ask you to salute for me your most blessed companions, august Mistress.”<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Aeneas, employing official honorifics, concludes *Letter 11* to Marinianus, “And I salute the most glorious

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<sup>184</sup> ὦ πρὸς τὰ καλὰ πάντων σὺ ποριμώτατε.

<sup>185</sup> ἄριστε ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ στρατηγῶν. Anysius is one of seven generals Synesius names in the letters; Synesius praises Anysius in the first and second *Catastases*. See Augustine Fitzgerald, trans. *The Letters of Synesius of Cyrene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 93n1.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 106n2.

<sup>187</sup> ἀσπάζομαι διὰ τῆς σεμνοτάτης φωνῆς τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν νέον Ταῦρον τὰς ἀγαθὰς Ρωμαίων ἐλπίδας.

<sup>188</sup> αὐτήν τέ σε καὶ διὰ σοῦ τοὺς μακαριωτάτους ἑταίρους ἀσπάζομαι, δέσποινα σεβασμία . . .



Victor and the respectable Stephanus and the most elegant Johannes, and your familiars and my associates.”<sup>189</sup> Such parting regards indicate an interlinked circle around the nodes of Aeneas and Marinianus.

A fascinating yet understudied dimension of the friendship language adopted by some Late Antique epistolographers was the use of erotic language to intensify expressions of affection for the purposes of achieving ingratiation and successful persuasion.<sup>190</sup> Ostensibly deployed in imitation of the erotic language Plato’s Socrates uses in conversations with his disciples, such speech articulates intense affection and is thus a mechanism of friendship. Erotic language speech has a cognitive dimension for these Late Antique epistolographers who likely understood its connection to the pursuit of knowledge in Platonic texts. The intermediary spirit of Eros propels the souls of lovers of wisdom toward knowledge of ultimate reality in Diotima’s account as represented by Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*. Elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, erotic language pertains to the passionate quest for wisdom.<sup>191</sup> Erotic speech offers a heuristic for penetrating how Late Antique *literati* conceptualized friendship and expressed their emotional attachments. In the letters selected for this study, the rhetoricians Procopius and Aeneas were most fond of this type of speech.

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<sup>189</sup> προσφθέγγομαι τὸν ἐνδοξότατον βίκτορα καὶ τὸν περίβλεπτον Στέφανον καὶ τὸν χαριέστατον Ἰωάννην καὶ τοὺς ὑμετέρους οἰκείους καὶ ἐμοὺς ἐταίρους. According to Martindale, Marinianus, superscribed as ἀπὸ ὑπάτων, is not included in the roster of *consules ordinarii* and thus held the honorary consulship (cf. *PLRE* 2: 723). See also Positano, 90-91. It is perhaps not accidental, however, that the two letters in which Aeneas closes with elaborate salutation formulae are the two surviving letters addressed to high-ranking interlocutors. See also my discussion below regarding *Letter 24* addressed to Marcianus.

<sup>190</sup> Erotic language appears frequently in Classical and Christian texts of friendship, yet it is often explained away or ignored in modern scholarship. See, e.g., Jackson Bryce, “Review of Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*,” *Classical Review* 44 (1994): 145.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. e.g., Ann Carson’s interpretation of Plato *Phaedrus* 266b where Socrates claims he is a lover (*erastēs*) of the processes of “collection and division” that enable him to think and speak. See eadem, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 171-72.

Procopius' letters in particular abound with erotic registers of emotion. Such expressions often closely concatenate desire, speech, image, and memory. Letter *logoi* produce for lovers images of the beloved drawn from memory. Epistolary speech is thus connected to visibility. In *Letter 26* to Eusebius, father of his student Megalus,<sup>192</sup> Procopius opens with a temporal analogy measuring his longing for his friend: "If even one day makes those who are longing grow old, for such a long time you think me to have aged, thus struck by longing for you—for who having been put to the test would not have ceased loving? So long have I been deprived of the sight of you."<sup>193</sup> Eusebius' letters mitigate Procopius' longing, rivaling the cleverness of physicians who, though they do not have cures, are able to palliate pain. Eusebius' letters—even if they are second best to his presence—diminish Procopius' longing for his friend. Likening the aftereffect of letter *logoi* to the production of the image or likeness of his friend, Procopius again turns to erotic language to enunciate his affection, indicating "now I imitate the intense among lovers, and through an image I assuage my passion for you."<sup>194</sup>

Erotic language articulates affection for students. In *Letter 120* bidding his former student Pancratius to write, Procopius begins by recalling the story of Odysseus' rapturous oblivion upon hearing the Sirens' song: "Those who once sailed past the Sirens, drawing in the songs with their ears, did not long for their *patris*, did not remember their children, and it seemed

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<sup>192</sup> In addition to expressing his fondness for Eusebius, Procopius also writes in this letter of his hopes that his education of Megalus did not disappoint his father; cf. *RDG*, 453n145. The letter also plays on the concept of a "double father"; Procopius figuratively declares himself the father of Megalus in speech directed at Megalus' actual father; see *RDG*, 453n149.

<sup>193</sup> εἰ τοὺς ποθοῦντας καὶ μία γηράσκειν ἡμέρα ποιεῖ, ἐξ ὅσου με χρόνου γεγηρακέναι δοκεῖς, οὕτω μὲν σου βληθέντα τῷ πόθῳ—τίς γὰρ πειραθεὶς οὐκ ἐρῶν ἀπαλλάττεται ; τοσοῦτον δὲ χρόνον ἐστερημένον τῆς θεάς; This temporal simile is a *topos* of epideictic discourse, in particular of *epithalamia*; see *RDG*, 453n146 for references.

<sup>194</sup> καὶ νῦν τοὺς σφοδροὺς μιμοῦμαι τῶν ἐραστῶν καὶ διὰ τῆς εἰκόνης παραμυθοῦμαι τὸν ἔρωτα.

a good thing to suffer anything rather than to sail away from those from which they had experienced pleasure.”<sup>195</sup> The intense and all-encompassing pleasure of the Sirens’ songs is analogous to the eloquence of Pancratius’ letters. Procopius avers, “and having tasted of your Muse with the tip of my finger, as they say, I became frenzied like a Bacchic reveler toward her with utter desire and it was no small thing to choose to leave her, even if it is necessary to be separated in the bodies.”<sup>196</sup> As his student sailed away to Alexandria, Procopius mentally projects himself as present with Pancratius, imagining that he too now dwells in Alexandria. That is the sort of thought the Cupids (*Erōtes*) have engendered within him.<sup>197</sup>

A second letter to Pancratius also preserves Procopius’ affectionate professions wrought in erotic speech and articulates a perception of the interpenetrating relationship among desire, image, and *logoi*. Rebuking his former student’s silence in *Letter 152*, Procopius opens, “Thus do you disregard those who are longing for you? Thus do you hold back the flowings of your tongue?”<sup>198</sup> Desire itself furnishes Procopius’ imagination with Pancratius’ image: “But in my eyes, desire delineates your image, and now I realize I was dreaming though awake in body.”<sup>199</sup> If Procopius cannot have Pancratius present at Gaza, he pleads “at least in letters give yourself to me; for to those who are longing it is a consolation to see a small symbol of those who are

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<sup>195</sup> οἱ τὰς Σειρῆνάς ποτε παραπλέοντες καὶ τὰ μέλη ταῖς ἀκοαῖς ἀρυόμενοι οὐ πατρίδας ἐπόθουν, οὐ παίδων ἀνεμιμνήσκοντο, πάντα δὲ πάσχειν αὐτοῖς ἐδόκει καλὸν ἢ τούτων ἀπαίρειν, ὧν τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐπειράθησαν.

<sup>196</sup> ἡμεῖς δὲ τῆς σῆς μούσης ἄκρω, φησί, δακτύλῳ γευσάμενοι οὕτως ὄλω πόθῳ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἐβακχεύσαμεν, ὡς μηδὲ μικρὸν ἀπειναὶ ταύτης αἰρεῖσθαι, κἂν ἀνάγκη διεστάναι τοῖς σώμασιν.

<sup>197</sup> τοιαύτην μοι γνώμην ἐναποτίκτουσιν Ἔρωτες; literally, “This is the disposition that the Cupids have engendered in me.”

<sup>198</sup> οὕτω παρορᾷς τοὺς ποθοῦντας; οὕτω τῆς γλώττης ἐπέχεις τὰ νάματα;

<sup>199</sup> ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ καὶ διαγράφει τὴν ὑμετέταν θεάν ὁ πόθος, καὶ νῦν ἔγνω ὄνειροπολεῖν ἐγρηγορότος τοῦ σώματος.

beloved.”<sup>200</sup> Reiterating his request, Procopius reminds Pancratius of promises made in his earlier letters: “Remember those words, in which there were promises to come soon to me or with frequent letters to make your absence imperceptible.”<sup>201</sup> Both the imaginative force of desire—a sort of cognitive power—and epistolary *logoi* are sufficient to rouse the surrogate image of one’s beloved friends.

Memory, as Procopius indicates in *Letter 68* to Thomas, perhaps a rhetorician who served as governor of Palaestina Prima,<sup>202</sup> is a continual font of pleasure for separated friends: “Memory of good men knows how to delight even without sight of them and especially at that time, when they are no longer present who have filled with complete love those who have experienced their lovers continually delivering pleasure through sight.”<sup>203</sup> The source of memory that grants sight, Procopius maintains, is desire itself.<sup>204</sup> Lovers “create for themselves images of those who are away and contrive a likeness of them as present.”<sup>205</sup> Suggesting that desire’s imaginative work is second best to physical presence, Procopius closes with a prayer

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<sup>200</sup> ἀλλὰ δίδου σαυτὸν μέχρι γούνη γραμμάτων ἡμῖν • τοῖς γὰρ ποθοῦσι παραμυθία τὸ καὶ σμικρὸν τι σύμβολον τῶν ἐρωμένων ἰδεῖν.

<sup>201</sup> μέμνησο δὲ καὶ τῶν λόγων ἐκείνων, ἐν οἷς ὑποσχέσεις ἦσαν ἢ θάπτον ἐλθεῖν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἢ γράμμασι πυκνοῖς ἀνεπαίσθητον τὴν ἀπουσίαν ποιεῖν.

<sup>202</sup> *RDG*, 459-60 n217. The other letter in Procopius’ corpus addressed to Thomas, *Letter 68*, does not necessarily confirm the identification that the addressees of the two letters are the same person.

<sup>203</sup> τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν εὐφραίνειν οἶδε καὶ χωρὶς θεᾶς ἢ μνήμη, καὶ τότε μάλλον, ἤνικα τοὺς πειραθέντας ὅλου πληρώσαντες ἔρωτος μηκέτι παρῶσι χορηγοῦντες αἰεὶ τῇ θεᾷ τὴν ἡδονήν.

<sup>204</sup> τότε γὰρ ἀποροῦντες οἵτινες γένωνται τὸν πόθον ἔχουσιν ἀντὶ τῆς θεᾶς αἰεὶ χορηγοῦντα τὴν μνήμην.

<sup>205</sup> ἑαυτοῖς γὰρ ἀνατυποῦσι τοὺς ἀπελθόντας καὶ παρόντων σοφίζονται μίμημα.

“that fortune will contrive something new and bring together sometime those lovers who have for so long kept themselves away from one another.”<sup>206</sup>

The vigor and life of erotic speech intensified professions of emotional intimacy in the context of letters requesting favors. For example, in *Letter 31* requesting legal aid from the Caesarean lawyer Diodorus, Procopius unleashes sexual language to communicate his intense pleasure upon receiving a letter from his long-silent friend.<sup>207</sup> Opening with a stock accusation of silence, Procopius gushes how upon receiving Diodorus’ letter “I was filled full with the old happinesses, and you seemed to me to be present in your letters, and I was induced to say something as if you were present.”<sup>208</sup> Here Procopius reiterates the widely-held perception among ancient epistolographers that words conjure images and presence; a person’s *logoi* were thought to offer direct access to a person. Procopius, however, admits that this was simply a dream. Indicating the pleasure Diodorus’ letter grants, Procopius rhapsodizes in clear sexual language about the experience of receiving the letter after a period of silence: “So do not write often, so that I lacking sight of you might delight in dreams, since even a passionate lover missing his darling saw a serviceable dream and was satisfied.”<sup>209</sup> Not wishing, though, to encourage his friend’s silence, Procopius teases, “but I have feared speaking such things lest you thought it true and might be filled with pride and silence would occur again. Therefore know

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<sup>206</sup> καὶ τὴν Τύχην προσεύχομαι μηχανᾶσθαι τι καινὸν καὶ συνάγειν ποτὲ τοὺς τοσοῦτον ἀλλήλων ἀπέχοντας ἐραστάς.

<sup>207</sup> Ciccolella, *RDG*, 456n172, comments that this letter seems to follow chronologically after *Letters 23* and *29* when Diodorus had finally broken his silence after transferring to another city (probably Caesarea).

<sup>208</sup> παλαιᾶς ἐνεπηλήσθην εὐδαιμονίας, σὲ παρεῖναι δοκῶν ἐν τοῖς γράμμασι, καὶ τι λέγειν ὡς παρόντι προήχθην.

<sup>209</sup> οὐκοῦν γράφε πολλάκις, ἵνα τῆς θέας ἀποροῦντες ὄνειρασιν εὐφραινώμεθα, ἐπειδήπερ καὶ δεινὸς ἐραστής τῶν παιδικῶν ἀτυχῶν χρηστὸν ὄναρ εἶδε καὶ μεταβάλλεται.

that they are falsehoods, and only might I hear someone chattering!”<sup>210</sup> Procopius then points to the request motivating his letter. Diodorus must lend his eloquence (*glōttē*) to assist Procopius’ relative who bears the letter.<sup>211</sup>

As implements of social networking among powerful provincials, letters introduced and recommended friends and associates, thereby organizing relations of power among provincial elites. Letters facilitated promotion and favor. In *Letter 42* Procopius addresses the provincial governor of Palestina Prima, Thomas, and recommends his former student Megas who has entered provincial administration as Thomas’ subordinate.<sup>212</sup> Calculated, continuous flattery precedes the request. Procopius opens his letter with the twofold praise that Thomas is learned in the art of oratory as well as in the law, and has returned after a departure of unspecified length to govern at Caesarea, vaunting “now truly Justice and the Muses are blossoming and becoming also my housemates!”<sup>213</sup> Thomas’ governance blends harmoniously the gifts of the offspring of Zeus, Dikē and the Muses<sup>214</sup>: “For whenever you make a decision, Justice will not deny it, and whenever you give a speech, the Muses will praise it in every way.”<sup>215</sup> Procopius marvels at the

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<sup>210</sup> ἀλλὰ γὰρ δέδοικα ταυτὶ λέγων μὴ καὶ νομίσας ἀληθῆ φρονήματος ἐμπλησθῆς καὶ γένηται πάλιν σιγῆ. νόμιζε τοῖσιν εἶναι ψευδῆ, καὶ μόνον λαλοῦντος ἀκούσαιμι.

<sup>211</sup> Ciccolella, *RDG*, 456n175, speculates that this relative allied by marriage was probably a relative of Procopius—perhaps a sister or a niece.

<sup>212</sup> *RDG*, 460n217.

<sup>213</sup> νῦν ὄντως ἡμῖν ἀνθοῦσι Δίκη καὶ Μοῦσαι καὶ σύνοικοι γίνονται. Regarding Thomas, cf. *PLRE* 2:1114 and *RDG*, 459-60n217; it is not at all clear that Thomas addressed in *Letter 42* is the same as that addressed in *Letter 68*, although the Thomas of the latter letter is also clearly an enthusiast for rhetoric like most of Procopius’ addressees.

<sup>214</sup> *RDG*, 460n218: according to Hesiod (*Theogony* 902), Zeus is father of Justice and the Muses. The rhetorical *topos* that imperial governors combine justice with love of the Muses survives in poems inscribed in stone dedicated to these magistrates; see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 35 and 35n3.

<sup>215</sup> κἂν γὰρ ψῆφον ἐνέγκῃς, οὐκ ἀρνεῖται ταύτην ἡ Δίκη, κἂν λόγον εἴπῃς, ἐπαινοῦσι πάντως αἱ Μοῦσαι.

governing skill and personal care of Thomas, specifically “that such a person who is so far superior does not neglect his inferiors but presides over speeches and remembers friendship and is willing to listen when someone has something to say.”<sup>216</sup> Delineating Thomas’ superior stature with regard to himself, Procopius affirms Thomas’ ability to respond to his subjects’ requests and thereby primes Thomas’ favorable response to his current request. Procopius gushes, “may many good things happen to the one who has been chosen to serve as governor for us!”<sup>217</sup> Near the letter’s closing, Procopius introduces to Thomas his beloved former pupil the fair (*kalos*) Megas and, confirming his good stock by commenting upon the virtue of Megas’ father and kinsmen, Procopius avers, “and if now you have put forward for the young man, I will pray a just prayer; by Zeus and the other gods, were I capable more than before then might our Megas profit as much as his relative wishes.”<sup>218</sup> Procopius anticipates that Thomas will take Megas under his wing and fulfill the dearest wishes of his kin.

Letters were instruments of provincial action, and sometimes epistolographers fought for the little people. In *Letter 24* to Marcianus, Aeneas inquires whether the *stratēgos* had fulfilled his promise to compensate a man assaulted and robbed by a group of “barbarians.”<sup>219</sup> It is not clear from the letter what role Marcianus held; observing that Marcianus was not the *stratēgos*, Martindale suggests that he was an associate of the *stratēgos*, perhaps part of his staff, possibly

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<sup>216</sup> τὸ γὰρ τοσοῦτον προὔχοντα μὴ τῶν ἐλαττόνων ὑπεριδεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγων ἄρχειν καὶ φιλίας μεμνησθαι καὶ τι καὶ λεγόντων ἐθέλειν ἀκούειν.

<sup>217</sup> πολλὰ δὲ κάγαθὰ γένοιτο τῷ τὰς πόλεις ἡμῶν ἐπιτροπεύειν λαχόντι •

<sup>218</sup> ὑμῶν δὲ νυνὶ προστεθέντων τῷ νέῳ εὔξομαι δικαίαν εὐχὴν • Ζεῦ ἄλλοι τε θεοί, δυναίμην τι μεῖζον ἢ πρότερον, καὶ ὄναιτο Μέγας ἡμῶν ὅποσον ὁ κηδόμενος βούλεται.

<sup>219</sup> *PLRE* 2:716.

his *domesticus*.<sup>220</sup> The sophist opens by nearly apologizing for his request since such behavior is not friend-like, stating “you were bidding me to be a friend, but I’m beginning with a request.”<sup>221</sup>

Indicating that the victim also bears the letter, Aeneas relates how the carrier had been wronged:

He went down to purchase dates carrying a bit of gold for the price of the dates. But, O fortune, one is not even able to ward off poverty without dangers! For as the man went along being carried by good hopes, the most thieving of barbarians pretending to be his friends fell upon him striking and wringing him and stretching out a naked sword threatened to slay him altogether, and in the end seizing the gold they bade him to be thankful that his fortune and not his life had been lost.<sup>222</sup>

With Platonic inflection—specifically, the citation of how “good hopes”<sup>223</sup> propelled the victim toward the marketplace—Aeneas likely draws upon the shared culture of his learned interlocutor, perhaps expecting that Marcianus would recognize and appreciate this tiny marker of *paideia*.

Although the ethnic designation of the perpetrators is imprecise, they may have been Bedouin raiders. Aeneas indicates that “the *stratēgos* learned of this event and he was angrier with the robbers than with enemies of the state. And with good reason, for the enemy is to be fought against from afar, but the robbers set upon one’s friends by stealth.”<sup>224</sup> The *stratēgos* decreed that the victim receive full compensation, but apparently such reimbursement remained pending. Aeneas urges Marcianus to reverse this by speaking with the general: “But may you put an end

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., the *stratēgos* could have been either *magister utriusque militiae per Orientem* or *dux Palaestinae*.

<sup>221</sup> φιλεῖν ἐκέλευες, ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ αἰτεῖν ἄρχομαι.

<sup>222</sup> κατέβαινε ἐπὶ φοινίκων ὠνήν φέρων χρυσίον τὴν τῶν φοινίκων τιμὴν. ἀλλ’ ὦ τῆς τύχης, οὐδὲ πενίαν ἄνευ κινδύνων ἔστιν ἀμύνεσθαι. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἤλαυνεν ἀγαθαῖς ἐλπίσιν ἐποχούμενος, τῶν δὲ φιλίαν ὑποκρινομένων βαβάρων οἱ ληστικώτατοι προσπεσόντες παίουσί τε καὶ στρεβλοῦσι καὶ γυμνὸν τὸ ξίφος ἐπαναπροσπεσόντες ἀποσφάττειν ὄλωσεν ἠπέιλου, τέλος δὲ τὸ χρυσίον λαβόντες ἐκέλευον χάριν εἰδένασι ὅτι τὴν τύχην, οὐ τὸν βίον μετήλλαξεν.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 67c, Positano, 52.

<sup>224</sup> ἦκουσεν ὁ στρατηγός, ἐχαλέπαινε μισῶν αἰεὶ τοὺς κλέπτας μᾶλλον ἢ τοὺς φανερῶς πολεμίους, καὶ μάλα γε εἰκότως • τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἔστι πόρρωθεν προφυλάττεσθαι, οἳ δὲ τοῖς φίλοις ἐξ ἀφανοῦς ἐπιτίθενται.



to robbery for them, and to helplessness for the poor man.”<sup>225</sup> Aeneas closes with regards for the general via the standard titles for the Late Antique *dux*, “and I salute the general, most magnificent and dear to the god.”<sup>226</sup>

This letter thus suggests that as late as the beginning of the sixth century, the *dux* was expected to take military action in response to Bedouin offenses against subjects, even those perpetrated against someone of a relatively humble social location. Identification of these barbarians as part of the nomadic populations is suggested by Procopius’ testimony in his *Panegyric on Emperor Anastasius* (A.D. 491-518) in which he describes how the eastern half of the empire was devastated by neighboring barbarians, “terrible and arrogant men whose only skill was to rob other people’s territory and, as quickly as they attacked, escape notice and return back to wherever they could at that time easily hide.”<sup>227</sup> Now, however, the emperor has vanquished such marauders, who now recognize him as their lord and, though reluctantly, they live sensibly. The cities are now free from such tragic events and old defensive walls have been repaired and new ones built. The cities live moderately and show their beauty with tranquility to the barbarians. New fortifications are erected everywhere to protect inhabitants and a new crop of soldiers—outfitted with strength and valor—has arisen. Speaking before a Palestinian audience, Procopius here recalls measures Anastasius took against nomads from the deserts of

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<sup>225</sup> ἀλλὰ στήσατε τοῖς μὲν τὴν ληστείαν, τῷ δὲ τὴν ἀπορίαν.

<sup>226</sup> προσφθέγγομαι τὸν μεγαλοπρεπέστατον καὶ θεοφιλέστατον στρατηγόν.

<sup>227</sup> *Panegyric*, 7. ἄνδρες ὕβριστὰ καὶ θρασεῖς καὶ μίαν ἀρετὴν εἰδότες τοῖς ἀλλοτρίοις ἀγαθοῖς ἐπιτίθεσθαι καὶ θᾶπτον μὲν ἐπιόντες, θᾶπτον δὲ μεθιστάμενοι καὶ ὅποι ποτὲ γῆς εἰσι ῥαδίως λανθάνοντες •

Arabia and Syria, who for years led raids against border regions, particularly Palestina Tertia, Lebanese Phoenicia, and the Osroene.<sup>228</sup>

### The *Kosmos* of the Late Antique Republic of Letters

In sum, it is my objective to investigate epistolary corpora of Synesius, Isidore of Pelusium, Procopius, and Aeneas of Gaza as a form of vicarious community, webbed networks linking Late Antique provincial elites in the Greek East. My model, adapted from scholarship on the Early Modern Republic of Letters, is to envisage letters as conduits of a social organism regulated by the discursive strictures characterizing Late Antique epistolography. I conceptualize this universe of the Late Antique Republic of Letters as a type of public space in which lettered men located themselves within certain modes of feeling, communicating, and remembering.<sup>229</sup>

It is my task to map the topographies of affiliation and identity suggested by epistolary speech in the selected corpora. This is a speech rich with reference, quotation, and allusion to Classical philosophy and Classical texts. This is an elaborately-wrought speech whose living vessels—epistles—link spaces and individuals.<sup>230</sup> The letter is a living vessel, a text whose inherent plasticity grants it countless lives. As vicarious modes of shared presence, these living vessels were elaborately-wrought gifts for both recipient and friends alike to treasure. In the hands of the recipient, the letter was a living and plastic medium of conversation and memory to which one could return time and time again. The intricacies of epistolary language were the

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<sup>228</sup> Martino, 96.

<sup>229</sup> This conceptualization bears the imprint of the language of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>230</sup> Language of "vessels" inspired by Gilroy's discussion of the image of ships in Atlantic trade, 4.

precious product of years of intellectual cultivation. The author's *paideia* may be conceptualized in this project as a form of Bourdieusian *symbolic capital*: "its development required time, money, effort, and social position; eloquence was the essential precondition of its display."<sup>231</sup> Epistolary language showcased the symbolic capital that was a major signifier of elite status in Late Antiquity. Through analysis of epistolary language, I shall seek to locate Synesius, Isidore, Procopius, and Aeneas in terms of various types of identity, including religious identity, identity to more concrete spaces such as *polis* or region, and identity as *Hellenes*.

The first half of this dissertation focuses upon the communications mechanisms of the four selected epistolographers. The first of these, Chapter 2 "The Mechanisms of Friendship: Exchanges," addresses first the technology of letters or the means by which letters traveled from one friend to another. It surveys the concrete devices constituting the infrastructure of letter commerce in Late Antiquity, including the seasonality of letter transport and letter carriers. It also investigates the physical document of the letter, including superscription and handwriting as well as the exchange of intellectual materials and gifts transmitted with letters. In this chapter I also begin to explore the more ethereal devices of epistolary sodality in the form of the elevated and eloquent language of the letters rich with allusion and reference to classical texts, including Attic tragedy, oratory, and historiography, as well as language and reference pertaining to philosophical figures and traditions of thought. A theme running throughout this chapter and those subsequent to it will be letters as devices of requesting and granting favors among friends.

The second consecutive chapter analyzing the mechanisms of epistolary sociability is Chapter 3, "Tasting Honeyed Atticisms: Epistolary Theaters." This chapter investigates what

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<sup>231</sup> Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1995), xxi.

can be known of the social dynamics of epistolary exchange and explores in particular the Late Antique habit of reading letters aloud in gatherings of literati known as *theatra*. The testimony of Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas illuminate details of these sites of intellectual sodality, and two letters of Procopius in particular may provide specific examples of letters read aloud as a rhetorical theater event. These letters convey copious data about the discursive strategies and use of humor epistolographers wielded to forge rapport with their literati audiences. The earlier witness of Libanius also suggests rhetorical theater as well as the phenomena of “cross-talk” or the social dynamics of the horizontal dissemination of letter content. I investigate the specific physical locations of epistolary theater and establish what can be known about the theater in the larger civic context of our epistolographers. Lastly, I investigate in two separate sections the strategic use of theatrical language in the sociolect of the selected authors.

The second half of my dissertation explores the letter writers’ identifications and affiliations with regard to physical spaces, scientific speculation and gadgets, and religion. Chapter Four, “Letters and Places,” will turn from discussion of the “polity” created through letters to chart letter interlocutors’ language of identification and personal loyalty to physical places. Epistolographers frequently articulated their loyalties to localities, such as identification with one’s *polis* or region. I will endeavor to locate letter authors and their addressees in terms of their language of affiliation with physical places. The cases of Synesius and Procopius suggest the enduring identification with their home regions and *poleis*, yet the letters of Isidore, many of which were written at the monastery, testify to the Late Antique trend of defining new communities in opposition to the *polis*. The third section of this chapter explores Isidore’s construction of a sort of anti-polis and its complex interdependence with the city.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter Five, entitled “Gadgets and Scientific and Medical Enthusiasms,” explores the character of correspondents’ fascination with technology and mechanical gadgets. A significant facet of epistolary currency was exchange regarding how mechanical devices operated and how they could be used to understand the physical world. In this chapter, I shall interrogate both letters and other relevant writings of corpora authors to explore Late Antique discourse related to scientific exploration.<sup>232</sup> For the Gazan sophists, *ekphrasis* represented the authoritative approach to intellectual engagement with gadgets such as waterwheels and waterclock. For Synesius, technology such as the astrolabe he sends to his friend Paeonius served the highest science of all, Philosophy. Epistolary commerce enabled vibrant discussions of scientific and medical ideas, ranging from the nature of the universe, to discussion of the relationships between various types of matter, to the Galenic definition of the soul. Finally, this chapter examines how epistolography forged spaces for intellectual sodality among the selected authors and professionals engaged in scientific, medical, and technical fields.

The final chapter, “Chapter Six: Pagan and Christian,” addresses the most abstract and immaterial of the identities forged in the epistolary communities of Synesius, Isidore, Procopius, and Aeneas. In this concluding section, I seek to locate these Late Antique letter writers and their addressees in terms of religious identity. I shall set myself the task of grappling with the issue of whether these individuals were “pagan” or “Christian,” or both, or something else. In this chapter I confront the tendency within modern scholarship to chart Late Antique religious

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<sup>232</sup> Examples of texts of interest in this chapter will be Synesius’ *Letter* 15 to Hypatia requesting a hydrometer as well as his *Letter* 154 to Hypatia referring to the gift of an astrolabe sent to his friend Paeonius. Accompanying this gadget gift was Synesius’ treatise on the astrolabe which has not survived. In addition, Procopius’ *ekphrasis* on an *horologion* at Gaza will be a useful source.

identity in terms of the rigid and clear-cut categories “pagan” and “Christian.”<sup>233</sup> This binary does not depict adequately the religious identity of many individuals in late antiquity, and I will seek empirical models to represent the religious identity of the selected epistolary authors. In the cases of Procopius and Aeneas, their Christian identities are virtually silent in their letters. In fact letter speech of these corpora constructs a pre-Christian linguistic dreamscape with slight mention of the religious life of their actual historical context. For whatever reasons, these sophists were comfortable with engaging in an epistolography written largely in a pagan currency. Synesius’ case suggests a high degree of identity qualifying, in which his prose in surviving letters embraced Christian language typically only in those letters written after ordination to the bishopric and addressed to other Christian clergy. Isidore develops a vocabulary of exclusion with regard to the pagans, whom he calls *hoi exōthen* (a term that can also encompass the Jews) or Hellenes. This vocabulary provides an entry-point to analyze the oppositional character of Isidore’s religious identity.

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<sup>233</sup> I favor the approach recently adopted by Sandwell, *Religious Identity*.

## Chapter 2

### The Mechanisms of Friendship: Exchanges

If letters hypothetically construct virtual communities, or groups of individuals who share common vocational, political, social, and literary pursuits but are not spatially limited, the issue of how spatial distances were overcome in Late Antiquity is critical for understanding the devices undergirding this social organism.<sup>1</sup> My task in this chapter is to peel back the outermost concentric layers encircling epistolary communications—starting from the most concrete and external elements which both mobilized and accompanied the letter, including transportation, the conveyer of the letter, the original physical document replete with address and handwriting, as well as gifts and intellectual materials exchanged. I will trace here all such elements that enveloped the literal transmission of these texts and in succession, led to the recipient's first reading of the letter—which was probably aloud and was even expressed by Procopius as a “hearing.”<sup>2</sup>

### Virtual Communities: Linking Spaces

The letters of Procopius, Aeneas, Synesius, and Isidore, as literary creations, performances, and moments of social exchange, took considerable energy, effort, and invention to design, and were the products of cultivating an educational and cultural repertoire founded

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of virtual community is based upon the definition which Rebecca D'Monté and Nicole Pohl develop in *Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The question of whether the ancients read silently or aloud has been a topic of keen debate. For a recent overview of the scholarship on this issue, see William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-9. Judging from Procopius' language of “hearing,” it is reasonable to assert that he read the letters aloud. He may also refer to subsequent public readings of letters received in “theaters,” a topic I will investigate in Chapter 3.

upon years of agonistic discipline and training beginning in childhood. Along with the more ephemeral gifts that might be conveyed with letters, the text of the letter itself was meant to be tasted and savored time and again. It was a vessel of affection between friends drizzled with honeyed Atticisms and gifts of the Muses.

The preciousness of such letters is intensified when one examines the vagaries of letter transit in the ancient world. Letter writers were well aware of the realities of letter travel even as they carefully drafted their letters rich with classical references and subtle rhetorical engineering. Private letters in Late Antiquity were conveyed through carriers;<sup>3</sup> as much letter transit required sea travel for at least part of its journey, ship transit and communications in the Mediterranean fundamentally structured letter transit. A seafaring courier would customarily survey a port, querying if ships were traveling in the direction of the desired designation. The fortune of the carrier in finding a ready ship headed in the right direction affected the length of a letter's journey fundamentally.

During the Late Republic, Cicero related how one letter to his son sent from Rome to Athens took seven weeks to travel,<sup>4</sup> while another letter of his traveling between the same coordinates arrived within three weeks.<sup>5</sup> In the former case the carrier was forced to wait for someone headed to Athens; in the latter, a ship headed in the desired direction was located

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<sup>3</sup> Martin R.P. McGuire, "Letters and Letter Carriers in Christian Antiquity," *Classical World* 53 (1960): 150, 185.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero *ad. Fam.* 16.21.1. Cf. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974), 221-22, 356. Casson's chapter on mail in the ancient world provides a useful overview; see Chapter 13, 219-25.

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *ad Fam.* 14.5.1.



immediately. This excellent fortune, however, seems to have been rare, since Cicero welcomes the letters as having arrived “mighty quickly” (*sane strenuē*).<sup>6</sup>

Procopius relates in a letter how he sought out commercial ships in eager pursuit of expected letters. Procopius, chastising Stephanus in *Letter 71* for his ironic silence, since Stephanus lives beside the “babbling and prophetic spring”<sup>7</sup> at Daphne, relates his repeated queries at the harbor in pursuit of his friend’s letters: “for a long time I enquired of all the trading ships, always being up in the air toward the future.”<sup>8</sup> Presumably, Procopius means that he surveyed the cargo vessels that went to shore at the Gazan port, Maioumas. Procopius emphasizes his zeal for Stephanus’ precious correspondence, writing further, “there put into port a second and a third ship, and they refuted what I was thinking of as only hopes.”<sup>9</sup> Tracing the increments of his enthusiasm, Procopius strikes to intensify silent Stephanus’ guilt and thereby cajole him to write.

Many of the letters in the corpora of Isidore, Aeneas, and Procopius, however, addressed to correspondents residing relatively nearby in Pelusium or Palestine respectively, were probably transmitted entirely by carriers on land. Procopius has a number of correspondent friends in Caesarea, as well as other Palestinian cities including Elusa. Likewise, Isidore maintained lively communications with lettered men in Pelusium, including a circle of grammarians and *scholastikoi*. Epistolographers centered in Pelusium and Gaza, located along the major arterial

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> τὸ λάλον ὕδωρ ἐκεῖνο καὶ μαντικόν

<sup>8</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ πάλαι περισκοπῶ τὰς ὀλκάδας, μετέωρος αἰεὶ πρὸς τὸ μέλλον γινόμενος.

<sup>9</sup> αἱ δὲ που καταίρουσι καὶ δευτέρα καὶ τρίτη, καὶ τὰ καθ’ ἡμᾶς διελέγχουσιν ὡς μόνον ἦσαν ἐλπίδες.

highways interlinking the cities of Egypt and the Levant, had clear and easy access to lengthy thoroughfares of overland imperial transit. The means transport couriers took overland, however, are not always clear. In *Letter 19* Synesius states that the letter carrier Ammonius, a councilman from Alexandria, has traveled on the public highway, presumably *en route* from Alexandria to Cyrene. Letters journeyed with couriers on horseback; Synesius *Letter 13* mentions a request for a change of horses for the carrier.

Because ship transit and communications in the Mediterranean were seasonal and subject to the various uncertainties and delays which beset ancient transit in general, letter transit had its seasons and uncertainties.<sup>10</sup> The climactic characteristics of the Mediterranean meant that there were two long seasons: *cheimon* which was marked by unpredictable storms and *theros*, the season of transit; both season names meant something more than winter and summer respectively.<sup>11</sup> Summer weather tended to be stable and facilitated shipping. Winter weather was less predictable and doubly dangerous because of the greater occurrence of storms and diminished visibility. The months from November to March, consequently, marked a closed Mediterranean or *mare clausum*. Exigent issues, however, could compel ship travel during unseasonable months.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> McGuire, 150. For discussion of maritime transit in the late-ancient Mediterranean, see Jean Rougé, *Recherches sur l'organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l'empire romain* (Paris: S.E.V.P.N., 1966); Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); idem, *Travel in the Ancient World*; Jean Rougé *Ships and Fleets of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Susan Frazer, trans. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 11-23; Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300-900* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Blake Leyerle, "Mobility and the Traces of Empire" in Philip Rousseau, ed., *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Chichester, U.K., Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 110-23; Philip A. Harland, ed. *Travel and Religion in Antiquity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Rougé, 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> McCormick, 98.

In addition to seasonal conditions, agricultural patterns conspired to launch grain and oil fleets northward beginning, for instance, in Africa from 13 April through 15 October.<sup>13</sup> April and October appear to have been marginal months for transport. Vegetius, the fifth century author of a treatise on the Later Roman military (*Epitoma rei militaris*), considered April, May, and October hazardous months for travel, particularly for the military.<sup>14</sup> The Late Roman state, however, framed the maritime season generously in order to supply optimally the capital and the army.<sup>15</sup>

Even though summer brought the blessings of the “yearly” or *etesian* winds billowing from the northeast,<sup>16</sup> specific local climatic conditions shaped the operative routes. Wind direction inflicted particular patterns on summer sea transit. Ships moving southward from, for example, Italy or Greece to Africa, Asia Minor, Syria, or Egypt, could rely on fairly swift travel during summer. The return voyage, however, was lengthened considerably by the breezes that had sped them along on the outgoing trip.<sup>17</sup> Travel to Constantinople was hampered from July through September because of wind patterns—the *meltemi* winds—which blast vigorously during these months from the Black Sea down to the Aegean. In the Levant, however, weather patterns were favorable for westward travel in October, as a voyage beginning 1 October 474 in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 98, 454.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 454. McCormick, 454n38, specifies that Vegetius classifies as “uncertain” (*incerta*, implying risk) 10 March to 27 May, and 14 September to 11 November, *Epitoma rei militaris*, 4.39.1-7, 4.246.711-248.729.

<sup>15</sup> McCormick, 454, 98n62 Cod. Theod. 13.9.3.3 (Trier 380), 761.19-762.1; see also Casson, *Ships and Seamanship*, 270-72.

<sup>16</sup> The etesian winds greatly facilitated the relatively quick sail from Rome to Alexandria in a span of 10 days to three weeks; the return, however, against the winds sweeping from the northern quadrant, could mean a journey of as long as two months or longer. See Casson, *Travel*, 151-152.

<sup>17</sup> Casson, *Ships and Seamanship*, 272.

a horoscope indicates.<sup>18</sup> In addition to winds, speed of transit was also affected by the type of vessel conducting the voyage.<sup>19</sup> Letter transit, like travel, was thus deeply implicated in the ebb and flow of seasonal rhythms of shipping and food production. Essentially, the armature of Mediterranean connectivity in the Late Roman Empire was its ships, which forged “a kind of invisible highway on which people, things, and ideas moved around the inland seas, connecting distant and nearby provinces, societies, and regional economies.”<sup>20</sup>

During seasons of letter transport, letter carriers were vulnerable to shipwreck, weather delays, personal illness, robbery, and countless other uncertainties.<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, themes of travel and images of voyages continued to appear in Byzantine letters under transit conditions more favorable than those of Late Antiquity.<sup>22</sup> The precariousness of travel is something late ancient epistolographers knew first hand. As Ryan Schellenberg has recently pointed out, the letters of St. Paul contain ample reference to the caprice and uncertainty of travel in the early Empire, as well as its physical discomfort.<sup>23</sup> Synesius’ lengthy *Letter* 4 to his brother Euoptius relating his experience of shipwreck in a voyage from Alexandria to Cyrene is an emblematic description of perils of sea travel.

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<sup>18</sup> McCormick, 98.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Casson, *Travel*, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. For issues of Mediterranean environment and connectivity see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> McGuire, 185, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Mullett comments on the longevity of the themes of travel and voyage imagery as well as the consciousness of distance between interlocutors, writing how “separation is inscribed in the Byzantine letter”; see Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K., Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1997), 16, 13-16.

<sup>23</sup> Schellenberg contends ultimately that the vicissitudes of ancient travel fundamentally shaped Paul’s journeys in ways which call for re-evaluation of scholarly portrayals of the “mission” of Paul. See Schellenberg’s article “‘Danger in the wilderness, danger at sea’: Paul and the Perils of Travel,” *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip Harland, 141-61.

Letter authors engraved personal travel experiences in epistles. Procopius appears to allude to his previous journey by sea to Constantinople in *Letter* 155 to a former student, the lawyer Orion. Orion is traveling from Berytus in Phoenicia to Constantinople, presumably in search of a position. In this letter, Procopius describes the route from Berytus to Constantinople, most likely from his own personal travel experience. Responding to Orion’s accusation of Procopius’ silence, and perhaps jokingly deploying legal language to his student-turned-lawyer, Procopius chides his student for not having provided an “accounting” (*euthyna*) of his travel experiences. Procopius articulates the same expectation of a trip report in *Letter* 86 to Hieronymus—in this case, a report of the trip to Egypt.<sup>24</sup> He writes, “you should have revealed how ‘I left Berytus,’ . . . how ‘having sailed by the islands I caught sight of the Hellespont, being guarded from both sides of the land by means of wonders, and having passed by Propontus, I arrived at the Bosphorus itself.’”<sup>25</sup> Procopius continues to indicate how Orion should have described the approach to the city by sea:

Whence I saw the polis as an incredible sight coming out to meet those sailing up to her. For lying at the neck of the land the city looks upon Asia being pushed forward from Europe, and making a boundary at Pontus the city exhibits wonders along the rest of the sea.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *RDG*, 497n733.

<sup>25</sup> σὲ γὰρ ἔδει πρῶτα μηνύειν ὡς “τὴν βηρυτιῶν ἀπέλιπον” ὡς “πολὺ διεμέτρησα πέλαγος”, ὡς “τάς νήσους παραπλεύσας τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον εἶδον, τοῖς ἐξ ἑκατέρας ἡπείρου δορυφορούμενον θαύμασι, καὶ παρελθὼν τὴν Προποντίδα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφῖγμαι τὸν βόσπορον.

<sup>26</sup> ἔνθα πόλιν εἶδον παραδόξῳ θέᾳ προαπαντῶσας τοῖς καταπλέουσιν. ἐπ’ αὐχένι γὰρ κειμένη τῆς γῆς τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐφορᾷ τῆς Εὐρώπης προβεβλημένην, καὶ τὸν Πόντον ὀρίζουσα τῇ λοιπῇ θαλάττῃ παραπέμπει τὰ θαύματα” καὶ ὅσα φλυαρεῖν ἀπειροκάλως εἰώθασιν οἱ τάκεῖ θεασάμενοι, τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀκοὴν καταπλήττοντες.

Vivid spatial images and the order of the itinerary suggest Procopius' prior peregrination along the coast-hugging trade routes by sea interlinking Levantine cities with the eastern capital.<sup>27</sup>

The seasonality of letter commerce and the concomitant inactive winter bring to mind Peter Brown's characterization of Late Antiquity as "a world haunted by under-employment."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, letter writers "fantasizing during the months when leaves fall"<sup>29</sup> had the greater part of fall and all of winter to brood and (over-)analyze received letters and to engineer letters to send in springtime. As Van Dam has observed, seasonal communication lapses meant that for epistolographers like the snow-covered Cappadocian Fathers all they were able to do, hibernating during the winter, was obsess about talking. As Basil remarks in *Letter* 13, "Flowers blossom in spring, ears of corn bloom in summer, apples ripen in autumn; the fruit of winter is conversation."<sup>30</sup> Such temporal interludes without fresh communication from correspondents also meant that letter writers had to be wary of writing anything that might be misinterpreted or potentially offend because correspondents had long spans of time to chew on letter content. If winter afforded epistolographers ample time to ruminate on epistolary conversations past and future, the months without fresh letters were silent nonetheless.

Letter authors clearly ached for correspondence during the silent months of winter. In *Letter* 138 to his friend Dorotheus, Procopius, noting the seasonal communication lapses with his

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<sup>27</sup> Ciccolella comments that Procopius probably alludes to mythical and historical echoes connected to the Hellespont such as the stories of Phrixus and Helle (Ps.-Apollod., 1.9.1), Hero and Leander (Ovid *Heroides* 18-19) and Xerxes' bridge across the Hellespont (Herodotus 7.34). See *RDG*, 497n735.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 9.

<sup>29</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 207; quoted in Van Dam, *Friends and Families*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-34.

friend during winter months, defines spring not by its physical beauty but by the greater pleasure of hearing from one's friends:

Indeed for those longing for it spring is certainly not the changing of the season, the bright hours, the swallows singing, and earth embroidered with flowers, but rather spring is the voice of my dear one transforming the winter of silence, which troubles greatly the souls of lovers, into a more pleasant sound.<sup>31</sup>

Procopius praises spring as the inaugural season of letter commerce and celebrates how the change of season is the change of silence toward “a more pleasant sound” (*eudion akoē*).

Procopius here figuratively qualifies his hearing of a letter read aloud with the adjective *eudion* typically used to describe weather and the sea. In fact, Procopius asserts that “you (Dorotheus) show yourself to be the sort of person who made a gift of letters stronger than any pleasure.”<sup>32</sup>

The receipt of letters grants the greatest sort of pleasure—even when compared with the beauties of spring. Procopius asserts that even as winter bears down on nature, it is the silence of Diodorus which makes winter even more detestable.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Procopius urges his brother Philippus to write to him now that it is summertime and carps not only at his brother's silence at the outset of spring but his exasperating silence that continues even in the heart of summer, the season that should correspond with receiving letters: “you stopped writing a long time ago and I am not able to bear it. You see now, there was winter, and even then I did not bear it moderately, but then the

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<sup>31</sup> ἦν ἄρα τοῖς ποθοῦσιν ἕαρ οὐ καιροῦ μεταβολὴ καὶ ὥρας λαμπρότης καὶ χελιδόνες ἄδουσαι καὶ γῆ ποικιλομένη, ἀλλὰ παιδικῶν φωνῆ χειμῶνα σιγῆς τῇ τῶν ἐρώνων ψυχῇ παρενοχλοῦντα πρὸς εὐδιον ἀκοὴν μεταβάλλουσα. τοιοῦτός τις πέφηνας κρείττω πάσης ἡδονῆς τὰ γράμματα χαρισάμενος. ὡς ὁ γε παριππεύσας χειμῶν ἐπῆλθε μὲν τῇ φύσει πολὺς, σοῦ δὲ σιγῶντος ἔδοξε δυσχερέστερος.

<sup>32</sup> τοιοῦτός τις πέφηνας κρείττω πάσης ἡδονῆς τὰ γράμματα χαρισάμενος.

<sup>33</sup> ὡς ὁ γε παριππεύσας χειμῶν ἐπῆλθε μὲν τῇ φύσει πολὺς, σοῦ δὲ σιγῶντος ἔδοξε δυσχερέστερος.

swallows were seen and you made not a peep after these things, and now the cicadas are singing and contrary to my expectations there is still silence.”<sup>34</sup>

Seasonal delays could mean that letters arrived significantly late—from the previous year or years—and in accumulated bunches. Synesius laments in *Letter* 88 to his friend Pylaemenes how he had received a bundle of letters dated to the previous spring from Thrace and how he searched in vain, hoping that just one letter would contain the name Pylaemenes. In *Letter* 129, also addressed to Pylaemenes, Synesius complains how a number of his own letters were returned to him and he would have to resend the lot.

As part of maritime connectivity, geographical circumstances likely shaped the attitudes of individual epistolographers to letter writing and letter receipt. Particularly for Synesius, geographical conditions in Cyrenaica must have contributed to a sense of loneliness and isolation from epistolary friends. Cyrenaica is essentially a green oasis of a plateau wedged between expanses of desert and a hazardous coastline. Approximately 700 kilometers of desert separates Cyrenaica from the Nile delta to the east, and a comparable space of desert divides Cyrenaica from Tripolitania in the west. In the hinterland, the Sahara comprises about half a million kilometers of desert territory. The narrow strip of coastal plain framing Cyrenaica to the north could be accessed by animal transport only via a small number of ravines; the chain of communications was accessible on the coast east to west by proverbially difficult seas.<sup>35</sup> A cosmopolitan Cyrenean such as Synesius who had experience with travel in the eastern Mediterranean must have been aware of the environmental challenges of the region and the

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<sup>34</sup> *Letter* 7: σκόπει γάρ, χειμῶν ἦν καὶ οὐ μετρίως ἐφέρομεν, ὠφθησαν χελιδόνες καὶ οὐδε μετὰ τούτων εφθέγξω, καὶ νῦν τέττιγες καὶ παρ’ἐλπίδας ἡμῖν ἡ σιγή.

<sup>35</sup> Horden and Purcell, 67.



formidable natural barriers to communication with other Greek-speaking cities in the eastern Empire. The sense of isolation Synesius experienced in Cyrenaica must have made his letters particularly precious to him.

The location of Isidore was strikingly different from Synesius' seclusion on the Cyrenaican oasis. While he was active as the city sophist selected by the Pelusian *boulē* and, subsequently, a *didaskalos* (spiritual teacher) in Pelusium in the province of Augustamnica I on the eastern Nile delta in the late fourth century, Isidore was ensconced in a thriving polis actively engaged in Mediterranean trade and communications. Situated in eastern Egypt near the Palestine border and located about 3.7 kilometers from the sea, Pelusium was both a river- and seaport with lively trade imports of timber and stone from Asia and salt from Ostracine. Pelusium's major exports were lentils, onions, and flax; occasionally Egyptian wheat travelled through Pelusium *en route* to Constantinople. Capital of its province, Pelusium also had a strategic location on the route from Egypt to Gaza via the Sinai,<sup>36</sup> which was a required transit passage for commerce as well as imperial and military administration. A garrison was stationed in Pelusium known as the *equites Stablesiani*.<sup>37</sup> It is unlikely that Isidore shared with Synesius the same sense of living on the margins and periphery of cultivated social circles of the Greek East. In fact, Isidore opted for greater seclusion by withdrawing from the city to the desert to live as a monk and maintained social relations with his network primarily via letters.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, "Review of Han J. W. Drijvers and John F. Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa & Osrhoene: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*," *Syria* 80 (2003): 298-99.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Éviéux, "The Personal Itinerary of Isidore of Pelusium," *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, ed. Pauline Allen *et al.* (Brisbane, Australia: Watson Ferguson & Company, 2000), 145.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. Some of Isidore's friends did visit him in his retreat; *Letter* 1690 suggests that the sophist Harpocras and his students visited Isidore in the desert.

As sophists at the Gaza School, Procopius and Aeneas had access to a vibrant intellectual community which Synesius had experienced at Alexandria and during his embassy at Constantinople but sorely missed in his hometown of Cyrene. Additionally the commercial and strategic significance of Gaza and its port to Roman trade and administration meant constant movement of people and resources in and out of the city. At the heart of an extensive system of roads, some of which interlinked the Levant in pre-historical days, Gaza had commanding access to land communications. The most significant, and likely also the oldest, of these circuits was the highway extending north and south along the Levantine coast, yoking together cities of the Greek east from Syria to Egypt.<sup>39</sup> The other major road linking Gaza to the north and to central Palestine was a road directed toward Eleutheropolis and continuing on to Jerusalem. Three other roads branched out from Gaza, leading south and east traversing the Negev desert. Of these roads, the oldest and most important led from Gaza to Elusa, Oboda, and on to Petra; at Petra this highway connected directly to the ancient spice and trading caravan route leading to the south of the Arabian peninsula.<sup>40</sup> Opening onto the sea via its busy port Maioumas, Gaza participated in vibrant maritime commerce of imports and exports. Despite their stock complaints of silence, commonplaces of Late Antique epistolography, Procopius and Aeneas, unlike Synesius, likely did not want for company, intellectual or otherwise, in their vivacious hometown. Unlike Isidore in the desert, however, these Gazan epistolographers ensconced in their city did not employ letters as a central means of communicating with friends in their city,

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<sup>39</sup> Glucker, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28.

and, judging from the case of Procopius, never sought to escape what Peter Brown described as the “claustrophobia and the tensions of living in a face-to-face society.”<sup>41</sup>

### The Technology of Exchange: Letter Carriers

Carriers, as has been well-acknowledged in the scholarship, were a vital element in the communication matrix between sender and recipient, often augmenting and explicating letter content as well as potentially supporting and authorizing a communication.<sup>42</sup> In many cases, letter carriers were trusted parties, who, if literate, had access to letter content. Carriers known to one correspondent or both were sometimes entrusted with verbal communications to be delivered to recipients along with missives; this practice is often indicated within letter texts or may be inferred from elliptical letter language. Synesius himself suggests in *Letter 53* that verbosity in a letter signifies a certain lack of intimacy with the carrier. Not surprisingly, many of the letters containing information about carriers in the corpora of Procopius and Aeneas are letters of recommendation ferried by students. Letter carriers in the corpora of Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas occupied various social levels—from less-affluent acquaintances to lettered elites, including lawyers and other sorts of professionals, and, of course, in the cases of Aeneas and Procopius, students. Presumably, hired dependents also ferried letters, but these individuals remain unnamed and unmentioned in the extant sources. The following examples will outline what can be known about those individuals entrusted with the letters of Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas, as well as the role played by these carriers in communication. Exploring letters in which

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, 4.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31-40; Schor, 35-38.

carriers may be positively identified, I will suggest below strategies for delineating how they fit into the sociability and the sociology of epistolary exchange.

There are many instances of the naming of carriers without additional description. Presumably, in many of these cases, it was not required to acknowledge or specify data well known to the parties engaged in the communication. It is not always clear why the transmitter is named in these situations, though the name of the carrier likely played some role in authenticating the parties involved in the communication. The fact that numerous carriers were named and identified suggests their significance. Some epistolographers articulate the names of carriers more than others; Michel-Yves Perrin demonstrated that Paulinus of Nola names his carriers far more frequently than his contemporaries.<sup>43</sup> Various epistolographers offer conspicuous praise for carriers in letters. Adam Schor, for example, has recently commented on Theodoret's practice of praising carriers in his epistles, ranging from terse compliments noting the bearer's personal attributes to longer multi-line descriptions.<sup>44</sup> Such ingratiating language was likely a feature of recipient design on the part of the letter author in order to ensure proper carrier comportment, to authorize any supplementary verbal message the carrier might relay, and, obviously, in the case of letters of recommendation, to dispose the recipient favorably to the carrier to ensure the granting of a request. At a minimum, such praises authorized and validated epistolary communications.

Letter writers employed various types of messengers, from strangers to relations, and epistolographers seem to have been ever-vigilant, eagerly scouring their environs for potential

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<sup>43</sup> Michel-Yves Perrin, “*Ad implendum caritatis ministerium.*” La place des couriers dans la correspondance de Paulin de Nole,” *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité* 104 (1992): 1025-68; cited in Conybeare, 32n63.

<sup>44</sup> Schor, 35-36.

carriers. Even the sight of a letter messenger could prompt a correspondent to write a letter in return. Synesius reprimands his brother for having seen a messenger from Synesius delivering a paschal letter and not bothering to write to Synesius when a ready messenger was present. Epistolographers made ready use of all potential carriers in their vicinity. Carriers on hand could incite the writing of a letter or accelerate the completion one.<sup>45</sup> This is a practice clearly continued in the eleventh-century Byzantine epistolography of Theophylact of Ochrid, who deploys a carrier who has just brought him a letter (*Letters* G35 and G52).<sup>46</sup> Letter writers oversaw the proper care of carriers along their journey to ensure successful letter transmission. In Synesius' *Letter* 13 addressed to Peter the Elder announcing the circulation of the paschal letter, Synesius provides instructions for the provisions of the carrier, namely, that he be given a change of horses at a particular interval in his journey.

It does not seem to be the case, however, that either corresponding party always knew their letter carriers personally. Anonymous travelers as well as professional seafarers transmitted letters as another item of cargo. For example, in *Letter* 54, Synesius writes to his brother Euoptius that if he sees a skipper heading for Piraeus he should convey a letter to Synesius, who was visiting Athens. Similarly, Synesius' *Letter* 101 to Pylaemenes mentions that a man from the Cyrenean harbor Phycus brought Pylaemenes' most recent missive. In this example, the letter may have been passed along through two or more travelers whose paths crossed along routes interlinking Constantinople and Cyrene.

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<sup>45</sup> Conybeare, 32-33.

<sup>46</sup> Mullett, 35.

Excluding students carrying letters of recommendation, carriers when identified in Procopius' letters are often relations of one correspondent or another, or of both. Procopius *Letter 79* to friends Eusebius and Elias refers to a boy, probably Megas—Procopius' student and son of one of the addressees—who conveys the letters between them. *Letter 96* to Silanus (probably a former classmate of Procopius) mentions a “fair Macarius” who conveys the letter. Macarius is a judge and former student of Procopius (96.1; *Letter 97* is addressed to Macarius) who seems to be the relative of Silanus.

Not surprisingly, family members bearing letters could be recognized because of personal resemblance to their related correspondents. When Ulpius' unnamed brother delivers a letter to his sibling's former teacher Procopius in *Letter 49*, Procopius almost mistakes the brother for the student: “having seen him I supposed I had you in another body, and having gone away a long distance you seemed to me to be present from an image.”<sup>47</sup> Procopius employs similar language in *Letter 105* to Stephanus, prefacing his message by remarking how the presence of the carrier, Stephanus' brother, was almost equal to having Stephanus present with Procopius: “having beheld your brother I thought myself to have you yourself, and I was led to you by the inborn likeness of the sight.”<sup>48</sup> Stephanus' unnamed brother brought the letter as well as the much-desired book Procopius had lent Stephanus and which Procopius badgered Stephanus to return in *Letter 89*.

As is typical of Late-Antique letter carriers and true as well of the selected corpora, various individuals, including female letter carriers and relatives of correspondents, conveyed

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<sup>47</sup> καὶ τοῦτον ἰδὼν σὲ δι' ἑτέρου σώματος ἔχειν ἠγοῦμην, καὶ μακρὰν ἀπὼν δι' ἄλλης ἡμῶν εἰκόνος ἐδόκεις παρῆναι.

<sup>48</sup> τὸν ὑμέτερον ἀδελφὸν θεασάμενος αὐτοῦς ὑμᾶς ἔχειν ἐδόκουν, καὶ τῷ συγγενεῖ τῆς θέας ἀνηγόμην πρὸς σέ.

letters of recommendation, or epistles beseeching correspondents to offer assistance of various kinds to the carrier. Synesius *Letter 155* contains the rare instance of a mentioned female letter carrier. According to the letter, Synesius recommends that Domitian the jurist hear the claims of a widowed woman bearing the letter. The carrier will likely seek some sort of legal help from Domitian and explain her needs in person.

The precise nature of favors requested is often unclear, and bearers likely substantially supplemented letter content in such cases with their own words. Synesius bids that his brother receive with the living letter also the inanimate one.<sup>49</sup> The former is the wondrous (*thaumastos*) Gerontius; the latter is the few lines of the letter which Synesius writes merely for custom's sake (*nomos*). Synesius declares that he lives with his brother in memory; this in fact is what the young carrier will express in a more powerful voice than ten thousand letters.

Carriers are expected to receive favors from letter recipients based on letter author appeals to unspoken behavioral protocol. In *Letter 90 to Sabinus causidicus*, Procopius requests that Sabinus show favor to the one bearing the letter to him. Procopius seems concerned about the letter carrier's opinion of him, writing "if you show favor to the letter carrier, you will confirm the disposition which he happens to have of me"—a fact which likely signifies that the carrier was not a slave. Within the manners of genteel epistolography, letter authors frame requests in terms of bestowing mannerly kindness on friends of friends. Fulfillment of requests is a social performance signaling one's allegiance to the rules of elite decorum and membership in a group sharing these practices. Epistolary design attempts to mobilize behavior through discursive reminders of elite codes of conduct.

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<sup>49</sup>μετὰ τῆς ἐμφύχου καὶ τὴν ἄψυχον ἐπιστολὴν

When carriers seek legal help in Procopius' letters, the boon of persuasive oratory is typically the object. Relatives of friends frequently transmitted letters to addressees from whom assistance was sought. Procopius *Letter 31* to his friend Diodorus mentions a nephew (*anepsios*) of Procopius who either is or will be allied to Procopius by marriage (as a *kēdestēs*) bidding that Diodorus "look upon him with favorable eyes and, if necessary, lend him your tongue to help him, seeing fit to have given me the whole of favor."<sup>50</sup> The favor is unspecified, but since Procopius suggests that Diodorus employ eloquence on the carrier's behalf, the nature of the favor is likely legal oratory. If at this time Diodorus was at Caesarea, it may be that Procopius asks Diodorus to speak for his relation before the governor. Similarly, in *Letter 73* to Kastor, Procopius writes that many things demanded favor from Kastor for the one bearing the letter.<sup>51</sup> Procopius wishes that Kastor, an advocate, might help Procopius's relative by marriage by means of eloquence. Employing the epistolary *topos* of false modesty, Procopius primes his recipient to be favorably disposed to the request, complaining how "my things are small by nature, but through you are capable of great things."<sup>52</sup> Apparently, Procopius' relative has been the victim of false accusations: "there is need of a just tongue and flowing words to quench the false accusations of a tongue that is clever."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> τὸν δὲ φέροντα τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀνεψιὸν ὄντα καὶ κηδεστήν, εἴ γε δεῖ τὸ μέλλον εἰπεῖν, εὐμενέσιν ἰδῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς, κἄν δέη παρασχῶν αὐτῷ συμμαχοῦσαν τὴν γλῶτταν, ἐμοὶ τὸ πᾶν διδόναι δόκει τῆς χάριτος. On the basis of the clause εἴ γε δεῖ τὸ μέλλον εἰπεῖν, Ciccolella thinks that the letter carrier is going to become the nephew of Procopius either through a marriage to Procopius' sister or niece; see *RDG*, 456n175).

<sup>51</sup> τῷ φέροντι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πολλὰ παρὰ σοῦ τὴν εὐνοίαν ἀπαιτεῖ.

<sup>52</sup> ὥς τὰ μὰ μικρὰ μὲν τῇ φύσει, μεγάλα δύναται παρὰ σοί. Ciccolella notes that self-depreciation is an epistolary *topos* bound by the rules of rhetoric; Hermogenes includes it in the precepts of his chapter in his work *Περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος* entitled *Περὶ τοῦ ἀνεπαχθῶς ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινεῖν*. See *RDG*, 468n352.

<sup>53</sup> δεῖται δὲ γλώττης δικαίας καὶ λόγων εὐροίας σβέσαι δυναμένης συκοφαντίαν.



Procopius mentions a letter carrier in the context of a family dispute in *Letter* 158 to Johannes.<sup>54</sup> Procopius asks that John assist the letter-bearer, a good man, who laments a difficulty with his unjust brother.<sup>55</sup> Procopius requests that John intercede legally for this unnamed carrier, pleading that Johannes “make available those powerful men as a suitable alliance for him.”<sup>56</sup> Procopius then asks specifically that Johannes find a means of cutting down the fees of the law courts.<sup>57</sup> In this case, the carrier appears to be a less affluent man who needs legal assistance from a powerful pleader.<sup>58</sup>

In the webs of sociability suggested by the letters, carriers bearing letters of recommendation were a means of introducing friends to friends or friends to relations in the context of requesting and granting favors. Thus, the letter carrier could be conceptualized as a sort of “gatekeeper” or broker between social circles. Synesius emerges from his many letters of recommendation as a formidable magnate of real substance in negotiating curial, military, and administrative affairs in Cyrenaica, Alexandria, and Constantinople. In *Letter* 100 to Constantinopolitan friend and advocate Pylaemenes, Synesius introduces and recommends his friend Anastasius who ferries the letter on his embassy to Constantinople as a favor for

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<sup>54</sup> Ciccolella identifies Johannes as an advocate who worked in both Alexandria and Caesarea, with poetic and philosophical interests. See *RDG*, 442n36.

<sup>55</sup> ὁ τὴν παροῦσαν ἐπιστολὴν ἐπαγόμενος, ἀνὴρ ὢν ἀγαθός, ἐξ ἀδικίας ἀδελφοῦ τὴν ἀπορίαν ὀδύρεται.

<sup>56</sup> τοὺς μέγα δυναμένους πρὸς συμμαχίαν αὐτῷ παρασχεῖν.

<sup>57</sup> τὰς ἐκ τοῦ δικατηρίου περικόψαι δαπάνας.

<sup>58</sup> The preceding letter of recommendation in the manuscript transmission, *Letter* 157 addressed to the advocate Sosianus, though not mentioning the carrier, contains a similar request from Procopius that his lawyer-friend reduce the legal costs for a man who has been deprived of his property by a brother. Ciccolella suggests that the similar vocabulary and requests shared by *Letters* 157 and 158 may likely mean that they were preserved as different models for writing letters of recommendation for the same topic. See *RDG*, 498n747.

Synesius.<sup>59</sup> Synesius bids these men to be friends by claiming that they have already known each other in a sense through their separate relationships with Synesius:

Here is that man I have spoken of so much to you. And if I had been introducing him to you, I would have spoken the same praise concerning you. Just as, accordingly, you are both joined together in me from long ago and this event you consider as a reunion, show one another kindness and examine in common how you may do something good for me.”<sup>60</sup>

Synesius hopes that his praise of the addressee and his mutual regard for both the addressee and the recommended will ensure the fulfillment of his request.

In the context of requesting favors via letters, praise of the carrier’s learning and character serves as a means of complimenting the carrier and enhancing the carrier’s appeal in the eyes of the letter recipient. In *Letter 59* to the Libyan military governor Anysius in 411, Synesius requests that Anysius obtain the favor of a provincial governor for the letter carrier, a man “in his soul a philosopher but by profession a pleader.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in *Letter 82* Synesius introduces the carrier, Gerontius, to Synesius’ brother Euoptius by praising the character and culture of the bearer: “he is wise, elegant, a friend of *paideia*, and devoted to God.”<sup>62</sup> Synesius bids that Chryses become friends with the same carrier Gerontius in *Letter 83*, because not only is Gerontius Synesius’ relation (which in itself is sufficient), but because Gerontius also befits the manners of golden Chryses.<sup>63</sup> In fact, Synesius continues to aver that it is the truth that since

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<sup>59</sup> Roques, 3:353n1, dates this letter to 405/406; cf. *Études*, 134-35, 212-13.

<sup>60</sup> οὗτος ἐκεῖνος ὁ πολὺς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἡμῶν Ἀναστάσιος. Καὶ σὲ δ’ ἂν αὐτῷ δείξας, τὸν αὐτὸν ἔπαινον εἶπον ἂν περὶ σοῦ. Ὡσπερ οὖν ἐν ἐμοὶ συνελθόντες πάλαι καὶ τὴν συντυχίαν ἀναγνωρισμὸν ποιησάμενοι, φιλοφρονήσασθέ τε ἀλλήλοισι καὶ κοινῇ σκοπεῖτε πῶς ἂν ἀγαθὸν τί με ποιήσητε.

<sup>61</sup> ὧ δέδωκα τὴν ἐπιστολήν, εἰ καὶ φιλοσόφος ἐστὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀλλὰ ῥήτωρ τὴν τέχνην.

<sup>62</sup> τὸν σῶφρονα, τὸν ἐμμελῆ, τὸν παιδείας ἐταῖρον, τὸν προσανέχοντα θεῷ.

Chryses is on the side of all that is virtuous, the carrier Gerontius is even more worthy to enjoy the society of Chryses.<sup>64</sup> Praise of the recipient and claims regarding his compatibility with the character of the carrier operate as discursive techniques manipulating the behavior of a set of social agents.

Carriers were implicated in different epistolary networks in different ways. In particular epistolary circles, such as that of Paulinus, letter carriers could become intimately involved in the daily life of the community of a letter writer, sometimes staying with a community for several months. Paulinus apologizes to Sulpicius Severus for delaying the letter carrier Victor with him for the length of a spring and summer.<sup>65</sup> Letter carriers might be expected to stay with letter recipients for a certain period awaiting letter replies. The behavior of carriers residing with correspondents could provoke comment in letters. Paulinus refers to a carrier Cardamas, a recurrent carrier-visitor in letters between Paulinus and Delphinus and Amandus, who is the butt of jokes owing to his imperfect commitment to monastic eating habits.<sup>66</sup>

Noteworthy is how the ethos of tension attaching to carrier choice differs among different types of epistolary networks. There does not seem to be the same sort of anxiety about the choice of carrier in the letters of Aeneas and Procopius, for example, as in certain epistles of Theodoret or Paulinus. The choice of carrier could prompt angry reproaches in letters, simply

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<sup>63</sup> οὐχ ὅτι μοι τῶν παιδίων συγγενής ἐστὶν ὁ θαυμαστός Γερόντιος συνίστημι τὸν νεανίσκον τῆ φιλίᾳ σῆ (καὶ τοῦτο μὲν γάρ), ἀλλ' ὅτι πρέπων ἐστὶ τοῦ χρυσοῦ Χρύσου τοῖς τρόποις.

<sup>64</sup> παντὸς μέντοι μᾶλλον ἐστὶν ἀληθές εἰπεῖν σε εἶναι ἀπάσης ἀρετῆς εἴσω καὶ τὸν διδόντα σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀξιώτατον ἀπολαύειν σου τῆς συνουσίας.

<sup>65</sup> *Letter 28*, quoted in Conybeare, 37.

<sup>66</sup> Conybeare, 37. Apparently Cardamas' dining table behavior elicits criticism from Paulinus, although Paulinus later states that Cardamas no longer avoids the "humble vegetables" and "minimal drinks" at Paulinus' table (*Letter 23.4*). Fare originally repugnant to Cardamas apparently became more palatable after successive visits.

because recipients might have to endure the carrier's cohabitation. Carriers could also offend one or both corresponding parties. The poor choice of a carrier who criticizes one of the correspondents during the process of transmitting letters back and forth could count as a betrayal. Paulinus instructs Sulpicius that when choosing a carrier, priority must be given to those closest spiritually to the letter author—including sons and servants.<sup>67</sup> Adam Schor suggests the role of carriers in providing surveillance for communications among clerical personnel in the epistolary networks of Theodoret.<sup>68</sup> Particularly in correspondence surrounding doctrinal disputes, it is reasonable to suspect that great anxiety could attach to the choice of carrier who ferried sensitive material, both in terms of a written text and verbal message.

Data concerning carriers in the letters of Aeneas, Synesius, and Procopius suggests that carriers were either bearing their own letters of recommendation—either as students or individual in need—or the carriers were relations or friends of communicating parties. To judge from the content of the letters, Aeneas' letters recommending students most likely were conveyed by the students recommended. *Letter 12* to Epiphanius mentions a “fair Euthymius” who carries the letter along with a portrait of Aeneas; there is also mention of Euthymius traveling by sea. The other Aenean letter addressed to Epiphanius, *Letter 22*, describes in the opening line a carrier who is concerned with “how to live or write toward beauty.”<sup>69</sup> It is likely that the carrier is a man of letters. Aeneas reveals that the carrier will stay with Epiphanius a certain amount of time and will relate to Epiphanius his wanderings. Aeneas bids that Epiphanius

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<sup>67</sup> *Letter 11.4.* Conybeare, 34.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Theodoret's reference to clerics as *proxenoi*, Schor argues, carries the Classical undertone of “agent for a foreign power.” Schor, 37; cf. J.K. Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 69. See Schor, 221n143.

<sup>69</sup> εἰς κάλλος ζῆν ἢ γράφειν μεμελέτηκεν. . .

act as King Alcinous (a figure to which Aeneas also refers in *Letter 25*) and send this Odysseus (the carrier) homeward. Specifically, Aeneas asks the recipient to imitate the kind and hospitable behavior of the Homeric king to the long-suffering seafarer when he lands at the island of the Phaeacians. The sophist here depicts carrier and recipient alike in classicizing language as authoritative Homeric figure and deploys such language to shape Epiphanius' behavior to the letter carrier.

The recommended student Pontus likely bears his own recommendation letter to Marianus in Aeneas *Letter 11*. A recommended student is also the likely letter carrier of *Letter 17* to Dionysius, sophist in Antioch. Aeneas writes that this student, presumably traveling from Gaza to Antioch, is not in great physical health and sails and travels a great distance in order to meet Dionysius with the letter. Aeneas personifies his letter, wishing that Dionysius meet it with kindness: “welcome it lovingly and say something sweet to it.”<sup>70</sup>

### Readings: Scripts and Sounds

These letters contain indications of the physical sensations of the immediate moment of reception of a letter in terms of script, the opening of a missive, and the address inscribed. Synesius and Procopius both comment on the handwriting of friends and associates, indicating that these epistolographers often handwrote their letters. In *Letter 96* to Silanus, Procopius delights when he sees his friend's handwriting and superscription, and plunges into reading with alacrity: “I recognized your writing as soon as I saw it, and welcoming what was inscribed upon

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<sup>70</sup> ἔρωτικῶς τε προσίεσθαι καί τι πρὸς αὐτὴν ἠδέως λαλεῖν.

it, hesitating not at all, straightaway I was inside what you had written.”<sup>71</sup> The wear and tear of travel conditions sometimes engraved themselves on letters received. In *Letter 133*, Synesius complains that his letter from his friend and former Alexandrian classmate Olympius is largely illegible, surmising, “I judge by physical signs that your letter was quite old, for it was most worm-eaten and the greater part of its words had been obliterated.”<sup>72</sup> Interlocutors thus could discern the length of a missive’s travel time from physical markers. Synesius manages to discern the letter author only because of Olympius’ seal and his “sacred name” inscribed on it.<sup>73</sup>

Sloppy handwriting could pose problems for correspondents. In *Letter 94* Procopius complains to his Caesarean lawyer friend Diodorus that Diodorus’ handwriting obfuscates the meaning of his communication: “I have received again from you a letter which is clear in words and exceedingly beautiful, but in unclear script obscuring the grace of your words.”<sup>74</sup> Procopius seems to suggest that Diodorus intentionally muddles his writing to soften the meaning of his words, writing “for you seem to me, fearing perhaps you might tend to forget your nature and force yourself toward clarity, to misrepresent by means of your handwriting the meaning of words, so that from your usual indistinctness you might again have a token of yourself.”<sup>75</sup> Perhaps Procopius teases his lawyer friend for writing his previous letter in an elusive, lawyerly fashion with his unclear script. Procopius says he suspects that Diodorus contrives such unclear

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<sup>71</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ τοὺς τύπους ἐπιγνοὺς ἅμα τῆ θεᾶ καὶ τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν ἀσπασάμενος, εὐθὺς μελλήσας οὐδὲν τῶν γεγραμμένων εἶσω γεγένημαι . . .

<sup>72</sup> τεκμαίρομαι δὲ αὐτὴν εἶναι παμπάλαιον, τῷ τε θριπιδέστατον γεγονέναι καὶ τῷ συγκεχύσθαι τὰ πλείονα τῶν γραμμάτων.

<sup>73</sup> κατασσημασμένην ἐκομισάμην ἐπιστολὴν τὸ σὸν τῆς ἱερᾶς κεφαλῆς ἐπιγεγραμμένην ὄνομα.

<sup>74</sup> δέδεγμαί σου πάλιν ἐπιστολὴν τοῖς μὲν λόγοις σαφῆ καὶ λίαν καλὴν, τοῖς δὲ γράμμασιν ἀσαφῆ καὶ τῶν λόγων τὴν χάριν καλύπτουσαν

<sup>75</sup> δοκεῖς γάρ μοι, δεδιῶς μὴ ποτε πρὸς λήθην ἔλθῃς τῆς φύσεως πρὸς τὸ σαφὲς αὐτὴν βιασάμενος, τῷ τύπῳ τῶν γραμμάτων παραμυθεῖσθαι τῶν ῥημάτων τὸ γνῶρισμα, ὅπως ἂν πάλιν ἐκ τῆς συνήθους ἀσαφείας ἔχῃς τὸ γνῶρισμα.

writing out of fear of losing Procopius' fair opinion of him.<sup>76</sup> Procopius exhorts Diodorus to be honest: "Be bold, accordingly, as I would never change my opinion, thinking different things about you, and not willingly would I rob you of marvelous reputation."<sup>77</sup> Procopius consoles Diodorus that his favorable estimation of his friend is in no jeopardy. In a comical farewell, Procopius humorously chides his friend to write more clearly next time, clothing his joke in classical culture through mock address of the oracle of Apollo: "Only do not compel me to go to Pytho and, showing my letters to him say, 'declare, oh Pythian one, what did the one writing wish to say?' Such things let me say in jest to you, in imitation of your charm."<sup>78</sup>

Other elements of the tangible experience of letters delivered include mention of letter seals, addresses inscribed, and the unrolling of letters received. In the guise of false modesty, Procopius in *Letter* 163 to the father of his student Cledonius mentions the address of the letter. He quips that Cledonius has praised him so much that he wonders if Cledonius has in fact put the correct address on the letter. He complains, "You raise aloft to such an extent me who am small in letters and equipped with the art only as far as the outline."<sup>79</sup> In *Letter* 51 to Ulpius, Procopius explains how he often would kiss letters from his friend before opening them, and in *Letter* 48 to

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<sup>76</sup>“Thus the deed seems to you a matter of excessive advantage, and it seems to me that you feared to fall from your designation [that by which one is addressed, a name].” οὕτως σοὶ πλεονέκτημα τὸ πρᾶγμα φαίνεται, καὶ δεδιέναι μοι δοκεῖς ἐκπεσεῖ τοῦ προσρήματος.

<sup>77</sup> θάρρει τοίνυν, ὡς οὐποτε μεταθείην τῆς δόξης, ἕτερα φρονῶν περὶ σοῦ, οὐδὲ ἐκὼν εἶναί σε τῆς θαυμαστῆς εὐκλείας στερήσαιμι.

<sup>78</sup> μόνον μὴ με ἀναγκάσης Πυθῶδε φοιτᾶν καὶ δεικνύντα τὰ γράμματα “φράσον” λέγειν “ὦ μαντικὲ Πύθιε, τί ποτε λέγειν ὁ γράφων ἐβούλετο;” ταῦτα δὲ μοι πεπαίχθω πρὸς σέ, τὴν ὑμετέραν χάριν ἐκμιμουμένῳ.

<sup>79</sup> ὅπου γὰρ ἐμὲ τὸν μικρὸν ἐν λόγοις καὶ τὴν τέχνην μέχρι τοῦ σχήματος περικείμενον τοσοῦτον ἦρας ἄνω.

Constantius, Procopius describes himself as “loosening” a letter, likely referring to the unrolling of the papyrus.<sup>80</sup>

As an element of epistolary sociability, epistolographers sometimes bantered jokingly about proper conventions concerning the matter of addressing a letter. In *Letter* 91 addressed to the sophist Hieronymus from Elusa, Procopius refutes Hieronymus’ (likely) jocular charge in his previous letter that Procopius has behaved arrogantly by heading the letter with the name of the sender first followed by the recipient’s name. Apparently this was an old-fashioned epistolary custom that Procopius used which deviated from contemporary practice and his friend seizes upon it, mocking the address style because it smacks of pretentious pedantry.<sup>81</sup> In response, Procopius rebuts teasingly, “how much did I enjoy your accusation of me, the imposter, the-all-too sophisticated, suffering from presumptuousness even though I am really a modest person!”<sup>82</sup> It is not clear from Procopius’ response why he employs this particular address style, but to judge from the two letters of Procopius whose headings survive (addressed to his sophist friend Megethios, *Letters* 169 and 172 in *RDG*) and which follow the same formula as the heading described in *Letter* 91, this seems to have been Procopius’ typical address style. This likely indicates habits of archaizing by design on the part of Procopius. The fact that Procopius probably routinely headed his letters this way, without previously provoking Hieronymus’ comment, may explain why Hieronymus apparently unleashed a litany of complaints in his letter,

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<sup>80</sup> *Letter* 51: “And as someone came and gave me your letter, first before loosening it I kissed the letter many times” (ὡς δέ τις ἔλθων τὴν παρ’ ὑμῶν ἐπιστολὴν ἐπεδίδου, πρῶτον μὲν πρὶν λῦσαι πολλακίς τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἠσπαζόμεν); *Letter* 48: “having loosened the letter” (ὡς δὲ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀναλύσας).

<sup>81</sup> *RDG*, 474 n426.

<sup>82</sup> ὅσης σου τῆς κατηγορίας ἀπελεύσαμεν οἱ ἀλαζόνες ἡμεῖς καὶ λίαν σοφισταὶ καὶ νοσοῦντες ὑπεροψίαν ἐν μετρίῳ τῷ σχήματι.



which he had been collecting for some time: “I cannot say how many arguments you have accumulated against me, as if from long ago desiring to rouse your tongue. So, without giving even a proper motivation, you pull out that which long you kept hidden.”<sup>83</sup> Why is it so terrible (*deinon*) Procopius asks, if I headed the letter “Procopius greets Hieronymus;”<sup>84</sup> “I am sure you would agree that this is the ancient and intended use.”<sup>85</sup> Procopius thus defends the rhetorical authority of his preamble. In epistolary dialogue, Procopius then appears to quote Hieronymus’ carping in the preceding letter: “But there is no need, you say, to break away from the use now prevailing.”<sup>86</sup>

Procopius has archaizingly reverted to an ancient epistolary formula of opening letters with the sender’s name first, followed by the recipient’s name in the dative, and the verb *chairein*. This is the common preamble in letters found on papyrus, conforming to the ancient practice endorsed by Libanius and Pseudo-Libanius.<sup>87</sup> A variant rubric lists first the recipient’s name in the dative with or without the verb *chairein*. This formula is found in official letters and Christian letters in Late Antiquity, and appears to be the contemporary practice to which Hieronymus refers in criticizing Procopius’ archaizing form of address. The formula Hieronymus appears to favor surfaces especially in letters in papyri from the fifth century

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<sup>83</sup> καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιμι λέγειν ὅσα καθ’ ἡμῶν συνεφόρησας, ὥσπερ καιρὸν πάλαι ζητῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐγεῖραι τὴν γλωτταν. ὅθεν οὐδὲ πρόφασιν δικαίαν λαβῶν εἰς μέσον ἄγεις ἅ πάλαι κρύπτων ἐλάνθανες.

<sup>84</sup> Προκόπιος Ἱερωνύμῳ χαίρειν

<sup>85</sup> ὡς μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαῖος ὁ νόμος, ἔχω δὴ πούθεν ὁμολογοῦντα ἂν καὶ σέ.

<sup>86</sup> “ἀλλ’ οὐδὲν δεῖ” φήσ, τὴν νῦν ἐπιπολάζουσαν ἐκβῆναι συνήθειαν”.

<sup>87</sup> *RDG*, 474n427.

onward, and it may reflect the presence of letter-writing customs of Christian epistolary communities within Procopius' network.<sup>88</sup>

Procopius continues to defend the validity of his form of epistolary address through the use of classical examples. Hieronymus' charge of Procopius' pretension because he quotes Hieronymus' name after his own is "typical of a person who does not know that he who is first in order does not in all cases have the first in honor, and of one who pretends not to know the saying of Demosthenes that his students were accustomed to practice, how action occurs after speaking and voting, but it comes first in capability and power."<sup>89</sup> Procopius crafts his rebuttal to showcase his knowledge of stories of the Old Attic orators, and the jesting barb of his quip resides in its charge of Hieronymus' ignorance of classical tradition. Procopius authorizes his own action through the wisdom of the sayings and pedagogy of Demosthenes. Adducing fictitious literary letters of the Second Sophistic, Procopius continues to defend his epistolary address through appeals to the epistolary practices of Socrates and Plato: "But if you charge such things undoubtedly of presumption, take the time to charge with the malady of pretense, along with me, even those who have used the ancient custom of these headers, including among whom omitting others, I count Socrates and Plato, those who have raised philosophy up to heaven . . ."<sup>90</sup> Hieronymus' charge transgresses grievously indeed if it encompasses the ethereal figures of Socrates and Plato! Moreover, Procopius' practice has its authorizing antecedents in some of the most esteemed figures of classical philosophy. Proclaiming "checkmate," Procopius

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Demosthenes, *Olynthiac* 3.15; see *RDG*, 475n435.

<sup>90</sup> εἰ δὲ πάντως ἀλαζονείαν τὰ τοιαῦτα κατηγορεῖς, καιρὸς [ἐστὶ] καὶ τοὺς πάλαι κεχρημένους τῷ νόμῳ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐπιγραφῆς ὑπεροψίας σὺν ἐμοὶ περιβάλλειν νοσήματι, ὧν τοὺς ἄλλους παρεῖς Σωκράτην λέγω καὶ Πλάτωνα τοὺς ἄνω τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐξάραντας.

moves resolutely to close his defense, bidding that Hieronymus desist, and, employing what seems to be a colloquialism, commands that Hieronymus not “move himself against the knife of the proverb.”<sup>91</sup>

In addition to the sights of the letter in terms of its physical detail, there were also the sounds of the letter. Ancient letter recipients read aloud their letters and commented on the subsequent experience of “hearing” the letter. In this way, the reception and reading of a letter was a type of performance in which letter interlocutors actively re-enacted letter content, simultaneously imagining the perspective of letter writer while vicariously placing oneself in the role of listener. Procopius indicates his recitation of letters in *Letter 126* to Johannes. He writes “I have received your dear letter full of cupids . . . leading me by its praises to philosophy itself rather than being carried away by the hearing.”<sup>92</sup>

### Gifts: Presents and Representation

If letters arrived safely, gifts—ranging from edible delights to keepsakes to booklets and treatises—might also accompany them for the recipient’s enjoyment and edification, almost as ancillary stimulation. Gifts were customary elements associated with letters from the time of the Second Sophistic.<sup>93</sup> Late-Antique epistolographers sent a variety of gifts, ranging from

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<sup>91</sup> Ciccolella comments that this is a saying that does not appear in any other literary source and could belong to popular language, *RDG*, 475n438.

<sup>92</sup> δέδεγμαί σου τὴν φίλην καὶ γέμουσαν ὄντως ἀφροδίτης ἐπιστολήν . . . εἰς αὐτὴν φιλοσοφίαν τοῖς ἐπαίνοις ἀνάγουσαν, μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν ἀκοὴν ὑποσυρομένην

<sup>93</sup> Mullett, 32. Cf., B.P. Reardon, *Courants littéraires grecs des IIe et IIIe siècles après J.-C.* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971), 180-84, 187.

foodstuffs to mementos. In the case of foods, those sent—dates, briny sparrows—seemed prepared for preservation, even if they did not in fact travel long distances. A letter of Libanius appears to mention the gift of produce (*Letter 59* to Demetrius), while the Cappadocian Fathers sent humble items such as herbs, dried fruit, and candles.<sup>94</sup> Epistolographers sometimes sent carefully-selected keepsakes. Libanius' friend Theodorus sent three portraits of Libanius' rhetorician model Aelius Aristides, according to *Letter 143*. Libanius gushes about how long he has wished to have such a portrait and that he is almost as grateful to receive it as if Theodorus had resurrected Aristides himself. He confesses that he even has conversations with the image of his rhetorician hero.<sup>95</sup>

These gifts carried significant social meanings, as discourses simultaneously encoding author identities and defining the recipient.<sup>96</sup> Gifts were vessels that articulated identities of individuals engaged in epistolary relationships. Food, for example, had clearly different symbolic valences within different epistolary communities. The gifts exchanged in the epistolary circle of Paulinus of Nola lacked the same sumptuary display as the food exchanged in Procopius' letters. Paulinus' case demonstrates a particular Christian iteration of the traditional aristocratic practice of epistolary gift-giving. The gifts themselves, as well as the rhetorical constructions of their meaning, changed dramatically once Paulinus became a Christian.

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<sup>94</sup> Van Dam, *Friends and Families*, 134-35.

<sup>95</sup>In what may be an extended joke about the portrait, Libanius quips that the portrait looks too healthy to have been Aristides, however, and instead he claims it must be Asclepius. In view of this, Libanius installs the portrait in the temple of Zeus Olympius in Antioch. This sanctuary was selected because it was near a painting of Apollo depicted in between Asclepius and Hygieia.

<sup>96</sup>For recent scholarship concerning the gift-giving in the Ancient World, see Michael L. Satlow (ed.), *The Gift in Antiquity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). See in particular D. F. Caner's essay on Late Antiquity: "Alms, Blessings, Offerings: The Repertoire of Christian Gifts in Early Byzantium," 25-44).

Paulinus had previously sent with letters delights from his own property such as *ficedulas*, or birds that fed on figs and grapes; once converted and forging a network of epistolary friends within a specific Christian community, he sends gifts that, by their nature or by virtue of their rhetorical representation, signified specific social and spiritual meanings to epistolary cohorts, such as gifts of bread.<sup>97</sup> Upon sending Sulpicius Campanian bread with a letter, Paulinus explains that it is a blessed offering from his monastery and that Sulpicius' piety will ensure its successful arrival. Additionally, Paulinus requests that Sulpicius convert the bread received from sinners (*a peccatoribus*) into a blessing (*in eulogiam*).<sup>98</sup> The offering of bread is thus rhetorically shaped to fortify and to harmonize with a specific vision of community that the letters constructed and perpetuated.

Similarly, the keepsakes sent in the letters of Paulinus had, by their nature and the discourses enshrouding them, distinctive meanings within a particular Christian epistolary community. Certain gifts exchanged among these friends, such as splinters from the cross, had obvious meanings that intensified the sense of spiritual unity among epistolographers. Writers also represented the gift in terms of its specific symbolic and spiritual associations for an epistolary circle. Interlocutors in Paulinus' network exchanged camel-hair *pallia*, upon which Paulinus extemporizes on the biblical associations of prickly hair as memory aids recalling Elijah, John the Baptist, and David.

In terms of inherent symbolic meaning, gifts exchanged with letters seem to have been opening bids for reciprocity, nonverbal requests for symmetrical behavior from correspondents. Discussions of gifts within the letters are thus instructive in terms of what they indicate about the

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<sup>97</sup> Conybeare, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Paulinus *Letter 5*. Conybeare, 27.

mannered precision of epistolary sociability. As Paulinus used rhetoric to indicate the symbolic meanings of gifts whose shared understandings actualized intimacy among letter interlocutors, so Procopius of Gaza carefully devised rhetorical gratitude in terms of Attic references, jokes, and other types of calculated epistolary currency. The quality and specific pedigree of gifts—such as briny swallows—played targeted roles in the social mechanics of letter exchange. Unlike some later Byzantine examples, the letters of Procopius and Aeneas do not demonstrate contempt for gifts of material value. This does not mean that these Gaza letter writers were raging hedonists in terms of their epistolary masks. As I will examine further in Chapter 3, the Stoic personae that Procopius and Aeneas develop in their letters contained strong anti-materialist sentiments. With regard to sensuous enjoyment of gifts, however, Procopius does not seem to object to the physical pleasure of delicious foods bestowed with letters. In the letters that survive, these Gazan epistolographers do not actively express ideals of anti-materialism and asceticism with regard to gifts.<sup>99</sup> Instead, the gift's status as a luxury item appears to carry weighty cultural capital for Procopius and his interlocutor Diodorus. The thoughtful selection of a gift and its value was a genuine expression of affection and a sign encoding information about correspondents.

Another tactic Procopius deploys in discourse about gifts given or received is to extemporize on various classical associations different gifts suggest. Such rhetorical framings of gifts surely underscore the breadth of Procopius' erudition while simultaneously affirming his identification with the educational culture that he and his friends shared. Classical speech and stories regarding presents operated sociologically as markers of cultural inclusion, strengthening

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<sup>99</sup> For study of anti-materialism in eleventh-century letters regarding gift-giving, see Floris Bernard, "Greet me with words': gifts and intellectual friendships in eleventh century Byzantium," in Michael Grünbart, ed., *Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft: Gabentausch und Netzwerkpflge im europäischen Mittelalter* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 1-11.

affective bonds among interlocutors. Jokes and gibes were likely signs of fondness; humor enshrouding competitive banter may also have quickly mitigated potential offense.

If such thoughtfully-selected gifts appear to be something less than bribes in these letters between friends, the psychological value of gifts sent with epistles should not be minimized. Such presents, as signs of affection, were also means of imposing obligation and indebtedness upon letter recipients. At minimum, they were means of establishing good will and expressing affection; as elements marshaled in calculated social performances, however, they were opportunities for competitive discursive displays of the sophistication and taste representing and defining the erudition and social standing of the gift-giver.

The letters of Procopius contain rich rhetorical banter with regard to epistolary gifts, and Procopius embraces the sensuous delight of eating gifts exchanged. In *Letter* 133 to his Caesarean friend Diodorus,<sup>100</sup> Procopius thanks his friend for the gift of dried figs, and compliments this gift by writing how these are “even better, I suppose, than those of Attica, on account of which the great war was set in motion,” and he then mentions how a king, presumably Xerxes, heaped up earth into the sea.<sup>101</sup> Procopius frames praise of his friend’s gift through the language of a tradition in Athenaeus and Plutarch relating how the offering of Attic figs to Xerxes precipitated war against the Greeks.<sup>102</sup> Procopius thus carefully conveys his gratitude

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<sup>100</sup> In *RDG*, 490n640, Eugenio Amato suggests that these gifts were actually metaphors for the literary compositions exchanged between Procopius and Diodorus. As I shall explore below, however, there does seem to have been a genuine exchange of gifts between the two men. In *Letter* 98, Procopius paints several images of himself parading about in a pair of sandals which Diodorus had sent him. The items sent—figs, briny sparrows, sandals—would be likely gifts which could easily travel from Gaza to Caesarea or vice versa.

<sup>101</sup> Attic figs, fresh or dried, in ancient times were considered the best in the world, so that their export was regulated by special laws. Cf. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 3.74e, *RDG*, 490n639.

<sup>102</sup> The stories seem to be slightly different: Athenaeus 14.652b details how a eunuch serving figs at the table of Xerxes reminds him how they came from a region that was not his, thereby exacerbating the outbreak of war

while defining the pedigree and quality of the gift (figs *even better* than those of Attica) through the mannered precision drawn from the cultural toolkit of classical allusions.

Procopius' letters carefully gauge the quality of the gifts he received, and in so doing, comment on the sophistication and culture of the giver. Alluding obliquely in *Letter 133* to the gift Procopius has just sent Diodorus, and asserting its superiority over Diodorus' gift, Procopius invokes a bucolic line from Theocritus,

except that neither the dog-rose  
nor the anemone is comparable to the rose.<sup>103</sup>

In the second half of the letter, Procopius takes his gloves off, engaging in lively yet competitive epistolary banter concerning gifts exchanged. He jokingly quips that his gift of briny sparrows is better than Diodorus' dried fruit: "I have sent briny sparrows, an exhortation of the gluttonous stomach. Aren't mine far better? Every single gourmand, I think, would judge so."<sup>104</sup>

According to discriminating judges of taste, Procopius' gift is of a finer register than the measly figs of Diodorus. This constitutes a competitive repartee over the gifts exchanged, mitigated by humor. Procopius then subtly reminds Diodorus that he had earlier promised to send slippers

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against the Greeks; Plutarch (*Moralia*, 173c) says that Xerxes refused to eat Attic figs until he had conquered the lands that cultivated them. See *RDG*, 490n639.

<sup>103</sup> "ἀλλ' οὐ συμβλητ' ἐστὶ κυνόςβατος οὐδ' ἀνεμώναι πρὸς ρόδα" (ἀνεμώναι in Theocritus). Theocritus 5. 92-93. A.S.F. Gow, trans. *Theocritus: introduction, text, and translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); *RDG*, 490n641.

<sup>104</sup> *Letter 133*, lines 7-9: πέπομφα δε καὶ στρουθοὺς ἐξ ἄλμης, ἀδηφάγου γαστρὸς παραμύθιον. ἄρ οὐ κρείττω πολλῶ τὰ ἡμέτερα; πᾶς ἂν τις οἶμαι, τένης φήσειε δικαστῆς. Dried figs, line 1: τὰς καλὰς ἰσχάδας. The processing and preserving of pickled foods has been documented since ancient times. For example, Herodotus 2.77 mentions the use of fish in brine among the Egyptians. During the Middle Ages and up until the later Early-Modern world, birds treated with water, vinegar and salt were considered a delicacy throughout the eastern Mediterranean (especially in Cyprus) and exported to Europe; see *RDG*, 490n644, and W. Geoffrey Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 225-28, "Strouthos" (1).



(*blautai*): “except perhaps you will say that the slippers are better” (than my briny sparrows).<sup>105</sup>

He closes the letter with a jocular threat that when Diodorus sends these “I would not wish to say how much I will joke with you.”<sup>106</sup>

Letters sometimes literally oozed with honey, ever sweetening the honeyed words they contained. In *Letter 97* to Macarius, Procopius mentions what seems to be some sort of sweet—perhaps a cake or honeycomb—sent by friend Macarius: “your token of good favor concerning me is sweet, and the gift imitates your disposition (*gnomē*), dripping with honey.”<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Macarius had sent some sort of cake or sweet gift such as a honeycomb.<sup>108</sup> The figurative pleasure of the sweetness of *logoi* is intensified by the literal sweetness of a gift accompanying it. This sugary offering also provides an opportunity for Procopius to express his affection for the personality of the giver. Local resources clearly shaped the gifts accompanying letters. In *Letter 106* to his brother, Synesius thanks his brother for the gift of *silphium*, a plant native to Cyrenaica which was an expensive and scarce cash-crop—now extinct and still a mystery to modern botanists—used in cooking and medicine.<sup>109</sup> In *Letter 134* to his Constantinopolitan friend Pylaemenes, Synesius describes gifts—including slain ostriches, silphium juice, wine,

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<sup>105</sup> πλὴν ἴσως τὰς μελλούσας βλαύτας ἐρεῖς.

<sup>106</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐ βούλομαι λέγειν οἷα δὴ καὶ σκώπτειν πειράσομαι.

<sup>107</sup> τῆς περὶ ἡμᾶς εὐνοίας γλυκύ σου καθέστηκε καὶ τὸ σύμβολον, καὶ μιμῆται τὴν γνώμην τὸ δῶρον τῷ μέλιτι συμπλεκόμενον.

<sup>108</sup> Especially during the Second Sophistic, gifts of honeycombs were associated with letters because epistolography was a pastoral genre at that time. See Mullett, 32, and Reardon, 180-84, 187.

<sup>109</sup> Horden and Purcell, 65.

olive oil, and saffron (also local to Cyrene)—which he does not convey with the present letter, and attempts to make arrangements to transport such edible local delights.<sup>110</sup>

Like foodstuffs, epistolographers also framed items of clothing and keepsakes exchanged with letters in classical terms and with lively praise. Noteworthy is Procopius' approval of material gifts; he does not show contempt for gifts of material value. In *Letter* 98, Procopius of Gaza thanks his Caesarean friend Diodorus for the gift of beautiful sandals. Procopius playfully compliments the gift, painting in words for Diodorus a vibrant image of himself traipsing in his new footwear: "I walked forward in the manner of Homer's Ajax, taking great strides and making noises on the earth."<sup>111</sup> Procopius continues to express his pleasure and pride in his friend's gift by writing that if a witness looked at him stomping loudly, he would force that witness to look at his feet and then declare to the onlooker that Diodorus had sent him the sandals. He closes the letter remarking with jest his zeal for his footwear, "thus did I take enjoyment from the beautiful sandals, having all but stepped on your [Diodorus'] head, so that your gift might be in the beauty of seeing."<sup>112</sup> Procopius represents his appreciation in vivid physical images—he desires so fiercely that Diodorus understand his pleasure in wearing these shoes that he will do everything short of beating Diodorus over the head while wearing them. Through the archaizing language of epistolary speech, Procopius marches around like a warrior from the *Iliad*, expressing his gratitude to Diodorus through ekphrastic language whose brushstrokes are designed to paint images in Diodorus' mind.

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<sup>110</sup> This letter, dated to 406, contains mention of the siege of Cyrene in 405. Invasion has interrupted communications in Cyrenaica, and Synesius attempts to arrange conveyance of his gifts in strained circumstances.

<sup>111</sup> *Il.* 3.22; προήειν κατὰ τὸν Ὀμηρικὸν Αἴαντα μακρὰ βιβῆς καὶ κατεκρότουσιν τὴν γῆν.

<sup>112</sup> τοιαῦτά σοι τῶν καλῶν ὑποδημάτων ἀπέλαυσα, μικροῦ δεῖν ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν βαδίσας, ὅπως ἐν καλῷ τῆς θεᾶς ἔσται τὸ δῶρον.

A pair of slippers, alluded to in *Letter* 133, provided an opportunity for Procopius to craft a dense letter stuffed with jests and Atticisms. In *Letter* 140 to Diodorus, Procopius fulfills his earlier promise (*Letter* 133, above) to tease his friend mercilessly on receipt of a pair of slippers: “you sent ill-fitting shoes, as you like to call them, unmuse-like slippers and shoes of Iphikratid type, upon which the general Iphikrates would truly have groaned much, for they bear no trace of the Attic.”<sup>113</sup> In the guise of an extended gibe, Procopius here refers to Diodorus Siculus’ account of how the Athenian general Iphikrates authored a series of reforms designed to increase the speed of the hoplite infantry in battle. One element of these innovations was the design of shoes which bore the general’s name: *hai iphikrates* (Diod. Sic. 15.44.4). These shoes were lightweight, easy to untie, and probably relatively inexpensive.<sup>114</sup> Deliberately drawing upon Iphikrates and the history of Athens according to Diodorus Siculus, intermixing also a tiny phrase in the aorist optative— ἦ κε μέγ’οιμώξειεν— from the *Iliad* and/or Herodotus, Procopius jests at his friend’s gift while flaunting the precision of his memory and the breadth of his erudition. Perhaps he suggests as well that the shoes are so cheap and poorly-fashioned that they would even have elicited a complaint from Iphikrates, Athenian designer of fleet and cheap footwear for warfare. At a minimum, the gift, not being Attic, being “unmuse-like” (*amousoi*) is to be scorned by an Athenian. Procopius clearly asserts his identification with the superiority of

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<sup>113</sup> The phrase ἦ κε μέγ’οιμώξειεν “he would have truly groaned much,” is a citation of either or both *Iliad* 7.124 and Herodotus 7.159, *RDG*, 492n673. ἀδωνάρια πέμψας ἄρρυθμα, καθά σοι φίλον καλεῖν, καὶ βλαύτας ἀμούσους καὶ ἰφικρατίδες, ἐφ’αἷς ἦ κε μέγ’οιμώξειεν ὁ στρατηγὸς Ἰφικράτης οὐδὲν Ἀττικῆς φερούσαις τεκμήριον. Ἀδωνάρια is a Procopian *hapax*. The LSJ suggests that these are a “kind of shoes (probably with play on ἄ-priv., Lat. *donarium*, worthless gifts” (25). Ciccolella, along with Garzya and Loenertz (*Procopii epistulae*, XXXIIIn1), proposes that the adjective ἄρρυθμος implies that the letter was written in meter. Poetry competitions, such as those performed on the “Day of the Roses” were common at Gaza. See *RDG*, 492n672. The LSJ glosses ἄρρυθμος in terms of sounds to mean unrhythmical, but metaphorically to mean “in undue measure,” “ill-proportioned” (247). In view of the fact that Procopius seems to refer literally to shoes in this instance, and not to compositions, it seems likely instead that the adjective indicates that the shoes were ill-fitting or that they were ill-proportioned in the sense that one shoe was a different size than the other one.

<sup>114</sup> *RDG*, 492-93n674.

Attic traditions while either teasing his friend with charges of it being “un-muselike,” “un-Attic,” or perhaps classifying the gift as deficient in value. Procopius uses an aggressive type of humor to deride Diodorus’ gift. This sort of humor likely signifies a secure friendship between these epistolary interlocutors.

Procopius continues his erudite jabs: “For they (the footwear) do not have any grace nor taste of the honey of Mount Hymettus, nor at first sight do they cry out ‘Attica!’ where there are Marathon and Salamis and men loving freedom and high spirit, [men] not, by Zeus, initiated by your Muse.”<sup>115</sup> The shoes of poor Diodorus do not suggest Attica in any way, claims Procopius resolutely. And the Attic is the culture which these men jointly emulate above all others. In the end, however, this inside joke between two epistolary friends transcends the gift itself.

Procopius seizes upon the gift as a platform to spew Atticisms at his friend, a moment to socialize with his lettered interlocutor through the medium of delicately-combined allusions, puzzle pieces offered in return for the recipient to dissect and reconfigure with pleasure.

Procopius deploys this insider language as a means of including his friend in shared *paideia*; as a moment to crystallize what they share in common and build rapport. Language of gratitude, jocular or otherwise, becomes a device for defining the culture of Procopius and his friends and a means of distinguishing themselves. This language is an epistolary device buttressing a virtual community.

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<sup>115</sup>οὐδὲ γὰρ χάριν τινὰ καὶ πείραν μελίττης Ὑμηττίου παρέχονται, οὐδὲ βοῶσι τῇ θεᾷ τὴν Ἀττικὴν, ἐν ἧ̃ Μαραθῶν καὶ Σαλαμῖς καὶ ἄνδρες ἐλευθερίας καὶ φρονήματος ἐρασταὶ οὐ μὰ Δία τῇ παρ’ ὁμῶν Μούσῃ τετελεσμένοι. *Eleutheria* perhaps means here “liberality,” that is, virtues that Diodorus has demonstrated himself to have based on his cheap gift. See *RDG*, 493n675 and Garzya and Loenertz, XXXIII n3.

Instead of the consuming passions of food and fine clothing, Aeneas' surviving letters describe gifts of keepsakes. In *Letter* 18 to the sophist Theodorus, Aeneas thanks his friend, likely a former student,<sup>116</sup> for the gift of a garment which makes “more beautiful” the reputation of the giver. Presumably, Aeneas means that when he wears the garment it augments the fame of Theodorus, thereby indirectly casting light on the reputation of the teacher Aeneas. In *Letter* 12, Aeneas sends a self-portrait for an epistolary friend Epiphanius the sophist. Apparently, Epiphanius has been asking Aeneas for this likeness, and Aeneas uses erotic language, noting how “to the other lovers even the footprint of the lover is sufficient to create desire, and you are seeking images of both soul and body.”<sup>117</sup> He writes how *logoi*, here presumably his earlier letters to Epiphanius,<sup>118</sup> trace in outline his own soul.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps suggesting the language of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Aeneas explains, “I decided no longer [to portray] the image of the image.”<sup>120</sup> He summoned an artist, sat opposite him, permitted “the art to join together with nature (that is, the outward form of Aeneas).”<sup>121</sup> Once Epiphanius receives his friend's image “set forth in colors,”<sup>122</sup> it will grant a sort of vicarious shared presence: “you can talk with me

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<sup>116</sup> Positano, 106.

<sup>117</sup> τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ἐρασταῖς καὶ ὑπόδημα τοῦ ἐρωμένου φανὲν ἰκανὸν παραμυθεῖσθαι τὸν ἔρωτα, σὺ δὲ καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος εἰκονας ἐπιζητεῖς.

<sup>118</sup> Positano, 93n4, thinks that this is an allusion to the letters that Aeneas has sent to Epiphanius.

<sup>119</sup> ὑπογράφουσι τὴν ψυχὴν.

<sup>120</sup> ἐμοὶ δὲ ἦν δεδογμένον μηκέτι τοῦ εἰδώλου τὸ εἶδωλον. Positano, 44, glosses Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 1.2 εἰδώλου εἶδωλον.

<sup>121</sup> τὴν τέχνην τῇ φύσει συνάπτεσθαι.

<sup>122</sup> τοῖς χρώμασιν ἐγκατατίθεται.

and see me and have no less than being with me.”<sup>123</sup> As in the case of Libanius’ conversations with Aristides’ portrait, Epiphanius can now conduct pretend dialogues with Aeneas’ image.

### *Loci of the Republic of Letters: Intellectual Exchange*

Intellectual materials also accompanied missives, underscoring the role of letters in exuberant intellectual discourse. These could include copies of texts as well as original compositions of the correspondents themselves. This is true across such distinctive epistolary corpora as those of Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, Sidonius Apollinaris, and Libanius. Though the writings exchanged might transmit different symbolic meanings within particular epistolary networks, the exchange of texts among Late Ancient epistolographers constitutes a significant locus of intellectual sociability. Exchanges between two interlocutors facilitated lateral exchanges of ideas, communications, and intellectual materials; correspondents frequently not only shared letters, but also compositions, with their local friends and associates and/or with epistolary contacts. These exchanges could themselves take place through letters or face to face, via gatherings of friends together in public places, perhaps in homes, perhaps in the public spaces where rhetoricians delivered declamations, poetry, and other oratory before audiences. Through letters, epistolographers also served as gate-keepers or brokers, introducing unacquainted friends to one another through letters or disseminating writings between or among unacquainted epistolary friends.<sup>124</sup> Procopius, sending letters from Gaza, operated as a gatekeeper in his letters by introducing his lawyer friends Sosianus to Diodorus in *Letter 21*, and

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<sup>123</sup> καὶ νῦν ἐστὶ παρὰ σοί, ὡς ἐξεῖναι καὶ διαλέγεσθαι καὶ ὄρᾶν καὶ τῶν ἐμοὶ παρόντων μηδὲν ἔλαττον ἔχειν.

<sup>124</sup> E.g., Libanius’ *Letter 186* introducing himself to Moderatus stems from a communication (not clear whether epistolary or otherwise) from Moderatus to Eudaemon requesting that Libanius send Moderatus a letter to introduce himself. Letters interlinked friends of friends, enlarging social (and epistolary) webs. For the concept of “gate-keepers” in the Early Modern Republic of Letters, see Shelford, 32-33.

introducing Johannes to Diodorus in *Letter 22*. All three men lived in Caesarea and practiced the same profession, and the two pairs were apparently unacquainted prior to Procopius' missives. In this way, the city sophist could clearly interlink *literati* of various professions, in this case the legal profession, via epistolary means.

Epistolary contacts offered advice to correspondents concerning writings received. In *Letter 28* to his brother Victor, Procopius subtly criticizes a booklet Victor wrote and sent him. Procopius writes how he longed for the *biblion* more before he experienced it. It had something wondrous (*thaumaston . . . helikon*) in its title (literally, inscribed upon it--*hupographō*), but it was not in fact anything particularly unfamiliar; other artful people had already come up with similar things.<sup>125</sup> However, he still thanks his brother. Employing the story of the traitorous Spartan general Pausanias in Thucydides 1.129,<sup>126</sup> Procopius contrasts his gratitude for his brother's efforts with Xerxes' gratitude for the treason of Pausanias: "nevertheless, thankfulness is laid up to you inscribed in my memory, but not that (gratitude) of the Persian (i.e., Xerxes) for Pausanias who was not able to control himself completely."<sup>127</sup> In this way, Procopius praises Victor's literary production as actualized via good intentions, as opposed to the motivations undergirding Pausanias' treachery. Thus, Procopius draws on the examples of two authoritative figures from classical tradition and applies them as meaningful vehicles to thank his brother and offer him frank but kind criticism.

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<sup>125</sup> τῷ δὲ πράγματι ξένον φέρον οὐδέν, ἀλλ'ὃ καὶ πολλοῖς καὶ ποικίλοις ἐσπούδασται.

<sup>126</sup> Pausanias led the Greeks to victory against the Persians in the Battle of Plataea (479 B.C.), but was suspected of pro-Persian sympathies, and when evidence surfaced of his treason, to avoid capture he sought refuge in the Temple of Athena of the Brazen House, where he was starved to death. Cf. *RDG*, 454n156.

<sup>127</sup> ἀλλ'ὅμως κείσεται σοι χάρις εἰς ἐμὴν μνήμην ἀνάγραπτος, πλὴν οὐχ οἷα παρὰ τῷ Πέρσῃ τῷ Πασσανίᾳ τῷ μὴ μέχρι παντὸς σωφρονοῦντι. Procopius may hint at the original language in Thucydides, who uses similar language in the letter of King Xerxes sent to Pausanias: κείσεταιί σοι εὐεργησία ἐν τῷ ἡμετέρῳ οἴκῳ ἐς αἰεὶ ἀνάγραπτος. See *RDG*, 454n156.

In *Letter 87* Procopius sends speeches to Agapetus, a rhetor in Elusa in the Negev. Procopius remarks that long ago Agapetus was in Alexandria, which may indicate that they were fellow-students together at the School of Alexandria. Upon leaving that city, he ceased to correspond with Procopius. Personifying writings he has sent to Agapetus, a trenchant critic, Procopius comments “my children, as you used to call my discourses, blush to go to you, you who know how to point out infelicities that even escape my notice.”<sup>128</sup> Procopius nags and threatens his friend Stephanus in *Letter 89* to return a book that he has lent before he loses something of his earlier goodwill. However, Procopius avers that even if he does not receive the book back, they will still remain friends, and he then proceeds to congratulate Stephanus on setting up a school in Daphne and wishes that he may have there a multitude of students, but still closes the letter firmly with a wish that his book be returned. In *Letter 119* to Pancratius, Procopius pleads with his friend to send his poetry. In *Letter 63* Procopius thanks Athenodorus for having sent him a booklet (again termed a *biblion*).

Procopius also helped his epistolary contacts hunt down specific texts. In *Letter 3* to Pythius, Procopius is trying to find a book his friend previously requested. Procopius updates Pythius on the situation, indicating that he has ordered men to bring the book back from Alexandria, and they have reported from there back to Procopius.

Aeneas’ surviving letters also provide evidence of the sharing of books within epistolary circles. In *Letter 1* to Johannes, Aeneas bemoans his missing book that is in Johannes’ possession and provides a rare gnomic statement about friendship: “if the book happens to be

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<sup>128</sup> οἱ δὲ ἐμοὶ παῖδες – οὕτως γὰρ ἐκάλεις τοὺς λόγους – πρὸς σὲ φοιτᾶν ἐρυθριῶσι, διελέγχειν εἰδότα καὶ λανθάνουσαν ἀμορφίαν. The use of various words for children as metaphors for literary productions is a common feature of Byzantine epistolography. Cf. *RDG*, 445n62. For examples cited, see Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 1 (München: Beck, 1978), 226n101.



with you, and I loved it, it would be right for it to be long since with me, for such a thing is friendship.”<sup>129</sup> Aeneas continues his complaint strategically, using it to highlight his

identification with the ether of intellectual pursuits:

For this in my eyes is more revered than all of the possessions of Croesus. For one man loves the hoe, and another loves dogs, and another loves the bow, and to another the horse is his darling, but to me books and discourses. But that which makes the possessor rejoice more than all other things, this pains the one deprived more than the others. And if you give it back, I will be persuaded that the book has been engraved in your mind [that is, that you have memorized it].<sup>130</sup>

To induce his friend to return the book, Aeneas provides an ascending scale of things various individuals esteem most according to their social location. At the apex of such a hierarchy he represents his own vocation, the devotion to thought and speech epitomized by written texts. At the base of this scale is a farm laborer’s love of his implement. Aeneas simultaneously adds force to his request while defining himself: the *biblion* is especially precious and needed because it is the possession of an owner who truly understands its worth.<sup>131</sup>

Synesius’ epistolary correspondence contains abundant evidence of a lively interchange of writings among friends, including classical texts<sup>132</sup> as well as his own poetry and treatises. In *Letter* 143 Synesius sends to Herculian, an intimate friend Synesius met during his school days at Alexandria, four sets of iambics appended to eight lines written by Synesius to form a single

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<sup>129</sup> εἰ σὸν ἐτύγχανε τὸ βιβλίον, ἥρων δέ, παρ’ ἐμοὶ πάλαι δικαίως ἂν ἦν · τοιοῦτον ἡ φιλία. Positano, 69, points out that this mention of law of friendship whereby the possessions of friends are common—a proverbial phrase—is repeated by various letter writers of the period, including Aeneas himself in *Letter* 6 line 4.

<sup>130</sup> μὴ γάρ μοι τοῦτο ὅτι βιβλίον ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐσία τοῦτο, καὶ μοι τῶν Κροίσου ταλάντων σεμνότερον εἶναι τὸ κτῆμα δοκεῖ. ἄλλος μὲν γὰρ σμινύης ἐρᾷ, [γεωργὸς οὗτος], ἑτέρῳ πρὸς κύνας ὁ ἔρωσ, [κυνηγέτης οὗτος], ἄλλῳ τόξον ἐν ἡδονῇ, τῷ δὲ ἵππος τὰ παιδικά, ἐμοὶ δὲ βιβλία καὶ λόγοι. ἀλλ’ ὁ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων τὸν ἀφημένον λυπεῖ. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀποδώσεις, πείθομαί σοι τῇ διανοίᾳ τὸ βιβλίον ἐγγεγράφθα.

<sup>131</sup> Positano, 70, thinks that Johannes may be of a better socio-economic position than Aeneas.

<sup>132</sup> In *Letter* 65 to his younger brother Euoptius, Synesius writes that he is sending the *Dionysii* to him, so that Euoptius can keep one and return the other. It is not clear exactly what these texts are; they could be Dionysius of Halicarnassus or some other Dionysius. See *Letter* 65 in Roques, 3:309n3.

epigram. Synesius' lines are written from knowledge of poetry intermixed with astronomy.<sup>133</sup> The last four, according to Synesius, are merely “poetic luxuriating”<sup>134</sup> and an ancient fragment.<sup>135</sup> In *Letter* 141, however, Synesius has apparently lost his own copy of the verses and begs Herculian to send back the copy Synesius sent with *Letter* 143, with which the author converses with his soul.<sup>136</sup> Synesius thought in error that he could recreate the lines from memory, and he now laments that in trying to recall his creation, he is inventing something new altogether. Again referring to his literary work as offspring, Synesius reasons “it is not necessary to produce twice the same offspring, when it is possible to have the thing that has already been born.”<sup>137</sup> Synesius tells his friend that he should return the copy “to the same soul which the scroll wishes to adorn.”<sup>138</sup> In this way, Synesius attempts to elicit his writing from Herculian through repeated eloquent claims about the spiritual value of his writing, for with it he engages in dialogue with his very soul, which it has the power to beautify.

Like Procopius' epistolary interlocutors, Synesius' circle had its share of critics. In *Letter* 74 to Pylaemenes, a close friend of Synesius in Constantinople, Synesius mentions an unspecified treatise, “wrought in Attic style and of meticulous workmanship.”<sup>139</sup> If Pylaemenes, “the most discerning judge of its audience”<sup>140</sup> praises it, this in itself recommends it to posterity.

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<sup>133</sup> μετ' ἐπιστήμης γραφέντες ποιητικῆς, μιγείσης ἔξεως ἀστρονομικῆς

<sup>134</sup> ποιητικῆς τρυφώσης

<sup>135</sup> Roques, 3:410n21, comments that these twelve verses are inserted in the Letter to Paionius.

<sup>136</sup> οὐ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ γεγραφὼς διαλέγεται.

<sup>137</sup> οὐ μὴν δεῖ τίκτειν δις τὸν αὐτὸν τόκον, ἐξὸν ἔχειν τὸ τετεγμένον.

<sup>138</sup> πρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς ἦν κοσμεῖν βούλεται τὸ βιβλίον.

<sup>139</sup> τὸν λόγον ἀττικουργῆ, τῆς ἀκριβοῦς ἐργασίας.

<sup>140</sup> Πυλαιμένης ἡ κριτικωτάτη τῶν ἀκοῶν.

But if it seems in no way serious, it is possible he supposes to sport with it like a plaything.<sup>141</sup> In another letter to his Constantinopolitan friend, Synesius employs false modesty to tease friends who requested his writings. In *Letter* 101, Synesius says that his interlocutor must be joking and full of sarcasm to request Synesius' treatise the *Cynegetica* (a lost treatise on hunting). He even claims to be the poorest speaker among the Cyreneans. By the letter's close, however, Synesius softens his expression in order to acquit Pylaemenes of his jocular charge of sarcasm, praising Pylaemenes for his many fine qualities, including kindness and his ability to bestow lavish praise. Indeed, Pylaemenes makes his request precisely to give Synesius the joy that he had garnered the respect of such a judge.

In *Letter* 1 to Nicander, Synesius reveals the source of his literary production: "I have given birth to children in my speeches, some of them from most august Philosophy and from the art of poetry who dwells with her, some from rhetoric of the public place."<sup>142</sup> Synesius, like Procopius above, follows here the Late Antique and Byzantine habit of referring to his writings as offspring.<sup>143</sup> Synesius perhaps knowingly employs this sort of language as a Platonic inflection, for as Diotima the Pythia at Delphi revealed to Socrates, human beings are all pregnant in body and in soul. Similarly, Plato depicts words as the speaker's legitimate offspring at *Phaedrus* 278a.

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<sup>141</sup> This treatise has been identified variously. Some have thought it was *On Dreams*, *Dion*, and more often, *In Praise of Baldness*. Various arguments support the view that it is the *Cynegetica*, a lost work on hunting. See Roques, 3:328n3.

<sup>142</sup> παῖδας ἐγὼ λόγους ἐγεννησάμην, τοὺς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς σεμνοτάτης φιλοσοφίας καὶ τῆς συννάου ταύτη ποιητικῆς, τοὺς δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς πανδήμου ῥητορικῆς.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 278 a, 275 b; *Symposium* 210a, 177d. This tradition continues in Greek texts such as Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 9.7.3), Libanius (*Disc.* 16.16), Themistius (*Disc.* 2. 33 b ; 26. 325 a-d ; 28. 341 b ; 32. 355 d-357 a, 363 d-364 a). See Roques, 2:81n3, for further references.

The exchange of intellectual materials among friends facilitates the dissemination of writings among friends of friends, thus interlinking broader circles of *literati*. Synesius encourages Nicander to circulate the treatise among the Hellenes around him. However, Synesius qualifies his recommendation by specifying that Nicander should only share his work with others if he judges it worthy of distribution; otherwise he recommends that Nicander return it to its sender and progenitor. Synesius seeks a second opinion because as father of his writings his assessment is warped: “For, according to the saying, whenever apes bear young, they look steadfastly at their newborns as if they were images of worship, astonished at the beauty of them (for thus is the nature of loving one’s offspring), but the offspring of one another they see just as they are, the offspring of apes.”<sup>144</sup> In view of this, Synesius argues, “one must therefore permit others to scrutinize one’s offspring.”<sup>145</sup> He concludes his request for candid advice with a reference to the examples of the Hellenistic sculptor and painter Lysippus and Apelles: “because of this [that is, that one cannot examine critically his own productions] Lysippus brought in Apelles to see his work, and Apelles brought in Lysippus.”<sup>146</sup>

However, the advice of all his friends was second only to Synesius’ *theia gunē*, his mentor Hypatia. In *Letter 154* Synesius discusses treatises he is currently preparing, presumably conveyed with the letter, and bids Hypatia to approve them for publication. Hypatia’s

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<sup>144</sup> τὰς πιθήκους γὰρ φασιν, ἐπειδὴν τέκωσιν, ὡσπερ ἀγάλμασιν ἐνατενίζειν τοῖς βρέφεσιν, ἀγαμένας τοῦ κάλλους (οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ φύσις φιλότεκνον), τὰ δὲ ἀλλήλων ὄρωσιν ἄπερ ἔστι, πιθήκων παιδία. Ed. Roques, 2:83-84n9, remarks how the ape was an object of jokes and amusement for the Greeks, sometimes represented as a prudent creature, sometimes silly, but always as a comic imitation of a human being, to which he gives a grotesque image. Pliny the Elder comments on the characteristic affection of apes for their offspring. Subsequent to Synesius, Byzantine writers such as Psellus, Nicephorus Basilides, and early modern humanists such as Thomas More, Erasmus, and Rabelais repeat this tradition.

<sup>145</sup> ἑτέροις οὖν ἐπιτρεπτέον ἐξετάζειν τὰ ἔκγονα .

<sup>146</sup> διὰ τοῦτο Λύσιππος Ἀπελλῆν εἰς τὰς γραφὰς εἰσήγε, καὶ Λύσιππον Ἀπελλῆς. Allegedly, Lysippus and Apelles, as well as the engraver Pyrgoteles, were the only artists awarded the right to depict the features of Alexander the Great during his lifetime . Cf., Roques, 2:84n10.

approbation is decisive with regard to the first of these writings: “if you decree that I should publish it, it will be exposed to rhetoricians and philosophers.”<sup>147</sup> However, if she does not deem it “worthy of Greek ears,”<sup>148</sup> if, like Aristotle, she places truth before friendship,<sup>149</sup> a dense and deep darkness will envelope the writing, and it will never again be mentioned to humankind.<sup>150</sup>

Synesius reveals to his mentor the circumstances inspiring the creation of the second work he sends, describing it as contrived under a mystical experience: “The other work God enjoined and commanded [this work] which is laid up as a thank-offering to the imaginative nature (of the mind).<sup>151</sup> This writing, which examines “the whole imaginative soul”<sup>152</sup> as well as some other unspecified matters philosophizing Hellenes have hitherto neglected, was completed in the space of the end of a single night under the direction of a vision (*opsis*). While composing two or three passages, Synesius divulges, it was as though he was out of own body: “as though I was someone else, I became one of the hearers present listening to myself.”<sup>153</sup> Even now, Synesius claims that each time he reads the work, a certain wondrous disposition (*thaumastē diathesis*) comes upon him and a divine voice pours around him as in poetry.<sup>154</sup> Synesius

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<sup>147</sup> κἂν μὲν ψηφίση προσοιστέον εἶναι, ῥήτορισιν ἅμα καὶ φιλοσόφοις ἐκκείσεται.

<sup>148</sup> τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀκοῆς ἄξιον.

<sup>149</sup> πρὸ τοῦ φίλιου τὴν ἀλήθειαν θήση.

<sup>150</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6, 1096 a 17; Plato *Phaedo* 91 c; Roques, 3:305n50.

<sup>151</sup> θάτερον δὲ θεὸς καὶ ἐπέταξε καὶ ἀνέκρινεν ὃ τῆ φανταστικῆ φύσει χαριστήριον ἀνατέθειται.

<sup>152</sup> τῆς εἰδωλικῆς ἀπάσης ψυχῆς.

<sup>153</sup> ὡσπερ ἕτερος ὢν, ἐμαυτοῦ γέγονα μετὰ τῶν παρόντων ἀκροατής.

<sup>154</sup> καὶ τις ὀμφή με θεία περιχεῖται κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν. Ed. Roques, 3:431n54, notes that the term *omphē* is of Homeric origin (*Il.* 2.41; *Od.* 3.215) always signifying a divine voice, only later does it mean simply “a voice.” Synesius uses it in his Hymns in the original sense (*Hy.* 1.112 and 642; 9.48) and once in the later sense of “renown” (*Hy.* 4.31).

speculates that whether his experience of the work is singular or not will be resolved by Hypatia's judgment; in fact, Hypatia is the only Hellene with whom he has shared his work (that is, no one other than Synesius has previously read the work).

In the letters of Synesius, interlocutors also exchanged technological devices and related treatises. I will examine this topic at length in Chapter 5, but it is appropriate here to draw attention to them as part of the intellectual commerce of letters. In *Letter 15*, Synesius requests Hypatia to oversee the fabrication of a hydroscope, or an instrument designed to measure water volume. He describes the chief components and design of the device, and explains to her how it is used. In the final section of *Letter 154* to Hypatia, Synesius mentions also how he sends a third treatise which he wrote on an astrolabe addressed to his friend Paeonius during his ambassadorship to Constantinople (August 399-October/November 402).<sup>155</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have surveyed some elements of the technical elements undergirding transport of private letters in Late Antiquity as well as salient features of the physical experiences accompanying these letters. Letter commerce was mired in the limitations of ship transit and communications characteristic of the Later Empire. Letter travel was precarious and seasonal. Letters traveled during the long summer (April-October) that coincided with the travel patterns facilitating the transit of grain and the military. Epistolographers relied on a bevy of assistants to ensure the proper delivery of their beloved missives. Such assistants included skippers and sailors who took letters onboard alongside cargo as well as travelling carriers who

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<sup>155</sup> Roques, 3:432n57.

included students, relatives of the letter writer and/or recipient, and individuals seeking favors or aid. Carriers known to either party often supplemented epistles with explanatory messages, and they could function as “gatekeepers” introducing various friends and relations of one associate to another associate and members of social circles. The letters contain abundant linguistic strategies to persuade the recipient to be favorably disposed to the carrier, including praise and the use of figurative examples drawn from classical *paideia*.

Extant letters illuminate some of the physical experiences accompanying the receipt of a letter. Travel conditions sometimes inscribed themselves on letter texts and could provide a means of gauging the length of letter transit. Letters had distinctive seals and addresses, and were written on rolled papyrus which epistolographers describe as being unrolled. Procopius indicates that some of his interlocutors (*Letter 96* to Silanus; possibly *Letter 94* to Diodorus) handwrote their own letters. Letter authors sometimes argued about the styles of epistolary superscription atop letters and contrived extended erudite banter as entertainment (Procopius *Letter 91* to Hieronymus). Letter recipients likely recited letters received to re-enact the letter content, perhaps in an imaginative attempt to make present the absent author.

The honeyed speech of the letter was sometimes sweetened by means of accompanying gifts. Presents submitted with letters ranged from foodstuffs such as cakes and briny sparrows, to apparel like sandals, as well as keepsakes such as self-portraits. These gifts conveyed discursively social meanings delineating the culture of both author and recipient. The nature of gifts exchanged, and the symbolic valences attached to them, vary across different epistolary communities. Epistolographers such as Procopius delighted in the sensuous enjoyment of edible gifts and skillfully gauged their quality. Letter authors deployed their cultural repertoire of classical texts to extemporize exuberantly about gifts and to showcase their learning and wit.

Such exchanges solidified the emotional and social bond between parties as it affirmed their participation in a common cultural world, the Republic of Letters.

Lastly, letters fostered the intellectual pursuits of lettered provincials. Treatises and literary creations, including copies of texts, as well as the original compositions of letter authors and friends, often accompanied missives. Epistolographers offered frank reviews of items received, wrought in dense archaizing speech from classical texts. Sometimes letter authors badgered each other through letters to return items they lent one another; they also requested help to locate particular works. The sharing of texts across circles of associates engendered the horizontal dissemination of ideas and intellectual materials. These exchanges likely promoted additional events of intellectual sociability, as interlocutors and their associates met together to read compositions received, both in their homes and in urban spaces before lettered audiences. Such an issue signals the topic of the next chapter: lateral audiences and theaters of letter exchange. The letters themselves, as compact gifts of erudition, encoded the content of moments of intellectual sodality. In this next chapter, I will examine the Late Antique phenomenon of “theaters” of letters in which literati gathered to read letters aloud. Such theaters of letters forged moments of vivacious intellectual sociability that united lettered provincials through a shared culture of erudition.



## Chapter 3

### Mechanisms of Friendship: Theaters

One of the most significant social contexts for understanding the audience and reception of Late Antique epistolography was the habit of organizing public readings or “theaters” of letters, as Late Antique letter authors called them. Letters were also presumably circulated among friends by means of the copying and recopying of letter texts passed among colleagues. The dissemination of epistolary texts through linked friends as well as public readings of letters were a locus of the sociability of literati in the polis and constituted the main contexts of the “lateral address” component of the letters. Late Antique epistolographers mention the context of letter readings or *theatra*. Libanius, for example, discusses public readings of letters in several of his own letters (*Letters* 476, 477, 547, 773, 892, 963, 1259). In Byzantium, when public theater had disappeared, the habit of staging “epistolary theater” persisted. Authors like Michael Psellus (11<sup>th</sup> c.), as well as Nicephorus Gregoras (14<sup>th</sup> c.), John VI Kantakouzenus (14<sup>th</sup> c.), Demetrius Kydones (15<sup>th</sup> c.), John Chorstasmenos (15<sup>th</sup> c.) and Manuel II (15<sup>th</sup> c.) report this practice among their networks of friends and associates across the eleventh to fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> In Late Antiquity, in addition to Libanian references, Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas mention in their letters public readings of letters received. As I will elaborate below, this performative dimension of Late Antique epistolography has significant consequences for the historical reading of the letters, because it means that the letters often were not simply

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<sup>1</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 40, and eadem, “Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople,” in Michael Angold, ed., *The Byzantine Aristocracy: IX to XIII Centuries* (Oxford, U.K.: B.A.R. International Series 221, 1984), 173-201.

conversations between two parties, but indicate simultaneously conversations between immediate interlocutors as well as a whole host of other potential horizontal audiences.

Late Antique epistles functioned not only for communication between a pair of interlocutors. In the view of Federica Ciccolella, translator of the letters of Procopius of Gaza into Italian, the intellectuals of Late Antique Gaza wrote letters as a sort of philosophical practice: letters gave voice to thought, served as mnemonic exercises for author and audience alike, for the former of recall, for the latter, of recognition. Late antique and Byzantine epistolography involved the composition of literary works that were put to use in conversations between and among lettered associates. For Ciccolella, Procopius' epistolary corpus suffers from the absorption of the epistolographic practices favored by the Second Sophistic, which featured fictitious letter models showcasing a technical literary epistolography. The fact that these letters were intended for public reading suggests that the ideologies, tastes, and concerns of an entire community of *litterati* likely shaped letter style and content.<sup>2</sup> It is this complex tension between letter as literary form and letter as real communication, oral performance versus written text, which lies at the center of the historical reading of Late Antique epistles. A third layer in the Later Empire emerges as well because letters were consumed as teaching models by the pupils at the school of Gaza and Libanius' school at Antioch.

The use of the word *theatron* by Late Ancient epistolographers to denote public readings of letters is implicated in a larger semantic development of the word *theatron* and related theater-terminology from Late Antiquity through Byzantium. In the Byzantine epoch, as in Classical Antiquity, this word could designate the hippodrome or any public spectacle.<sup>3</sup> The use of the

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<sup>2</sup> Federica Ciccolella, "Le Epistole," *RDG*, 145-46.

term to indicate a gathering of people or an audience endured with gusto up to the final decades of Byzantium, appearing in a letter which mentions *theatron* as an audience hearing the text read aloud, and which accompanies Mazaris' Journey to Hades (dating approx. to January 1414-October 1415).<sup>4</sup> Like the Late Antique epistolographers, Byzantines employed the term to indicate gatherings wherein writings of various kinds were performed publicly, or the audience for such performances. There may have been some perception among Byzantine authors that *theatra* of this type in a sense replaced or compensated for the classical theaters as vibrant centers within the Greco-Roman city-state.<sup>5</sup>

Late Antique authors, unlike their Byzantine descendants, stood closer in time to the living theater as a central city institution, and they inherited a perception of the significance of theatricality in the polis. As I shall explore below, in Late Antiquity classical comedy and tragedy were no longer publicly performed in monumentalized spaces of the city. The language of Classical theater was, however, a vivacious element of rhetorical education, and epistolographers freely quoted Attic plays in letters. There is also some indication that theatrical performances commemorated academic milestones in a rhetorical education. Late Antique epistolographers' use of the word *theatron* to refer to public readings of letters suggests that the sort of social interchange that took place at a public reading of a letter reminded these men of drama; they conceptualized public letter readings through the performance spaces of the Classical city. It was this living "social chorography"—the mapping of social space—of the

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<sup>3</sup> Przemyslaw Marciniak, "Byzantine Theatron---A Place of Performance?" in Michael Grünbart, ed., *Theatron: Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 277-285, at 277.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 279 and 279n16. Herbert Hunger made this assertion in "On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature" *DOP* 23/24 (1969-70): 18.

Classical city which was still part and parcel of how Late Antique epistolographers organized their thinking about the social life of the city and which manifested itself in the language selected to designate the social practice of the public readings of letters.

In this chapter, I will explore the language of letters in which Synesius, Procopius, Aeneas, and Libanius discussed the public readings of letters, and I will indicate the social dynamics of epistolary theater as suggested by the letters. Some of these letters may in fact preserve the actual texts read at gatherings of literati. These letters indicate details of the social play and the “inside jokes” of a group of provincials which hypothetically fostered a sense of social rapport among letter audiences. Of course, as we will examine in the case of Libanius, the undesired leakage of letter details via interlinked associates could also provoke social discord and resentment. Following this discussion, I will offer suggestions of the possible physical settings for epistolary theater. I will next contextualize letter author language regarding epistolary theaters within the civic life of Late Antique cities. This subsection will address what can be known about the theater in the Later Empire. I will then consider other epistolary testimony concerning the use of *theatron* in the context of other types of public readings, including the evidence of six letters between Procopius and a younger admirer named Megethios. The final section of this chapter examines the selected epistolographers’ use of the language of Classical tragedy and Old Attic Comedy to forge and sustain epistolary friendships. Theater language in the selected authors punctuates the epistolary sociolect and functions strategically as a form of social play. It also authorizes requests, advice-giving, and biblical exegesis. Additionally, epistolographers turn to the language of tragedy and comedy to interpret and depict major life experiences. First, however, let us turn to survey the language suggesting epistolary theaters in Synesius, Procopius, Aeneas, and Libanius.

## Synesius

In *Letter* 101 Synesius tells his Constantinopolitan friend Pylaemenes how he has read Pylaemenes' letter aloud before local friends whom he designates "Greeks" (Hellenes) among the Libyans. He reports, "of course, I made ready for you a Greek theater in Libya,<sup>6</sup> announcing that they should come and become hearers of your notable letter."<sup>7</sup> Again the audience of the letter is its "hearers," and the audience of the letter reading is cast as a theater.<sup>8</sup> Pylaemenes is now famous: "now you have become much (talked of) in our cities,<sup>9</sup> you the demiurge of the divine-voiced letter."<sup>10</sup> Synesius reports his friend's newborn fame among Libyan cities with perhaps a Platonic inflection designating its architect the demiurge, and the letter again has its auditory dimension, in this case the "divine voice" of its author. Synesius exhorts Pylaemenes to send letters more often: "Write accordingly as many times (as you can), feast the Cyreneans with discourse."<sup>11</sup> Synesius may sculpt his speech here through the Platonic resonance of "hearths of speech."<sup>12</sup> Although this usage may reflect the epistolary topos of letters as feasts (e.g., the use of *heortē*), the association of letters with banquets may in fact evoke the dining room as a context of epistolary readings. The performance space of these letters may have been

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<sup>6</sup> Synesius' Libya is Libya Superior or Pentapolis. Cf. Roques, 3:354n7.

<sup>7</sup> καὶ δῆτα παρεσκευάσα σοι θέατρον ἐπὶ Λιβύης Ἑλληνικόν, ἀπαγγείλας ἦκειν ἀκροασομένοις ἐλλογίμων γραμμάτων.

<sup>8</sup> The term *theatron* appears numerous times in Synesius' *oeuvre* to designate a space of listening, a classroom, an audience, and metaphorically for the epideictic genre. See Roques, 3:353n6.

<sup>9</sup> Roques thinks Synesius likely means the five cities comprising Pentapolis: Cyrene, Berenice, Balagrae, Teucheira, Sozousa; Roques, 3:354n8.

<sup>10</sup> καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς παρ' ἡμῖν πόλεσιν ὁ Πυλαιμένης πολὺς, ὁ δημιουργὸς τῆς θεσπεσίας ἐπιστολῆς.

<sup>11</sup> γράφε οὖν ὅσάκις ἂν ἐγχωρῇ καὶ ἐστία Κυρηναίου τῷ λογῷ.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 227b; *Republic* 571 d; *Timaeus* 27 b; all instances, ἐστίαι λόγων. See Roques, 3:226n13.

Synesius' home, or in the home of another Hellene, before gatherings of friends dining together. Synesius seeks out future opportunities for the sharing of Pylaemenes with his Hellenes in Libya. With Homeric tincture associating language with "bite," Synesius strengthens his request for future letters, claiming "there would be no more pleasant reading than your letters for those who were already inspired by your bite."<sup>13</sup> Synesius packs his accounts of a public reading of his friend's letter with rich language, drawn from Platonic and Homeric texts. This language features as compact linguistic gifts of erudition, incitements for future letters and moments of learned display.

### Procopius

Friends contrived entire epistles as rhetorical offerings for public recitation and edification. A dense and lengthy epistolary/literary creation—Procopius' *Letter 91* to Hieronymus—likely constitutes a prime example of this form of sociability among lettered men in the Late Antique city. The erudite banter Procopius launches at his friend may be interpreted as a moment of "rhetorical theater" at a gathering in Gaza. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Hieronymus in his previous letter has railed jokingly against Procopius' epistolary style, particularly at his archaizing epistolary address, which conformed to the authority of Libanius but was not the commonplace preamble in official and Christian epistolographic practice from the fifth century onward. As Procopius reveals in this letter, however, Hieronymus' preceding letter has been read aloud in the middle of Gaza. In response, Procopius, Hieronymus, or associates of either may have delivered Procopius' epistolary reprisal in public, the text of which is, I suggest, *Letter 91*. At a minimum, its text constitutes a likely example of the sort of letter—

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<sup>13</sup> ὡς οὐδὲν ἂν αὐτοῖς ἥδιον ἀνάγνωσμα γένοιτο τῶν Πυλαιμένους γραμμάτων, ἤδη κατεσχημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ δῆγματος. τὸ δῆγμα—meaning sting, bite, appears in Homeric poetry where the image is applied to speech. Cf. *Il.* 8.165, and Roques, 3:355n14.

and the type of epistolary banter on the part of both interlocutors—that was read in gatherings of literati which Procopius calls *logikon theatron*. In its later life, this letter was also likely preserved for students as a sample refutation letter.<sup>14</sup> Deploying what seems to modern eyes to be “hyper-pedantry,” Procopius’ response to Hieronymus was likely a contrived public performance wrought in an insider language bristling with jokes about rhetorical practices that only those initiated in letters could appreciate. I suggest that we read *Letter 91* as an example of a public text designed for epistolary theater, or at minimum, as a text contrived with lateral address in mind.

Hieronymus has jokingly made many charges against Procopius concerning issues of proper rhetorical practice. In aggregate, Procopius’ humorous response aims to establish that Procopius himself is the defender of the true Attic speech in the lineage of Terpander, while according to Procopius, Hieronymus’ criticisms of Procopius stem from inferior and corrupted rhetorical practices that Hieronymus internalized while teaching in Egypt at Alexandria and Hermopolis.<sup>15</sup> In *Letter 2*, for example, Procopius charges Hieronymus with having gorged himself on the luxury (*truphē*) of Egypt, neglecting his homeland (Elusa) in zeal for money.<sup>16</sup> Now that Hieronymus has charged Procopius with arrogance and charlatanism (*alazdoneia*), Procopius will set his friend straight—publicly—with jokes only a lettered audience will comprehend, about the superiority of Procopius’ rhetorical style. Procopius repudiates his friend: “Accordingly do not accuse (a person) if he should wish to bring back to the ancient

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<sup>14</sup> *RDG*, 474n426.

<sup>15</sup> *RDG*, 439n12.

<sup>16</sup> The themes of the extravagance of Egypt and Procopius’ fears that Hieronymus has forgotten his homeland of Elusa run throughout Procopius’ correspondence with Hieronymus; cf. *Letters* 2, 9, 57, 81, 86, 91, and 124.

dignity the indulgence which now dominates, and to bring back to the muse of Terpander the music that has lapsed into nonsense songs and popular blather!”<sup>17</sup> Procopius publicly declares his identification with the literary style of the authorizing figure Terpander of Anthissa, a seventh-century B.C. poet and musician. As Choricus represented his beloved mentor in his Funeral Oration, Procopius conformed to the model of harmonious style and rhythm of Terpander and Arion. Presumably, Procopius was fond of publicly identifying his linguistic practices with the paradigms set by Terpander.<sup>18</sup> This was some element of his public persona at Gaza. By means of this rarefied literary lineage, Procopius casts in sharp relief the opposing style of the “indulgence,” “nonsense songs,” and “popular blather” of Hieronymus. Hieronymus’ Egyptian sojourn has corrupted his rhetorical practices, and a symptom of this seems to be his carping on Procopius’ ancient mode of address.

Procopius complains that Hieronymus speaks in an inconsistently Attic manner, haphazardly sprinkling Atticisms in a speaking style that is largely common and vulgar:

Wherefore by the god of friendship, do you consider yourself to be serious if you should utter an Attic phrase, and should get from those who are praising you that it is the ancient custom, it being possible to load yourself up with words from the streets and carry such things onto the speaker’s platform?<sup>19</sup>

Hieronymus’ typical speaking practices, Procopius jokes, are actually derived from the linguistic style of the types of people who gather at the crossroads (τρίοδος), literally, at the intersection of

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<sup>17</sup> οὐκοῦν κατηγορεῖ κἄν εἰ τὴν νῦν κρατοῦσαν τρυφὴν εἰς σεμνότητά τις τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐπανάγειν ἐθέλοι, κἄν εἰ τὴν μουσικὴν ἐκπεσοῦσας εἰς ὕθλους μελῶν καὶ δημοτικὴν φλυαρίαν εἰς τὴν Τερπάνδρου μοῦσαν αὐθις ἐνέγκοι.

<sup>18</sup> *RDG*, 474n429. Procopius also cites Arion in *Letter* 165 to Musaeus.

<sup>19</sup> αὐτὸς δὲ πόθεν ἡμῖν, πρὸς Φιλίου, σεμνὸς εἶναι δοκεῖς εἴ τι ῥῆμα φθέγγαιο τῶν Ἀττικῶν, καὶ τύχοις τῶν ἐπαινούντων ὡς ἀρχαῖον καθέστηκε, παρὸν ἐμφορεῖσθαι τῶν ἐκ τρίοδου ῥημάτων καὶ ταῦτα φέρειν ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος;



three roads, people like fortune tellers and loafers.<sup>20</sup> Quite a descent from the lofty claims of Procopian erudition! Why indeed does Hieronymus even bother to invoke before his students something from that exemplary second-century rhetor Aelius Aristides, Libanius' *paradeigma* and an Atticist: "Or, why ever, when you sit in a chair in front of young students do you think to bring some great thing of Aristides that is worth praising, as if you spoke as he did?"<sup>21</sup>

Procopius then implies that Hieronymus speaks a corrupted dialect similar to the so-called "Asiatic" influences on rhetoric that Polemon (second century A.D.), whom Procopius seems here to regard as a model of Attic oratory, expunged during the Second Sophistic.

Procopius exclaims, "Did not Polemon purify the old ancient rhetoric of Asian quackery?"<sup>22</sup>

Procopius quips that had Hieronymus been a contemporary of Polemon, he would have had the audacity to charge Polemon himself with imposture because Polemon wished to recover the ancient (and authoritative) rhetorical traditions. "If your fortune had been to be born then,"

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<sup>20</sup> *LSJ*, 1820, gloss "the τρίοδοι were frequented by fortune-tellers and loungers."

<sup>21</sup> ἢ τί δήτα τῶν μειρακίων προκαθεζόμενος οἶει τι μέγα φέρειν Ἀριστείδου τοῦ πάνυ πρὸς ἔπαινον, εἰ λέγοις ὡς αὐτός;

<sup>22</sup> ἢ Πολέμων τῆς Ἀσιανῆς τερατείας τὴν ἀρχαίαν ῥητορικὴν <οὐκ> ἐκάθηρεν; Procopius' indictment of Asiatic oratory and endorsement of Atticism may likely indicate a lively contemporary debate concerning oratorical style among his lettered associates. Atticism versus Asianism was a metalinguistic debate over authoritative discourse with tendrils stretching back to social, cultural, and linguistic movements in the Hellenistic world. Termed Asianism because it began in Asia Minor, Asianism emerged in the third century B.C. as a creative revival of the stylistic practices authorized by the fifth-century B.C. sophist Gorgias, who competed with poetry by adapting to his oratory poetic vocabulary and rhythms. See R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 53; Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (London: Longman, 1997), 51. According to Cicero, one of the two forms of *Asiatica dictio* was concinnity, or the harmonious arrangement of words in a sentence. Interrelated with this feature were various types of word play, such as puns on verbal prefixes. Bombastic language, emotive language, and specific rhythmic choices also characterized Asiatic oratory. See Doreen Innes and Michael Winterbottom, *Sopatros the Rhetor: Studies in the text of the Διαίρεσις Ζητημάτων* (London: University of London Institute of Classical Studies, 1988), 7-8. Opponents of asianizing oratory criticized its word choice, use of rhythm, and its emotionality. Writers of the Second Sophistic such as Dio, Lucian, and Philostratus harangue these orators for "singing." A century prior to Procopius, Libanius had railed ca. 365 against the Asianic style fashionable among his popular sophist contemporaries in *Letter 1477*, labeling this style as "vulgar ostentation." In Libanius' context, contemporary Athenian sophists including Himerius and Prohaeresius (teacher of Eunapius) approved and made use of elements of Asianic style (Cribiore, 53).

writes Procopius, “it seems to me, you would have brought an indictment against him (Polemon) also because, in neglecting the custom (of his day), he wanted to be a charlatan by returning to the ancient muse.”<sup>23</sup> Procopius wishes, “would that he (Polemon) now prevailed again, and the table were for us the Laconian one, and the lifestyle that which prevailed long ago among the Persians: barley bread, water, and cardamon!”<sup>24</sup> Thus, if only Polemon still prevailed over rhetorical conventions, rhetoricians would nourish themselves figuratively on the model antiquarian fare of the ancient Laconians. If these sorts of victuals happen to be customary in Hieronymus’ Elusa, Procopius parries, “it is not due to an excess of discipline, but because the land does barely furnish those things for its inhabitants!”<sup>25</sup> Hieronymus’ diet is not an indication of his character, but is imposed upon him by the puny fertility of the Negev.<sup>26</sup>

Procopius taunts Hieronymus that, now he has returned to his home city of Elusa to serve as a sophist, not only his rhetorical habits but his lifestyle and values bear the imprint of the “corruption” of Egypt. The *truphē* of Egypt has supplanted loyalty to his home traditions. “But still,” he writes, “now that you have learned the Egyptian luxury, you have taken off your

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<sup>23</sup> εἰ δέ σοι τότε γενέσθαι παρέσχευεν ἡ τύχη, τάχ’ ἂν μοι καὶ γραφὴν ἐπενέγκασθαι κατ’ ἐκείνου δοκεῖς, ὅτι τὰ συνήθη παριδῶν ἀλαζῶν εἶναι βούλεται, πρὸς ἀρχαίαν ἀναγόμενος μοῦσαν.

<sup>24</sup> εἶθε δὲ καὶ τράπεζα νῦν αὔθις ἐκράτει Λακωνικὴ καὶ ἦν ἡμῖν ὁ βίος ὡς πάλαι τοῖς Πέρσαις μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ κάρδαμα.

<sup>25</sup> ταῦτα δὲ καὶ νῦν ἐν Ἐλούση τις ἴδοι κρατοῦντα τῆ σῆ, οὐ διὰ καρτερίας ὑπερβολὴν, ἀλλ’ ὅτι τοσαῦτα μόλις χορηγεῖ τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσιν ἡ γῆ.

<sup>26</sup> Procopius also comments on the poor climate of Elusa in *Letter* 81. Philip Mayerson thinks that *Letter* 81 indicates that Elusa was stricken by severe drought coupled with winds which assailed, perhaps destroying, its vineyards. Mayerson thinks this letter might provide evidence of the beginning of a major change in the physical environment in the region surrounding Elusa also later evinced by the Piacenza Pilgrim (c. 570)—the invasion of shifting sands on arable lands. Procopius may also comment here in *Letter* 91 on this climatic phenomenon. At minimum, Elusa was not located in a terribly fertile region. See P. Mayerson, “Elusa in the Literary Sources,” *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 33 (1983): 251-53. On the other hand, Procopius’ description may be rhetorical and not indicative of actual conditions.

ancestral customs, you who prescribe maintaining the traditions even beyond what is fitting!”<sup>27</sup>

Procopius jokingly complains again how Hieronymus changed for ill the moment he arrived in Egypt:

Or has your situation not been this for a long time? As you disembarked from the ship, the children of the Egyptians escorted you with a barbaric yelping and held a festival no less than when long ago a certain favorable circumstance gave the god Apis to them.”<sup>28</sup>

Invoking the Egyptian bull-deity Apis, Procopius portrays Egyptian speech as non-Greek—perhaps he refers to Coptic. In this tiny fissure in the fabric of a self-enclosed Greek-speaking universe that Procopius and his interlocutors seem to assume, we find a pejorative reference to outsider linguistic communities.

Procopius’ apparently jocular “character assassination” of Hieronymus continued.

Hieronymus now looks down on Procopius, for “being raised high in your judgment by such things, you call me paltry living in a small city, your own homeland and both your wife and child having been rejected.”<sup>29</sup> When Hieronymus left Palestine for his Egyptian teaching stint, apparently he left behind for a period his wife and child.<sup>30</sup> Procopius claims that Hieronymus considers Procopius’ philosophizing to be a trifle (*lēros*) because Procopius never received the same applause from the Egyptians as Hieronymus: “I don’t have great applause, (shouted in) an

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<sup>27</sup> ἀλλ’ ὅμως αὐτὸς τρυφήν Αἰγυπτίαν μαθὼν ἀπεδύσω τὰ πάτρια, ὁ φυλάττειν τὰ συνήθη νομοθετῶν, κἄν ἔξω τοῦ πρέποντος ἦ.

<sup>28</sup> ἢ οὐ σὰ δήπου πάλαι ταῦτα καθέστηκεν, ὡς ἅμα σε τῆς ὀλκάδος ἐκβάντα προὔπεμπον δὴ σὺν βοῇ τινὶ βαρβάρῳ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων οἱ παῖδες, καὶ πανήγυρις ἦν οὐχ ἦττον ἢ ὅτε πάλαι φορὰ τις αὐτοῖς εὐμενῆς ἐδίδου τὸν Ἄπιν.

<sup>29</sup> καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ τούτοις ὑψοῦ τῆς διανοίας ἀρθεῖς ἐμὲ μὲν μικρὰν οἰκοῦντα πόλιν φαῦλον ἐκάλεις, ἀπόρριπτος δὲ παρὰ σοὶ πατρίς τε καὶ γυνὴ καὶ τὸ παιδίον αὐτό;

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Procopius *Letter 2*.

indistinct voice, O Zeus, and in a barbarian tongue.”<sup>31</sup> But the most remarkable thing is that from which Hieronymus derives happiness. He declares, “You called yourself happy if they said your home to be overflowing with food and meat.”<sup>32</sup> Hieronymus is the one who concerns himself with the trivial, “being puffed up by unimportant things, and now you accuse me of quackery?”<sup>33</sup>

Procopius heaps on a few final jocular threats, but hopes that such speech will not deter Hieronymus from sending more letters, averring “but if I could, I would make your language more moderate. But may you not, stricken by the power of my words, refrain from writing such things to me!”<sup>34</sup> Concluding by divulging that he read publicly Hieronymus’ letter before a Gazan audience, Procopius swears that “in the name of your Nile and the Graces that dwell with thee, I presented your letter as a rhetorical public event (*theatron logikon*), and recited it to everyone in the middle of Gaza.”<sup>35</sup> Procopius closes ironically, “I enjoyed being called pretentious in your letter and the theater laughing at me, while you seemed to be successful with your arguments.”<sup>36</sup> The crowd’s laughter indicates an engaged audience who enjoyed Hieronymus’ witty epistolary assaults, and Procopius suggests his own good-natured public response to the light-hearted ridicule he met while reading his friend’s letter.

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<sup>31</sup> ὅτι με μὴ κρότος εἶχε πολὺς, ἐξ ἀσήμου φωνῆς, ὦ Ζεῦ, καὶ βαρβάρου γλώττης ὦν .

<sup>32</sup> εὐδαίμονα σαυτὸν ἐκάλεις, εἰ σίτου σοι καὶ κρεῶν πλήρη τὴν οἰκίαν ἀπέδειξαν.

<sup>33</sup> ὄρῳς ὅσον ἐπὶ σμικροῖς ἐπήρθεις, ὁ νῦν ἀλαζονείας γραφόμενος;

<sup>34</sup> ἀλλ’ εἰ πως δυναίμην, μετριωτέραν σοι τὴν γλώτταν ἀποδείξαι βουλόμενος. ἀλλ’ ὅπως μὴ τὴν δύναμιν τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων καταπλαγείς πόρρω γένη τοῦ τὰ τοιαῦτα γράφειν ἡμῖν.

<sup>35</sup> μὰ γὰρ τὸν σὸν Νεῖλον καὶ τὰς παρούσας σοι Χάριτας, θέατρον λογικὸν τὴν σὴν παρέσχον ἐπιστολήν, κὰν τῇ Γάζῃ μέση πρὸς πάντας ἐλέγετο.

<sup>36</sup> κἀγὼ μὲν ἀλαζῶν ἠδούμην ὑπὸ τῶν σῶν γραμμάτων καλούμενος, ἐγέλα δὲ τὸ θέατρον ἐπ’ ἐμοί . σὺ δὲ τῶν λόγων εὐδαίμων ἐδόκεις.

The comical and teasing nature of the jibes exchanged between Procopius and Hieronymus likely constituted an inclusive banter of rhetorician comrades. Hieronymus charges Procopius with pedantry and snobbery on the basis of Procopius' letter address; in response, Procopius retorts with barbs about Hieronymus' "barbarized" and Asianizing rhetoric, tinged by the luxury and excess of the Nile, and depicts Hieronymus as disloyal to his homeland and family. The various rhetorical assaults drawn from classical lore, as well as "shop talk" about rhetorical tradition and proper practice, are expressions of a secure friendship (cf. pp. 15 and 23). Each joke, wrought carefully from insider knowledge, is a playful nudge, an incitement aiming for response. Each rejoinder may be interpreted as designing its own moment of solidarity and inclusion between the two sophists as well as the other lettered hearers and readers. The insider rhetorical jokes among Procopius, Hieronymus, and an audience of literati constitute a sort of *idioculture*, or a system of ideas, understandings, and customs by which a group of individuals articulates its identity discursively and which creates a sense of unity and social cohesion among these individuals.<sup>37</sup> In this view, "in-jokes" articulate and forge shared identity. In appreciating Hieronymus and Procopius' jokes, the audiences of epistolary theater affirmed the distinctive *idioculture* these epistolographers constructed and claim that *idioculture* as kindred.

The letter between these friends and colleagues—presented and shared with a lettered audience in Gaza and perhaps in Elusa—showcases a distinctively Late Antique "metalinguistic" form of conversational joking, or jokes which comment on linguistic form.<sup>38</sup> The bulk of the jokes in Procopius' extant letter (91), concern proper rhetorical practice and associated

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<sup>37</sup> Gary Alan Fine developed the concept of *idioculture* and its relationship to interpersonal humor which I apply here. See his article, "Humour in Situ: the Role of Humour in Small-Group Culture," in A.J. Chapman and H.C. Foot, eds., *It's a Funny Thing, Humour* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 315-18.

<sup>38</sup> Neal R. Norrick, *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 82.

authorizing figures such as Terpander, Aristides, and Polemon. Metalinguistic jokes constitute a common category of humor deployed in conversation, according to modern sociologists. In a sociological approach, metalinguistic jokes in conversational humor often expose group norms. By making fun of undesirable speech patterns of outsiders and the verbal mistakes of insiders, teasing and sarcasm operate to structure in-group linguistic practice. The function of joking in shaping behavior in the linguistic realm enables conversationalists to articulate and endorse a collectively-authorized linguistic code, and regulate the appropriate speech for specific contexts. Such negotiations in sum enhance rapport among interlocutors.<sup>39</sup> Procopius teases Hieronymus' speech patterns by claiming that Hieronymus breaks with key authoritative figures. Another conspicuous metalinguistic assault is Procopius' joke that Hieronymus speaks not just like an unlettered person, which is bad enough, but that he speaks like the lowliest creatures (presumably Greek speakers) who hang out at the crossroads (that is, fortune tellers and loungers). Procopius' response to Hieronymus overflows with metalinguistic jokes or "talk about the forms of talk"<sup>40</sup> which address the speech patterns of sophists as well as the talk of uneducated and poorer individuals—people without a reputable or even valid role in the social landscape of the city—which existed in the Late Roman city and its environs. The speech patterns of people who hang out at the cross-roads are the polar opposite linguistic and social category from the likes of Hieronymus, Procopius, and their audiences. Additionally, jokes in *Letter 91* concerning epistolary superscription indicate metalinguistic commentaries concerning the technical features of epistolography. Metalinguistic jokes in *Letter 91* set clear identifiable

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 82-83, 85, 87, 96.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 83.

boundaries around the speech patterns that are valid and respected by indicting opposing invalid and ridiculous speech forms.

It is valid to suggest, in accordance with the modern social-psychological study of humor—itsself a burgeoning yet relatively young field—that humor in this letter is a sort of social play, almost a sort of “social preening” among Late Antique literati as expressed by samples of epistolary theater. Humor, in this view, is a social phenomenon, a type of “social skill or interpersonal competence” which serves various interpersonal functions while comprising cognitive, emotional, and expressive (laughter) dimensions.<sup>41</sup> Laughter in itself—such as the laughter Hieronymus’ epistolary jokes provoked from his audience as Procopius reveals in *Letter 91*—constitutes a nonverbal communication which likely promotes affiliative behavior among audience members.<sup>42</sup> Though Procopius’ teasing tactics in *Letter 91* are aggressive in character, teasing humor also serves various interpersonal functions, incorporating certain “prosocial” functions—or behaviors meant to benefit other members of a specific group or society as a whole. For example, teasing is often an expression of affection.<sup>43</sup> If Procopius and his target Hieronymus both enjoyed Procopius’ teasing, then hypothetically a positive response from each party served to increase the social intimacy between them. Adding to the mental work of the

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<sup>41</sup> Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: an Integrative Approach* (Burlington, MA; San Diego; London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007), 6-10, 150.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-131. According to recent approaches of social psychology, laughter is an inherently social form of communication aimed at gaining others’ attention, articulating emotional information nonverbally, and eliciting from others similar emotions. Theorists contend also that laughter operates interpersonally to communicate that social play is occurring within a group of interactants. Various theorists suggest that laughter directly influences a listener, activating positive emotional arousal, perhaps by triggering particular brain pathways in the listener. Overall, recent theorists propose that laughter promotes social interaction and bonding by encouraging, regulating, and coordinating interpersonal interaction via the duplication of emotions of various interlocutors.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-28. Terrion and Ashforth found that prosocial teasing enhanced the perception of emotional closeness between communicants (125). Aggressive teasing viewed by an audience, however, had the effect of inhibiting observers’ subsequent performance in completing tasks (127).

audience hearing and interpreting the letter, epistolary humor embraced a cognitive dimension as well, in that it demanded an audience to appraise communications which were typically incongruous, unusual or unexpected, and playful; this cognitive process theoretically shifted an audience into a non-serious frame of mind which permitted the simultaneous perception of incongruous and incompatible claims.<sup>44</sup>

*Letter 107* to Sosianus and Julius provides a second potential case for a letter contrived for performance in the Procopian corpus.<sup>45</sup> In this letter, Procopius expresses how he read his interlocutors' preceding letter, relating that "laughter came running toward me on account of those who heard it."<sup>46</sup> Quite possibly, *Letter 107* constitutes a reprisal designed for public recitation which Procopius addressed to his lawyer friend Sosianus, as well as an otherwise unknown Julius, possibly a business or legal associate of Sosianus.<sup>47</sup> Sosianus occupied an important legal position in imperial administration in Caesarea; in fact, Martindale asserts that he was *assessor* to the *consularis Palaestinae Prima*.<sup>48</sup> In two of the four letters addressed to Sosianus, *Letters 64* and *157*, Procopius has sought legal aid from Sosianus on behalf of Procopius' acquaintances. In the prosopography of the "epistolary theater" of Late Antique Caesarea and Gaza, the participants were not solely rhetoricians, as is the case in the exchange between Procopius and Hieronymus in *Letter 91*, but they were other types of lettered men in the city as well, including men who made their livelihood in legal professions. The letter recipients

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> Julius, not otherwise known was possibly a business associate of Sosianus. *RDG*, 452n127.

<sup>46</sup> καὶ γέλωσ διὰ τῶν ἀκούτων ἐπέτρεχεν ἐπ' ἐμοί. *RDG*, 481n518.

<sup>47</sup> *RDG*, 480n513.

<sup>48</sup> *PLRE* 2:1022; *RDG*, 452n127.



had rhetorical training but were likely not sophists or grammarians. Unlike *Letter 91*'s insider language regarding rhetorical practice, mention of figures such as Aristides and Polemon, and classicizing flourishes, such as the Laconian table, *Letter 107*'s content encompasses jokes about religious practice and the socioeconomic location of letter interlocutors, and most probably the audience. As in to *Letter 91*, the tone of Procopius' repartee is highly comical. Unlike the aggressive jests launched at his sophist peer in *Letter 91*, however, the comedy of *Letter 107* is a self-deprecating one explicating the result of the prior letter of Sosianus and John from Procopius' standpoint.

Procopius begins by saying, "it wouldn't be a bad thing for me to relate to you what happened when I received your letter."<sup>49</sup> Implying his genuine anticipation of receiving his friends' letter, Procopius narrates a humorous story of how the letter was the fulfillment of a prophecy:

Not long ago, someone who claimed to be an expert in celestial phenomena and knew the art of predicting the future from the stars, came upon me suddenly and, placing the pebble on his fingers, said 'how fortunate you are. Even if it escapes your notice, something great and splendid contrary to expectation will happen to you.'<sup>50</sup>

This august prophecy leads Procopius to expect that Sosianus' letter would bring a change in his personal fortunes in terms of wealth and occupation: "Having heard these words I fantasized Pluto himself and I was full of offices in my mind [meaning that he dreamt of offices at the level of imperial administration] and I had an opinion more splendid than fortune in my hopes."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> οἶά μοι συνέβη δεξαμένῳ τὴν ὑμετέραν ἐπιστολήν, οὐ χεῖρον πρὸς ὑμᾶς διηγῆσασθαι.

<sup>50</sup> πρῶην γὰρ τις τὰ οὐράνια σοφὸς εἶναι βουλόμενος καὶ τέχνην ἔχων, ὡς ἔλεγεν, ἐκ τῶν ἀστέρων προλέγειν τὰ μέλλοντα, περιτυχῶν ἐξαίφνης ἐμοὶ καὶ θεὸς ἐπὶ δακτύλων τὴν ψῆφον, "ὡς εὐτυχής," φησιν "ὑπάρχων ἐλάνθανες · μέγα τί σοι καὶ λαμπρὸν ὅσον οὐπω παρ' ἐλπίδα γενήσεται."

<sup>51</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ τούτων ἀκούσας τὸν Πλοῦτον ἐφантаζόμεν αὐτόν, ἀξιωματῶν ἔγεμον τὴν διάνοιαν καὶ τῆς ἐν ἐλπίσι τύχης σοβαρωτέραν εἶχον τὴν γνώμην.

Using the word *axioma* to signify honor or public office, Procopius explicitly links the wealth of the god Pluto with appointment to political office, specifically imperial office. Procopius then narrates how he received the letter, in an ironic fulfillment of the prophecy, but its content was truly contrary to the lofty expectations roused by the fortune teller. “As I happened inside the letter,” he wrote, “I read of a discarded pen and a most humble trade. ‘Ouch! Ouch!’ I said to myself, ‘I have enjoyed fortune contrary to expectation.’ As the saying goes, we have been turned ‘from horses to asses.’”<sup>52</sup> The proverbial phrase “from horses to asses,” a proverb mentioned by Pseudo-Plutarch (*De Alex. prov.* 19.1) which continued to be used well into the Byzantine age,<sup>53</sup> signified a change in fortune from more to less favorable circumstances. In this case, Procopius has been cast down from a prior favorable circumstance or at least the hope of a forthcoming favorable circumstance.

What was the disillusionment brought by this letter? Procopius reveals, “I suppose Fortune (*Tychē*) knows how to renew all things, but I never expected to become a seller of reeds sitting in a tent. Such things in my eyes Zeus apparently bringing forth grants me.”<sup>54</sup> It seems that the content of the letter of Sosianus and Julius was figuratively the equivalent of sending Procopius, the city-sophist of Gaza, a consignment of reeds to sell, as merchants sold such wares from tents in colonnaded city streets. Perhaps Sosianus and Julius even called Procopius a “reed merchant” in their letter. Alternatively, because the word *kalamos* also means “pen,” “selling the reed” could be a metonym for selling one’s services as a scribe. Perhaps the letter of Sosianus

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<sup>52</sup> ὡς δὲ τοῖς ἔνδον ἐντυχῶν κάλαμον ἀνέγνων ἀπόβλητον καὶ ἐμπορίαν ἀτιμοτάτην, “ἰοῦ ἰοῦ” πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν ἔφην, “παρ’ ἐλπίδας εὐτύχηκα. τὸ δὲ λεγόμενον, ‘ἀφ’ ἵππων ἐπ’ ὄνους’ μεταβεβήκαμεν.

<sup>53</sup> *RDG*, 481n517.

<sup>54</sup> πάντα μὲν οἴμοι καινίζειν οἶδεν ἢ τύχη, ἀλλ’ οὔποτ’ ἄν ἤλπισα καλάμων γενέσθαι πρατῆρ ὑπὸ καλύβῃ καθήμενος. ταῦτά μοι Ζεὺς ὡς ἔοικεν ἀνατέλλων χαρίζεται.

and Julius indicated that Procopius' change in fortune with regard to offices meant that Procopius was to become a *notarius*. In the Later Empire these professionals, who wrote documents for fees, belonged to the public offices of the *comitatus*.<sup>55</sup> The importance of these officials increased in the Later Empire under fourth century emperors due to the secrecy of their work and proximity to the emperor, yet Libanius always refers to them disparagingly as men devoid of literary culture, mere clerks proficient only in shorthand and descending from fathers such as sausage makers, cloak-room servants, and manual laborers.<sup>56</sup> This usage may draw upon a widely-held stereotype of this official. Procopius, though writing two hundred years later, may here preserve this literary depiction of this official that Libanius records. This would also result in a change in fortune for the worse to which Procopius refers, because a sophist was generally of a higher social standing than a *notarius*. Sosianus, likely secure in an imperial position of substance, may joke with Procopius about matters of imperial appointments. Either way, Procopius seems to be the butt of a joke in the letter he received. Sosianus and Julian must have humbled Procopius through their letter language, albeit in a good-natured way.

Procopius relates how his audience laughed when he read this letter which playfully debased him, indicating to his correspondents the success of their jokes. As he put it, "laughter through those who heard it came running toward me and said 'receive the man and the bird (omen) of the god.'"<sup>57</sup> This quotation which closes the letter, drawn from Aristophanes' *Plutus* line 63, links Procopius' fate in receiving the letter of Sosianus and Julian with the prediction of the Oracle of Delphi in the *Plutus* concerning the fate of the dull-witted Chremylus. Line 63 is

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<sup>55</sup> See *LRE* 1:103, 123, 127-8, 143, 161-62, 378, 387, 431, 547, 548, 572-75.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 572, 572-75, and *LRE* 2:1234-35n18. See Libanius *Orations* 2, 18, 42, 62.

<sup>57</sup> καὶ γέλως διὰ τῶν ἀκουόντων ἐπέτρεχεν ἐπ' ἐμοὶ καὶ "δέχου τὸν ἄνδρα" φησί "καὶ τὸν ὄρνιν τοῦ θεοῦ."

the sarcastic comment of Chremylus' slave Cario in response to the rude behavior of the god Plutus—*incognito* as a blind beggar—whose company Chremylus courts in order to heed the injunction of the Pythia to follow and take home with him the first person whose path he crosses upon leaving the temple. Plutus, however, is neither friendly nor forthcoming. In fact, when Chremylus inquires after the identity of Plutus, the latter threatens to assault him: “I’ll break you!” In a stroke of incredulous humor, Cario replies, “receive the man and the bird of the god!”—thereby joking sarcastically about how charming the unfolding of Pythia’s forecasts was proving to be. Procopius thus derides his fortune through the language of a few words of a character in Aristophanic comedy. His Plutus is the grand fortune of the letter from Sosianus and Julian which degrades him to the status of perhaps a reed merchant or an imperial scribe (*notarius*). Drawing from the toolkit of the classical repertoire of educated men—a sliver of a reference of Old Attic Comedy—Procopius expects that his audience, including the addressee lawyer and imperial official Sosianus, equipped with the same educational and cultural toolkit, would immediately recognize these unattributed lines and get the joke.

We can go further. Comfortable in his senior status in his circles of associates and his renown as city-sophist at Gaza, Procopius freely effaces himself before the letter addressees as well as his acquaintances and friends, who likely also heard his friend’s riposte recited publicly. Self-deprecation likely constitutes here a form of ingratiation used to obtain social approval.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, self-deprecatory humor seems part and parcel of the behavior code among lettered elites, and, as has been addressed earlier (Chapter 2), false modesty is a commonplace of Late Antique epistolography. To judge from Late Antique epistolography, ingratiation attained via self-deprecation was a pervasive social strategy of mannered literati.

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<sup>58</sup> Martin, 121.

It is worth exploring briefly the sources of comedy in this letter because the issue relates to Procopius' defining of the social location of his audience and himself. The first joke is the story of a fortune teller. Procopius' attitude toward the representative of this profession hardly seems respectful, particularly since the prophecy was dead wrong. This may not necessarily mean that Procopius' audience was exclusively Christian, but at a minimum this is a group of individuals from which Procopius (and likely his audience) desired to demarcate clear social distance. Moreover, Procopius affirms the social distance of his audience from such types by asking them to join him in ridiculing the flaky prophet. Thus, this joke heightens the social bond between Procopius and his audience with one another through drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion. However, this "classed-joke" is tempered by Procopius' cynical assertion in linking the god of wealth with political office. He here expresses a perception that wealth came with imperial service.<sup>59</sup> This statement may implicitly contrast Procopius' profession as sophist—earned via merit—with that of imperial office, thereby legitimizing Procopius' social location and the location of his audience. Procopius jokingly poses as desirous of an increase in wealth and social position, or at least Procopius articulates a traditional Greco-Roman expectation of what a prophesied change in fortune truly meant. But the true barb of the joke probably is a teasing swipe at the Sosianus himself—who held a prestigious imperial office! The second major joke defines the sophist and his audience by affirming the social chasm separating the men of Procopius' circle from the likes of reed merchants or *notarii*. The absurdity of the letter of Sosianus and Julian is that its rhetoric has knocked Procopius down from the highbrow ether of eloquence to the sordid porticos of commerce.

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<sup>59</sup>On the profitability of service as a *notarius* or *chartularius* (clerk) see Leah di Segni, Joseph Patrich, and Kenneth G. Holum, "A Schedule of Fees (*Sportulae*) for Official Services from Caesarea Martitima, Israel," *ZPE* 145 (2003): 288-89.

Through the comic strokes of his letter, delivered in a *theatron* of literati, Procopius and his audience colluded to create a lettered community within the Late Antique city. Comic devices suggesting the common social location of the letter author and his audience likely underscored elements of the identity Procopius and his audience shared. Procopius' jokes at the expense of fortune tellers and reed merchants or *notarii* signify "unmasking tactics," or strategies whereby poking fun at someone else communicates one's refusal to accept the identity projected by the ridiculed object.<sup>60</sup> Procopius' mockery of Hieronymus' speech as like that of people hanging out at the crossroads is another example of an unmasking tactic. These jokes represent a type of social discourse aimed at social control.<sup>61</sup> Humor in epistolary theater likely represented continual discursive explorations designed to gauge and to represent the values, beliefs, and emotions of one's interlocutors. Audience response in the form of applause or laughter which Procopius records had occurred at his expense in *Letters* 91 and 107 was one observable sign of success. Art-letters as public theater theoretically strengthened social solidarity among provincial elites in Late Antique Gaza, constituting moments of sociability among lettered elites in the city.

#### Aeneas

Language in two of Aeneas' letters also suggests public readings of letters. The first is Aeneas' *Letter 7* addressed to Diodorus, who is likely one and the same as the Caesarean lawyer to whom 18 letters of Procopius were addressed.<sup>62</sup> Judging from Aeneas' *Letters 7* and 22

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<sup>60</sup> Martin, 119-120.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> *RDG*, 444n53; Positano, 85.

addressed to Diodorus, the two men had hitherto been engaged in what appears to have been friendly intellectual banter between a sophist and advocate.<sup>63</sup> *Letter 7* professes a change in their relationship from some sort of previous discord or disagreement toward peace. Aeneas teases Diodorus though a humorous and archaizing reference to a libation ritual that would seal their friendship and terminate their latest feud, in honor of Hermes and a certain eloquent Herodotus who Aeneas claims was responsible for the change in relations. “Setting up a krater to make a peace treaty,” wrote Aeneas, “let us pour libations to Hermes among the gods, and among human beings to Herodotus, who with difficulty resolved the discord for us.”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps referring to a dining occasion which involved the recitation of letters, Aeneas asserts, “holding the feast for them, the comedy which, shamelessly running around, divulges the secret things of the most dear ones, we will drive out, by means of the apparatus of our correspondence, calling in that which guards every friendship: persuasion, thankfulness, pleasure, applause, praise.”<sup>65</sup> This may indicate that humor in letters read publicly can undercut friendship. The use of *heortē* repeats again the figurative likening of epistolary theater to a feast. Perhaps this suggests a dining context as well for epistolary theater. Aeneas refers cryptically to the public transmission of letters as a comic performance which exposes details about interlocutors which should not be spoken (τὰ ἀπόρρητα). Aeneas affirms to Diodorus that henceforward their letters will contain

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<sup>63</sup> Pace Positano, 85, who may overstate the animosity between these correspondents. Language relating to war and peace (such as Aeneas uses in *Letter 22* to Diodorus) can simply indicate intellectual banter. *Letter 22* looks more like a complaint of silence: Aeneas affirms that if peace brings silence but war brings much conversation, then he prefers that kind of war. He closes *Letter 22* exhorting Diodorus to write, avowing that the sun should catch neither friends nor rhetors being silent.

<sup>64</sup> ἀλλὰ κρατῆρα στήσαντες οἶον ἐν εἰρήνῃ σπονδὰς ποιησώμεθα θεῶν μὲν Ἑρμῆ, ἀνθρώπων δὲ Ἡροδότῳ, οἱ τὴν στάσιν ἡμῖν μόλις διέλυσαν.

<sup>65</sup> τούτοις ἄγοντες τὴν ἑορτὴν τὴν μὲν κωμωδίαν, ἢ ἀναιδῶς περιτρέχουσα ἐκλαλεῖ τὰ τῶν φιλτάτων ἀπόρρητα, αὐτῇ σκευῇ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν ἐξελάσομεν, εἰσκαλεσάμενοι ὁ πᾶσαν φιλίαν δορυφορεῖ, τὴν πειθῶ, τὴν χάριν, τὴν ἡδονήν, τὴν κρότον, τὸν ἔπαινον.

the true communications mechanisms which undergird friendship: persuasion, thankfulness, applause, praise. Through the use of words like applause and praise Aeneas confirms that the art-letters of his epistolary circles both create audiences and forge moments of approval and unanimity among *literati* gathered together for social dining and/or recitation events. Distilling his recommendations for subsequent epistolary conversations, Aeneas avows that Diodorus and he will create more solemn theaters of letters: “we will set up a more solemn theater, refusing to cause any trouble by means of comedy.”<sup>66</sup>

Aeneas’ *Letter 16 to Sarapion*<sup>67</sup> also seems to refer to *theatra* of letter readings. Framing social and religious conflict with the term “drama,” Aeneas gives advice to Sarapion, who is apparently being persecuted by priests. “I heard,” he writes, “the tragedy that has happened among you, and I shed tears on the earth itself, if the war begins from the priests, among whom the teaching is peace.”<sup>68</sup> Aeneas empathizes with Sarapion and his friends, advising them to demonstrate good courage and persevere in the face of struggle. Aeneas then mentions readings of his letters among Sarapion and his associates: “for you increase love rather than diminish it, gathering a theater by means of a letter and rousing applause.”<sup>69</sup> Perhaps Aeneas hopes that his

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<sup>66</sup> τούτοις καθίσωμεν σεμνότεραν θέατρον, ἀπειπόντες κωμωδία μηδὲν ἐνοχλεῖν.

<sup>67</sup> Positano, 100n1, examines evidence from the *Suda* regarding a Sarapion mentioned as a friend of Isidore of Damascus (c. A.D. 450-526) in the *Life of Isidore*. Isidore was head of the Neoplatonic School of Athens, and Positano suggests that the drama mentioned here could refer to imperial rulings against the School of Athens prior to 529. Ultimately, however, Positano does not consider this identification secure. Because Sarapion’s name is Greco-Egyptian in origin, Positano also hypothesizes that he is Egyptian and that his earliest acquaintance with Aeneas may date back to Aeneas’ student days at Alexandria.

<sup>68</sup> τὸ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀκήκοα δράμα, καὶ αὐτὴν ἐδάκρυσα τὴν γῆν, εἰ ἐκ τῶν ἱερέων ὁ πόλεμος ἄρχεται, παρ’ οἷς εἰρήνη τὸ κήρυγμα. Positano thinks that this refers to persecution of the orthodox Sarapion and his associates (100) but the letter does not identify the involved parties. Perhaps the quarrel corresponds to Christological controversy in the fifth century; Monophysitism seems a reasonable conjecture, particularly if Sarapion lived in Egypt at this time.

<sup>69</sup> ἠύξήσατε γὰρ μᾶλλον ἢ διελύσατε τὸν ἔρωτα, θέατρον τῇ ἐπιστολῇ συλλέγοντες καὶ κρότον διεγείροντες.



epistolary advice might offer succor to Sarapion's associates also grieved by their recent struggle. Aeneas indicates again the perception of the sharing of art-letters as a social interchange with concomitant markers of social approval such as applause which reminded late antique men of drama. Theater appears at the heart of the intervisibility of communities of lettered men.

### Libanius

We find the same phenomena earlier in Libanius. Seven of Libanius' letters contain references to the lateral exchange of letters among lettered friends and associates. These indicate a broad prosopography of individuals involved in epistolary theater and epistolary "crosstalk," including former students who ascended to influential roles in provincial government, such as Andronicus, who reached imperial office as governor of Phoenice (360-61), governor of Bithynia, and vicar of Thrace (365-66); powerful sophist-politicians such as Themistius of Constantinople; high-ranking magistrates like Entrechius, governor of Palestine (361-62) and Pisidia (362-64), Sibourius governor of Palaestina Prima (390), and the Patricius Datianus who travelled with the retinue of Jovian.<sup>70</sup> As a whole, Libanius' references to the lateral dissemination of his letters generally do not contain the word *theatron* or language related to the theater, but he does suggest the phenomenon of crosstalk or the leakage of information from letters across communities of associates. He suggests the divulgence of letter texts through his use of the word *agorai* in *Letter* 476. In *Letter* 1259 to Datianus, Libanius writes that he set up for Datianus' letter a *boulē* as a theater.

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<sup>70</sup> *PLRE* 1:64-65 ("Andronicus 5"), 243-244 (Datianus), 278-279 (Entrechius), 839 ("Sibourius 2").

Libanius presumed that parents of students might share with others his letters praising students. As a sophist who had epistolary relations with the fathers of his students, Libanius offered praise of students like Themistius (not the Constantinopolitan sophist) in letters to the young man's father Heortius. Themistius seems to have been one of Libanius' success stories: probably not originally a good student, apparently considering rhetoric useless and bored in school, but whose academic performance improved and who rose to provincial power at a young age as governor of Lycia in 361.<sup>71</sup> Libanius anticipates in *Letter 547* to Heortius that Heortius will show Libanius' letter lauding Themistius to many others.<sup>72</sup> It is not clear who these "many" were; they could have been friends and associates of either Libanius or Heortius. Perhaps the proud father would read Libanius' letter boastfully to his friends or, at minimum, relate letter content to friends. Libanius warns Heortius, however, that readers or hearers of the letter will likely attribute such fine appraisals to the typical behavior of teachers, regardless of the student's aptitude.<sup>73</sup> Such a caveat may indicate Libanius' own disingenuousness in offering praise of a poor pupil. At any rate, praise leaked from Libanius' letter may have had diminished credibility, given the source.

Letters shared among friends and associates of various cities could incite various types of disputes, though elliptical language frequently does not clarify details, and, as I suggested above in the relationship between Aeneas and the Caesarean lawyer Diodorus, language relating to war and peace could signify intellectual banter or disputes and their resolutions (cf. Aeneas *Letters 7, 22*). In *Letter 476* (dated A.D. 356) addressed to Themistius, sophist, philosopher, senator, and

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<sup>71</sup> Criboire, 135-36, 226 and 226n150, 179; Themistius was apparently named governor at age 25 (see pp. 135-36).

<sup>72</sup> οὐ μὲν πολλοῖς τὰ γράμματα δείξεις.

<sup>73</sup> ταυτὶ γὰρ εἶναι τῶν διδασκάλων ἐπαινεῖν τοὺς ὁμιλητάς, κἂν ᾧσι φαῦλοι.

proconsul of Constantinople (358-59),<sup>74</sup> Libanius accuses his interlocutor of betraying the god of friendship and of the proverbial offense of “running the risk of a Carian”; that is, of disrespecting Libanius as though he were expendable or of little value like a mercenary soldier.<sup>75</sup> The cause: Themistius has shared Libanius’ letters in *agorai*. Libanius probably does not refer to a formal location in the city, but may employ this term to indicate public places where his letters were read before gatherings of hearers. At any rate, with the word *agora* Libanius refers to lateral readings of his letters. Perhaps one such *agora* was Themistius’ school. Using climate imagery, Libanius asserts that when Themistius pointed out Libanius’ letters in *agorai* “a wind having roused up and falling upon our shore made waves for me.”<sup>76</sup> The divulgence of epistolary information foments social uneasiness among a group of associates. Unfortunately, from the modern reader’s viewpoint, the details of this conflict cannot be discerned, and judging from the terse language, it is likely that the letter carrier, a certain Macedonius, was to supplement the missive with a message.

This letter must be viewed in the broader context of the relationship between Libanius and Themistius.<sup>77</sup> Apparently, Themistius was the only sophist in Constantinople to whom Libanius regularly wrote; forty of Libanius’ extant letters are addressed to him.<sup>78</sup> These men became acquainted in Constantinople in the early 350s and were part of a circle of lettered friends which encompassed Libanius’ former student the doctor Olympius and the philosopher

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<sup>74</sup> Cribiore, 41. Themistius settled at Constantinople in 348/49 (62).

<sup>75</sup> ἐν τῷ Καρὶ κινδυνεύειν οἴεσθε.

<sup>76</sup> εἶθ’ ὑμεῖς μὲν ἐπ’ ἀγορᾶς δείκνυτε τὰ γράμματα, πνεῦμα δὲ ἐκεῖθεν ἀρθὲν καὶ δεῦρο ἐμπεσὸν κύματα ἡμῖν ἐγείρει . . .

<sup>77</sup> See Cribiore, 61-66.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

Themistocles who enjoyed each other's company while dining.<sup>79</sup> Themistius, a sophistic politician heavyweight who wrote and delivered a number of speeches, public and private, was promoted to the chair of philosophy at Constantinople by the late 340s, was admitted to the senate of Constantinople in 355, and served as envoy on ten embassies for the senate of Constantinople between 355 and 384, and as prefect of Constantinople in 358-59.<sup>80</sup> The weather imagery of Letter 476 aptly depicts a stormy epistolary relationship between these two men, who apparently competed for students. As a powerful rhetorician in Constantinople, Themistius trained future governors and provincial magnates, and Libanius seeks out Themistius' power of eloquence and his important contacts for the benefit of his recommendees.<sup>81</sup>

Other indiscreet epistolary interlocutors rankled Libanius. In *Letter 477* (A.D. 356), Libanius lambasts his former pupil Andronicus for having shown his letter to other people around him, likely in Constantinople,<sup>82</sup> who then divulged it to those around Libanius, presumably in Antioch.<sup>83</sup> It is not clear where those who "divulged" the letter had access to a copy of it or, as seems more likely, revealed its contents. The verb Libanius uses to indicate how the information in his letter was shared—*ekpherein*—probably means that letter content was simply disclosed verbally, but it could also mean that the letter or a copy of it was ferried back to Antioch. Here is an instance of a letter circulating between two interlocutors, in which the recipient copies or reads or shares the original letter with his associates who then, presumably via

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, 210; *Letters* 534, 539, and 1198 are addressed to Olympius; see Crihiore's dossiers of students and translations of these letters, 300-1.

<sup>80</sup> *PLRE* 2:889, 890, 892, 893; Crihiore dates Themistius' move to the capital to 348/49.

<sup>81</sup> Crihiore, 62-63.

<sup>82</sup> *PLRE* 1: 65. *Letter 477* was likely written while Andronicus was at Constantinople.

<sup>83</sup> σοί μὲν ἐγὼ γέγραφα, σύ δὲ ἑτέροις ἔδειξας, οἱ δὲ εἰς τοὺς ἐνθάδε ἐξήνεγκαν.

letter(s), shared letter content with their contacts or friends in Antioch. This letter suggests the phenomenon of cross-talk or leakage of epistolary messages among their correspondents and their friends or associates and suggests the social dynamics of letter sharing.

Libanius censures Andronicus' indiscretion because it was the beginning of a "war" (ἀρχή πολέμου) or some type of dispute. Again we may observe the use of war language to denote interpersonal or intellectual conflict in lettered epistolography. Libanius then refers to the lateral dissemination of intended messages through interlinked friends. In his preceding letter Andronicus has apparently complained that Libanius has previously been sending messages to him through missives to an associate in common named Harmas, thereby avoiding direct communication. Drawing on a proverb in Diogenes Laertius,<sup>84</sup> Libanius requests that Andronicus learn to remain mum about Libanius' letters in the future: "And if the people of Attica still celebrate the Eleusinian mysteries, again I will write to you; and if you add to the previous (dictum) let him who wishes learn in front of the Eponymus heroes [that is, the public notice board], you will agree to cherish my silence."<sup>85</sup> Silence is framed in terms of pagan mystery practice.<sup>86</sup> Thus, marshalling the linguistic capital of a classical reference to the silence of the Eleusinian initiates, Libanius aims to persuade his pagan friend to be more careful in the future with the information contained in friends' letters. The reference to Attic cult, as part of a shared culture of these epistolary interlocutors adds force to a request and lends Atticizing embroidery for rhetorical persuasion.

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<sup>84</sup> Foerster cites Diogenes proverb 1.51.

<sup>85</sup> εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀλλὰ νῦν Ἀττικοὶ τὰ Ἐλευσίνια, πάλιν ἐπιστελοῦμεν · εἰ δὲ προσθήσεις πρόσθε τῶν Ἐπικωνύμων τῷ βουλομένῳ μαθεῖν, ὁμολογήσεις τῆς σιωπῆς ἡμῶν ἐρᾶν.

<sup>86</sup> Andronicus is identified as a pagan in *Letter* 1460 (*PLRE* 1:65) native to Constantinople (*PLRE* 1:64, *Letter* 150).

Libanius also reveals how he has shared his received letters with his friends and associates. In a letter expressing gratitude for a received favor, *Letter 773* addressed to Entrechius (A.D. 362), a powerful man who served as governor of the province of Palaestina Prima (361-362) and Pisidia (362-364),<sup>87</sup> Libanius ebulliently praises his magistrate friend and thanks him for some sort of legal help he rendered on behalf of Libanius' mother. He heaps high praise upon Entrechius, attributing a gigantic monument to his honor and likening his energy and achievement to that of Achilles.

A stele high as heaven has been set up for you in Palestine, like (the one) to that Iphikrates, and you already having been snatched away for another labor straightaway after finishing the course, shining forth at the starting line (of a race course) like Achilles who just attacked Troy.”<sup>88</sup>

Libanius mentions how he has shared Entrechius' letter with others, writing that he could not be silent concerning the favors Entrechius has granted.<sup>89</sup> The epistolary eloquence and erudition of this provincial governor satisfied Libanius' standards to justify a rhetorical theater. Libanius' report of this epistolary theater serves a role in recipient design, a rhetorical strategy that aims to increase rapport between the two men, showcase Libanius' gentility, and motivate Entrechius' favorable disposition toward Libanius.

In *Letter 892* (dated 388) to his former student Gessius who served as a curial magistrate and teacher in Egypt, and probably Alexandria,<sup>90</sup> Libanius mentions the applause which followed

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<sup>87</sup> *PLRE* 1:279.

<sup>88</sup> This stele may be a metaphorical compliment and not an actual monument. σοὶ δὲ κατὰ τὸν Ἰφικράτην ἐκεῖνον ἔστηκε μὲν οὐρανομήκης ἐν Παλασιτίνα στήλῃ καὶ ταῦτα σοῦ πρὸς ἄλλον ἀρπασθέντος πόνον ἀπὸ βαλβίδος εὐθύς ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀπὸ γραμμῆς ἐξέλαμψας ὡσπερ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἅμα τῆς Τροίας ἀψάμενος.

<sup>89</sup> πῶς οὖν ἔστι τοὺς εἶ παθόντας ἡμᾶς ἢ πρὸς σέ μὴ γράφειν ἢ πρὸς ἄλλους περὶ σοῦ σιγαῖν, ὧν τοὺς φίλους ἤδεως ὀρᾷς ;

<sup>90</sup> *PLRE* 1:394-95; Gessius was likely executed late in life for consulting two oracles who promised he would be consul; his death was sudden and violent, possibly crucifixion, since his legs were broken (395).

a public reading of Gessius' letters. "I admire them," he wrote, "not having stood apart from my friends in some corner and having stuck myself against some wall, but among many friends who are capable of seeing beauties of this kind."<sup>91</sup> Libanius relates to Gessius his enjoyment and approval of Gessius' letters by organizing an epistolary theater of literati at Antioch whom he defines as sharing the education and culture requisite for appreciation of the "beauties" (τὰ κάλλη) of Gessius' epistolary erudition.

In 963 addressed to Sibourius (dated to 390), Libanius reports that Sibourius' previous letter furnished the material for an epistolary theater. Libanius reveals how he organized a public reading of his friend's letter by sending young men, perhaps his students, to invite worthy men to hear a reading. As he put it, "thus I was pleased by your letters, so that giving them to certain young men I bid them carry them throughout the whole city to show them to those who were worthy to see (them)."<sup>92</sup> Libanius again defines the audience as possessing the requisite sort of culture to appreciate his correspondent's letter. His audience literally flowed together (συρρεῖν). Libanius reports "many men streamed together to me, the reading of it having brought this about."<sup>93</sup>

*Letter 1259* (A.D. 364) to the influential Datianus records the public reading of a letter containing a series of messages written for a group of Antiochenes. Libanius reports to Datianus that he has received his most worthy letter, and having marveled at it he set up for it a *boulē* as a

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<sup>91</sup> θαυμάζω δὲ αὐτὰς οὐκ ἀποστάς τῶν φίλων ἐν γωνίᾳ τινὶ τοίχῳ προσθεὶς ἑμαυτόν, ἀλλ' ἐν πολλοῖς ἐταίροις τοῖς ὄρᾶν κάλλη τοιαῦτα δυναμένοις.

<sup>92</sup> οὕτως ἦσθην σου τοῖς γράμμασιν, ὥστε δοῦς αὐτὰ τῶν νεανίσκων τισὶν ἐκέλευσα καὶ πάσης φέροντες τῆς πόλεως δεικνύειν οἷς ἄξιον . . .

<sup>93</sup> καὶ συνερρύησαν δὴ πολλοὶ παρ' ἐμὲ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως τοῦτο πεποιηκίᾳς.

theater.<sup>94</sup> This may literally mean that the audience gathered in a council building, but it may also constitute a figurative usage of the term *boulē*. Perhaps the letter was read in a dining room. Employing language similar to *Letter 963* to depict the movement of the assembling audience, Libanius writes how many men “flowed together” to sit in conclave. When the letter had been read, the audience offered various emotional responses, seemingly similar to audience responses watching a theatrical performance: “some stamped their feet, some grew pale, some blushed, and others bowed their heads toward the earth.”<sup>95</sup> Libanius also provides relatively rare testimony about the physical fate of a letter. Stating that Datianus’ letter is now his treasure, Libanius tells Datianus that he has tucked away his art letter and placed it in his library.

#### Loci of the Theaters of Letters

Where did audiences in Late Antiquity gather to hear “letter theater?” Unfortunately, the letters provide little data regarding the actual locations where letters were read aloud. It is difficult to isolate the concrete spaces in the city where events of intellectual sociability such as epistolary theater took place. Procopius in *Letter 101* to Pylaemenes and Aeneas in *Letter 7* to Diodorus may suggest a dining context for letter audiences. Procopius’ vague statement in *Letter 91* that he had read the preceding letter of Hieronymus “in the middle” of Gaza may suggest a reading in the *agora* or city-center of Gaza, which he indicates in his *Ekphrasis tou horologiou* was the location in Gaza of the monumental water-clock of Heracles performing his

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<sup>94</sup> θαυμάσας δὲ καὶ θέατρον καθίζω τοῖς γράμμασι τὴν βουλήν.

<sup>95</sup> δεικνυμένων δὲ τῶν γεγραμμένων οἱ μὲν ἐπήδων, οἱ δὲ ὠχρίων, οἱ δὲ ἠρυθρίων, οἱ δὲ εἰς γῆν ἔκυπτον. Libanius does not feel the need to specify the contents of Datianus’ letter to its author, so the nature of his message to this Antiochene audience is unclear, but it seems to blame some members of the audience and perhaps vindicate or declare certain members of the audience as without blame. Libanius reports that the letter and its praises of him make him seem like a prophet (*mantis*), so its content likely vindicated Libanius’ earlier foresight which was perhaps previously ignored or criticized.



twelve labors. Though Procopius does not use the term *agora* for the location of the clock, he indicates that it was “in the middle of the city (where) there is a medium-sized building, opposite the *stoa basilikos*, where to the left an open square delimits a summer gathering place” [lit. a place where people hang out in the summer: *endiatēma therous*].<sup>96</sup> Perhaps Procopius, Aeneas, and their associates read their letters aloud in the Gazan agora.

The monumental buildings at Gaza where Procopius, Aeneas, and Choricus met with their students were also possible settings for epistolary theater. These “theaters” may have been gatherings of students and instructors in the school. In this way, the lives of a letter text as a publicly-read document and teaching model were conflated in a single performance space. Little information survives regarding the buildings used for instruction by Procopius, Aeneas, and Choricus. It seems that the primary location of pedagogy at Gaza was not the private home of a sophist, but that there were public buildings where instruction took place. John of Gaza, for example, indicates that there was a place for teaching in Gaza which he calls a *diatribē*.<sup>97</sup>

The homes of rhetoricians—sometimes used as teachings spaces—may also have accommodated audiences for letter readings. The House of Proclus and the houses on the Areopagus at Athens in the fifth century may offer comparative contexts of contemporary academic communities. As Allison Frantz has argued, the so-called “House of Proclus,” located on the southern slopes of the Acropolis between the Odeion of Herodes Atticus and the Theater

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<sup>96</sup> οἶκος ἐστὶν ἐν μέσῃ τῇ πόλει μέτρα φέρων, ἀντιπρόσωπος μὲν τῇ βασιλείῳ στοᾷ, ἐξ εὐωνύμου δὲ χωρίον ἀπεῖργον ἐνδιὰίτημα θέρους. *Ek tou horologiou* 4, *RDG*, 206. Balbina Bäbler charmingly refers to this space as a “Tummelplatz,” or a place where people hang out; see Balbina Bäbler and A. Schomberg, “Prokop: Die Kunstuhr in Gaza,” *RDG*, 528-59, at 528.

<sup>97</sup> *Anacreontica* 5.3. Guglielmo Cavallo, “Places of Public Reading in Late Antiquity,” in Tomasz Derda, et. al., eds., *Alexandria: Auditoria of Kom El-Dikka and Late Antique Education*. The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements, vol. 8 (Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2007), 155 and 155n37.

of Dionysus, and a concatenated group of five buildings on the north slope of the Areopagus were likely settings for instruction in Late Antique Athens. The house on the slope of the Acropolis Frantz identifies as the home of Plutarch, founder of the Neoplatonic School at Athens as well as of the successive heads of the school, including Proclus. She bases this identification on the testimony of Marinus' biography of Proclus, which indicates that the home of Proclus, Plutarch, and Syrianus was located near the Asklepieion and the Temple and Theater of Dionysus. This house not only fits the location offered by Marinus, but "its site, as far as it could be estimated from its scattered known parts, precludes the existence of anything comparable in the area."<sup>98</sup>

The architecture of the houses on the Areopagus resembles closely that of the House of Proclus. These homes boast an apsidal room with niches for sculpture as well as greater size in comparison with the typical Athenian home.<sup>99</sup> Frantz argues that, provided the general affinity in layout and appointments between the House of Proclus and the Areopagus houses, plus the reality that the elite of Athens seems to have been constituted mainly of intellectuals, it is reasonable to connect the Areopagus houses with the wealthy teachers of Athens who were reputed to have taught students in their homes.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the observable physical interrelationship of the Areopagus houses suggests their planned concatenation and common purpose.<sup>101</sup> Grzegorz Majcherek, however, has recently disagreed with Frantz's identification of the apsidal halls in Areopagus houses A-D as lecture halls, contending that they do not appear

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<sup>98</sup> Allison Frantz, *The Athenian Agora*, vol. 24: *Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1988), 42-43.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

properly furnished for that use; these halls may have accommodated a large number of students, but no benches have been preserved in these spaces.<sup>102</sup> Garth Fowden had earlier judged these villas to be residences of wealthy Athenians and not teachers or philosophers.<sup>103</sup>

Franz also argues that not only the similarity of the plan of the Areopagus House to the “Proclus House,” but also the niches for sculpture as well as the sculpture itself, support a view of these structures as the private homes of teachers. Two statues, specifically a statue of Heracles found in House C of the Areopagus houses, and a statue of Hermes discovered in the well of an adjacent house, serve as emblems of the role of Heracles and Hermes as patron figures of education.<sup>104</sup> Majcherek points out, on the other hand, that the survival of these statues in no way contradicts Fowden’s earlier view that these villas simply belonged to wealthy Athenians and not to educators.<sup>105</sup>

Literary sources indicate the common practice of education at home or in-home classes on certain days of the week, regardless of whether instructors could afford better classroom settings.<sup>106</sup> Zacharias Scholasticus reports that Horapollon and the other philosophers taught at a school building on Fridays, but other instructors, including sophists and perhaps *grammatikoi*, taught from their homes on this day of the week.<sup>107</sup> Damascius also suggests Hypatia may have

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<sup>102</sup> Grzegorz Majcherek, “The Late Roman Auditoria of Alexandria: An Archaeological Overview,” in Derda, 42. Majcherek does agree with Franz’s identification of the House of Proclus as an in-home site of pedagogy.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., n. 42; cf. Garth Fowden, “The Athenian Agora and the Progress of Christianity,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3 (1990): 494-501.

<sup>104</sup> Franz, 46.

<sup>105</sup> Majcherek, 42.

<sup>106</sup> Criatore, “Spaces for teaching in Late Antiquity,” in Derda, 146.

<sup>107</sup> *Life of Severus* 3. See Criatore, “Spaces,” 147 and 147n18.

taught her chorus of students from the home.<sup>108</sup> Describing home settings of instruction as containing small-scale theaters, Eunapius indicates that Athenian sophists of the fourth century were wont to teach in their homes because of tension between students and the local population.<sup>109</sup> Eunapius declared, “not one of the sophists dared to go down into the city and discourse in public, so they lectured to their students in their own private theaters.”<sup>110</sup> Also in the same section of his text, Eunapius claims that the house of the sophist Julian contained “a theater of polished marble, imitating the public theaters but smaller, and of a size suitable to a house.”<sup>111</sup> The apsidal room, which became a common element in many homes in the fourth century, may have appeared to sophists as a lecture room and provided the architectural context for the theater Eunapius describes in Julian’s home.<sup>112</sup>

Libanius shifted his sites of pedagogy repeatedly as he progressed from private teacher to public sophist elected by the Antiochene *curia*. As a private instructor at Antioch Libanius first taught from his home, and upon receiving his municipal appointment he relocated his classroom to a site in the *bouleutērion* of Antioch.<sup>113</sup> According to Libanius *Oration* 22.31 this

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<sup>108</sup> Damascius, *Life of Isidore*, fr. 102; Cribiore, 147 and 147n16. Damascius says that when Archbishop Cyril passed by Hypatia’s home, he observed with disapproval a crowd of men gathered there. According to Cribiore, this may indicate that Hypatia taught from her home. These may also have been various events of intellectual sociability Hypatia held at home. Damascius, fr. 102, also reports that Hypatia taught out in the streets of the city διὰ μέσου τοῦ ἄστειωσ (Cavallo, 154 and 154n29).

<sup>109</sup> Franz, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Eunapius, *Vita sophistarum*, quoted in Frantz, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Cribiore, *The School of Libanius*, 43; eadem, “Spaces for Teaching in Late Antiquity,” in Derda, 145-46. When Libanius moved to Antioch he had the expectation that he would immediately fill the role of city sophist, based on an agreement with the current city sophist Zenobius. Apparently Zenobius did not keep his promise (*Or.*, 1.100-104); as a result, Libanius started out in Antioch as a private teacher with the fifteen students who traveled

*bouleutērion* contained “a covered lecture room (*theatron*) and four colonnades surrounding a courtyard that had been turned into a garden” encircled by trees.<sup>114</sup> This multifunctional building was also a temple which was available for the occupation of various parties who put the space to various uses.<sup>115</sup> This space housed the declamation practice and instruction sessions of Libanius’ students. His classroom was a great hall with a monumentalized entrance, opposite which two seats were stationed, one of which was Libanius’ teaching chair or *thronos*.<sup>116</sup>

Similar to Libanius’ description of his lecture space as a theater, Procopius refers to a theater in a *phrontistērion* in Antioch designating either an audience of students or the space of pedagogy. The reference is in *Letter 89* to a *grammaticus* named Stephanus who likely taught at Antioch.<sup>117</sup> After complaining of Stephanus’ silence and in particular of his neglect in returning some books of his, Procopius inquires about his friend’s professional life. “Reveal to me,” he wrote, “if you have a thinkery (*phrontistērion*), and if a multitude of students for you form a fence around the theater.”<sup>118</sup> Such language suggests that the teaching space of this *grammaticus* was a large theater-like room, but Procopius could also use the term “theater” simply as a metonym for an “audience” of students. At any rate, such “thinkeries” were viable sites of epistolary recitations.

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with him, without official appointment, and of inferior status to other private teachers who offered instruction at temples, such as the Temple of the Muses (145).

<sup>114</sup> Cribiore, *School of Libanius*, 44.

<sup>115</sup> J.W.H. Walden, *The Universities of Greece* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 267n1.

<sup>116</sup> Cribiore, 44.

<sup>117</sup> This Stephanus is likely *grammaticus* Stephanus, addressee of *Letters* 13, 71, and 105, who was from Gaza but transferred to Antioch to teach. *RDG*, 473n414; 447n76.

<sup>118</sup> δῆλωσον δὲ μοι καὶ ὅπως ὑμῖν ἔχει φροντιστήριον, καὶ εἰ πλῆθος ὀμιλητῶν σοι περιφράττει τὸ θέατρον.

Various other *loci* of pedagogy may have served as venues for the public readings of letters, before students and/or city literati. Unfortunately, material evidence of the special urban complexes of the most renowned schools of Late Antiquity does not survive.<sup>119</sup> It is also difficult to identify educational facilities in the surviving texts with precision, because while various terms for educational sites are named in our sources, the terminology is far from consistent or clear.<sup>120</sup> Common terms which seem to designate lecture halls include *akroastērion*, *acadēmia*, *phrontistērion*, *museion*, and *diatribē*.<sup>121</sup> Zacharias Scholasticus sets the second disputation of his *Ammonius*, featuring a mutual friend of Aeneas and Procopius of Gaza—Gessius iatrosophist—at the temple of the Muses and writes that this location is “where poets, rhetors, and grammarians usually held their declamations.”<sup>122</sup> Teachers also met with students in city spaces which were not designed or reserved exclusively for education. Multi-use facilities housed instruction, as in Libanius’ theater in the Antiochene *bouleuterion* or a space in the Basilica at Constantinople where Socrates tells us Julian attended lectures.<sup>123</sup>

One venue of education in Late Antique cities which has received much recent attention was the *auditorium*. According to the author of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, lecture halls for the teaching of law called *auditoria* existed at Berytus as early as the fourth century.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Majcherek, 43.

<sup>120</sup> For example, Libanius refers to his school of higher education as a *didaskaleion* (Cribiore, “Spaces,” 146), whereas Agathias also uses the term *phrontistērion* to denote schools of higher education in Constantinople which he distinguishes from the schools of elementary education, which he calls *didaskaleia* (*Hist.* 5.21.3, Cavallo, 155).

<sup>121</sup> See Majcherek, 44, and Cavallo, 154-55.

<sup>122</sup> Lines 366-368. Cribiore, “Spaces,” 146.

<sup>123</sup> *Eccl. Hist.* 3.1. Majcherek, 44.

<sup>124</sup> Cribiore, *The School of Libanius*, 44 n. 8. *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 25. For *auditoria* at Berytus, Cribiore suggests Linda Jones Hall, *Roman Berytus: Beirut in Late Antiquity* (London, New York:

A series of rulings in the *Theodosian Code* in the fourth and fifth century concern *auditoria* at Constantinople. Indeed the *Code* refers to the entire school at Constantinople as an *auditorium*.<sup>125</sup> Study of *auditoria* has been reinvigorated in particular by the relatively recent discovery and excavation of the remains of a Late Antique educational complex of twenty limestone *auditoria* at Kom el- Dikka in Alexandria.<sup>126</sup> These structures feature seats for the instructor and rows of seating for student viewers and thus likely functioned as interlinked educational theaters for instruction in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy.<sup>127</sup>

Located in the very heart of the Late Antique city, these *auditoria* at Alexandria would have provided space suitable for 500-600 students.<sup>128</sup> Stone benches constitute the most significant interior furnishing of these halls, and a common interior organization is two to three rows lining three walls of a rectangular space or rows of benches in a horse-shoe plan.<sup>129</sup> As in Libanius' depiction above, instructors seated themselves on a high chair or throne located atop a raised platform before the rows of stone benches of pupils.<sup>130</sup> The throne appears as a common element in images depicting teachers and philosophers in art from the Classical Greek period and became even more widespread by Late Antiquity. The image of Christ as a Divine Teacher

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Routledge, 2004), 66-67. See also Jean Rougé, ed., *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1966), 158.

<sup>125</sup> *Theodosian Code* 13.3.6 (4<sup>th</sup> c.); 6.21.1, 14.9.3, and 15.1.53 (5<sup>th</sup> c.). See Cribiore, *The School of Libanius*, 44, and eadem, "Spaces," 149.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Derda et al., *Alexandria*.

<sup>127</sup> Cribiore, *The School of Libanius*, 44.

<sup>128</sup> Majcherek, 12.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

seated upon a dais also features in Christian art.<sup>131</sup> Such iterations of iconographical culture likely granted authority in images to the epistolographer who recited letters from atop this throne.

The theater itself was a likely venue for letter readings. Theater structures in Late Antiquity were venues for audiences of various types of rhetorical displays and public oratory.<sup>132</sup> In a discussion of strife between pagans and Christians at Gaza in the early fifth century, Sozomen reveals that Gaza had a theater at that time.<sup>133</sup> The mosaic portrayal of Gaza in the mid-sixth century Madaba Map depicts a semicircular building which several scholars have suggested was in fact a theater.<sup>134</sup> If this is the case, a monumental theater may have been a thriving feature in the cityscape of Gaza during the time of Procopius and Aeneas. Choricus' oratory contains language pertaining to the theater as well as the term *theatron*, but it is not clear whether such terms denote a monumental theater or if they signify figurative ways of speaking about audiences and performances. For example, Choricus mentions a *horaia skēnē* which Catherine Saliou has recently suggested was a summer theater, yet the term *skēnē* could simply indicate a public performance itself and not a formal performance space.<sup>135</sup> In *Letter 172* to the lawyer Megethios, Procopius uses the term *skēnē* figuratively to mean something like

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>132</sup> Mayerson, 250 n. 16; Walden, 266-69. Walden, 269, indicates that public theaters were built at Smyrna in Asia Minor for rhetorical performances (Aristeides 1. 376); Libanius *Letters* 767 and 782 also relate that the theater was a venue for rhetorical display.

<sup>133</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9. Zeev Weiss, "Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost," in Brouria Bitton-Askelony and Aryeh Kofsky, eds., *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 24 and 24n4.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 24-25; see nn 5, 6, and 7 for an overview of scholars who have addressed this issue.

<sup>135</sup> Choricus *Laud. Arat. Et Steph.*, 55, ed. R. Foerster, E. Richsteig (Leipzig, 1929); Cavallo, 153 and 153n20; Saliou, "L'orateur et la ville: réflexions sur l'apport de Chorikios à la connaissance de l'histoire de l'espace urbain à Gaza," in *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive* (Helios: Salerno, 2005), 178-79.



“spectacle” or “theater” when referring to Megethios’ language in his previous letter: “you hang about yourself the whole spectacle (*skēnē*) of your tongue.”<sup>136</sup>

A reference to theaters at Gaza occurs in a funeral oration delivered by Choricus to an unnamed *astynomos* of Gaza. Choricus personifies the city as mourning the loss of an invaluable benefactor, wailing “who will now adorn my baths? Who will now erect porticos and theaters?”<sup>137</sup> This passage may suggest the continuing practice of the construction of monumental theaters at Gaza, these could also be a *topos* associated traditionally with oratory about the *euergetism* of curial officials such as *astynomoi*. We should also recall Choricus’ concern for the destruction of theaters in his *Apologia Mimorum* 143, and Violaine Malineau recently suggested that this indicates theaters were fading in significance in the urban landscape of the sixth century and thus vulnerable to quarrying.<sup>138</sup>

In his Panegyric to Anastasius, likely addressed to the emperor’s image, Procopius of Gaza states that he stands in the middle of a theater, and as rhetor has been judged by the city to serve as its voice.<sup>139</sup> On the basis of this passage, Elizabeth Gebhard maintained that Procopius literally addressed the Gazan citizenry gathered in the *cavea* of the theater of Gaza.<sup>140</sup> This is not

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<sup>136</sup> τὴν σκηνὴν ὅλην ἐξῆφθαί τῆς γλώττης.

<sup>137</sup> A. Laniado, “La carrière d’un notable de Gaza,” in Catherine Saliou, ed., *Gaza dans l’antiquité tardive*, 237.

<sup>138</sup> See Violaine Malineau, “L’apport de l’ Apologie *des mimes* de Choricus de Gaza à la connaissance du théâtre du VI siècle,” in *Gaza dans l’antiquité tardive*, 149-69.

<sup>139</sup> Providing an excellent example of the role of public sophist as the voice of the Late Ancient city, Procopius reasons, “there isn’t sufficient time for each man (of the city) to speak, and by a common vote they are satisfied by the voice of the rhetor” (lines 16-19). For recent editions of the text of Procopius’ Panegyric to Anastasius and translation into modern Italian, see Giuseppina Matino, ed. and trans., *Procopio di Gaza: Panegirico per l’imperatore Anastasio* (Napoli: Accademia Pontaniana, 2005); G. Ventrella, trans., “Panegirico per l’imperatore Anastasio,” 240-67; *RDG*, 283-87n149-235.

<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Gebhard, “The Theater and the City,” in William J. Slater, ed., *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 116-17. Gebhard asserts, “The

entirely clear, given the polysemy of the word *theatron*. As has been demonstrated above, *theatron* often simply indicates an audience or the event of the performance and not a physical location; Procopius could simply refer to any assembly of the Gazan *polis*, gathered in any public space, including the *agora*.

At Elusa, there is a probable link between the school of rhetoric and its theater. On the basis of a Greek inscription dating to 454/455 commemorating the repavement of the theater floor, Avraham Negev demonstrated that the theater of Elusa was in use in the Late Antique period.<sup>141</sup> The inscription specifies that this work was sponsored by Abraamius son of Zenobius. It is probable that this mid-fifth century Zenobius is a relation of another famed Zenobius: Libanius's teacher and professor at the school of rhetoric of Antioch, as well as its elected city-sophist (d. 345), who hailed from Elusa.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, the cousin of Libanius' Zenobius, named Argyrius, likely also native to Elusa, was an acclaimed rhetor and one of the *curiales*. Another cousin of the fourth-century Zenobius, Boethus, served at Elusa as a police magistrate of curial rank, the *Irenarch*.<sup>143</sup> Clearly, members of the line of the fourth-century rhetor Zenobius were Elusan curial magnates who had connections with rhetorical training. The *philotimia* of Abraamius son of Zenobius might have been an act of the line of the Zenobii at Elusa perpetuating lettered culture in their hometown. The theater at Elusa could have been a site

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occasion of these orations presided over by the Muses must still be festivals in honor of the imperial house and celebrated in the theater, at which rhetors competed with encomiums to the emperor" (116-17).

<sup>141</sup> Mayerson, 249 n13; A. Negev, "Survey and Trial Excavations at Haluza (Elusa), 1973," *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976): 92-93; idem, *Les Nabatéens au Négev*, *Le Monde de la Bible* 19 (1981): 17-19; 18, fig. 23.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-50.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

where Procopius' friend Hieronymus performed epistolary theater of Procopius' letters as well as his own reprisal letters.

Synesius' so-called *Panhellenion* of Constantinople does no more to help us locate specific venues of epistolary theater in the city, because it likely refers to an informal constellation of intellectuals who met at Constantinople rather than to a particular building or society.<sup>144</sup> Modern commentators have focused on what can be known about this circle of savants based on the letters.<sup>145</sup> The sole reference to the *Panhellenion* in Synesius' *oeuvre* occurs during the concluding lines of *Letter* 101 to Pylaemenes, where he writes,

There is no small danger that my letter will be read in the *Panhellenion*. For I call this the place in which often I meditated upon weighty thoughts, where famous men from all parts of the world gathered together to hear the sacred voice of old men carefully examining tales both ancient and new.<sup>146</sup>

At minimum, Synesius likely points here to the practice among a coterie of literati of meeting and reading letters and various literary works aloud. Cameron and Long suggest that Synesius uses the term jokingly to refer to the coalition of Greek cities created by Hadrian, centered upon Athens. Cyrene was a member of this federation, and Synesius likely refers here to himself as

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<sup>144</sup> For scholarship concerning the *Panhellenion* of Synesius, see Roques, *Synesios* 3: 357-58n37. For skepticism concerning its literal existence, see Gerhard Albert, *Goten in Konstantinopel: Untersuchungen zur oströmischen Geschichte um das Jahr 400 n. Chr.* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), 28-33; Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long, 71-80, esp. 79-80, and 80n44.

<sup>145</sup> See, for example, G. Grützmaker, *Synesios von Kyrene: Ein Charakterbild aus dem Untergang des Hellenentums* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1913), 61-72; Christian Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène: hellène et chrétien* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951), 122-30.

<sup>146</sup> οὐ γὰρ μικρὸς ὁ κίνδυνος ἐν τῷ Πανελληνίῳ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀναγνωσθῆναι. Καλῶ γὰρ οὕτω τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ πολλάκις ἐφρόντισα τὰς βαρείας φροντίδας τῶν ἀπανταχόθεν ἐλλογίμων συνιόντων ἐφ' ᾧ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀκοῦσαι τοῦ πρεσβύτου φωνῆς παλαιὰ καὶ νέα καταμαστευούσης διηγήματα.

the Cyrenean representative of this group of friends who met for convivial intellectual gatherings.<sup>147</sup>

The context of private dining rooms and reception spaces in the houses of intellectual elites and other types of provincial elites is another possible setting for epistolary theater in the Late Antique city. In Augustine's harangue against the pleasures characterizing the false happiness of an exceptional councilman, the "sumptuously laden" table figures, along with, for example, honorific statues and inscriptions as well as the capacity to serve as a patron to clients, as verifiable marker of one's location in the social landscape (*Contra Academicos* 1.2). Men of this social location were the likely associates of sophists and grammarians; sophists and grammarians themselves likely often hailed from curial families.<sup>148</sup> Letters of Libanius refer to lively dinners where lettered friends gathered to enjoy company and share and display their erudition.<sup>149</sup> In a letter to his former student the doctor Olympius, Libanius cites the memory of dinners these men shared and "discourses that flowed from your mouth and of Themistocles, full of pleasure and the sophist drinking."<sup>150</sup> Libanius suggests that gatherings of dining sociability among Olympius' friends, adding "I think that even now you dine in the same fashion."<sup>151</sup>

Architectural changes in the Late Antique provincial private house illuminate the centrality of dining as a locus of Late Roman elite sociability and provide potential contexts for

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<sup>147</sup> See Cameron and Long, 80n44. The authors also place this archaizing reference in the larger context of references to his Dorian ancestry and the Cyreneans' Spartan lineage in Synesius' *oeuvre*.

<sup>148</sup> See Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 132-33.

<sup>149</sup> Criore, 63, 300-301, *Letter* 153 (Foerster 1198) to Olympius.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 301; Criore's translation. Criore thinks the drinking sophist must be Libanius himself.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

the Republic of Letters. The changing architecture of the private home in Late Antiquity was characterized by the incorporation of certain features of public buildings—and thus may represent attempts to project the social and political power with which they were imbued. According to Simon Ellis, the most significant architectural development of Late Antiquity was the increasing use of the apsidal dining room featuring the *stibadium* or semicircular couch.<sup>152</sup> Apsidal dining rooms have been identified from as early as the first century A.D., but appear to become common from the late third century onward.<sup>153</sup> Ellis regards the Late Antique popularity of the *stibadium* as part of the devolution of the *triclinium* wherein the dining area was furnished with an apse and one semicircular couch substituted for the usual three rectangular couches.<sup>154</sup> Lavin suggested that this phenomenon represents an aristocratic attempt to absorb the architectural design of imperial palaces or churches, thereby constructing publicly-recognized architectures of power in the elite home on display for guests. The apse became a common architectural feature in both public and private buildings by the fourth century, and it appears designed to outline and showcase the authority of the individual or object it encircled.<sup>155</sup>

Closely related to the apsidal dining room and the trend of incorporating features of public buildings in private homes was the emergence of other kinds of reception spaces within

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<sup>152</sup> Simon Ellis, *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa, and Insula* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 119.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, and *idem*, “The End of the Roman House” *American Journal of Archaeology* 92 (1988): 571. Ellis comments, however, that few scholars have engaged this issue with the exception of I. Lavin, “The House of the Lord,” *Art Bulletin* 44 (1962): 1-27.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 119 and 571-72.

<sup>155</sup> Ellis, *Roman Art*, 119-120.

the Late Roman provincial dwelling, such as the private audience chamber,<sup>156</sup> meant most likely to advertise a patron's power to clients, and the large formal dining room. The dining hall may have been a site of readings of letters, a locus of the lateral address of Late Antique epistolographers. While most homes of the Early and Middle Empire had only one reception or dining room, the *triclinium*, from the third century onward three forms of specialized reception spaces begin to emerge in differing combinations in provincial elite homes and villas.<sup>157</sup> The *triclinium* or dining hall was likely designed to receive clients and less powerful guests, whereas the large dining hall would house more distinguished guests. These three spaces of domestic elite sociability—apsidal dining rooms, reception rooms, and large dining halls—are likely contexts of the readings of letters among gatherings of literati in the Late Antique city.

Written and material evidence of the Greek East indicates that traditional Roman dining customs persisted with vivacity deep into the sixth century.<sup>158</sup> Reception rooms employed for the *stibadium* banquet are often identified through their plans, fittings, and decorations. Such remains include the villa of the Falconer at Argos in Greece (early sixth century) with a mosaic floor detailing the layout for the couch and table. A series of large houses at Apamea in Syria featuring huge reception rooms with an apse at one end continued to be used, renovated, and redecorated through the fifth and sixth centuries. No change in the use of these rooms is detectible until the early seventh century.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> These “home theaters” consisted of an audience chamber and large apsidal rooms following an entrance hall accessible through the main door of the house opening onto the street. The location of the vestibule, contiguous with the street, protected the privacy of the resident family.

<sup>157</sup> Ellis, *Roman Art*, 122.

<sup>158</sup> Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge, U.K., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

Visual and material evidence depicting Roman banqueting in the later Empire cast in images the sensory delights of dining sociability as well as the decoration embellishing dining rooms. Images of food appear from at least the first century B.C. on panels of painting or mosaic called *xenia*.<sup>160</sup> These panels were later incorporated as pieces of larger mosaic pavements, which are found in Italy and North Africa beginning in the second century A.D. These pavements typically depict animals and birds either live or prepared for cooking, seafood, prepared dishes, and baskets of fruits and vegetables. Foods presented on these panels likely underscored the wealth and bounty of the host, both in terms of his own land-holdings and his capacity to acquire foodstuffs from distant regions. Mosaic pavements decorated reception rooms and enshrined in images the status and hospitality of the host.<sup>161</sup> Statues of Greco-Roman deities may have ornamented the seven-apsed hall excavated near the hippodrome in Constantinople, which has been identified as the house of Lausus, the grand chamberlain of Theodosius II in the fifth century A.D.<sup>162</sup> Such elements constituted some of the ornaments of dining spaces, the likely domestic venues of epistolary theaters.

These public spaces within the elite home were likely sites in which elite friends of various social locations, including lawyers and magistrates as well as educators, read letters from friends, quite possibly friends in other cities in the Greek East. Like Synesius' audience of Libyan Hellenes, domestic audiences became vicarious addressees of letters received by local friends. We may also envision Sosianus and Julian, a Caesarean lawyer and his associate,

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> The history of Byzantium compiled by Cedrenus (12<sup>th</sup> c.), employing earlier sources, asserts that Lausus owned a large sculpture collection. See Ellis, *Roman Art*, 128-29; see also Immanuel Bekker, ed., *Georgius Cedrenus* (Bonn, Germany: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1838-39), 587.

reading aloud the letters of Procopius in such a domestic context, or Hieronymus sharing Procopius' letters in his homes in Egypt or Elusa. In this way, the private dwelling operated as a social space—a type of Late Antique “salon”—in which local provincial elite circles became interlinked with the thoughts and concerns of other provincial elites from various locales in the eastern Empire through performances of letters. These settings and exchanges perpetuated and authorized a sort of lettered speech among literati.

### Theater in the Late Antique City

In this section, I am interested in establishing the larger civic context in which these authors referred to letter readings as “theaters” and freely drew from Classical tragedy and comedy. What was the status of the theater in the Late Antique city? The urban landscape no longer housed performances of tragedies and comedies. References to them were already archaisms. Classical tragedies, comedies, and satires, which were rare in Roman theater, had been supplanted in the Late Antique city by mime and pantomime.<sup>163</sup> Sources indicate that theatrical performances of various types came increasingly under attack—both in the form of legislative activity and moral diatribes—in the sixth century, contemporaneous with the activity of both Procopius and Aeneas. Mime and pantomime enjoyed vivacious support throughout Late Antiquity as the favored performance type in theaters in cities, beginning in the second century.<sup>164</sup> Different cities gained renown for specializing in particular performance types; according to the author of the fourth-century *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (32), Tyre and

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<sup>163</sup> Zeev Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, 23-39, at 28.

<sup>164</sup> Alexandra Retzleff, “Near Eastern Theatres in Late Antiquity,” *Phoenix* 57 (2003): 116 and 116n7. Retzleff recommends E. Csapo and W. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), and T.D. Barnes’ “Christians and the Theater,” in W. Slater, ed., *Roman Theater and Society*, 161-80.



Berytus excelled in mime, Caesarea in pantomime.<sup>165</sup> Festivals included theatrical performances and were organized well into the Christian period; they were not ordered to cease until the early Byzantine period with the ruling of the Council of Trullo at Constantinople in 691-692.<sup>166</sup>

By the early sixth century, polemic, legislation, and financial stresses combined to curtail theatrical performances. Ancient criticism of theater and public spectacles was generally moral/philosophical, political, and religious. Mime shows elicited attack from Christian writers on both moral grounds and their association with pagan traditions. Particularly noxious to the late fifth-century author Pseudo-Joshua were the theatrical displays and their concomitant licentiousness associated with an annual springtime festival, likely the Maiouma, at Edessa.<sup>167</sup> Pseudo-Joshua's contemporary Jacob of Serug lambasted theater performances in his homilies entitled *On the Spectacles of the Theater* in language often quite close to the phrases of Pseudo-Joshua.<sup>168</sup> Rabbis also criticized games and spectacles on moral grounds and expressed disapproval that rabbis and their disciples attended theaters and circuses.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, pagan authors castigated mime shows on moral grounds. Zosimus blamed pantomime shows for the decline of Rome and faulted Theodosius for his fondness for ostentation and mime shows.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. See also Rougé's edition cited above.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., Canon 62 in Michael Maas, *Readings in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 183.

<sup>167</sup> Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt, trans., *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 32 (Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2000), xvi.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>169</sup> *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* 26.2, cited in Weiss, 31.

<sup>170</sup> Zosimus, 4.33.4; Trombley and Watt, xvii. See also Ludwig Mendelssohn, ed., *Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci historia nova* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1887).

Procopius of Gaza's protégé Choricus is careful in public oratory to defend Gazan festivals against suspicion of theatrical displays and concomitant immoderate behavior among Gazan citizens. Discussing the celebration of the exhumation of the remains of Saint Stephen on 2 August<sup>171</sup> in an encomium in honor of Marcian the bishop, Choricus asserts "far from us are contentious competitions and tasteless [*apeirokalos*—lit., devoid of beauty] dancing and vulgar cries befitting the scenes of Dionysus!"<sup>172</sup> Such claims may not be entirely accurate, however, particularly as they appear in an address of a genre meant to be entirely complimentary to Marcian and which likely represents the city over which Marcian presided as eschewing indecorous behavior. In his *Apologia Mimorum*, however, Choricus defends the mime as an important element of men's education.<sup>173</sup>

Educators and related personnel in Late Antiquity—including from Julian's pedagogue Mardonius, to Libanius, Augustine, and Isidore of Pelusium—also criticized public spectacles because they distracted students from study and had adverse effects on the moral development which sophists considered themselves as inculcating in students.<sup>174</sup> In a letter to a fellow-sophist Harpocras lamenting Harpocras' own failure to restrain his students' regular attendance at the games, Isidore agrees with his friend that "corrupting habits will not readily grow up to a

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<sup>171</sup> Fotios K. Litsas, "Choricus of Gaza: An Approach to His Work: Introduction, Translation, Commentary." (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1980), 94.

<sup>172</sup> *Laudatio Marc.* 2 Section 70. ἀλλ' ἡμῖν ἐκποδῶν δυσέριδες ἄθλοι καὶ δημῶδεις φωναὶ καὶ χορεία τις ἀπειρόκαλος καὶ πρέπουσα ταῖς Διονύσου σκηναῖς.

<sup>173</sup> Weiss, 29 and 29n23. This oration is an important source for public performances at Gaza during the early sixth century; see also U. Albini, "Il mimo a Gaza tra il V e il VI sec. d. C.," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 15 (1997): 116-22; see Violaine Malineau in C. Saliou ed., *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive*, 149-69.

<sup>174</sup> Richard Lim, "Isidore of Pelusium on Roman Public Spectacles," *Studia Patristica* 29 (1996): 67-68. Isidore's text is preserved in *PG* 5:185.

virtuous manhood.”<sup>175</sup> Isidore continues, averring that “close association with the licentious robs the young of temperance; flight from the sweaty toil in the necessary readings takes away their prudence; the perjury of the mimes destroys their sense of right and wrong.”<sup>176</sup> Addressing the issue of strife in the *polis*, Isidore ultimately contends in the same letter that spectacles were designed by imperial interests to create civic struggles among the citizenry and thereby distract urban masses from organizing acts of political insurrection against imperial hegemony.<sup>177</sup>

As an instrument of Christianization, imperial legislation aimed to de-sacralize public spectacles by removing pagan cultic elements and thereby severing theatrical events from their roots in pagan Greco-Roman traditions.<sup>178</sup> In terms of legislative rulings, Pseudo-Joshua and Procopius of Gaza both report that Anastasius prohibited mime shows in A.D. 502.<sup>179</sup> In his *Apologia Mimorum*, Choricus reveals that a law at Gaza forbade teachers from attending mime performances.<sup>180</sup> John Malalas tells us that Justinian forbade spectacles and dancing in the Greek East following riots in Antioch incited by the Blue faction (17.12.416-417).<sup>181</sup> Procopius of Caesarea linked Justinian with the end of public spectacles in his *Secret Histories*, but he also suggested that the fundamental reason for this legislation was financial (26.6-8). According to

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> For this interpretation, see Lim, 68-73.

<sup>178</sup> Retzleff, 132-34. Attempts at desecralization took the form of legislation and also innovations in architectural design. For example, rectilinear and rounded niches chiseled in the *proscenium* (front of the stage) were filled in at Caesarea and Petra so that cultic paraphernalia could no longer be showcased (117, 133). Retzleff also cites (133 n. 102) Richard Lim’s article on the desecralization of the games: “People as Power: Games, Munificence, and Contested Topography,” in W. Harris, ed., *The Transformation of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 33, 1999), 265-81.

<sup>179</sup> Trombley and Watt, xvi, 46; Procopius of Gaza *Panegyric* 16.

<sup>180</sup> Weiss, 30.

<sup>181</sup> Retzleff, 116.

Procopius, entertainment spaces such as theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters ceased to be used when the treasury could no longer afford to pay personnel in the entertainment business.<sup>182</sup> In this context, town councilors were likely under increasing pressure to finance spectacles as a municipal liturgy. A law of Justinian, for example, indicates that city councilmen at Alexandria were ordered to subsidize chariot games by contributing 100 gold *solidi* each (*Just. Edict.* 13.5-6).<sup>183</sup>

The vicissitudes of monumental theaters in Late Antiquity should also be placed in a broader context of diminishing municipal resources in cities in general which likely contributed to a general reduction in building activity of all types. Most new construction was church building. After A.D. 300 few theaters were constructed anywhere in the Empire; only the theater at Antipatris, thought to have been a project of Julian, appears to date to the fourth century.<sup>184</sup> Theater construction was also implicated in imperial building laws. Several rulings dating to the 360s required imperial authorization for the construction of new buildings, and local officials were increasingly advised to use funds for the restoration of existing structures rather than to construct new buildings.<sup>185</sup> Theater buildings in the Near East remained virtually unchanged until the sixth century, at which point encroachment on older public buildings and subdivision of them began. Overall, however, theaters endured throughout Late Antiquity as living public structures in the urban topography of many cities in the Near East.<sup>186</sup> Despite the fact that new

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Lim, "Isidore," 72n28.

<sup>184</sup> Retzleff, 116.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 116-117 and 117n12; for legislation concerning building see Lim, "People as Power," 266; Cod. Theod. 15.1.11 (364), 15.1.16 (365), 15.1.17 (376), 15.1.19 (376).

<sup>186</sup> Retzleff, 116.

theaters were not built subsequent to the fourth century, physical evidence suggests that architectural remodeling of theaters continued in the later Empire and such construction represented the enduring use of traditional elements used in theater design in the Near East from the second century. Near Eastern theaters such as those at Caesarea, Daphne, Neapolis, Scythopolis, and Shuni in Palestine were still likely employed in the fifth or sixth century, as indicated by repair work.<sup>187</sup>

Theatrical performances did not require monumentalized spaces in the urban cityscape. Various types of theatrical displays were associated with events punctuating the lives of Roman provincials of various socio-economic levels, whether the events were festivals, celebrations associated with higher education, or marriage. Choricus of Gaza, Procopius' student and subsequent head of the Gaza School, tells us how students at the school celebrated the completion of academic milestones with a special day called the *axiōsis* which apparently involved theatrical performances and pantomime.<sup>188</sup> While at other schools this celebration occurred among students of a lower level of education, at Gaza older students observed this ritual which seems to have garnered Christian criticism, and perhaps parent complaints, in the sixth century. Likely countering opposition, in his *Apology of the Mimes* Choricus appears to justify this practice by maintaining that it is the custom and that it does not seem to be a deed of a shameful nature.<sup>189</sup> This rite took place at the school in the midst of teachers, parents, and perhaps other members of the local community. Students would highlight their scholastic

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 134 and 122n35; and 122n35; see 122-30 for architectural remodeling of theaters at Caesarea, Petra, Bostra, and Nablus (Neapolis); also regional analysis 20-31.

<sup>188</sup> Litsas, 47.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. n3: ἐξ ἔθους ἡμῖν, ἀλλὰ οὐ κατὰ φύσιν αἰσχρὸν εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα δοκεῖ, Foerster and Richtsteig, 368, 10-11. Apparently this rite endured until the later centuries of Byzantium.

achievements with displays accompanied with mimic and theatrical performances including classical tragedies and comedies. Following the public event held at the school, students apparently continued their merriment in their own private parties which likely escalated into even more flamboyant theatrical expressions.<sup>190</sup>

Theatrical performances accompanied other major life *caesurae* for students. Weddings of students at the Gaza school also involved not only rhetorical performances but dancing and performances organized by groups of artists or by groups of students.<sup>191</sup> Like the student body at Libanius' school in Antioch, students formed various groups akin to fraternities.<sup>192</sup> Student theatrical performances could have been planned and organized by such bands of student associations.

#### Theater Language in Our Authors and Related Texts

Epistolary theater was just one form of public recitation event in the Late Ancient city. The public readings of letters, therefore, must be placed in the broader context of public readings and oratory which garnered audiences of *literati* who gathered in the same venues as those I suggested were *loci* of epistolary readings. These gatherings before an engaged intellectual audience were also conceptualized through the term “theater” and related language. As public performances these events could turn the reader into an actor.<sup>193</sup> In the section which follows, I will address usages of theater language to refer to public oratory and its audiences.

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<sup>190</sup> Litsas, 48 and 48n2.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. and 48n5.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 49 and 49n1.

<sup>193</sup> Cavallo, 153.

As Ciccolella has noted, the term *theatron* may be used metonymically for audience<sup>194</sup> but it also seems to indicate a public performance. *Theatron* is a polysemous term in Late Antique texts, referring to a monumental structure or other space for viewing a performance of some type, to an audience, or to a performance; sometimes it indicates the two latter meanings simultaneously, and it may indicate all three meanings at the same time. In *Letter 46* to his brother Zacharias, for example, Procopius remarks happily how his *patris* looks upon him favorably. Since having left Gaza briefly, his *patris* has gathered together theaters for him and roused applause for him as well as fame. “Theater” here may indicate at once the audience and the event. The two uses of the term *theatron* at the end of Procopius *Letter 91* alternate between audience and event of epistolary theater (see above).

The other uses of the term *theatron* in the Procopian corpus are limited to a set of seven letters between Procopius and a younger advocate named Megethios.<sup>195</sup> Five of these letters were written by Megethios to Procopius (166, 170, 171, 173, and 174), and the remaining two were addressed to Megethios and written by Procopius (169, 172). Teasing his friend Procopius, Megethios refers to theater as a rhetorical event in *Letter 171*: “for three days you threaten theater to the wretched hearers.”<sup>196</sup> Procopius uses the term *skēnē* in *Letter 172* to Megethios figuratively to mean something like “spectacle” or “display” in a joking reference to the rhetorical gymnastics of Megethios’ preceding letter: “you hang about yourself the whole spectacle (*skēnē*) of your tongue.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> *RDG*, 461n240.

<sup>195</sup> See Chapter 1 for editions and scholarship concerning these letters.

<sup>196</sup> πρότριτα τοῖς ταλαιπώροις ἀκροαταῖς ἀπειλεῖτε τὸ θέατρον.

<sup>197</sup> τὴν σκηνὴν ὅλην ἐξῆφθαί τῆς γλώττης.

*Letter* 166 from Megethios to Procopius is a fascinating glimpse into the enthusiasm for rhetoric expressed by a group of lettered men in the Late Antique city, and suggests the tastes and interests of an audience of contemporary literati. Procopius has delivered a funeral oration, and Megethios expresses his utter enchantment with Procopius' speech, writing, "I was delighted to such an extent by the honeyed Atticisms of yours, that I considered Mousagetes himself to have labored with you on the speech along with the Graces."<sup>198</sup> Referring to Procopius as collaborating with the leader of the Muses—Mousagetes, an epithet for Apollo in Pindar and Plato—Megethios likely draws on an established literary tradition employing this epithet, and perhaps the Platonic parallel wherein Apollo Mousagetes appears with Dionysus as *synchoreutai*—companions in dance—alongside human beings.<sup>199</sup> In this way, Megethios links Procopius' oratory with theatrical performance, specifically choral dancing. Megethios continues to report the energetic response of Procopius' audience: "in fact, upon each of your words I and all those who were listening filled the theater with applause, each (of us) shouting like Stentor." Stentor was a Greek at Troy known for his loud voice, *Iliad* 5.785-6.<sup>200</sup> The raucous approval of the audience is conceptualized through the example of the renowned herald of the *Iliad*, and the theater here may simply be a gathering in any public place, though it could be a monumental theater at Gaza or elsewhere. The city location is unclear.

Megethios describes further the success of Procopius' oratory which electrifies circles of literati.

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<sup>198</sup> τοσοῦτον ἦσθην ταῖς Ἀττικαῖς σου μελίτταις, ὥστε καὶ ἠγούμην τὸν Μουσηγέτην αὐτὸν συνεργάσασθαί σοι μετὰ Χαρίτων τὸν λόγον.

<sup>199</sup> See *RDG*, 503n830.

<sup>200</sup> ἐφ' ἐκάστῳ μὲν οὖν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐγώ τε καὶ ὅσοι τῶν ἀκροωμένων ἐπέπλησα τότε κροτῶν τὸ θέατρον βοῶντες ἕκαστοι τὸ Στεντόρειον. See *RDG*, 501n802: this expression appears in Aristides *Or.* 2.109.



And when I had gone out into the city, wonderment at you extended out even more, and there were in the mouths of all your golden creations, everyone judging your creations against one another, since there was nothing close to them, everyone being at a loss as to how one might crown your creations more than the others for beauty.<sup>201</sup>

In fact, an audience of literati associated with Megethios has requested a copy of the speech, which Megethios now beseeches Procopius to forward: “Since therefore some did not hear your speech, and they pleaded to taste from me your honeyed Atticism, [so] do send the speech. Know well that I will deck it with the garlands of myriad praises and send it swiftly on to them.”<sup>202</sup> Megethios requests that Procopius send the speech; perhaps Procopius will send a written copy which Megethios will have copied and forwarded to his associates, creating new theaters in his own community for Procopius’ literary creation. Megethios will continue to augment Procopius’ reputation among a group of associates and will disseminate Procopius’ speech to his admirers, thereby creating new theaters for his sophist friend.

Within the context of a playful and humorous epistolary debate between these two men concerning the differences between sophists and rhetors, Procopius in *Letter 170* refers to a *theatron* as an audience. “If you are unhappy,” he writes, “that you had not been asked to provide letters to secure the favor of the theater through the speech I have sent . . .”<sup>203</sup> It is not clear, but Procopius could refer here to the use of epistolary communication to prime a particular audience to respond favorably to his speech before hearing it. In *Letter 169* Megethios again refers to the audience of a declamation as a theater which is primed to respond favorably,

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<sup>201</sup> ὡς δὲ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν γεγονάμεν, ἐντεῦθεν μᾶλλον ἐπετείνετό σοι τὸ θαῦμα, καὶ ἦν ἐν τοῖς ἀπάντων στόμασι τὰ χρυσᾶ σου γεννήματα, κρινόντων μὲν ταῦτα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τῷ μὴ τι παραπλήσιον εἶναι, ἀπορουμένων δὲ ποῖα δεῖ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων στεφανῶσαι τοῦ κάλλους.

<sup>202</sup> ἐπεὶ οὖν ὅσοις δι’ ἀσχολίαν ἀνηκόοις γενέσθαι τοῦ λόγου συμβέβηκεν, ἰκέτευον ἀπογευσασθαι δι’ ἐμοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς σου μελίττης, πέμπε τὸν λόγον, εἴ εἰδῶς ὡς μυρίοις αὐθις αὐτὸν καταστέψαντες τοῖς ἐγκωμίοις εἰς τάχος ἀποστελοῦμεν.

<sup>203</sup> εἰ δὲ μέμφῃ τὸ μὴ σοῦ δεηθῆναι διὰ γραμμάτων παρασχεῖν εὐμενὲς τῷ λόγῳ τῷ πεμφθέντι τὸ θέατρον . . .

presumably through Megethios' high opinion of Procopius: "when your students are about to go for a show-off speech, if nothing else, you should have written that the theater became well disposed to them through my agency."<sup>204</sup> Megethios likens the orator to actors who customarily appear onstage before the performance to bid the audience to respond favorably, writing "for those also beginning a performance, when they are ready to present it to the audience, beforehand ask those very ones to be favorably disposed toward them."<sup>205</sup>

Procopius' *Letter 91* (discussed above) and the letters between Megethios and Procopius indicate that Procopius claimed to be an admirable exponent of Attic rhetoric in sixth-century Palestine, and that a circle of literati in the Greek East shared enthusiasm for Atticizing rhetoric. Megethios classifies Procopius' rhetoric in *Letter 166* by referring to the industry of the bees at Mt. Hymettus in Athens, marveling at the speech's honeyed Atticisms. In response to Megethios' praise, Procopius in *Letter 170* affirms the authority of Atticism: "you cast before me Atticism itself, through which long ago august things prevailed, and the great name of Athenians was preserved on account of their achievements!"<sup>206</sup> Procopius teasingly contends that Megethios' own reverence for Atticism confirms his being inscribed as a member of the ancient Eupatrid *genos* of Attica and his descent from the Athenian hero Butes, twin of Erechtheus and son of the legendary king Pandion.<sup>207</sup> Atticizing oratory thus has the cultural

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<sup>204</sup> καίτοι μελλόντων σοι τῶν παίδων πρὸς ἐπίδειξιν καταβαίνειν, εἰ καὶ μηδὲν ἕτερον, τὸ γούν εὐμενὲς αὐτοῖς δι' ἐμοῦ γενέσθαι τὸ θέατρον ἐχρῆν ἐπιστεῖλλαι.

<sup>205</sup> καὶ γὰρ οἱ τὰ δράματα εἰσιόντες, ἐπειδὴν μέλλωσι ταῦτα δεικνῦσαι τοῖς θεαταῖς, πρότερον ἐξαίτουσιν εὐνοῦς αὐτοῦς ἐκείνου.

<sup>206</sup> αὐτῆς ἡμῖν, ὃ λῶστε, προσβάλλεις τῆς Ἀττικῆς, δι' ἧς γε τὰ πρώην ἐκράττει σεμνά, καὶ τοῦτο μέγα ὄνομα τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἐσφῆξετο.

<sup>207</sup> Pandion was also the father of Philomela and Procne. See Apollodorus 3.14.8, and *RDG*, 502n813.

weight to identify its practitioner as descendant of one of the noblest lineages of Archaic Attica. Procopius again affirms his identification with Atticizing speech in this letter, referring back to Megethios' compliment to Procopius which began *Letter 166*: "in my eyes you would not refute my opinion [literally his vote, *psēphisma*], you who have only spoken to the judges and proclaimed, 'thus to you [Procopius] the legitimate strains of the Attic tongue (belong) and the font of the Muses flows upon your tongue.'"<sup>208</sup> Procopius continues to relate Megethios' enthusiastic approval of Procopius' Atticizing speech, stating that Megethios had earlier related to him the ecstatic power of Procopius' speech, saying "hearing your speech I am not be able to remain in myself, just as when the Bacchantes became full of the god."<sup>209</sup>

The letters between Procopius and Megethios testify to the continuing enthusiasm for Atticizing rhetoric, and demonstrate little or no interest in Latin authors and linguistic traditions. Atticism began as a socio-linguistic movement of the Second Sophistic claiming that the authoritative form of the Greek language lay in the imitation of the style of the classical Athenian authors. Originating in the late first century B.C. and spearheaded in particular by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *attikismos* involved the authentication of the list of Athenian authors judged truly "Attic" as authoritative models of imitation, as well as specific grammatical and linguistic choices and a vocabulary confined to the ranks of Attic authors (and some of the poets). Those sophists identifying as Atticists perceived themselves to be the bearers of a true classical Attic speech and aimed to distinguish themselves from other Greek speakers as purveyors of the most

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<sup>208</sup> οὐκ ἄν μοι τὴν ψῆφον ἤλεγξας μόνον εἰπὼν τοι τοῖς δικασταῖς καὶ φθεγγάμενος · “οὕτω σοι τῆς Ἀττικῆς τὰ γνήσια καὶ πηγὴ Μουσῶν ἐπιχεῖται τῆς γλώττης . . .”

<sup>209</sup> ὥστε τι τῶν σῶν ἀκούων οὐ δύναμαι μένειν ἐν ἑμαυτῷ, ὥσπερ οἱ βακχεύοντες ἐπειδὴν πλήρεις γένωνται τοῦ θεοῦ.

authoritative type of Greek.<sup>210</sup> As an archaizing movement focused upon an ideal of pure “Attic,” Atticism was inherently unstable and unattainable, with Atticists never reaching agreement regarding specific choices with regard to imitation of classical authors.<sup>211</sup> As an emblem of elite identity, Atticism among sophists should be viewed as one particular antiquarian movement of the Second Sophistic which sought classical models as sources for authority in the Greek East, with the aim of constructing Greek identity vis-à-vis Roman rule.<sup>212</sup>

Megethios also alludes to Procopius’ Atticizing speech in *Letter* 174 when he requests that Procopius send to him a copy of a second speech, now lost, imitating Aeschines’ orations treating the glorious past confrontation of Athens with Philip II. The passage offers the first testimony to this theme—popular since the Second Sophistic—among the Gazan School.<sup>213</sup> Megethios makes evident the popularity of Procopius’ declamation, referring to it as “your sung-of Philip.”<sup>214</sup> He may suggest that he was also present in the audience to hear the speech, and may refer to the echo of applause along the walls of an outdoor venue: “you have taken much applause from me wandering along the walls.”<sup>215</sup> Referring to a sensual enthusiasm for *logoi* as well as the engagement of a greater set of literati with Procopius’ oratory, Megethios begs

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<sup>210</sup> Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World A.D. 50-250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 20. See also Graham Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (London; New York: Longman, 1997).

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66.

<sup>213</sup> See Amato, “‘ΡΗΤΩΡ VS. ΣΟΦΙΣΤΗΣ,” 272 and 272n14.

<sup>214</sup> τὸν Φίλιππον ὑμῶν τὸν ἀοίδιμον.

<sup>215</sup> ἐφ’ οἷς δὴ πρῶην μυρίουσ ἀπηνέγκασθε κρότους ἐμοῦ παρὰ τὰς αίμασιὰς πλανωμένου.

Procopius to forward his speech “so that I might not be alone in having not tasted the delights of Attica.”<sup>216</sup>

### Theater Language and the Sociolect of Late Antique Epistolography

Allusion, reference, and quotation relating to Classical Athenian tragedy and Old Attic Comedy featured prominently in letters as a constituent part of the distinctive sociolect of Late Antique epistolography. Such language functioned simultaneously as an expression of the linguistic and cultural mechanisms used to catalyze and maintain friendships or relationships in letters as well as underscoring the erudition of the letter author. Thus language drawn from tragedy and comedy was a living component of the cultural toolkit constituting lettered currency among Late Antique provincials. Speech drawn from tragedy and comedy comprised “a set of symbolic vehicles” through which epistolographers “shared and learned about each other.”<sup>217</sup> Hence, I propose a sociological approach to reading epistolary speech which conceptualizes theater language as a device of emotional and intellectual commerce. In this section, I will provide an overview of the various uses of theater language in the letters of the selected epistolographers, ranging from its use as shorthand sound bites in epistolary conversation, to its role in social interaction including its humorous use as a form of social play,<sup>218</sup> to its strategic function in the context of advice-giving, to its use in making requests and granting favors, to its

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<sup>216</sup> ὥς ἂν μὴ μόνος τῶν ἐξ Ἀττικῆς ἡδυσμάτων ἄγευστος γένωμαι.

<sup>217</sup> Language borrowed from Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>218</sup> For the view of humor as a *paratelic* (non-goal oriented) state of mind and form of social play, see Michael Apter, *The Experience of Motivation: The Theory of Psychological Reversals* (London: Academic Press, 1982).

role in biblical exegesis, and finally, to its role in understanding and representing experience, particularly in the face of major life stresses.<sup>219</sup>

As a part of the exchange of literary materials, tragic verse could literally accompany letters, and epistolographers in turn seized such opportunities to construct finely-selected rhetorical representations of such gifts wrought in the language of the theater. In *Letter* 140 to his Caesarean lawyer friend Diodorus, Procopius mocks Diodorus' gift of "worthless little rags of Euripides" which Diodorus sent apparently with his preceding letter.<sup>220</sup> Procopius deliberately selects the diminutive *rakion* (rag) used in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 412-15 in a discussion between Dikaiopolis and Aristophanes' Euripides. Dikaiopolis, authorized by the chorus to deliver a speech against the Peloponnesian War, visits Euripides ostensibly for help with his oratory, yet ends up instead borrowing a costume from the tragedian to wear when he delivers his speech—the beggar's costume Telephus dons in the now-lost Euripidean play bearing his own name. Dikaiopolis teases the playwright, jeering at his beggar-like "work outfit" of little rags from tragedy,<sup>221</sup> and bids Euripides to lend him some little rags from his play the Telephus.<sup>222</sup> Procopius strategically selects Aristophanes' language in this passage referring pejoratively to Euripides' dress and the beggar's costume worn by the character of Telephus in order to tease his friend affectionately as well as flaunt his erudition. As part of the gibe, Procopius adopts Aristophanes' characteristically mocking and derisive tone with regard to the

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<sup>219</sup> For a recent discussion of theatrical language in Procopius' oratory and some of his letters, see also Giuseppina Matino, "Lessico e immagini teatrali in Procopio di Gaza," in *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique: Hommages à Jacques Schamp*, Eugenio Amato, ed., with Alexandre Roduit and Martin Steinruck (Bruxelles: Éditions Latomus, 2006), 482-94.

<sup>220</sup> τὰ Εὐριπίδου ῥάκια.

<sup>221</sup> τὰ ῥάκι' ἐκ τραγωδίας.

<sup>222</sup> Lines 412-15.

unconventional Euripides. In this way, Procopius deploys a tiny diminutive in a brief conversation in Old Comedy to demonstrate warm yet learned affection toward his friend.

Short proverbial phrases from comedy and tragedy operated as shorthand rhetorical devices punctuating epistolary conversations. One such stock phrase which appears twice in Procopius' letters is the Aristophanic phrase signifying a pointless effort, "to take owls to Athens" from *Birds* 301.<sup>223</sup> In *Letter* 102 to the doctor Gessius, Procopius relates the praise Gessius' new student and Procopius' former student Dorotheus has for his new teacher Gessius: "having come to me he wished to say nothing but about you . . . he carried on and on about you."<sup>224</sup> Procopius represents himself as succinctly rejoining with his own praise of Gessius by deploying the comic sound bite: "you're taking owls to Athens"; that is, Procopius is fully convinced of Gessius' merits, and Dorotheus need not expend his energy trying to convince the already-admiring Procopius.

In the context of banter regarding philosophers versus sophists, Procopius in *Letter* 126 counters his advocate friend Johannes' mocking remarks about the inferiority of sophists to philosophers with a curt proverb from Aristophanes *Wasps* 191.<sup>225</sup> For Johannes to conflate Procopius as a sophist with the likes of Plato's morally bankrupt sophists such as Thrasymachus and Polus, parries Procopius, is "as they say, 'for the sake of the shadow of an ass.'"<sup>226</sup> That is,

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<sup>223</sup> *Letters* 87 and 102; cf. *RDG*, 472n407. The image of the owl, the bird sacred to the patron goddess Athena, was engraved on Athenian coins.

<sup>224</sup> ἐλθὼν δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ἤθελε λέγειν ὅτι μὴ σέ . . . καί σε πολὺν ἐπὶ στόματος ἤγεν. See *RDG*, 50n105 regarding the identity of Dorotheus.

<sup>225</sup> *RDG*, 486n605. Cicolella identifies Johannes as a rhetor and advocate who studied in Alexandria and Caesarea. See *RDG*, 442n36. He is likely "Johannes 50" in *PLRE* 2:606.

<sup>226</sup> χάριν ὄνου φασὶ σκιάν. The phrase in Aristophanes is "περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς." Gorgias' student, Polus in the *Gorgias* 461b-481b defends rhetoric and accepts injustice as a means to obtain and exercise power (*RDG*, 459n206); Thrasymachus, a sophist from Chalcidice (459-400 B.C.) is one of the interlocutors of Plato's *Republic*

such epistolary teasing is so unfounded with regard to the facts that it is, like taking owls to Athens or coals to Newcastle, a useless endeavor. A tiny Aristophanic adage operates as a ready rhetorical expression in the cultural toolkit informing jocular epistolary comraderie.

Tragic maxims such as “getting caught in your own feathers,” a proverbial phrase from a fragment of the *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus, similarly operate as shorthand expressions furnishing the linguistic arsenal of epistolary repartee.<sup>227</sup> In *Letter 98* Procopius mocks his advocate friend Diodorus for his silence, demanding to know “what has happened to you who are of much tongue and who look down on those who are silent?”<sup>228</sup> Procopius accuses Diodorus of committing the same transgressions of which he has accused others: “For the things you blame having done them you have the refutation from yourself; you have been caught in your own feathers, having experienced the proverb.”<sup>229</sup> Diodorus’ own behavior is an effective cross-examination of his own accusation. “Caught in his own feathers,” he does not assess his own conduct with clarity.

Similarly, Synesius interjects pithy stock phrases drawn from the Attic stage into his letters. In *Letter 129* to his dear Constantinopolitan friend Pylaemenes, Synesius laments that an entire year of his letters addressed to Pylaemenes have been sent back to him and explains his current mission to re-send these missives along with a debt owed to a friend in common named Proclus. He writes, “yet I swear in the name of him who presides over our friendship [that is,

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who in this dialogue conforms to his name (“bellicose audacity”) and propounds the theory of force as the source of law (338c) and defends injustice as an expression of the liberty of the individual (344c). Regarding Thrasymachus cf. *RDG*, 487n606.

<sup>227</sup> Fr. 139. 4-5, Radt; *RDG*, 478n475.

<sup>228</sup> τί τοῦτο πέπονθας ὁ πολὺς τὴν γλῶτταν, καὶ μέγαπνέων κατὰ τῶν σιωπῶντων;

<sup>229</sup> ἄ γὰρ ἐμέμψω δράσας οἴκοθεν ἔχεις τὸν ἔλεγχον καὶ τοῖς σεαυτοῦ πτεροῖς ἐάλως, τὴν παροιμίαν παθῶν.



Zeus the god of friendship] that I came down to the sea for this very purpose, having conversed with the oarsmen of Phycus [the Cyrenean port], ‘having given up the horsemanship.’”<sup>230</sup>

Referring to a line spoken by Strepsiades in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*—“having given the horsemanship”—the words of an Athenian man beleaguered by his debts run up by his son Pheidippides’ excessive fondness for horse-racing, Synesius jokingly refers to his own debt and likens his situation to that of a character in an Attic comedy which Synesius likely studied in his school-boy days.

Humorous references to theatrical language in epistolary sociability provide devices for social play. In *Letter* 124 to Hieronymus, Procopius contrives a letter which responds to the accusations of silence from his sophist friend.<sup>231</sup> Drawing once again upon a recurring epistolary theme in letters addressed to Hieronymus contrasting the wealth of Egypt, where Hieronymus taught at Alexandria and Hermopolis, with the poverty of Hieronymus’ hometown of Elusa,<sup>232</sup> Procopius begins by charging Hieronymus, “You got haughty on the Nile, and you march out against us leading us into the middle of Egypt, as if having become forgetful of dearest Elusa!”<sup>233</sup> Apparently Hieronymus, now teaching in Hermopolis, has boasted mendaciously to Procopius in a prior letter that his new home, whose climate and soil are notoriously dry,<sup>234</sup> produces generous crop yields: “And why say, lying, that it has a rich harvest? Unless you call

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<sup>230</sup> Aristophanes *Clouds*, 107. See Roques, 3:384n8. καίτοι, << νῆ τὸν Φίλιον τὸν ἐμὸν τε καὶ σόν>>, ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τούτῳ κατέβην ἐπὶ θάλατταν καὶ τοῖς Φυκουντίων κωπεῦσι διείλεγμαι, <<σχασάμενος ἰππικὴν>>

<sup>231</sup> But you accuse me of silence when you do not even make a peep! ἀλλὰ καὶ σιωπῆς με γράφῃ, μηδὲν ἡμῖν τὸ παράπαν φθεγγόμενος.

<sup>232</sup> *RDG*, 439n12; Ciccolella also points out this theme in the letters addressed to Hieronymus at 444n57.

<sup>233</sup> ὡς μεγάλα τῷ Νείλῳ φρονεῖς, καὶ ἀντεξάγεις ἡμῖν εἰς μέσον ἄγων τὴν Αἴγυπτον, ὥσπερ Ἐλούσης τῆς φιλτάτης εἰς λήθην ἐλθῶν.

<sup>234</sup> *RDG*, 486n586.

snakes and such a huge number of scorpions a harvest!”<sup>235</sup> Lambasting his friend for preferring Hermopolis to Palestine, Procopius then jokes that Hieronymus may have been stung by one of these scorpions, but having spotted a well-laid table he quickly forgets the scorpion, and preparing to feast bids adieu to the venomous pest, uttering to it a comic paraphrase of a line from Euripides’ *Alcestis*: “not even having died may I be without you!”<sup>236</sup> Alluding to Admetus’ grieving words to his wife Alcestis, who agreed to die in her husband’s stead to fulfill an agreement between the god Apollo and Admetus, Procopius comically contrasts the relationship between Hieronymus and Hermopolitan scorpions—certainly not a loving one—with the relationship between a mythical Thessalian king and his all-sacrificing wife. Procopius thus lampoons Hieronymus’ ready appetite for Egyptian “luxury” (*truphē*) which renders negligible the scorpion’s sting, Hieronymus’ homeland, and perhaps most significantly, the obligation to write to Procopius.

Epistolographers deployed language drawn from tragedy and comedy to enhance the authority of epistolary advice to friends. In *Letter* 131 to his former student the advocate Sabinus,<sup>237</sup> framed by opening and closing allusions to the goddess Poverty from Aristophanes’ *Plutus*, Procopius chides his friend for his apparent devotion to money and his neglect of intellectual discipline, the discipline inextricably intertwined with virtue from the sophist’s point

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<sup>235</sup> τί δὲ καὶ ψευδῶς ὀπωρίζεσθαι φής; πλὴν εἰ μὴ τοὺς ὄφεις ὀπώραν καλεῖς καὶ σκορπίων ὄσον γε πλῆθος.

<sup>236</sup> RDG, 486n588, Euripides *Alcestis* 367-68, repeated in Aristophanes *Acharnians* 893-94. The actual line in the *Alcestis* is spoken by Admetus to Alcestis: “never, even in death, may I be apart from you who alone has been faithful to me” (μηδὲ γὰρ θανῶν ποτε σοῦ χωρὶς εἶην τῆς μόνης πιστῆς ἐμοί.)

<sup>237</sup> RDG, 489n625.

of view.<sup>238</sup> Drawing upon *Plutus* lines 442-43 characterizing Poverty as the most fearful creature to exist,<sup>239</sup> Procopius begins by declaring, “You bring forth poverty against me as blameworthy, and it seems to you to be the most fearful beast!”<sup>240</sup> Sabinus’ fondness for money distracts him from true assessment of the life of mind embodied by Procopius, whose material circumstances Sabinus presently censures. “For why would you not say,” Procopius writes, “that you have fallen away from both virtue and philosophy, pitying what you ought to admire, and considering him who is lofty and airy and him who has not been borne toward the things below by the weight of material things to have been deprived of the great things?”<sup>241</sup> Procopius concludes his letter with the exhortation that his former student become a devotee of Poverty once more: “come of your own accord to me if it seems good [that is, forsake material concerns], and worship the goddess of poverty that you and I share and recognize that She loves you. She will follow you around more than me, and it has been announced that she will love you.”<sup>242</sup>

Isidore invokes classical tragedy in a larger conversation which interweaves references to classical mythology and discussions of the stories of Amnon and Absalom in the Hebrew Bible in order to advise his learned friend Heron scholasticus to avoid the company of individuals of

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<sup>238</sup> In *Letter* 75 addressed to his former student Nestorius upbraiding Nestorius’ love of wealth, Procopius opens by referring to Aristophanes’ *Plutus* lines 335-36 in which Blepsidemus indicates that Chremylus has suddenly grown rich. Procopius writes, “Chremylus had become wealthy suddenly as the comedy says.” Cf. *RDG*, 468n357; 466n326. In the second line of the letter, we learn that Nestorius has experienced this change of material fortune suddenly, just like Chremylus.

<sup>239</sup> Πενία γὰρ ἐστὶν, ὃ πόνηρ’, ἧς οὐδαμοῦ οὐδὲν πέφυκε ζῶον ἐξωλέστερον. See *RDG*, 489n626.

<sup>240</sup> σὺ μὲν ὡς ἐπ’ ὀνειδίζει πενίαν προφέρεις ἐμοί, καὶ θηρίον ἐξωλέστατον εἶναί σοι τὸ χρῆμα δοκεῖ.

<sup>241</sup> καὶ τί γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴποις ἀρετῆς ὁμοῦ καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἐκπεπτωκῶς, ἐλεῶν μὲν ἃ γε θαυμάζειν ἐχρήν, μεγάλων δὲ τινῶν ἐστερηθῆσαι νομίζων τὸν ὑψηλὸν τε καὶ κοῦφον καὶ μὴ τῷ βάρει τῆς ὕλης πρὸς τὰ κάτω φερόμενον;

<sup>242</sup> ἀλλ’ αὐτομόλησον πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰ δοκεῖ, καὶ τὴν κοινὴν θεὸν τὴν Πενίαν προσκύνει καὶ φιλοῦσαν ἐπίγνωθι. καὶ γὰρ σὲ περιέπει μᾶλλον ἢ περὶ ἡμᾶς, καὶ φιλήσειν ἔτι κατεπήγγελται.

corrupt moral character (*Letter* 1660). Employing the language of sexual reproduction as an analogue for social intercourse, Isidore opens with the *exempla* of Greek myths: “Just as in mythology, the union of different species gave birth to the monstrous body, like the Minotaur, or the Centaurs, the first of which devoured the children of Attica,<sup>243</sup> while the second kidnapped the wives of others,<sup>244</sup> so the same (is true) also of intercourse with men the worst kind, which gives birth to monstrous and unseemly mores, imitating nearly the audacity of the Centaurs.”<sup>245</sup> Next Isidore splices classical tradition with a lesson from the Psalmist (i.e., David), commenting, “that’s why the Psalmist ran these people [i.e., men of bad character] off as far as possible, saying ‘stay away from me, all who are practicing lawlessness.’”<sup>246</sup> Isidore warns that “intercourse with immoral men does not bring forth a small damage but looks toward the soul itself, than which nothing is more precious.”<sup>247</sup> He continues to explain that if, as some claim, the events in the myths actually happened, that is why Moses the lawmaker prohibited sexual union with animals and decreed capital punishment for those practicing it in order to prevent offspring of monstrous bodies and the germination of tragedies.<sup>248</sup> The precaution of the lawgiver is indeed admirable, Isidore remarks. Isidore then provides a second iteration of hybrid

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<sup>243</sup> Evieux, 2:406n2 refers to the myth in which following defeat, Athens sent each year to the king of Crete seven young men and seven young women, who were fed to the Minotaur.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, n3.

<sup>245</sup> ὡσπερ ἡ μυθευομένη τῶν ἑτερογενῶν σύνοδος ἀλλόκοτα ἔτικτε σώματα, Μινώταυρόν τινα καὶ Κενταύρους, ὧν ὁ μὲν τοὺς Ἀττικοὺς ἐθoinᾶτο παῖδας, οἱ δὲ τὰς ἀλλοτρίας ἤρπαζον γυναῖκας, οὕτω καὶ ἡ τῶν κακίστων ἀνδρῶν συνουσία ἀλλόκοτα καὶ ἄτοπα ἦθη τίκει, μικροῦ τὰ τῶν Κενταύρων μιμούμενα τολμήματα.

<sup>246</sup> Evieux, 2:406; *Psalm* 6.9. δι’ ὃ καὶ Μελωδὸς τούτους ἀπήλαυεν ὡς πορρωτάτω, λέγων · << Ἀπόστητε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, πάντες οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν. >>

<sup>247</sup> οὐ γὰρ μικρὰν ἢ τούτων συνουσία τίκει βλάβην, ἀλλ’ εἰς αὐτὴν βλέπουσαν τὴν ψυχὴν ἦς οὐδὲν τιμιώτερον.

<sup>248</sup> εἰ μὲν οὖν, ὡς φασὶ τινες, ἔργῳ γεγόνασιν οἱ μῦθοι – δι’ ὃ καὶ ὁ νομοθέτης τοῦθ’ ὅπερ ἐζήτησας μαθεῖν ἐθέεπισε, τὴν πρὸς ζῷα κωλύων σύνοδον καὶ θανάτῳ τοὺς συνιόντας κολάζων, ὥστε μὴ τερατώδη τίκτεσθαι σώματα καὶ τραγωδίας βλαστάνειν.

counsel regarding the deleterious effects of immoral companions on one’s moral conduct by interspersing classical and biblical models, specifically a fragment from Euripides and the examples of Amnon and Absalom in the Hebrew Bible: “for intercourse (with corrupt persons) harms most greatly, and, on the one hand makes clear the phrase, ‘bad association spoils good characters,’<sup>249</sup> and on the other hand, the elder son Amnon and Absalom the youngest son of the Psalmist make this clear—by living shamefully they ruined their lives.” Deploying the pithy Euripidean adage “bad association spoils good characters” in combination with the lessons offered by the stories of Amnon’s rape of his half-sister Tamar and Absalom’s avenging murder of Amnon, Isidore fortifies his advice to a friend regarding his social choices. In this way, classical *paideia* and biblical texts work synergistically to authorize epistolary advice.

References to classical tragedy and comedy collectively operate as linguistic strategies of recipient design. That is, language from classical theater furnishes discursive devices which letter authors deploy to prime a correspondent to respond to a communication in favorable ways, such as by granting a request for intellectual materials. *Letter* 119 addressed to Pancratius, an ex-student of Procopius who continued his rhetorical study at Alexandria,<sup>250</sup> provides an instructive example of tragic language in the service of recipient design. Procopius, citing Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* line 592, opens a request for Pancratius’ poetry with praise glittering with the symbolic capital of tragic verse. “Aeschylus,” he writes, “having chosen someone to praise, says he does not wish to seem best but to be the best.”<sup>251</sup> Procopius continues to prime Pancratius to respond favorably, praising him: “for you showed yourself to be such a

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<sup>249</sup> Évieux, 2:406, Euripides fr. 1024.

<sup>250</sup> *RDG*, 484n563; *PLRE* 2:829.

<sup>251</sup> *RDG*, 484n564. οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος ἀλλ’ εἶναι θέλει φησὶν Αἰσχύλος, ἐπαινεῖν τινα προελόμενος.

one to me [that is, “the best”], not, as is common, showing forth friendship as long as you are present, and not measuring good will by the place, but showing yourself to be better and urging yourself to prevail.”<sup>252</sup> Flattering his former pupil, Procopius gushes,

Suitably indeed forgetfulness does not know how to filch you from my thoughts, but it always occurs to me to say something Socratic, such as ‘if I don’t know Pancratius, then I have also forgotten myself.’ Pancratius whose tongue dances with the Muses—virtue made his holy soul like a temple inaccessible to ills.<sup>253</sup>

Procopius frames his parting request with the authorizing force of Euripidean verse, bidding Pancratius “‘give a share of your success to your friends,’ delighting us with the good things from your tongue, sending from your house to mine your poetry.”<sup>254</sup> The phrase, “give a share of your success to your friends,” is a quotation of a small phrase spoken by Orestes in Euripides’ *Orestes* line 450.<sup>255</sup> Procopius expected that Pancratius would readily recognize these six words and that this morsel of erudition, along with the lush preceding adulation authorized by Aeschylean language, alongside classicizing references to Plato and the Muses, might charm his friend into sending some poetry to his former teacher who likely misses him.

The language of classical theater might also come to bear in negotiations between sophists and the parents of students. In *Letter 79* addressed to Eusebius, father of Procopius’

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<sup>252</sup> τοιοῦτος ἡμῖν ἀνεφάνης, οὐ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ κοινὸν μέχρι τοῦ παρεῖναι φιλίαν ἐπιδεικνύς, οὐδὲ μετρῶν τῷ τόπῳ τὴν εὐνοίαν, ἀλλὰ κρείττων εἶναι καὶ σαυτὸν νικᾶν ἐπειγόμενος.

<sup>253</sup> εἰκότως ἄρα σε τῆς ἐμῆς διανοίας οὐκ οἶδεν ὑποκλέπτειν ἢ λήθη, ἀλλ’ ἔπεισὶ τί μοι Σωκρατικὸν ἀεὶ λέγειν, ὡς “εἰ ἐγὼ Παγκράτιον ἀγνοῶ, καὶ ἑμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέλησμαι”, οὗ χορεύει μὲν ἡ γλῶττα ταῖς Μούσαις, ἀρετὴ δὲ καθάπερ τέμενος ἄβατον κακία τὴν ἱερὰν ψυχὴν ὤκειώσατο. The phrase “εἰ ἐγὼ Παγκράτιον ἀγνοῶ, καὶ ἑμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέλησμαι” is a quotation of Plato *Phaedrus* 228a (*RDG*, 484n565), a line spoken by Socrates addressed to Phaedrus. I found that Procopius inserts “Pancratius” for “Phaedrus.”

<sup>254</sup> ‘μετάδος δὲ φίλοισι σοῖσι σῆς εὐπραξίας’, τοῖς ἐκ γλώττης ἀγαθοῖς εὐφραίνων ἡμᾶς, καὶ πέμπων οἴκοθεν οἴκαδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὰ ποιήματα.

<sup>255</sup> *RDG*, 484n567. Ciccolella notes that Procopius adds a “δὲ” in between the first two words of this phrase.

student Megalus, and Elias,<sup>256</sup> Megalus is apparently terminating his studies with Procopius. Procopius closes his letter with polite wishes to his friend Eusebius that Megalus continue his studies with a teacher better than Procopius. Procopius paraphrases a line of Euripides (*Alcestis* 182) to communicate his wish, employing also the typical father-son language used among sophists to denote the relationship between teachers and students: “may there be another father of words for him, ‘not more kindly (toward him than I am), but perhaps more capable.’”<sup>257</sup> Theater language provides a compact, eloquent, erudite, and mannerly means for Procopius to discuss Megalus’ decision to discontinue study with Procopius.

Language drawn from tragedy also furnishes an archaizing vocabulary that epistolographers marshaled for the purpose of biblical exegesis. Isidore’s *Letter* 1435, superscribed to Johannes the deacon, offers us an opportunity to view a hybrid sociolect drawn from classical tragedy, Scripture, and ancient astronomical traditions. Responding to his friend’s request for help explicating Jude 13, quoted in the letter as “errant stars for which the obscurity of darkness keeps watch for eternity,”<sup>258</sup> Isidore suggests an allegorical interpretation of the passage by explaining that “stars” metaphorically represent human beings who have sinned by choice and reap eternal punishment.<sup>259</sup> Since, however, the passage in Jude introduces the issue

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 453n145. Elias’ identity is not clear. He may be the bishop to which *Letter* 159 is addressed. Ciccolella, however, cautions against this, noting that the tone of *Letter* 127 is far warmer and less formal than that of *Letter* 159 as well as *Letter* 36 in which Procopius thanks Elias for a gift which indicates a generous but powerful person (453n150).

<sup>257</sup> ἀλλά τις γένοιτο τούτῳ λόγων πατήρ, εὖνους μὲν οὐκ ἂν μᾶλλον, κρείττων δ’ ἴσως. *RDG*, 469n374. Ciccolella n374 provides the language from the *Alcestis*: σώφρων μὲν οὐκ ἂν μᾶλλον, εὐτυχῆς δ’ ἴσως.

<sup>258</sup> ἀστέρες πλανῆται οἷς ὁ ζόφος τοῦ σκοτόυς εἰς αἰῶνα τετήρηται.

<sup>259</sup> φημί τοίνυν ὅτι περὶ ἀνθρώπων συγγνώμης πατιόντων ὑψηλότερα ἢ τῶ ἐπιστείλαντι ὁ λόγος, οὐ περὶ ἄστρον καὶ νεφελῶν, κυμάτων τε καὶ δένδρων, οἷς δὴ παραδέγμασι κέχρηται · “I believe the author of the letter spoke of men committing mistakes exceeding forgiveness, not the stars and clouds, waves

of errant stars or planets, Isidore returns to discussion of heavenly bodies, threading together scientific traditions concerning wandering stars and fixed stars developed by thinkers such as the doxographer Aetius, and demonstrations transmitted, for example, by Posidonius of Apamea, by the astronomer Cleomedes, and by Vitruvius.<sup>260</sup> Offering a moral valence to celestial bodies, Isidore asserts that these entities perform their revolutions in agreement and perfect harmony, and, contrary to pagan belief, they are not themselves deities but instead are arranged in an ordered whole by a creator. Those who are not persuaded, Isidore advises, should listen to Plato who averred “Good is the demiurge of this world universe” (*Timaeus* 28c) and Euripides who has Jocasta say that “the sun and night are servants to mortals” (*Phoenician Women* 546).<sup>261</sup> According to Isidore, such Greek thinkers articulated a cosmological vision shared by Jews and Christians wherein heavenly bodies have a cause and a creator who rules their movement and order. Stitching together the strands of classical texts and Greek scientific tradition, Isidore underscores his erudition and authorizes his scriptural exegesis by harmonizing Christian cosmology with revered Greek scientific and philosophical lineages as well as the poetry of the tragic stage.

Tragic speech serves as a vehicle for the expression of emotion in letters between friends. In *Letter* 66 to Nestorius, a former student perhaps from Elusa who had reneged on his promise to visit Procopius, the latter laments his fate by “tragedizing” (*tragōdein*), albeit in probably a

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and trees, which he uses as examples.” In addition to errant stars, Isidore refers here to the other natural objects appearing in Jude 1:12-13.

<sup>260</sup> Evieux 2:46n1, 47n2, 51 n1. I will explore these traditions further in Ch. 5 below.

<sup>261</sup> εἰ δ' οὐ πείθονται, ἀκούετωσαν Πλάτωνος μὲν λέγοντος .<< Ἀγαθός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός δημιουργός>>, Εὐριπίδους δέ . *Εἴθ' ἥλιος μὲν νύξ τε δουλεύει βροτῶν, καὶ παύεσθωσαν τῆς τοσαύτης ἀσεβείας*. For citations of Plato and Euripides, see Evieux 2: 52.



joking tone.<sup>262</sup> Procopius wonders, now that he has been disappointed in his hope of seeing his dear student, how he can bear it patiently. In mock despair Procopius cries,

O Fortune, Fortune—for I will speak a little from tragedy for the consolation of my pain—why does my suffering delight you to such an extent? For you ought either not to have brought men together so they have longing for one another or should allow them to enjoy one another, and not take pleasure in men separated from each other.<sup>263</sup>

The vocative formula “O Tyche,” is reminiscent of the plaintive addresses to the gods by tragic characters, particularly the tragic chorus. The excess of tragic lamentation is likely simultaneously comic yet expressive of genuine sorrow. For epistolographers, the language of the tragic chorus is an appropriate vehicle for the playful expression of emotion, and Procopius articulates his disappointment in this mode to cajole or charm his former student to visit. Similarly, in the context of an abstract philosophical letter (159) to a bishop named Elias meditating about the impermanent nature of human experience Procopius refers to tragic portrayals of human affairs as the playthings of Fortune: “there are many things to say through which one might represent in tragedy the sport of Fortune, who always transforms our affairs as you would expect and does not permit anything to stand according to its form.”<sup>264</sup>

Epistolographers marshal the language of tragedy and comedy to represent and to understand experience. Recounting in detail his harrowing shipwreck on a journey from Alexandria to Cyrene, in a lengthy letter to his brother (Letter 5) Synesius jokes how his travails were a mixture of tragic and comic elements. He writes, “this (account) for you is the comico-

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<sup>262</sup> *RDG*, 466n326.

<sup>263</sup> ὦ Τύχη, Τύχη, –τραγωδήσω γάρ τι μικρὸν εἰς παραμυθίαν τῆς λύπης – τί σε τοσοῦτον εὐφραίνομεν ἀνιώμενοι; ὄφελος γάρ ἢ μὴ συναγαγεῖν εἰς πόθον ἀνθρώπους ἢ γοῦν ἀπολαύειν ἀλλήλων ἔαν καὶ μὴ χωριζόμενοις ἐφήδεσθαι.

<sup>264</sup> *Letter* 159: πολλῶν ὄντων εἰπεῖν ἐξ ὧν ἂν τις τὰ τῆς τύχης τραγωδήσειε παίγνια, μεταποιούσης αἰὲν πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν τὰ ἡμέτερα καὶ μηδὲν ἑστάναι συγχωρούσης ἐπὶ τοῦ σχήματος.

tragedy in which the *daimon* has fit me and that I relate to you by this letter.”<sup>265</sup> The great poet of Synesius’ experience is some force outside of human control, though it is not clear.

Phrases culled from tragedy enunciate epistolographers’ representations of major life events. In a longer letter presumably aiming to elicit aid and counsel from a group of presbyters of Ptolemaïs, Synesius invokes a tragic phrase to express his personal crisis upon his election to the bishopric.<sup>266</sup> Synesius laments how, in spite of his efforts to turn down the bishopric, a divine force has prevailed to assign him this public office. What grieves Synesius most is his assessment that his devotion to the exercise of the mind is incompatible with the office of bishop. In fact, Synesius doubts that someone like himself who has been devoted from youth to philosophic study and contemplation could satisfactorily undertake an office of such daily concerns. Injecting a proverbial phrase—“the unlivable life”<sup>267</sup>—appearing in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (line 821) and Aristophanes *Plutus* (line 969),<sup>268</sup> Synesius expresses intense concern that the bishopric will encroach upon the life of intellectual development which truly makes life livable. He exclaims, “again if I hand myself over to the multitude of affairs [matters of daily life] how will I ever apply myself to the beautiful things of the mind which can be reaped only

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<sup>265</sup> τοῦτό σοι δράμα ἐκ τραγικοῦ κωμικὸν ὃ τε δαίμων ἡμῖν ἐνήρμοσε καὶ γὰρ τοῖς πρὸς σὲ γράμμασι. It is difficult to translate what Synesius means by the word *daimon*, which has various meanings in texts ranging from Homer through the sources for Middle and New Platonism to Christian theologians. In Homer the term indicates the operator of unexpected events in human affairs; it could also refer to the Olympian gods. Plato employed earlier uses of the word and added to them a new meaning: Plato conceives of *daimones* as intermediaries between gods and humankind in *Symposium* 202d-203a. In later antiquity, *daimones* could designate semi-divine beings who acquired a positive valence and the status of intermediaries akin to angels. Christian theologians forged a divide between angels and *daimones*; *daimones* lost the positive roles of beneficent intermediaries and acquired the status of negative forces counteracting the will of God. For a useful summary of the many facets of the term *daimon*, see OCD, 426.

<sup>266</sup> Roques thinks the addressees are probably presbyters from the *presbyterium* of Ptolemaïs rather than the diocese of Ptolemaïs. See Roques, 2:111n2.

<sup>267</sup> ὁ βίος ἀβίωτος

<sup>268</sup> Roques 2:112n8.

from blessed leisure, apart from which for me and for those who are like me ‘life is unlivable?’”<sup>269</sup> Synesius draws from the language of the classical stage a powerful pithy phrase which encapsulates his spiritual angst upon accepting an office whose everyday demands will denude him of the *scholē*—that is, the leisure or spare time—required for pursuing that which makes life worth living: the cultivation of the mind.

In the context of a consolation letter addressed to the doctor Gessius whose wife has recently died (*Letter* 125), Procopius conceptualizes devastating personal loss in terms of the themes and language of classical tragedy.<sup>270</sup> He opens by remarking that fate contrives experiences for human beings that befit the plights of tragic characters: “How bitter are the designs of fate (*tychē*) against us, and how suitable for the plot of a powerful tragedy!”<sup>271</sup> Apparently, the death of Gessius’ wife occurred shortly after the loss of her young children who were still nursing. In fact, Procopius avers that Gessius’ loss is even more lamentable than that of tragic performance. He writes, “these things are truly worthy of tears and sufferings beyond those of the stage (*skēnē*), and such things have confirmed the story of an unfortunate woman changing from a human into a stone.”<sup>272</sup> Drawing upon the archaizing guise of classical myth, Procopius conflates Gessius’ wife, a native of Phrygia recently bereft of her young children, with the mythical Niobe, a Phrygian woman whose impious boasts regarding her many children

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<sup>269</sup> ἢ πῶς ἐμαυτὸν ἐπιδουῖς ὄχλῳ πραγμάτων ἔτι προσβαλῶ τοῖς νοῦ κάλλεσιν, ἃ μόνης ἐστὶ καρποῦσθαι τῆς μακαρίας σχολῆς, ἧς χωρὶς ἐμοὶ καὶ τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐμοὶ ἅπας <<ὁ βίος ἀβίωτος>> ;

<sup>270</sup> For the later tradition of the consolation letter in Byzantium, see A.R. Littlewood, “The Byzantine Letter of Consolation in the Macedonian and Komnenian Periods,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 19-41.

<sup>271</sup> ὡς πικρὰ τὰ καθ’ ἡμῶν τῆς τύχης βουλευμάτα καὶ πρὸς δεινῆς ἀρκοῦντα τραγωδίας ὑπόθεσιν. Concerning the role of *tychē* which dominates human life in Byzantine epistolography, see H. Hunger, *Literatur*, 1:227-28. Cf. *RDG*, 449n91.

<sup>272</sup> δακρύων ὄντως ταῦτα καὶ σκηνῆς ἐπέκεινα πάθη, καὶ οἷα βεβαιῶσαι μῦθον ὡς γυνὴ δυστυχῆς ἐξ ἀνθρώπου λίθος ἐγένετο.

provoked divine wrath in the form of the deaths of all (or in some versions, all but one of) her seven sons and seven daughters as well as her own personal transformation into a rock on Mount Sipylus in west central Asia Minor. Though Niobe appears in several classical texts, ranging from the *Iliad* 24.602-17 to Pseudo-Apollodorus (3.5.6), Procopius may specifically recall Antigone’s likening of her fate to that of Niobe in the Sophoclean tragedy (lines 823-33), particularly since Procopius’ reference appears amidst other remarks concerning tragedy.<sup>273</sup>

Applying Stoic rationalizations of human suffering, Procopius adduces the story of Anaxagoras, who, possessed of a soul instructed by the remedies of philosophy, responded to the untimely death of his own son with calm acceptance, “saying immediately he had been prepared for this a long time and he had not suffered anything great from hearing about it because ‘I knew having engendered him that he was mortal.’”<sup>274</sup> Similarly, Procopius speculates that Anaxagoras, upon learning that his dear wife was dead lying with her child in a grave, would have said “I already knew that since I lived together with a woman who was mortal.”<sup>275</sup> Based upon the wisdom of such responses to personal loss, Procopius promotes tragedy as performing a Stoic education of the soul concerning the vicissitudes and the transience of the conditions of human experience: “Wherefore [that is, based on the wisdom of the aforementioned two statements concerning Anaxagoras] I praise those who first invented tragedies, because they found that fate (*tychē*) mixes up and down the affairs of humankind. They thought up the scene

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<sup>273</sup> *RDG*, 486-87n592 for citations of the myth of Niobe in classical texts excluding Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

<sup>274</sup> εἰ πεῖν εὐθέως ὡς δὴ παρεσκευασμένον ἐκ πολλοῦ καὶ μηδὲν μέγα παθόντα πρὸς τῆς ἀκοῆς, ὡς “ἦδειν καὶ γὰρ θνητὸν γεννήσας.” See *RDG*, 487n594: this story of Anaxagoras survives in Galen (*De plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 4.7.9).

<sup>275</sup> “ἦδειν καὶ θνητῆ συννοικῶν.”

for us, anticipating my own misfortunes very well through the ills of others.”<sup>276</sup> In a manner parallel to philosophical meditation, tragic poets prepare the soul for suffering and loss by exploring the impermanent nature of human experience on stage for the audience to contemplate prior to the personal experience of misfortune.

In a manner homologous to Synesius’ depiction of the *daimon* as a poet inscribing him within a larger drama combining tragic and comic elements, Procopius represents the human lifetime as a dramatic story wrought by a cosmic poet or divinity who binds a soul with a transient persona or mask, which will be lifted away at death. Asserting philosophy to be an antidote against the fickleness of Fortune, Procopius writes: “but if it is dear to be seen as better than fate, we will run under the shelter of our accustomed philosophy. We ask what we are, and from where we came, and what is the meaning of what happens to us, and how having been bound we must be free only at whatever time will seem good to Him who bound us to lay down the mask which the Poet of the great drama has placed upon us.”<sup>277</sup> Philosophical questions and speculation offer the reflecting soul recognition of the truth that a human lifetime is a transient fiction like the productions of the stage, the fleeting incarnation of a character cast in a dramatic tale penned by the divine imagination.

Isidore also comments in *Letter* 1435 to Paul how the events of the stage and in real life parallel one another in sharing an essentially evanescent and illusory nature. He observes how

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<sup>276</sup> ὅθεν ἐπαινῶ τοὺς πρῶτους τραγωδῖαν εὐρόντας, ὅτι καταμαθόντες τὴν τύχην ἄνω καὶ κάτω κυκᾶν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα τὴν σκηνὴν ἡμῖν ἐπενόησαν, ἀλλοτρίοις εὖ μάλα κακοῖς τὰς τῶν οἰκείων προκαταλαμβάνοντες συμφοράς.

<sup>277</sup> ἀλλ’ εἴ γε φίλον ἡμῖν τῆς τύχης ὀφθῆναι κρείττουςι, πρὸς τὸν τῆς συνήθους φιλοσοφίας ὄρμον ὑποδραμούμεθα, τίνες τέ ἐσμεν σκοποῦντες καὶ πόθεν ἀφιγμεθα, καὶ τίνες ἄρα τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς πραγμάτων οἱ λόγοι, καὶ ὡς δεθέντας λυθῆναι δεῖ πάντως, ὀπηνίκα δόξει τῷ δήσαντι, καὶ ἀποθέσθαι τὸ προσωπεῖον, ὅπερ ἡμῖν ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου δράματος περιτέθεικε ποιητής.

life in this world and the theater both offer uncertain and impermanent conditions: “O my excellent man (*beltiste*), there is no difference between the stage and real life; they have nothing secure or stable or steadfast or solid.”<sup>278</sup> Quoting Sophocles *Ajax* 126, he continues to tell his friend that “‘The affairs of mortals are a shadow,’ said the comedy, and by these affairs I do not know how you are deceived even though marveling at the comic poet.”<sup>279</sup> That is, despite his admiration for classical Athenian theater—likely signifying that he was a student of classical *paideia*—Paul seems to have forgotten the lesson of tragedy and comedy that the productions of life are unreal distractions. In what appears to be an appeal to a view of the unending eternity of the Christian afterlife, Isidore reminds his friend, “here, the good and bad things come to an end, and a very rapid one, while there [in the Hereafter] both stretch out for unending time.”<sup>280</sup> Thus, contrasting the transience of the present life with the eternity that follows, Isidore asserts that the consequences of an individual’s moral or ill-tempered behavior will endure for all perpetuity, in the form of rewards and punishments respectively.

### Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon study of the social contexts of the selected epistolary corpora. The Late Antique practice of organizing public readings of their letters is critical to the modern interpretation of epistolary speech and constitutes one of the many lives these letters had in antiquity. Epistolographers wrote with the lateral audience in mind, and letters were often not

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<sup>278</sup> σκηνης οὐδέν, ὧ βέλτιστε, ὁ παρῶν διενήνοχε βίος, οὐδὲν βέβαιον, ἢ μόνιμον, ἢ σταθερόν, ἢ πάγιον ἔχων.

<sup>279</sup> σκιά γὰρ τὰ θνητῶν, λέγει ἡ κωμῳδία, οἷς οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως ἑάλωσ, καίτοι τὸν κωμικὸν θαυμάζων. See Evieux, 2:230n3.

<sup>280</sup> ἐνταῦθα μὲν γὰρ καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ χαλεπὰ πέρας ἔχει, καὶ τοῦτο τάχιστον, ἐκεῖ δὲ ἀθανάτοις ἀμφότερα παρεκτείνεται αἰῶσιν.

simply conversations between two individuals but constituted conversations among broader circles of provincials. This facet of the letters makes their interpretation difficult but rich, because the letters convey information about the perceptions and values of provincial literati in the Later Empire. Letters examined above indicating epistolary theaters encode the idioculture by which Late Antique provincials articulated both their social location and their shared *paideia*. The speech of letter theaters constructed moments of social solidarity and inclusion between interlocutors and broader audiences of hearers and readers.

It is unclear where letter readings were held, and the letters were often silent on the subject. They likely occurred at places where other public readings were held, such as school buildings, multi-use public facilities such as *bouleuteria*, the *agora* itself, and even the domestic context of dinner parties. Epistolographers' conceptualized letter readings as akin to the type of social interchange of the theater, yet, as has been demonstrated above, tragedies and comedies were no longer performed in monumental buildings in the city. Legislation, Christian polemic, and financial pressures combined to curtail theater in the Late Antique city. Theatrical performances did persist in the Gaza School, as Choricius tells us, in the form of student displays commemorating the completion of academic milestones as well as other major life events, such as weddings.

*Theatron* appears is a polysemous term in the letters, referring to audiences, to performances, and to the viewing spaces for performances. Theater language was applied to various kinds of public performances, including recitations and oratory. The epistolary conversations between Procopius and a young admirer named Megethios indicate the use of the term *theatron* and related terms such as *skēnē* to indicate public gatherings of hearers and preserve a rich vocabulary linking public oratory to the theater. A final section of this chapter

has analyzed the strategic function of language drawn from tragedy and comedy in the selected letters. This speech constituted a set of symbolic devices by which epistolographers offered advice, shared and represented experience, asked for favors, and even conducted scriptural exegesis.

In the second half of this dissertation, I will turn from discussion of the mechanisms undergirding epistolary sodality to study of the identities, concerns, and affiliations of the letter authors. The selected letters contain rich explorations of the letter authors' loyalties to their home cities, their fascination with medical and scientific commentary as well as technical gadgets, and the nature of their religious identities. We will now move away from how epistolographers mapped their social spaces in letters to an examination in the next chapter of how epistolographers explored discursively their affiliation to physical spaces.



## Chapter 4

### Letters and Spaces

This chapter is concerned with the chorography of the affiliations and identifications of epistolographers with physical spaces. The epistolary testimony of Synesius, Procopius, and Isidore respectively, offers three different paradigms for thinking about distinctively Late Antique trends of local identity: region, polis, and anti-polis. These three case studies engage with the issue of the fate of the city-state in Late Antiquity—the subject of lively contemporary debate—and represent a rejoinder in part to recent scholarship decrying city “decline,” such as that articulated most notably by J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz.<sup>1</sup> Under the historian’s lens, Late Antiquity emerges as a time of redefinition and refinement of community and place. Alongside enduring traditional modes of loyalty to home city, Church Fathers and holy men alike re-circuited conceptions of earthly places and their relation to the divine. One strand of the re-wiring of the contemporary imagination with regard to place was the creation of extra-urban Christian monastic communities.

Debate about the vicissitudes of the Late Antique city has been set to some extent by Liebeschuetz, who contends that the decline of the Roman city was rooted in the failure of the councilmen (*curiales*) to maintain their civic activity that sustained the Classical city. In Liebeschuetz’s view, the so-called “flight of the curiales” was due to a variety of factors, including increasing imperial pressure and intervention in local affairs as well as the attractive option of escaping curial *munera* or *leitourgiai*, civic duties, through imperial service, admission to the senate, or obtaining exemptions through service in the clergy. This loss signaled the death

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<sup>1</sup> J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

knell of the city, for it was the civic euergetism of the curiales that was central to the perpetuation of the Classical Greek city-state through their shouldering of community burdens such as the construction and maintenance of city buildings and amenities, as well as the fulfillment of imperial duties such as tax collection. For Liebeschuetz, the life went out of the cities when the city government of the *curia* was replaced by the rule of the notables, marking the end of constitutional politics dating back to Solon.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the vision of city demise has been opposed by scholars such as Mark Whittow and Kenneth Holum who contend that the city remained an engrossing focus of communal identity for Late Antique men and women. Whittow maintains that the decline of the curiales was in fact an “institutional rearrangement.”<sup>3</sup> New types of local leaders performed *munera* on behalf of the city. Whittow points out that to look only for the continuance of certain types of titles as guarantees of certain types of elite behavior is to mistake institutions for underlying social patterns. Holum points out that even in the High Empire, councilmen conducted affairs less through horizontal traditions of debate and deliberation and more by means of vertical webs of patronage.<sup>4</sup> In a form of “follow the leader,” a small circle of the most powerful councilmen typically dominated local politics.<sup>5</sup> In the Greek East, cities did not decline

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 107, 117, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Whittow, “Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 3-29.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth G. Holum, “The Classical City in the Sixth Century,” in Michael Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth G. Holum, “Mediterranean Cities in the Fifth Century: Elites, Christianizing, and the Barbarian Influx,” in Michael Maas, ed., *Cambridge Guide to the Age of Attila* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2013), 22 pp. plus figs.

because of the rise of oligarchic notables because these notables tended to be rooted in the city and “city-friendly.”<sup>6</sup>

For the historian, epistolary evidence offers a powerful means of evaluating the meanings of physical places in terms of the self-understanding and actions of provincials. For the historical actor, epistolography offered a discursive space for the representation and exploration of feelings about city and region. In fact, Late Antique epistolography suggests the continued vivacious conceptualization of physical place among educated elites and registers the power of these loyalties and identities to actuate major life decisions as well as one’s own conduct with regard to home communities. The epistolary testimony of literati such as Synesius and Procopius of Gaza suggest that the local region and city-state respectively remained exuberant *foci* of spatial identity for lettered elites in the later Empire.

Alternatively, however, study of epistolography underscores another distinctively Late Antique trend with regard to communal change and identity: the “anti-polis” or the tendency of urban elites to separate from the city and create for themselves Christian ascetic communities in the desert. Men and women seeking this style of communal (dis)engagement must have conceived to some extent that true asceticism was not located, or not possible, in the city. Isidore of Pelusium represents an understudied representative of what Derwas Chitty in his classic study of eastern monasticism termed making “the desert a city.”<sup>7</sup> Depicting his withdrawal into the desert as a “flight,” Isidore’s extant letters suggest that he continued post-retreat to participate in

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<sup>6</sup> Holum, “The Classical City,” 109.

<sup>7</sup> *The Desert a City: an introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1966).

the polis via epistolary contact. But first we will examine the epistolographers testifying to traditional engagements like loyalty to the *patris* and the polis.

### Synesius and the *Patris*

Letters provided a medium for Synesius to represent and explore his identification with the region of Libya, as well as offering opportunities for him to examine how that identity related to salient life decisions such as the defense of his home from invasion and the acceptance of the bishopric. Most of the letters to be studied here likely date to the period 404-412, during a period when Synesius was engaged in public service in his native Cyrenaica, a time of massive upheavals in the region, when he was forced to think about his identity as a philosopher and a community leader. Significant topographical features of the physical environment in Cyrenaica—mired by desert land and unpredictable seas—likely engendered in the cosmopolitan Synesius a keen sense of isolation when it came to communications with his friends in the Roman East outside of Cyrenaica. Entrenched in his ancestral home, Synesius lamented the lack of suitable philosopher colleagues in his hometown, and may have indicated his disapproving alienation in response to his local neighbors with intellectual interests. Synesius hungrily sought intellectual companionship inaccessible in his home environment through the surrogacy of letter exchange. In spite of the shortcomings of his hometown in terms of intellectual fellowship, Synesius remained anchored at Cyrene because of a fierce and enduring loyalty to the *patris* of his ancestors. As will be discussed below, letters were instruments of Synesius' intellectual friendships, serving as written vehicles of companionship to compensate for the shortcomings of his home environment. Synesius typically expresses his loyalty to home in terms of *patris*, the

native land of Libya, as opposed to the polis of Cyrene.<sup>8</sup> It was this attachment and sense of duty to his own town, stemming both from ancestry and his perception of the obligations of a curial magnate, that closely tethered Synesius to his Libyan home and galvanized his muscular efforts to defend his home against barbarian invaders and accept the office of bishop within a two years' period. Defining events in Synesius' life demonstrate that his loyalty to the region of his ancestors was the highest possible sort of value: it was a value upon which he was willing to act.

Yet Synesius' letters betray a certain ambivalence concerning his home territory. His relationship with his home was not an easy one even in the best of times. The letters testify to Synesius' longings for an intellectual community of like-minded philosopher-friends in Libya, and at the same time that they indicate his unwavering love of the home of his ancestors. In *Letter 139* to Herculian bidding his fellow disciple of Hypatia to visit him in Cyrenaica so they can continue to philosophize together, Synesius makes clear the scarcity of like-minded philosophers in his home. Unlike Synesius, Herculian in Alexandria has plenty of cultured peers: "for where you are culture acquires the following of many men who are the equals of Synesius and better."<sup>9</sup> The letters provide Synesius precious opportunities for intellectual companionship which he apparently lacked in Cyrenaica:

*My patris, because it is my patris, is precious to me; but in respect to philosophy, it is, I do not know, in a certain way "paralyzed" toward philosophy. Therefore, it is not without fear or a sense of helplessness that I stay at home, without someone who shares in the philosophic mania.*"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> By definition, both *patris* and *polis* include the countryside. *Patris* likely operates in Synesius' letters as synonym for *polis* with emphasis on descent. A reasonable English translation might be "native land."

<sup>9</sup> σοὶ μὲν γὰρ εὐτυχούσης ἐνθάδε πολυανδρίαν παιδείας συνέσονται πολλοὶ Συνεσίου καὶ βελτίους καὶ ὅμοιοι.

<sup>10</sup> ἢ δὲ πατρίς, ὅτι μὲν πατρίς ἐμοὶ τίμιον, πρὸς δὲ φιλοσοφίαν οὐκ οἶδ' ὄντινα τρόπον ἀπεσκληρότως ἔχει. ἔστιν οὖν οὐκ ἀδεὲς ἀβοηθήτῳ μένειν, οὐκ ὄντος τοῦ συγκορυβαντιῶντος.

Employing συγκορυβαντιᾶν, an archaizing verb referring to the ecstatic revels of the devotees of the cult of the Phrygian goddess Cybele, Synesius articulates his lonely and unaccompanied zeal for philosophy in his home region.

In *Letter* 101 to his Constantinopolitan friend Pylaemenes, Synesius openly laments the absence of philosophical colleagues in his *patris* of Libya, complaining “since it makes a difference to you to know at the same time how I am doing, I philosophize, my good man, having good solitude as a colleague, and not a single human being.”<sup>11</sup> Synesius has no philosopher friends in his home region: “I have never even heard someone uttering a philosophical phrase in Libya unless it was my own echo.”<sup>12</sup> He continues to describe his intellectual loneliness, affirming that he accepts this condition, by attesting that God is his witness: “whose seed, the intellect, has come to humankind.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, Synesius speculates that heavenly bodies look down upon his isolated path of philosophical commitment with kindly eyes, conjecturing, “it seems to me that the stars look fixedly upon me each time I gaze at them favorably, seeing in this vast land that I alone exist contemplating them with knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> Synesius can derive some satisfaction that his philosophical exploration is interlinked with the approval of the wisdom which orders and shapes celestial bodies—the divine mind itself.

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<sup>11</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ διαφέρει σοι τὰ μὰ εἰδέναι, φιλοσοφοῦμεν, ὃ ἄγαθέ, τὴν ἐρημίαν ἀγαθὴν ἔχοντες συνεργόν, ἀνθρώπων δὲ οὐδένα.

<sup>12</sup> οὐδ’ ἔστιν ὅτου ποτὲ ἐπὶ Λιβύης ἀκήκοα φωνὴν ἀφιέντος φιλόσοφου, ὅτι μὴ τῆς ἡχοῦς ἀντιφθεγγομένης ἡμῖν.

<sup>13</sup> ὁ θεός, οὗ σπέρμα ὁ νοῦς ἐς ἀνθρώπους ἦκει.

<sup>14</sup> δοκῶ δὲ μοι καὶ τοὺς ἀστέρας εὐμενῶς ἐνατενίζειν ἐκάστοτε, ὃν ἐν ἡπεύρω πολλῇ μόνον ὀρῶσι θεωρὸν αὐτῶν σὺν ἐπιστήμη γινόμενον.

Some of the types of *literati* with whom Synesius consorted in Libya were those with a rhetorical education who did not have philosophical interests. In *Letter 101* Synesius reveals that he did organize an audience of individuals he dubs “Hellenes” to feast upon his friend’s letter in an epistolary theater. Presumably, these were men Synesius thought to have the requisite *paideia* to appreciate and enjoy Pylaemenes’ letter, but they were not philosophers. Synesius also seems to indicate that members of this audience of Hellenes knew about his treatise the *Cynegetica*, writing that it struck his audience as contrary to expectation that Pylaemenes would ask for this work. According to Synesius’ mannerly modesty, Pylaemenes certainly was demonstrating that he had a good sense of humor if he sought that text! The mention of the audience here, however, may not be entirely genuine, since it appears within a series of statements meant to flatter Pylaemenes.

The extant evidence indicates that Synesius was deeply concerned about how to balance philosophical commitments with his sense of responsibility to his native home, and this is a recurring theme in the letters, suggesting that it was an issue for his philosopher friends as well. Synesius oscillates from conceptualizing duty to the city as at variance with the *scholē* required for philosophy to thinking of philosophy as an implement useful to city leadership. Synesius actively engages with his epistolary friends in thinking about communal obligations versus the pursuit of philosophy. In *Letter 151* to Pylaemenes, Synesius expresses his concern that his friend’s love of his native land (*patris*) threatens his pursuit of philosophy. Synesius exhorts Pylaemenes to remain loyal to philosophy:

Do you remain a philosopher? Are you that Pylaemenes whom I left behind, the newly-initiated soul, the offspring divine? I fear the time since that birth. I fear more the company of the marketplace, the constant engagement in many happenings and affairs, that these may sully your most holy temple, your holy mind, which I consider along with that of a few others most worthy to receive God. And I know I celebrated the mysteries

of philosophy with you having made a vow, but since the love of your native land (*patris*) became greater, I pray that wherever you might be upon the earth you will practice philosophy as much as you are able.<sup>15</sup>

Synesius is concerned that his friend who was only recently “born” into philosophy as an initiate will be distracted by the mundane events of communal life and that participation in these events will soil his intellect.

Synesius repeats his concerns about his friend’s devotion to public life versus his commitment to philosophy in *Letter 103*. Synesius defends himself against Pylaemenes’ view that Synesius in a prior letter had ridiculed his love of his city. Synesius corrects Pylaemenes’ misunderstanding by championing his friend’s eagerness to be of use to his native city, but entreats him to value philosophy over service to his city. Synesius worries whether Pylaemenes invests more of his energy in his city as a lawyer than as a philosopher, and contends that Pylaemenes can do far more good for his city as a philosopher than as a pleader of cases. Philosophy does make the man possessing her “more useful to his native land.” Certainly, philosophy does not by herself make men prosperous, but the fact remains that “the beauties of our pursuits have a certain power and help to prepare the soul, and by this is the only thing that profits us . . .”<sup>16</sup> It is true, Synesius writes, that the rise and decline of cities ultimately does depend on fortune and external circumstances. However, “there is not one other art, nor can all of the arts together rival philosophy in tuning the chord to the right pitch and rearranging and

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<sup>15</sup> ἄρά μοι μένεις φιλόσοφος, ἄρα ἐκεῖνος ὄν ἀπολέλοιπα Πυλαιμένης, ἡ νεοτελής ψυχὴ τὸ σπέρμα τὸ θεῖον; φοβοῦμαι τὸν χρόνον τῆς ἀπογενέσεως, πλεῖν φοβοῦμαι τὴν ὁμιλίαν τῆς ἀγορᾶς, τὸ ἐνειλινδεῖσθαι συχναῖς ἤδη τύχαις καὶ πράξεσι, μὴ μολύνῃ τὸν ἀγιώτατον νεών, τὸν νοῦν σου τὸν ἱερόν, ὄν ἐγὼ μετ’ ὀλίγων ἀξιώτατον ἡγοῦμαι δοχεῖα θεοῦ. καὶ οἶδα μέντοι συνοργιάσαι σοι τὰ φιλοσοφίας εὐχὴν ποτε ποιησάμενος· ἐπεὶ δ’ οὖν κρείττων ὁ τῆς πατρίδος ἔρωσ ἐγένετο, εὐξάμην, ὅπου ποτὲ γῆς εἴης, φιλοσοφίαν ἐργάζεσθαι σε κατὰ δύναμιν.

<sup>16</sup> τὰ καλὰ τῶν ἐπιδευμάτων δυνάμεις τινές εἰσι καὶ παρασκευαὶ ψυχῆς καὶ οἷον αὐτὸ μόνον τὸ χρώμενον . . .



making better the affairs of men.”<sup>17</sup> Urging his friend not to neglect philosophy, Synesius avers that philosophy has an invaluable role to play in the city because it is the *technē* (mechanism) best suited for governance.<sup>18</sup> Synesius provides here for his friend and himself a means of connecting their shared sense of communal obligations with their love of philosophy. In defiance of the forces beyond human control, the philosopher has his own power to arrange his local world. Philosophy is conceptualized as an implement of engagement in the polis.

Synesius exposes repeatedly in the letters a sense of duty to one’s city, and his defense of his city plagued by raiding invaders, as well as his decision to accept the bishopric despite clear misgivings, demonstrate his loyalty to his home region as well as his perception of the proper conduct befitting a man of the curial class. Synesius’ identification with the homeland is so close that he expresses continually in his letters how he suffers as his home country and its people suffer. This is particularly clear in his letters which concern the barbarian invasions of Libya in the early fifth century.

Synesius’ letters are a major source for curial provincial responses to barbarian incursions in regions under Roman rule. They provide testimony of Late Antique provincial reactions to the attacks of the barbarians of northern Africa, such as the Macetae and Ausurians, hailing from Southern Numidia and Tripolitania. Throughout the period of 404-411, these nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples regularly raided the Cyrenaican countryside. A more serious invasion occurred

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<sup>17</sup> οὐδεμιᾶς ἐστὶ τέχνης, ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ἅμα πασῶν ἐρίσαι φιλοσοφία περὶ τοῦ τὴν ἀνθρώποις ποιῆσαι τὰ πράγματα.

<sup>18</sup> This is an allusion to rule by the “philosopher-kings,” the thesis of Plato’s *Republic* Books 6-7. Cf. Roques, 3:360n16.

in 412, which gave way to a period of occupation of the countryside by the invader.<sup>19</sup> Synesius' letters describing his responses to these incursions are not merely literary showpieces. They are modes of an active exploration of identity and an interrogation of values and decisions in response to deeply stressful circumstances. Letters are a means for Synesius to represent and examine his own commitments and responsibilities; they serve as discursive spaces for the reflection and rumination about significant life decisions.

Synesius avows his loyalty to city in the midst of barbarian invasions, and expresses that he suffers as his city suffers. His emotional states are linked with the vicissitudes of his city, which compound other personal losses, such as the deaths of all three of his sons during 412-413.<sup>20</sup> As a member of the curial aristocracy, Synesius considers himself obligated to assume a leading role in defending his homeland from outside attack. In *Letter* 108, Synesius outlines how he has had spears and axes manufactured locally;<sup>21</sup> in 133 he requests that his friend Olympius send him bows and arrows and relates how he is constructing a catapult to launch missiles.<sup>22</sup> In *Letter* 107 to his brother Euoptius dated to 405, Synesius reports the necessity of raising armed militias from the Libyans to fight against the barbarians.<sup>23</sup> He laments that the enemy occupies the country, taking possession of all property that can be pillaged and everyday slaughtering masses of civilians. Identifying himself with his homeland, Synesius avows in the midst of such conditions that he desires to die only when his *patris* has recovered her former

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<sup>19</sup> See J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 229.

<sup>20</sup> Roques dates the death of Synesius' eldest son to January 412, the second son in April 412, and the youngest son in the first third of 413. See Roques, 3:342n7.

<sup>21</sup> Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 231 and 231n 25; Roques, 3:370n1, dates this letter to 405.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 231 and 231n26. This letter dates to May 405; see Roques, 3:392n1.

<sup>23</sup> Roques, 3:242n1.

character. He explains to his brother Euoptius in *Letter 89*<sup>24</sup> how he cannot divorce himself from concern for his city, and he sympathizes with the suffering of each person in his native land: “I live, not as a private citizen in a country that is under attack, and I must weep for the misfortunes of each individual.”<sup>25</sup> Often in the month, Synesius says, he must rush to the ramparts to defend against raids. Writing this while he has already accepted the office of bishop, Synesius comments that one would think he was being paid a stipend for military service rather than for praying. As a curial magnate and landowner, Synesius understood that it was his duty to lead even *ad hoc* responses to outsider incursions on his home territory. He comments merely that he is so often involved in military operations against the enemy that it seems as though it were his profession.

In *Letter 113* which likely dates to 405,<sup>26</sup> Synesius expresses to his brother his resolve to defend his home and expresses his optimism that the Libyan forces will prevail. Synesius exhorts himself to battle in epistolary conversation:

And so shall we watch such miserable men wishing to die for the possessions of others, that they may not yet desert to the owners themselves some property which they obtained as plunder?”<sup>27</sup>

Synesius fears if this is the case he shall no longer seem to be a man. “Accordingly,” he writes, “for me it is necessary to go against them as I can, since I must undertake trial of these men who

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<sup>24</sup> Roques, 3:341n1, dates this letter to 412.

<sup>25</sup> ζῶ τε γὰρ οὐκ ἰδιώτης ἐν χώρᾳ πολεμουμένη καὶ δεῖ κλαίειν ἀεὶ τὴν ἐκάστου συμφορὰν.

<sup>26</sup> Roques, 3:247n1. Roques assigns the date of 405 or 410 but considers 405 more likely.

<sup>27</sup> εἶτα τοὺς μὲν κακοδαίμονας τούτους ὀρωμεν ἀποθνήσκειν ἐθέλοντας ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων, ἅττα ἂν λείαν περιποιήσωνται, τοῦ μηκέτι προσέσθαι τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτά.

are all-daring, such men who think it right to make fun of the Romans.”<sup>28</sup> Synesius remains optimistic, invoking the proverb, “a camel—even one with the mange—can carry the burden of many asses.”<sup>29</sup> The Empire, he affirms, is a superior animal to the marauders, and it will endure.

In *Letter* 124 Synesius confides to his mentor Hypatia in lurid terms his grief and horror at the bloodshed of barbarian attack and explains clearly why he stays in Libya in the midst of such circumstances: “I tell you, I am encompassed by the sufferings of my native land and am wretched, for everyday I see enemy weapons and men slain like sacrificial victims, and inhaling air tainted by decaying bodies, I expect to suffer the same as others.”<sup>30</sup> Synesius wonders “who is of good hope, when even the sky is most downcast, overpowered by the shadow of flesh-eating birds?”<sup>31</sup> Even in the midst of such conditions, Synesius loves his country. He explains that he stays and suffers in Libya, “because I am a Libyan, having been born here and seeing the honored graves of my ancestors.”<sup>32</sup> Liebeschuetz dates to 404 the next letter in the manuscript order, *Letter* 125, in which Synesius relates how he marshaled a militia from among the peasants which was unsuccessful in protecting the countryside. Thus, *Letter* 124 might reflect conditions at the beginning of these raids, and probably express initial shock and grief at these early attacks. Synesius shares with his mentor his response to these invasions, affirms his identity as a Libyan,

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<sup>28</sup> ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν ἰτητέον ἐστὶν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ὡς ἔχω καὶ πείραν ληπτέον τῶν πάντα τούτων τολμώντων, οἵτινες ὄντες ἀξιοῦσι Ῥωμαίων καταγελαῖν. The use of “Romans” is a traditional appellation during Byzantium of the citizens of the eastern part of the Empire. Cf. Roques, 3:373n8.

<sup>29</sup> ἀλλ’ ἢ <<κάμηλος γὰρ τοι—φασί—καὶ ψωριῶσα πολλῶν ὄνων ἀνατίθεται φορτία.>>

<sup>30</sup> ἔγωγέ τοι τοῖς πάθεσι τῆς πατρίδος περιεχόμενος καὶ δυσχεραίνων αὐτὴν ἐφ’ οἷς ὀρῶ καθ’ ἡμέραν ὄπλα πολέμια καὶ ἀποσφαττομένους ἀνθρώπους ὥσπερ ἱερεῖα καὶ τὸν ἀέρα διεφθορότα ἔλκων ἀπὸ τῆς σήψεως τῶν σωμάτων καὶ αὐτὸς ἕτερα τοιαῦτα παθεῖν προσδοκῶν.

<sup>31</sup> τίς γὰρ εὐελπις ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸ περιέχον ἐστὶ κατηφέστατον, κατειλημμένον τῇ σκιᾷ τῶν σαρκοφάγων ὀρνέων ;

<sup>32</sup> Λίβυς ὢν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γενόμενος καὶ τῶν πάππων τοὺς τάφους οὐκ ἀτίμους ὀρῶν.

and asserts that he has an ancestral duty to his home territory. It is this love of his native land (*patris*) which prevents Synesius from deserting his home.

As a dimension of his loyalty to his home, Synesius elaborates discursively in letters and hymns written in an archaizing Dorian dialect his ethnic identification with the original Dorian settlers of the Greek colony of Cyrene. Synesius' genealogy is attached to a place. In his letters Synesius claims descent specifically from Spartan ancestors. Before a Cyrenaean congregation in his speech "Against Andronicus" (*Letter* 41), Synesius boasts of his ancient lineage which outshines the unknown lineage of Andronicus: "as for me . . . I come from those whose succession—from Eurysthenes who led the Dorians down into Sparta up to my own father—has been carved into the *kyrbeis*."<sup>33</sup> Thus, Synesius fortifies his public persona through a claim of descent from the earliest Laconian king and archaisingly refers to the triangular wooden tablets upon which laws were posted in the early Classical polis (*kyrbeis*). Perhaps he employs a clearly classicizing term to refer to monuments inscribed with his ancestor's names which still adorned the Cyrenean cityscape; however, his use of the term is more likely a rhetorical antiquarianism.

Representations of ancestral lineage served as cognitive aids that Synesius applies to examine his decisions with regard to his homeland. In *Letter* 113 to his brother, Synesius underscores his resolve to defend his home against barbarian raids, rooting this resolution in part in his ancient ancestry. Confronting his thoughts about the possibility of death, Synesius reasons that those who think only of saving their lives generally perish, yet those who are ready to sacrifice their lives survive. With a touch of black humor, Synesius draws upon the tradition of a

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<sup>33</sup> πρὸς ἐμὲ . . . ἐξ ἐκείνων γενόμενον ὧν ἀπ' Εὐρυσθένους τοῦ καταγαγόντος Δωριάας εἰς Σπάρτην μέχρι τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς αἱ διαδοχαὶ ταῖς δημοσίαις ἐνεκολάφθησαν κύρβεισιν.

letter which incited Leonidas and those at Thermopylae to fight without weakness:<sup>34</sup> “For I will fight as if I shall die, and I know well that I will survive. For I am from the Lacedaemonians, and I know the letter from the magistrates addressed to Leonidas: ‘let them fight as if they will die, and they will not die.’”<sup>35</sup> Identifying himself with the ill-fated Spartan king who led a Greek contingent against Persian forces at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C., Synesius jokes sarcastically about his fears for survival while rhetorically reinforcing his decision to take up arms. This classical *exemplum* affirms Synesius’ Dorian ancestry which undergirds in part his loyalty to his home. Synesius selects a Classical model of heroism, specifically a Spartan one, to shape and characterize his response to the stresses of barbarian incursions into his home. Even if Synesius is not successful, like Leonidas he can at least identify with his ancestral countryman’s unflinching valor.

Synesius reshapes his Dorian identity into devices to help him cope with his loneliness in Libya. He playfully shapes his ancestral identity in ways that showcase his erudition and legitimate his lineage as a provincial of an aristocratic line, in letters likely to be shared by literati. In *Letter* 101 to Pylaemenes, Synesius invokes a fragment from Euripides’ lost *Telephus* to express his resolve to continue to pursue philosophy in the midst of Libya’s dearth of intellectual fellowship. Likening his home to the dominant Lacedaemonian city, Synesius quotes the Athenian poet who refers jokingly to the system of land allotments or *klēroi* among Spartiates, saying “but, they say, adorn the Sparta you are allotted.”<sup>36</sup> Sparta is thus homologous with Synesius’ Libya. In this way, Synesius articulates his acceptance of his home’s

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<sup>34</sup> See Roques, 3:373n12.

<sup>35</sup> μαχήσομαι γὰρ ὡς ἀποθανούμενος, καὶ εὖ οἶδ’ ὅτι περιέσομαι. Λάκων γὰρ ἄνωθέν εἰμι καὶ οἶδα τὴν πρὸς Λεωνίδα ἐπιστολὴν τῶν τελῶν· Μαχέσθων ὡς τεθναζόμενοι, καὶ οὐ τεθνάξονται.

<sup>36</sup> ἀλλὰ <<κόσμηι-φησίν-ἔλαχεσ Σπάρταν >>.

shortcomings with the deliberate selection of a Classical verse which tacitly advertizes his ancient Spartan ancestry. If Synesius thought Pylaemenes might read this letter to his friends in Constantinople, just as Synesius tells us he had done by gathering a theater for Pylaemenes' letter, this sort of Classical flourish is just the sort of thing such an epistolary theater would enjoy.

In letters Synesius deploys specific rhetorical strategies to persuade imperial officials to offer help to his besieged homeland. One particular rhetorical strategy Synesius crafted in these missives was the use of the rhetorical strategy of *deinōsis* or the style of emphasizing the harsh and dire nature of a situation at issue, often evoking emotions of fear, anger, and grief, and aiming to elicit a response of compassion from a particular audience.<sup>37</sup> As Eleni Volonaki has pointed out, *deinōsis* in Classical Athenian oratory, particularly in forensic oratory, enhanced the persuasive power of a speech by amplifying the responsibility of an individual or group for a specific situation.<sup>38</sup> Synesius makes use of this rhetorical *topos* in *Letter 73* to Troilus, whom Synesius calls both philosopher and sophist, who served as councilor to the praetorian prefect of the East, Anthemius.<sup>39</sup> Synesius opens this missive with acknowledgment of the kindred intellectual and moral bond that secures rapport between the two men: “it is good that you are both a philosopher and a humane man; I ought to lament with you the misfortunes that strike my

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<sup>37</sup> Cynthia Damon, ed, *Tacitus Histories Book I* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16. Roques identifies this passage as a *deinōsis* (ed., Roques 3:326n6). Roques identifies other examples of this rhetorical strategy in Synesius' *Letters* 103, 134, and the opening declaration of *De Regno*.

<sup>38</sup> E. Volonaki, “Creating Responsibility: assigning blame for the Thirty,” in Michael Edwards and Christopher Reid, eds., *Oratory in Action* (Manchester U.K.; New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 34.

<sup>39</sup>Roques, 2:120n26. Synesius refers to Troilus as a philosopher in *Letters* 26, 49, 73, and 118; he refers to him as a sophist in *Letter* 79.

birthplace.”<sup>40</sup> Seeking Troilus’ aid, Synesius confides his deep fears that Pentapolis is doomed to utter destruction, bewailing the fact that war and famine are wearing Pentapolis down little by little. Heightening the sense of impending devastation, Synesius relates how an ancient oracle (source unnamed) presaged that “Libya will perish because of the wickedness of its leaders.”<sup>41</sup>

Both Synesius’ loyalty to Libya, the home of his ancestors, and his perception of responsibility for home community traditionally befitting a curial aristocrat had some part to play in Synesius’ acceptance of the office of bishop of Ptolemais in the year 411.<sup>42</sup> An urban position of leadership that members of the *curiales* often filled, the office of bishop emerges as a public office of consequence in the Late Antique city.<sup>43</sup> Synesius’ chief epistolary concerns with becoming bishop concentrated on various topics: the demands the office would place on the leisure time (*scholē*) necessary for philosophy, his refusal to separate from his wife if he accepted the office, and his own intellectual problems with the Christian idea of the Resurrection and the end of time.<sup>44</sup>

Synesius asserts repeatedly his concerns that the bishopric will interfere with his practice of philosophy. In *Letter* 41 “Against Andronicus,” the civil governor of Pentapolis from 411-412,<sup>45</sup> Synesius, alluding to Matthew 26:24, asserts publicly that he does not have the power to

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<sup>40</sup> σὺ γὰρ δὴ καὶ φιλόσοφος εἶ καὶ φιλόανθρωπος, σοί με δεῖ προσανακλάεσθαι τὰς τῆς ἐνεγκούσης με συμφοράς.

<sup>41</sup> <<φθερεῖ τὰ Λιβύων ἡγεμόνων κακότης>>.

<sup>42</sup> On this view, see also Lacombrade, 229-48. Roques dates to 411 Synesius’ election to the episcopate and dates Synesius’ ordination to 412; cf. Roques, 2:XLV.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Thomas A. Kopecek, “The Social Class of the Cappadocian Fathers,” *Church History* 42 (1973): 453-66; see also, Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 4, 75, 77.

<sup>44</sup> The latter two concerns are articulated in *Letter* 105 to Euoipius, a letter which Synesius acknowledges will be circulated among a larger group of associated readers.



serve two masters, specifically contemplation and practical matters, while serving as bishop. Though he admires bishops who are competent in both fields, Synesius does not believe he is capable of balancing both pursuits as bishop. Synesius repeatedly casts the office as repellant, asserting in *Letter 11* to a group of priests in Ptolemaïis and in *Letter 96* to Olympius that he would have preferred many deaths to the episcopate. In *Letter 96* Synesius underscores his recognition that his fulfillment of the office represents a duty owed to his community, stating that if he sought to flee the bishopric by traveling to Greece he could never return home unless he were ready to be the “most dishonored” and “most estranged” of all men, dwelling alongside a crowd of men who hated him.

In both *Letters 11* and *96* Synesius reasons that his appointment is the design of God, whom Synesius casts as “shepherd” of his life (*nomeas*) and “defender” (*prostatēs*)—a term which can also indicate “patron.” Noteworthy also in *Letter 11* is Synesius’ delineation of the responsibility of the bishop and priests of the city for its inhabitants. Beseeking his brother priests, Synesius bids that they pray to God on his behalf and “give orders both to the people in the town, and as many as inhabit the fields or frequent the village churches, to pledge prayers for us alike in private and in the congregation.”<sup>46</sup> In *Letters 11* and *96* alike, Synesius prays to God that the priesthood is not a departure from philosophy but an ascent toward it.

In his letters Synesius actively examines what he owes to his community in conversations with friends, and in them he rhetorically crafts his public persona. In *Letter 91* to his friend Troilus,<sup>47</sup> Synesius remarks that earlier in his life his conversations with friends were free from

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<sup>46</sup> τῷ τε ἐν ἄστει δήμῳ καὶ ὅσοι κατ’ ἀγροῦς ἢ κωμητικὰς ἐκκλησίας ἀυλίζονται τὰς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εὐχὰς καὶ κοινῇ καὶ καθ’ ἓνα πᾶσι παρεγγυήσατε.

<sup>47</sup> Roques, 3:342n1, dates this letter to 411.

care; he lived out of touch with any city or political affairs. Alluding to his acceptance of the bishopric, Synesius affirms that his situation has changed, for God has assigned to Synesius a definite spot to live, and to hold a certain rank in the city and live among a limited number of people. Synesius expresses his continuing devotion to his home community, his assigned lot, and the obligations of his rank: “I would like to be a help to my fellow citizens, and to do the good which I am able, both to each individual and to the city in common.”<sup>48</sup>

### Procopius and the Polis

The fullest account of Procopius’ abiding attachment to his hometown of Gaza appears in Choricus’ funeral oration of his beloved mentor. Discussion of loyalty to the city in an oration delivered before the literati and possibly unlettered audiences of Gaza idealized city loyalty and enshrined it as a normative affiliation befitting Gaza’s leading citizens. Employing erotic language reminiscent of Platonic usages, Choricus describes the efforts of various cities of the Greek East—specifically Antioch, Tyre, and Caesarea—to attract Procopius’ oratorical genius, recalling how “the city which lies by the Orontes River, the one which is Libanius’ mother, longed for him; the metropolis of Phoenicia (i.e., Tyre)<sup>49</sup> had felt the same.”<sup>50</sup>

Heaping up erotic language about a city’s desire, Choricus portrays Caesarea’s strategies to attract Procopius in terms of a lover and hunter, and represents Procopius as beloved and

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<sup>48</sup> βουλοίμην ἂν οὖν ὄφελος εἶναι τοῖς συλλαχοῦσι καὶ ποιεῖν ἄγαθὸν ὃ τι δυναίμην, καὶ ἕκαστον ἰδίᾳ καὶ τὴν πόλιν κοινῇ.

<sup>49</sup> Litsas, *Choricus*, 302n18.

<sup>50</sup> *Or. Fun. In Proc.* 12. ἐπόθησε τοῦτον ἢ παρὰ τὸν Ὀρόντην κειμένη πόλις ἢ Λιβανίου μήτηρ ὅμοια πέπονθεν ἢ Φοινίκων μητρόπολις.

quarry. Caesarea's love charm (lit., τὸ φίλτρον) exceeded those of the other magnificent cities that longed for him:

Caesarea outdid the spells of each of these cities to charm him, sometimes trying to compel him, sometimes flattering him, trying to entice him with much gold, always by means of the devices a lover would use to hunt his darlings, until at last she caught her quarry, but having caught it she was not able to keep it because he was led by stronger bonds, by the desire for his birthplace.<sup>51</sup>

Choricus publicly affirms that Procopius' stalwart love of his home city could withstand even the most vigorous attempts to lure him elsewhere: "justly he repaid his home city (lit., *patris*) for the upbringing that he had received, and placed such great and numerous cities together in second place."<sup>52</sup> Choricus enumerates in pleasing literary language the attractions of the cities—delineated here as capable of rousing strong erotic desire (ἔρωτα δεινὸν)—which failed to lure Procopius, however, because of his superior devotion to his home: "Even though apart from the imperial offices of high rank and imposing architecture in which those cities exalt themselves, each one of these cities has its own advantage which is able to rouse someone toward a terrible passion."<sup>53</sup> Antioch, for example, had the suburb which bore the name of Apollo's lover, Daphne, as well as "lovely, clear, potable waters, many plane trees, wide spreading and lofty cypress trees, and the songs of birds and breezes refreshing the body."<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. παρῆλθεν ἑκατέρας τὸ φίλτρον ἢ Καίσαρος τὰ μὲν βιαζομένη, τὰ δὲ κολακεύουσα, τὰ δὲ πειρωμένη χρυσίῳ πολλῶν δελεάζειν, οἷσιν αἰὲ μηχαναῖς ἐραστῆς πρὸς ἄγραν κέχηρται παιδικῶν, ἕως ὅψῃ μὲν εἴλε τὸ θήραμα, ἐλοῦσα δὲ φυλάττειν οὐκ εἶχεν ἰσχυροτέροις ἀγόμενον λίνους, πόθῳ τῆς ἐνεγκούσης.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 13. καὶ τὰ τροφεῖα καλῶς ἀπέδωκε τῇ πατρίδι τοσαύτας ὁμοῦ καὶ τοιαύτας ἐν δευτέρῳ θέμενος πόλεις.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. καίτοι χωρὶς ἀξιωματῶν λαμπρῶν καὶ μεγέθους κατασκευῆς, οἷς αἱ πόλεις ἐκεῖναι σεμνύνονται, ἴδιον ἐκάστη πλεονέκτημα κέκτηται πρὸς ἔρωτα δεινὸν ἐρεθίσαι.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. ὅπου χαρίεντα καὶ διαφανῆ καὶ πότιμα νάματα πλάτανός τε πολλὴ καὶ κυπάριττοι πλείους ἀμφιλαφεῖς τε καὶ ὑψηλαὶ καὶ ὀρνίθων ὠδαὶ καὶ αὔραι τὰ σώματα διαψύχουσαι.

attraction of Antioch was the grove, Tyre had the Graces, and Caesarea had the baths which were pleasant to look upon but even more pleasant once one had bathed in them.<sup>55</sup>

Repeating the oft-used *topos* in Late Antique epistolography of Odysseus' model loyalty to Ithaca, Choricus casts Procopius' city loyalty as homologous to that of Odysseus. Choricus avers: "having been drawn by such Sirens, Procopius settled in the city that reared him, perceiving rightly it would be frightful that the rhetor of the Achaeans (Odysseus) would love Ithaca, 'rocky though it was,'<sup>56</sup> and for he himself to despise a city fair in other respects and winning the victory by the virtues of its inhabitants, in which manner the city is best adorned."<sup>57</sup> Via intertextual design, Choricus praises Procopius' decision to ignore the Sirens' call of other illustrious cities and regard his own city on the basis of the virtues of its people. Interjecting three words of Homeric verse—κρᾶναῖς περ' εἰούσης—and the reference to "the rhetor of the Achaeans," Choricus indicates in just a few words which he anticipates his audience to understand that he refers to Odysseus' role of negotiating with Achilles on behalf of the Achaeans in Book 9 of the *Iliad*.

Procopius' *Letter* 134 to Stephanus contains what may be polite declining of a job offer at Caesarea, thereby confirming Choricus' testimony about Caesarea's interest in acquiring his mentor.<sup>58</sup> Procopius' opening address may indicate the high status of his interlocutor: "all the

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<sup>55</sup> Choricus may refer here to large public baths that existed at Caesarea in his day. These are unknown archaeologically.

<sup>56</sup> *Il.* 3.200 and *Od.* 9.27, cf. Litsas, 302n21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. ὑπὸ τουούτων Σειρήνων ἐλκόμενος εἶχετο τῆς θρεψαμένης δεινὸν εἰκότως ὑπολαβὼν τὸν ῥήτορα μὲν τῶν Ἀχαιῶν Ἰθάκης ἔραν κρᾶναῖς περ' εἰούσης, αὐτὸν δὲ τοιαύτης ὑπερφρονῆσαι πατρίδος τὰ τε ἄλλα καλῆς καὶ νικώσης ἀρεταῖς οἰκητόρων, ὅτι μάλιστα τρόπῳ πόλις κοσμεῖται.

<sup>58</sup> This was my thought upon first reading the letter; Ciccolella recently made the same conjecture; see *RDG*, 490-91nn646-47.

things that announce your brilliancy comprehend how to make known good men.”<sup>59</sup> Marveling at Stephanus, Procopius expresses his amazement that Stephanus’ own zeal for Procopius persuaded him to put a messenger on “a very short stretch of road” (μικρότατον μήκος ὁδοῦ) to see Procopius in person. Procopius seems to allude to his visitor’s nearly effective persuasion, and perhaps to the lofty status of his guest,<sup>60</sup> writing

Thus did he place upon me a heavy load, being in awe of his arrival and the virtue of his entire way of life and everything that report of him announced in advance and was confirmed by actual experience, so that I would have almost followed as my situation permitted not even bidding my own family farewell.<sup>61</sup>

Overcoming this attraction, Procopius concludes with a resolute affirmation of his duties to his home and to the students and scholars who have travelled from afar to study at Gaza, justifying why he refuses Stephanus’ offer:

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<sup>59</sup> τὴν ὑμετέραν λαμπρότητα κηρύττει μὲν ὅσα τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς γνωρίζειν ἄνδρας ἐπίσταται. Ciccolella thinks that the letter’s opening signifies that the address was a person of some influence, perhaps a *clarissimus*. Greatrex, repeating the hypothesis earlier espoused by Haury, suggests that the addressee of *Letter* 134 is the same Stephanus who was proconsul of *Palestina Prima* in 536 and who would also be the father of the historian Procopius of Caesarea as well as one of the dedicatees of Choricus’s Nuptial Oration Op. 6, Foerster-Richsteig, eds., 87-99; cf. *RDG*, 490n646. See also J. Haury, “Zur Beurteilung des Geschichtschreibers Prokopius” (PhD diss., Programm des K. Wilhelms-Gymnasium in München, 1896); K. Holum, “Flavius Stephanus: Proconsul of Byzantine Palestine,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 63 (1986): 231-39; G. Greatrex, “Stephanus, the Father of Procopius of Caesarea?” *Medieval Prosopography* 17 (1996): 125-145; Martindale, on the other hand, earlier identified the recipient of *Letter* 134 as the Greek grammarian friend of Procopius from Gaza who visited Daphne with Alypius and Hierius (cf., *Letter*. 13), who remained in Daphne and established a school there (*Letters* 71, 89) and who borrowed a book from Procopius and was remiss in returning it (*Letters* 71, 89, and 105). Martindale also does not consider Procopius’ address of Stephanus as “ἡ ὑμέτερα λαμπρότης” as literal. See *PLRE* 2:1029. The identification of Stephanus at Daphne seems less likely since Procopius mentions that the messenger traveled a short distance of road; this makes more likely the hypothesis of Stephanus as residing at Caesarea. Perhaps this offer comes from a Stephanus located at a city closer to Gaza than Caesarea, such as Ascalon, which was approx., 22 km. from Gaza. As we will see below, Aeneas’ *Letter* 25 to Julian might have been, in fact, addressed to Julian of Ascalon which suggests links between Gaza and Ascalon. At any rate, Stephanus is a common name in the later Roman Greek East, and the oblique language of *Letter* 134 obfuscates clear identification. What is significant, however, is Procopius’ clear attestation of city loyalty.

<sup>60</sup>Ciccolella suggests that the job proposal was submitted by a prominent person owing to the letter’s opening lines; cf. *RDG*, 490n646.

<sup>61</sup> οὕτω δὲ μοι βαρὺ φορτίον ἐπέθηκεν αἰδομένῳ τὴν ἄφιξιν καὶ τοῦ παντὸς βίου τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ ὅσα προλαβοῦσα κηρύττει φήμη βεβαιωθεῖσα τῇ πεῖρα, ὥστε μικροῦ δεῖν ὡς εἶχον σχήματος εἰπόμην, μηδὲ τοῖς οἰκείοις χαίρειν εἰπῶν.

But some thought scarcely held me from rushing out, reckoning not to overlook the *patris* in which I first saw the sun, and how it is more noble to guard justice before her than to possess much gold and to neglect so many foreigners being present on account of me.”<sup>62</sup>

Both his loyalty to his home city—here and elsewhere termed *patris* (e.g., Choricus’ *Funeral Oration* 13, and further examples below)—and those who have gathered round him in scholarly enterprises in his city ensure that Procopius could not not be lured away from Gaza by means of material inducement or requests from influential individuals.

Procopius may also have been offered a job at Berytus,<sup>63</sup> and *Letter* 113, and particularly, *Letter* 114, suggest job offers from this city, and, moreover, constitute convincing testimony regarding Procopius’ overwhelming loyalty to Gaza. In *Letter* 113 addressed to the brothers Hieronymus and Theodorus,<sup>64</sup> Procopius opens by praising the wisdom of these men which radiates with their fame and remarks as well about the talent of their accomplished father and grandfather, teachers of law, whose qualities the brothers share.<sup>65</sup> Procopius remarks that the

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<sup>62</sup>ἀλλὰ μέ τις ἔννοια μόλις ἐπέσχευ ὀρμῶντα, λογιζόμενον τὸ μηδὲν ὑπερορᾶν πατρίδος ἐν ἧ πρώτῳ εἶδον τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ὡς καλὸν τὰ πρὸς ταύτην δίκαια φυλάττειν ἢ πολὺν κεκτηῖσθαι χρυσίον, καὶ ξένους τοσοῦτους δι’ ἐμὲ παρόντας ὑπεριδεῖν. Ciccolella also points out that the mention here of money also makes it probable that Procopius is here refusing a job offer; cf. *RDG*, 491n647. The phrase regarding payment of “much gold” also seems later echoed in Choricus’ *Funeral Oration* (see above); Choricus would likely have had access to this letter, probably preserved at the School of Gaza, and could have consciously interlaced the language of Procopius’ actual refusal of the job at Caesarea in his oration.

<sup>63</sup> This is Ciccolella’s hypothesis; see *RDG*, 482n540; 483n545

<sup>64</sup> According to Martindale, Theodorus and Hieronymus were brothers and teachers of law, most likely at Berytus. They apparently belonged to a family of legal experts and were trained by their father and grandfather, eventually inheriting their teaching posts. It is likely they taught at Berytus since the succeeding letter (*Letter* 114) was sent there, and these letters may have been conveyed together. See *PLRE* 2:561. Arguably, the similarities in language (as shall be examined) between *Letters* 113 and 114 also suggest the interconnection of the letters.

<sup>65</sup> τὴν ὑμέτεραν σοφίαν ἔγνω μὲν καὶ πάλα πανταχοῦ τῷ λογῷ προλάμπουσαν, καὶ ὃν ἡ θέα μὴ παρέσχευ, ἧ γε φήμη χαρίζεται, κοινῶν βοῶσα κηρύγματι τὸν πάππον ὑψηγήσει νόμων ἐπιγραφόμενον, τὸν πατέρα γλώττης χάριτι πρὸς τὴν τῶν νόμων ἀυστηρίαν τὴν ἀκοὴν ὑποσύροντα, καὶ ἐκ τούτων ὑμᾶς πάντα φέροντας, ἅπερ ἐκεῖνοι πορλαβόντες ἐκ μέρους ἐνείμαντο, “I understand that your wisdom always and everywhere shines in speech, and whom seeing did not provide and report grants us, crying with a common proclamation that his grandfather is inscribed as in charge of the explication of the laws [i.e., he is an accomplished teacher of law], that the father by the grace of his tongue draws the listener to the strict language of the laws, and that through them you possess all the qualities that they, your elders, divided respectively.”

polis of such men is blessed (εὐδαίμων) and bewails that he cannot be present with these learned men: “Oh, if somehow I could stay with you and fill myself with your learning!”<sup>66</sup> Fashioning his declaration of his zeal for the polis in terms of erotic longing, Procopius exclaims “for great among men is longing for the *patris!*”<sup>67</sup> Drawing again upon Odysseus’ fidelity to Ithaca, Procopius bids Hieronymus and Theodorus to “witness how Odysseus spurned Calypso so that he could cast eyes upon Ithaca.”<sup>68</sup> He then makes a statement, which, together with the expression of his wish to live with the addressees above, may indicate that Procopius is in fact turning down a job offer: “further it does not seem right to make your own another field alongside the discourses of justice.”<sup>69</sup> These two statements likely signify that Procopius is referring specifically to the offer of a teaching post in another city.

The similarities in language between *Letters* 113 and 114, and the clearer indication of an offer of a job in *Letter* 114, suggest that these letters were interconnected. The addressee of 114 is clearly from Berytus, which makes likely the same address for the letter to Hieronymus and Theotimus. *Letter* 114 is addressed to Hermeias, whom Procopius praises as responsible for the city. “When I saw your greatness through the letters you sent to me,” he wrote, “I obviously admired your mind, and I applaud the city of Berytians if such a man has to been promoted to take care for virtue and discourses!”<sup>70</sup> Such address may well indicate that Hermeias,

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<sup>66</sup> ἀλλ’ εἴθε πως ἐδυνάμην συνεῖναι καὶ τῆς σῆς ἐμφορεῖσθαι παιδεύσεως.

<sup>67</sup> ἀλλὰ μέγα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις εἰς πόθον ἐστὶν ἡ πατρίς.

<sup>68</sup> καὶ μάρτυς Ὀδυσσεὺς τὴν Καλυψὼ παριδών, ἵνα τὴν Ἰθάκην θεάσῃται.

<sup>69</sup> πρὸς δὲ οὐ θεμιτὸν εἶναί μοι δοκεῖ τόπον ἀλλότριον παρὰ τὸν τοῦ δικαίου σφετερίσασθαι λόγον.

<sup>70</sup> τὸ ὑμέτερον μέγεθος διὰ τῶν πρὸς ἐμὲ γραμμάτων ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς μὲν εἰκότως τῆς γνώμης ἐθαύμασα, τῇ δὲ Βηρυτίων συνήδομαι πόλει εἰ τοιοῦτον ἔχει προβεβλημένον, ὡς ἀρετῆς καὶ λόγων ποιεῖσθαι φροντίδα.

represented as protector of the city, served a post such as *defensor, pater civitatis*, or *vindex* at Berytus, rather than as provincial governor of Phoenice.<sup>71</sup> Praising the model of Hermeias' service to his city, Procopius avers, "it would be hard to neglect my own city because of the example you give."<sup>72</sup> The following several lines likely indicate that Hermeias' letter has offered Procopius a position at Berytus:

For if you consider everything to contrive for the adornment of the city that bore you, how could it be good for me not to do that which I praised you for doing? But to introduce me to a position which another has acquired I consider to be contrary to logic.<sup>73</sup>

Invoking loyalty to his polis like that of Hermeias, Procopius firmly but politely resists acceptance of a teaching position at Berytus which seems to be held already by someone else. To accept the post would not only nullify the duty to city which Procopius espouses via his praise of Hermeias, but it also seems illogical because the position is already occupied.

In addition to epistolary messages enunciating polis identity in connection with the declining of job offers, Procopius' epistolary conversations demonstrate his repeated offer of normative instruction regarding duty to home cities to friends, students, colleagues, and family. In this way, epistolography forges a space for Procopius to explore his own values while meddling in his friends' affairs. Such texts suggest how the rhetor's self-understanding was bound up in his lived relationships and understanding of others. In *Letter 59* to his brother Philip, a *causidicus* serving in the imperial consistory at Constantinople,<sup>74</sup> Procopius requests

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<sup>71</sup> This is Martindale's suggestion; see *PLRE* 2:548.

<sup>72</sup> ἔμοι δὲ βαρὺ πατρίδος ὑπεροῶν ἐξ ὑμῶν λαβόντι παράδειγμα.

<sup>73</sup> εἰ γὰρ ὑμεῖς πάντα μηχανᾶσθε κοσμεῖν τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν οἴομενοι, πῶς ἂν ἔχοι καλῶς ἔμοι μὴ ταῦτα ποιεῖν ἐφ' οἷς ὑμᾶς ἐπήνεσα πράττοντας; ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰσποιεῖν ἑμαυτὸν εἰς τόπον ὃν εὐτύχησεν ἕτερος, τῆς λογικῆς καταστάσεως ἀλλότριον εἶναι δοκῶ.

<sup>74</sup> *RDG*, 465n299. Philip was the addressee of *Letters* 7, 10, 17, 25, 34, 47, 53, 59, 123, 160, and, jointly with brother Zacharias of *Letters* 24, 37, 45, 58, 61, 62, 76, 82-85, 100, 136, 137, 143. He served in Constantinople



that Philip advance a petition on behalf of the city of Gaza to the Patriarch of Constantinople or the emperor's brother, to be delivered to the emperor.<sup>75</sup> To persuade his brother, Procopius contends forcefully that Philip ought to forward the petition because it is a duty he owes to his home city. Apparently petitioned by a group of Gazan citizens, Procopius opens by beseeching that Philip show thankfulness to his home: "If both the ancient accounts and the law of nature wish that it is seemly to return what is due to one's parents, it is appropriate to render gratitude to your *patris* from which came forth the origins of your parents."<sup>76</sup> The time is ripe to pay back his home polis, and Procopius casts the polis as verbalizing her request through himself. "The occasion," he writes, "now calls you to give gratitude, and it seems that your native city utters its call to you through me."<sup>77</sup> By delivering the petition which likely accompanies *Letter 59* Philip would uphold his obligations to his home city and likely engender some goodwill toward himself from Procopius: "For thus you will have fulfilled your duty and you will have instilled in me the

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alongside Zacharias (*Letters* 136 and 143). Philip and Zacharias were requested to forward a petition from Gaza to the praetorian prefect (*Letters* 84 and 85). This makes it likely that Philip, like Zacharias, was a pleader at the court of the praetorian prefect. Philip and Zacharias were promoted to positions related to the imperial consistory (*Letter* 45). It is not clear what the exact positions were; Martindale argues that if they were *notarii*, they may have become secretaries of the consistory. Since they were likely advocates, they probably became *comites consistoriani* and served as legal experts when the consistory held judicial meetings (see *PLRE* 1:506-7n85). On the identity of Philip see *PLRE* 2:875-76. According to Garzya-Loenertz the emperor in question could be emperor Zeno and Longinus, consul in the year 486 and 490 (see *RDG*, 465n300).

<sup>75</sup> Procopius' request in *Letter 59* is: βασιλεῖ τῷ μεγάλῳ τὰς ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως δεήσεις ἐπιδοθῆναι βουλόμεθα διὰ τοῦ παρ' ὑμῖν ἀρχιερέως ἢ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀδελφοῦ, ἵνα τὸ τοῦ ἐπιδιδόντος ἀξίωμα λόγον τινὰ παράσχη τῷ διδομένῳ, "We want that petitions on behalf of the city to be delivered to the Emperor by your bishop or the emperor's brother, so that the dignity of the deliverer will offer some esteem to what is being presented." The use of the first and second persons in the plural here is unclear. Procopius may employ a "royal we" to denote himself or he may select the first and second person plural to indicate a group around Procopius or Procopius and those initiating the petition and Philip and his associates respectively.

<sup>76</sup> εἰ τοῖς γονεῦσι τὸ προσῆκον ἀποδιδόναί τε παλαιοί τε λόγοι καὶ ὁ τῆς φύσεως βούλεται νόμος, πόσον εἰκὸς πατρίδι χάριν ἐκτίνειν, ἐξ ἧς προῆλθε καὶ τοῖς γονεῦσιν ἀρχή;

<sup>77</sup> ἐπὶ ταύτην σε νῦν ὁ καιρὸς καλεῖ, καὶ δόκει τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν ταύτην δι' ἐμοῦ σοι φωνὴν ἀφιέναι .

memory of the deed, by so much more since the need concerns the most serious issues.”<sup>78</sup>

Procopius explains further that this favor is most easy for Philip to offer but a great thing for those who wish to receive it.<sup>79</sup> As a mechanism of recipient design, Procopius alludes again to how this favor will create appreciation for Philip in Procopius and closes with the promise that Philip’s fulfillment of polis duty will foster goodwill: “For this way doing this will establish collective gratitude both with the petitioners and with the one who was petitioned.”<sup>80</sup>

Duty to one’s hometown also meant returning to celebrate its annual festivals. In *Letter* 110 Procopius freely berates his Caesarean friend Diodorus for both his silence—a *topos* of Late Antique letters—and his neglect of his native city, Gaza. Diodorus, an advocate, had been transplanted from Gaza to Caesarea where he became a wealthy person of influence (one of the οἱ μέγα δυναμένοι –“powerful men,” of *Letter* 8) and whose arrogance Procopius repeatedly censures (*Letters* 23, 29, 110).<sup>81</sup> In *Letter* 110 Procopius wonders at Diodorus’ presumption:

You are mocking at my silence, but I am not able to bear your pretension. On account of it you perhaps think yourself to be someone grand, and I suppose you often seem of great account and inspire words in me, such as “when will a noble man come to me, he who is of pleasing appearance, he whose delights put the Sirens in the shadows, who disregards his *patris* so that he can save the city of Caesar?”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> οὕτω γὰρ καὶ τὸ δέον ἔση πεπληρωκῶς καὶ μνήμην ἡμῖν παράσχοις τοῦ πράγματος, ὅσα καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἢ χρεῖα.

<sup>79</sup> βαρὺ δὲ προσδόκα μηδέν, ἀλλὰ σοὶ μὲν ῥᾶστον διδόναι, μέγα δὲ τοῖς λαβοῦσι τυχεῖν.

<sup>80</sup> ταῦτα γὰρ ποιῶν κοινὴν καταθήσει χάριν καὶ τοῖς αἰτήσασιν καὶ τοῖς αἰτηθεῖσιν ἡμῖν. It is unclear exactly to whom the first person plural pronoun refers again, but the fact that Procopius positions it as the last word of the sentence for emphasis as well as the fact that he separates it from those making the request likely indicates he uses the “royal we.”

<sup>81</sup> *PLRE* 2:359.

<sup>82</sup> σὺ μὲν ἡμῖν σκώπτεις τὴν σιωπὴν, ἐγὼ δὲ σοὶ τὴν ἀλαζονεῖαν φέρειν οὐκ ἔχω, δι’ ἣν ἴσως οἶε τις εἶναι σεμνός, ἣν ἡμῖν διὰ πλείστου φανηκαὶ που λόγον πολλακίς ἐμβάλῃς ἡμῖν “πότε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ καλός, ὁ τὴν θέας ἡδύς, ὁ τὰς Σειρήνας ἀποκρύπτων ταῖς ἡδοναῖς, ὁ τὴν πατρίδα παρορῶν ἵνα σώσῃ τὴν Καίσαρος;”

Procopius chides Diodorus for not visiting his friends in his home town: in the blur of his lucrative success in Caesarea, Diodorus overlooks his home polis in favor of Caesarea. Employing erotic language, Procopius complains that such behavior amounts to a tantalizing type of torture which only intensifies Procopius' longing for Diodorus.<sup>83</sup> Procopius remarks that it is also troublesome that Diodorus deems his native city's festivals of little importance. Repeatedly Diodorus has offered empty promises of coming back home. Procopius bids his friend to please return home to celebrate a native festival together. Although Procopius may use the term for festival (*panēgyris*) metaphorically, it is likely that this letter is linked to *Letter 77* to Diodorus in which Procopius laments that his friend did not appear to celebrate the feast of the martyrs at Gaza.<sup>84</sup>

Procopius repeatedly pesters his teacher colleague Hieronymus regarding his decision to leave his home city of Elusa to teach in Egypt at Hermopolis and Alexandria.<sup>85</sup> The censure of Hieronymus, which occurs in several extant letters addressed to him, concentrates on a number of interconnected topics. Procopius criticizes Hieronymus' fascination with the luxury of Egypt (*truphē*) in *Letters 2, 9, 57, 81, 91*; his excessive devotion to the wealth he derives from teaching at Egypt in *Letters 2, 81, 86, 91, and 124*; his neglect of Elusa in *Letters 2, 91, and 124*, and the haughtiness that such material success and luxury have engendered in him in *Letters 81, 91,*

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<sup>83</sup> τοιαῦτα λογοποιεῖν ἡμᾶς ἡγῆ τῆ μελλήσει κατατείνων αἰεί, καὶ παρὰ σαυτῷ πάντως γνωμολογεῖς, ὡς τὸ σπάνιον αἰεὶ τοῖς ζητοῦσιν ἐπιτείνει τὸν πόθον, "You think you can make me think such things, always torturing me with what will happen, and you are always thinking that absence increases desire for those who are longing."

<sup>84</sup> See *RDG*, 481n528.

<sup>85</sup> See "Hieronymus 2," in *PLRE* 2:560-61. According to Procopius, Hieronymus went to Egypt to teach (*Letter 2*). He returned to Elusa to marry (*Letters 2,9*). A son called Alexander was born there (*Letters 57, 91, 124*). He went back to Egypt leaving his family behind (*Letters 57, 91*). They later rejoined him at Hermopolis (*Letter 124*).

124.<sup>86</sup> The critique of Hieronymus' neglect of his home is intertwined with these interwoven themes.

I have suggested above in Chapter 3 that we read *Letter 91* to Hieronymus as a text recited aloud before circles of literati, perhaps in Gaza. This letter likely voiced normative prescriptions about duties to the polis reflecting the tastes and values of an audience of literati. What is significant is not whether Hieronymus abandoned his home city in the ways that Procopius claims but the criticism of abandoning the polis itself. Gibes about Hieronymus' neglect of Elusa probably stemmed to some extent from Procopius' wish that his friend return to live in a location closer to Gaza than Alexandria or Hermopolis. The fact that these claims likely constitute an epistolary *topos* does not obviate the likelihood that Procopius' criticisms, probably accessed by a larger subset of literati either in a gathering of epistolary theater and/or other lateral dissemination of his letter, articulate normative attitudes about proper conduct with regard to the polis.

Both Procopius and Aeneas also berate colleagues and students alike for choosing an agrarian lifestyle outside of the city. For these epistolographers the city is the locus of erudition and scholarly activity, and the choice to leave the urban core of the polis is tantamount to abandonment of a life of intellectual pursuits and moral cultivation. City versus countryside constitutes a literary dichotomy which for these men clearly amounts to major differences in lifestyle and mentality for an individual. In *Letter 75*, Procopius carps that Nestorius, a former student likely from Elusa,<sup>87</sup> has chosen the wealth of an agricultural life and renounced

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<sup>86</sup> *Letter 57* has not been clearly authenticated as addressed to Hieronymus. *Letter 57* is addressed to Stephanus in the manuscript tradition, but Garzya-Loenertz sustained that it was destined for Hieronymus on the basis of its similarities to *Letter 2* addressed to Hieronymus. See *RDG*, 464n287.

<sup>87</sup> *RDG*, 466n326.

Procopius' instruction. Employing *patris* here to signify territory rather than a city, Procopius characterizes caustically Nestorius' newfound agrarianism:

Thereafter then [that is, after Nestorius' change in fortune] your fatherland has become more longed for, the *patris* which formerly you stigmatized as the pit of the inhabited world, and you have altogether become a person of material [that is, someone devoted to agriculture], having bid adieu to philosophy.<sup>88</sup>

From the teacher's point of view Nestorius has nullified his education, which Procopius frames as civilizing: "For that thing tame and civilized, which scarcely I had created in you earlier, and my hopes for your advancement, you have made all go away."<sup>89</sup> Instead Nestorius has become mountain-haunting and he follows the law of the country. This is what Nestorius now enjoys, "he who formerly philosophized at the side of poverty."<sup>90</sup> Nestorius' life in the country does not inspire intellectual commitments. Procopius complains "whence you are fond of living in the countryside of your *patris* and you do not examine how to be wiser but how you might see fields growing."<sup>91</sup> In *Letter 150*, Procopius, rankled by Nestorius' silence, avers that if only he would write, then he would know that his teaching was still intact despite Nestorius' rural abode: "Imitate the appearance of you in your letters, and you will persuade me that the pit of your countryside (*chora*) has in no way prevailed over my teaching."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> ἐκεῖθεν ἄρα σοι ποθεινότερα γέγονεν ἡ πατρίς, ἢ πρότερον ἀπεκάλεις τῆς οἰκουμένης τὸ βάραθρον, ὅλος δὲ τῆς ὕλης γέγονας, τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ χάριεν εἰπών.

<sup>89</sup> τὸ δὲ πρᾶον ἐκεῖνο καὶ ἡμερον, ὃ σοι μόλις ἐνεποίησα τὸ πρότερον, καὶ τὰς ἐπὶ σοὶ τοῦ προκόψειν ἐλπίδας φροῦδα πάντα πεποίηκας.

<sup>90</sup> ὁ παρὰ τὴν πενίαν πάλαι φιλοσοφῶν.

<sup>91</sup> ὅθεν ἐμφιλοχωρεῖς τῇ πατρίδι καὶ σκοπεῖς οὐχ ὅθεν ἔση σοφώτερος, ἀλλ' ὅθεν ἂν ἴδοις κομῶντα τὰ λήια.

<sup>92</sup> μιμοῦ τὴν θέαν τοῖς γράμμασι, καὶ πείσεις ὡς τὴν ἐμὴν διδασκαλίαν τὸ τῆς χώρας οὐδαμῶς ἐνίκησε βάραθρον.

In *Letter 2* addressed to Cassus, Aeneas of Gaza likewise locates the polis as the premiere site of pedagogy and learning, and urges his friend who has apparently moved to the country, perhaps to pursue agriculture, to return to the city and the pursuit of erudition. Aeneas commences by likening his friend's choice of residence to a Homeric antecedent:

Laertes the old man no longer wished to be king and to rule over human beings, but to be a gardener and to take care of his trees. And you seem to me to emulate this man. For you, having left behind the city and your things for a long time, have sat down in a field and you are talking to your plants.<sup>93</sup>

Switching immediately from a Homeric to a Platonic analogy, Aeneas next adduces Plato's

*Phaedrus* 230d and bids Cassus to be persuaded not by the example of Laertes but by Socrates:

“And it is necessary to remember not Laertes but Socrates and the teachings of Socrates, in

which he says elegantly and soberly that ‘the country and the trees do not wish to teach but that it

is men in the city (who teach).’”<sup>94</sup> Cassus may well be either an educator or a former student

who now pursues agriculture. Aeneas closes with a last exhortation that Cassus “overlook the

fields in which farmers reap a harvest poor in wisdom, but be mindful of the customary haunts in

which it is possible to learn something wise and to teach it also, and, the greatest thing, to delight

your friends.”<sup>95</sup> Deploying the cultural resources of Plato's Socrates and Homeric poetry,

Aeneas authorizes his advice to a friend regarding the city as the locus of learning via Classical

texts.

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<sup>93</sup> Λαέρτης ὁ γέρον οὐκέτ' ἤθελεν εἶναι βασιλεὺς οὐδ' ἀνθρώπων ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ κηπουρός τε εἶναι καὶ τῶν δένδρων ἐπιμέλεσθαι. σὺ δέ μοι δοκεῖς ἐζηλωκέναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον · οὐ γὰρ ἂν τὴν πόλιν καὶ τοὺς σαυτοῦ ἀπολιπὼν χρόνον οὕτω μακρὸν ἐν ἀγρῷ προσκαθήμενος τοῖς φυτοῖς διηγέες λαλῶν.

<sup>94</sup> ἔδει δὲ οὐ τοῦ Λαέρτου μεμνησθαι ἀλλὰ Σωκράτους καὶ τῶν Σωκράτους δογμάτων, ἐν οἷς ἐκεῖνος χαριέντως καὶ σεμνῶς λέγων φιλοσοφεῖ ὅτι “τὰ χωρία καὶ τὰ δένδρα οὐδὲν ἐθέλει διδάσκειν, οἱ δ' ἐν τῷ ἄστει ἄνθρωποι.” Plato *Phaedrus* 230 d; Positano, 40.

<sup>95</sup> μακρὸν τῶν ἀγρῶν ὑπεριδῶν, ἐν οἷς ἄπορον σοφίας κάρπον τοὺς γεωργοῦντας δρέπεσθαι, ἀναμνήσθητι τῶν συνήθων ἐκείνων διατριβῶν, ἐν αἷς ἔνεστι σοφόν τι μαθεῖν καὶ διδάξαι καί, τὸ δὴ μέγιστον, εὐφραίνειν τοὺς φίλους. Italicized words indicate Pindar fr. 209 which Aeneas likely knew through Plato *Republic* 5.457b. Cf. Positano, 74.

Letter language also attests to the city as the site of the interconnectivity of lettered men. The city was the space of the intervisibility of literati; it was where they socialized elbow-to-elbow in monumentalized structures of education, and it was the locus of epistolary theater and other types of literary sociability. The city was the physical backdrop where the reputation of orators, teachers, and students spread through social acquaintances. In *Letter 15* to Stephanus the priest, in which he claims that an associate of the two men named Eustratius persuaded him to write, Aeneas mentions the spread of fame through word of mouth among interrelated associates in the city. “May many good things happen,” he writes, “to fair Eustratius because he ran through many cities and filled all of them quite full with your name.”<sup>96</sup> As Procopius writes in *Letter 144* to his former student Orion, the student was the visible representative of his teacher in his travels through the Greco-Roman “archipelago of cities.” Procopius comments how “experience is the test whether those men who are absent are good friends. . . and if children are images of their fathers, reasonably then does rumor elevate me, a good son making a small father to seem greater and everywhere, as you say, conveying him among the cities.”<sup>97</sup> In his various travels, the student ferries the visible product of his teacher’s skill in the theater of the cityscape.

Rhetor and city could not be separated in Late Antiquity: they were intertwined and interdependent entities. The rhetorician was the visible voice of the Late Antique polis who continued to embody in oral and aural form its cultural energy. Procopius powerfully expresses his role as spokesman for the polis in his *Oration to Anastasius*:

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<sup>96</sup> ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καγαθὰ γένοιτο Εὐστρατίῳ τῷ ὅτι πολλὰς πόλεις διαδραμῶν τοῦ σοῦ ὀνόματος πάσας ἐνέπλησεν .

<sup>97</sup> τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τῶν φίλων ἀπόντας μᾶλλον ἐλέγχειν οἶδεν ἢ πεῖρα . . . εἰ δὲ καὶ πατέρων εἰκόνες οἱ παῖδες, εἰκότως ἄρα με καὶ φήμη κομίζει μετάρσιον διὰ παιδὸς ἀγαθοῦ σμικρὸν πατέρα μείζω ποιούσα δοκεῖν καὶ πανταχοῦ, καθάπερ ἔφησ, ταῖς πόλεσι παραπέμπουσα.

The whole city moves to make just compensation for the goods it has received, and considering there is not sufficient time for every single man to speak, by a common vote they are satisfied by the voice of the rhetor.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Procopius succinctly expresses the rhetor's perspective about the mutuality of city and rhetor when he declares in *Letter 38* that "rhetoric is the foundation of the city."<sup>99</sup>

### Isidore: the Desert Flight

Isidore represents a third paradigm for thinking about patterns of Late Antique communal engagement and affiliation with physical places: the trend of pursuing asceticism through flight from the polis. As an instantiation of a larger social process, Isidore's desert flight represents a rethinking of the traditional conception of engagement and loyalty to the urban organism of the city-state that befitted a man of Isidore's social location. From this perspective Isidore's letters serve as witness of a major trend which defines Late Antiquity: a newfound indeterminacy of community that co-existed alongside more typical affiliations with physical places. Isidore, like Aeneas and Procopius was a visible voice of the polis, elected by city councilmen to the post of city sophist. As city rhetor, Isidore had achieved a significant and verifiable index of success according to city elites. Unlike the two Gazan sophists, however, Isidore chose to remove himself from his home city and its social climate and live as a monk in the rural outskirts of Pelusium. From this vantage, flight from the city was a strategy for circumventing the competitive hurly-burly of the distinguished men in the city who rankled Augustine in *Contra*

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<sup>98</sup> Panegyric to Anastasius, Matino. ed., lines 17-19. ὅλη δὲ πόλις ἀνθ' ὧν εὖ πάσχει πρὸς ἀμοιβὴν κινεῖται δίκαιαν, καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ἄνδρα λέγειν οὐχ ἰκανὸν ἡγουμένη τὸν χρόνον, κοινῇ πάντες ψήφῳ τῆ τοῦ ῥήτορος ἀρκοῦνται φωνῇ .

<sup>99</sup> ῥητορικὴν, ἐφ' ἧς ἐστήκασιν αἱ πόλεις.



*Academicos*, those grasping councilman vying for verifiable gauges of status, including signs of consumptive display.

Letters had an important role to play in interlinking various monasteries, clergymen, and monks. Among associated monasteries letters were vehicles for organizing administrative matters of leadership and conduct, but they were also mechanisms of sociability and personal relationships among ascetics. Epistolary conversations provided access to shared spiritual and psychological struggles among monks and laity alike; indeed, epistolary webs hypothetically interlinked monks of associated monasteries just like city literati. Despite Isidore's claim of a discrete departure from the city—emblemized by his depiction of the departure with the verb *pheugin* (to flee)—the letters also underscore the inter-permeability and interdependency of anti-polis and polis. Isidore's epistolary testimony shows that monasticism emerges as a counter-cultural movement rethinking place, a step back from it, a process of reformulating and re-conceptualizing place, but not a clean departure from the social drama of the city. The desert flight was a created immersion in an anti-polis drama.

Not unlike the Sayings of the Desert Fathers,<sup>100</sup> the collection of wisdom drawn from monks, hermits, and ascetics situated in the northwestern Nile delta (beginning in the third c. A.D.), Isidore's letters were fonts of the oracular wisdom of the Egyptian desert monk. His missives preserve his own *apophthegmata* and advice addressed to other monks and clergy as well as intellectuals in the city—*scholastikoi* and sophists—and high-ranking councilmen and civil authorities. Like the corpora of John, Barsanuphius, and Nilus of Ancyra, Isidore's letters

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<sup>100</sup> See Wilhem Bousset et al. eds., *Apophthegmata: Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1923). For a recent translation, see John Wortley, ed., *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2012); see also Thomas Merton, ed., *The Wisdom of the Desert: The Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* (New York: New Directions, 1961).

written from ascetic retreat illuminate the role of letters as vehicles of continued involvement in polis affairs and the impossibility of a complete social separation from the city for letter-addicts like Isidore.<sup>101</sup>

The exact location of Isidore's monastic "flight" remains unclear. Pierre Évieux has recently suggested that Isidore's retreat was situated near Pelusium in the province Augustamnica I.<sup>102</sup> Évieux proposed that the monastery was located not far from Aphnaion to the southeast of Pelusium. This argument is based upon the noteworthy absence of letters addressed to Hierax the bishop of Aphnaion. Évieux hypothesizes that Isidore was located so close to this town that correspondence was made nearly unnecessary.<sup>103</sup>

Following the hagiographical testimony, Évieux contends that the extant letters were written during Isidore's desert sojourn in the last phase of his life.<sup>104</sup> Three texts transmitting various traditions about Isidore's biography comment on the context of letter production, and these sources all maintain that his letters were written from the desert retreat. These are the hagiographical compilations the *Synaxarium* of Constantinople (10<sup>th</sup> c.), the *Menologia* of Basil II (11<sup>th</sup> c.), and, a text from the Koutloumous monastery, the *Koutloumous 23* (12<sup>th</sup> c.).<sup>105</sup> This is thus a rather late tradition that is not confirmed in Isidore's letters. Based on this consideration, I argue that interpretive caution should prevent the undue and overdrawn view that the letters were

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<sup>101</sup>See Hevelone-Harper concerning the epistolography of Barsanuphius and John.

<sup>102</sup>Évieux, *Isidore*, 68, 314.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 315; see 295-305 for a discussion of the external testimony concerning Isidore.

<sup>105</sup>This text and three other manuscripts from the sixteenth century were edited by Morton Smith; see M. Smith "An unpublished life of St. Isidore of Pelusium," in Gerasimos Iōannou Konidarēs, ed. *Eucharisterion: Essays in honor of Professor H.S. Alevisatos* (Athens: Apostolikē Diakonia, 1958), 428-38. See Évieux, *Isidore*, 297-98, for a synoptic chart of the details of the external testimony for the life of Isidore.

all written in a monastic context. Details of several letters are highly suggestive of a monastic context of authorship. On the other hand, such internal clues are generally unavailable in the often pithy gnomic excerpts that constitute many of Isidore's surviving letters. In what follows, I will explore first those letters whose language most likely signifies the monastery as site of production. Following such discussion, I will examine other letters that Isidore may have written at a monastery but which contain comparatively fewer internal markers to confirm the monastic context as the context of letter composition, and I will offer hypothetical interpretations of these texts as if they were in fact written by Isidore or his interlocutor in the monastery. I will interrogate these selected letters from the point of view that letters were rhetorical vehicles that enabled communicants to examine their communal and spatial identities while also serving as surrogate vessels of sociability among associated monks and laypersons. In this way, these texts highlight the osmotic boundaries between city and desert communities.

Letters offered Isidore a discursive theater for exploring and representing his own decision to leave the city of Pelusium and live as an ascetic in the desert. *Letter 497* to the priest Theognostus preserves Isidore's defense of his monastic lifestyle as the pursuit of the true wisdom, superior to that of his former abandoned life of the rhetorician and his Classical texts. Isidore opens by stating his identification with those who pursue the highest and most inclusive type of wisdom, "the one that encompasses all fair things in itself (so that the Lord of all rejoices hearing it more than hearing anything else, although it is called by many names)."<sup>106</sup> This wisdom is under attack by a certain group whom Isidore judges to be "the all-daring ones," (*pantotolmoi*) who consider genuine wisdom "to be a trifle and trod upon" (φαῦλον καὶ

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<sup>106</sup> οἱ τὴν σοφίαν τὴν πάντα τὰ καλὰ ἐν ἑαυτῇ περιέχουσαν (ὡς καὶ τὸν πάντων Δεσπότην τοῦτο μᾶλλον ἢ τι ἕτερον χαίρειν ἀκούντα, ἐπειδὴ πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλεῖται).

πεπατημένον πρᾶγμα ἡγούμενοι). Isidore then specifies that it is the boon of asceticism—here referred to as labors (*ponoi*)—that offers the highest sort of intellectual and moral transformation: divine wisdom (*theia sophia*). These critics are eager for wisdom (ἔχειν μὲν ἐπιθυμοῦντες) but “do not consider it worthy to undergo the labors (*ponoi*, asceticism) upon which the divine wisdom comes.”<sup>107</sup> Isidore claims that such critics are jealous because they are too lazy to pursue monasticism: “on account of laziness that they might not appear to be left behind; jealous of the wise they ridicule the name of wisdom.”<sup>108</sup>

Referring to a group of competitors, such as rhetors, Isidore claims resolutely that those are not wise who “emulate the sublimity of Plato, the gravity of Thucydides, and the eloquence of Demosthenes.”<sup>109</sup> Also maintaining that wisdom resides with the explication of Scripture, Isidore contends that those who are truly wise are “those who can give an account of the divine teachings.”<sup>110</sup> Applying language with resonances from texts such as Luke, Revelation, and Paul’s letters, Isidore authorizes these men as “those who hear (οἱ ἀκούοντες)” who “blame not the inexperience of the speaker but the unsoundness of the teaching.”<sup>111</sup> The people with whom Isidore aligns himself scrutinize not a speaker’s inability—perhaps whether he was a trained and experienced orator—but the content of his message.

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<sup>107</sup> τοὺς δὲ πόνους ὑπομεῖναι μὴ ἀξιοῦντες, οἷς ἡ θεία σοφία ἐπιφοιτᾷ.

<sup>108</sup> τῷ μὴ διὰ ῥαθυμίαν δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ἀπολελεῖσθαι, φθονοῦντες τοῖς σοφοῖς διασύρουσι τὸ ἐκείνης ὄνομα.

<sup>109</sup> σοφὸς δέ φημι οὐ τοὺς τὸ Πλάτωνος ὕψος, καὶ τὴν Θουκυδίδου σεμνότητα, καὶ τὴν Δημοσθένους δεινότητα ζηλοῦντας.

<sup>110</sup> τοὺς λόγον ἀποδοῦναι δυναμένους ὑπὲρ τῶν θείων δογμάτων.

<sup>111</sup> οὐ τὴν τοῦ λέγοντος ἀπειρίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ δόγματος αἰτιῶνται σαθρότητα.

Arguably betraying some measure of cognitive dissonance, this letter may be read as providing a sounding-board against which Isidore defends his decision to forsake the wisdom of his former life as a rhetorician and dedicate himself not only to the teachings of Christianity and the Holy Scriptures but to the “labors” of the monastic life. Isidore now views as competitors those who pursue the texts and learning of his former profession. Perhaps registering a tinge of ambiguity about his own choices, and perhaps an enduring perception of the authority of the sophist’s learning—or at least the perception that it is evaluated as such by others—Isidore argues that ascetic discipline is associated with the highest kind of wisdom, surpassing the erudition of the polis spokesmen. Isidore reflects here on his life choices; from his perspective, those who do not admire his choice are characterized by laziness, and that is the reason why they treasure Plato, Thucydides, and Demosthenes. These critics are simply not ready to embrace the wisdom that comes with undergoing *ponoi*. Isidore’s asceticism is an intellectual achievement that circumvents the typical competitive search for wealth and power of city elites—emblemized by the *agon* of the sophists—which he had earlier pursued. His complaints concerning the group from which he is now an apostate register his own dissonance and ambivalence.

Isidore’s monastic vocabulary also communicates his perception of his monastic retreat as a complete and utter rupture with the city, placing high boundaries between the city and the monastery. In the letters Isidore frames his decision to leave the city and live as a monk in the desert in terms of the verb “to flee” (*pheugein*). The language of “flight” suggests the presence in the city of threats and dangers to be escaped, casts city life as incompatible or even impossible with the ascetic life, and hints at the monk’s fixation with and perhaps attraction for elements of the city which he sought to escape. The desert as an anti-polis represents the context bereft of

interfering attractions or attentions, a zone conceived as devoid of the sumptuary pleasures of the city and the pursuit of wealth and power among the elite circles to which Isidore ostensibly belonged. At a minimum, “flight” suggests ambivalence concerning both what is fled and the desert retreat itself, while implying a view that departure and distance between these sites are vacuum-sealed.

Isidore uses this vocabulary of flight in his epistolary commerce with friends who sought spiritual guidance and advice about how to pursue the monastic lifestyle. In *Letter 266* to Cratinus, Isidore paraphrases his interlocutor’s requests through the guise of the story in Luke 10:25:<sup>112</sup> “The question you brought before me someone else asked the Lord: for what do I need to do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>113</sup> Possibly inquiring about what monastic rule he should follow, Cratinus also asked Isidore “by what means (τίνι) will I accomplish the monastic life?” Isidore replies confidently, hinting at Cratinus’ future voyage heavenward under Isidore’s tutelage: “I will lead you by the hand to the height of the ascent.”<sup>114</sup> Isidore then pithily mandates the path to the true monastic life, which here has nothing to do with any specific rule: “Deny yourself and take up the cross<sup>115</sup> and flee as I have done.”<sup>116</sup> Flight from the city and its temptations is imperative to the ascetic life; Isidore does not conceptualize asceticism as an urban phenomenon but as juxtaposed to city life.

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<sup>112</sup>PG 78:342n92.

<sup>113</sup> ἦν αὐτός μοι πεῦσιν προσήγαγες, ἄλλος τις τῷ Κυρίῳ • ὁ μὲν εἰρηκῶς, τί ποιήσας, ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω ;

<sup>114</sup> πρὸς ὕψος χειραγωγῶ ἀναβάσεως.

<sup>115</sup>Paraphrase of Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23.

<sup>116</sup> ἄρνησαι σαυτὸν, καὶ ἄρον τὸν σταυρὸν, καὶ φεῦγε ὡς ἐγώ.

In *Letter* 191 to an otherwise unidentified Calliopius, Isidore claims, “we fled the cities because they were filled with tumult, and we found tumult in the most distant places (the desert).”<sup>117</sup> Alluding to the imposition of rule on the monastery by city officials, Isidore describes the source of such upheaval at the monastery. “For those who rule the cities,” he wrote, “those who should make the cities quiet, they made a city in the desert, turning those who lived there into exiles.”<sup>118</sup> Isidore likely points to the nature of this “tumult” in both city and desert as related to violence and injustice: “the fact when one is too weak to get justice adds to the suffering of the blow—this also I am not unaware of.”<sup>119</sup> Isidore beseeches Calliopius to stop city officials from imposing discipline on monastic life, asserting that “you having the means and sufficing for our defense, do bring an end to the injustice, stop the government, and give solitude to us and bring to an end the tears of the desert.”<sup>120</sup>

This letter registers a complaint about the role of magistrates attempting to discipline the monks and Isidore’s refusal to incorporate the monks within the city structure.<sup>121</sup> Isidore does not envision the desert as a city. This testimony also highlights the role of epistolography in interlinking monks with local and/or imperial officials and operating as a mechanism for monks to make requests for aid. Isidore appeals to Calliopius to check the violence and injustice in the

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<sup>117</sup> ἡμεῖς τὰς πόλεις ὡς θορυβώδεις πεφεύγαμεν, καὶ θορύβους ἐπὶ τῆς ἑσχατιᾶς εὐρήκαμεν.

<sup>118</sup> οἱ γὰρ ἡμερόνες τῆς πολιτείας, οἱ τὰς πόλεις ἡρεμεῖν παρασκευάζειν ὀφείλοντες, νῦν τὰς ἐρημίας πολίζουσι, τοὺς οἰκοῦντες αὐτὰς τρέποντες εἰς φυγάδας.

<sup>119</sup> ὅτι δὲ τὸ πρὸς ἐκδίκησιν ἀσθενὲς προσθήκη ἐστὶ τῆς πληγῆς, καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἄγνωῶ.

<sup>120</sup> αὐτὸς οὖν ὡς ἔχων τὸ δύνασθαι, καὶ ἀρκῶν πρὸς τὴν ἄμυναν, καὶ παῦσον τὴν ἀδικίαν, καὶ στήσον τὴν πολιτείαν, καὶ δὸς ἡμῖν ἡρεμίαν, στείλας τοὺς θρήνους τῆς ἐρημίας.

<sup>121</sup>This was a constant struggle. See, e.g., Gilbert Dagron, “Les moines et la ville: le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu’au concile de Chalcédoine,” *Travaux et mémoire* 4 (1970): 229-56. Chronicling the demise of Bishop Nestorius, Dagron explores the natural hostility between the monastic community, episcopal authorities, and municipal authorities at Constantinople.

city itself but also to check the efforts of the *hegemonēs* to impose order on the monks in the countryside. It is unclear whether these leaders are city magistrates, imperial officials, or some other group of powerful men in the city. What is clear is that these men were responsible for enforcing security in the city, and that activity apparently brought the freedom of monasteries into check. The nature of Isidore's request suggests that Calliopius could be a governor or provincial official.

Isidore's antipathy to city intervention in the monastery accords well with his representation of the monastery as a restoration of the communal life or *politeia* of Eden. In *Letter 282* to Serenus, Isidore opens by recalling the story of the Fall in Genesis 3:29:<sup>122</sup> “the Creator and Lord had offered us a place of easy living—Eden—but we were driven from it because we were easily deceived and because of the baseness of the snake, and and we were ejected onto toilsome soil and a tortured foreign sojourn.”<sup>123</sup> The return to Eden, however, has been accomplished by ascetics: “those among us who once again grew feathers and approached the height of the heavenly communal life (*politeia*), and the good Christ proclaimed for us to gather at that place (that is, Eden).”<sup>124</sup> Repeating the language of “the height” (τὸ ὕψος) to register the achievement of monastic life used in *Letter 266*, Isidore claims that the monastery replicates the life of Eden. Explicating a quotation from Matthew 24:28 that Serenus adduced in

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<sup>122</sup> PG 78:348n94.

<sup>123</sup> ἐπειδὴ χῶρον ἡμῖν εὐζωίας τὴν ἐν Ἐδέμ κακοικίαν ὁ Δημιουργὸς καὶ Δεσπότης παρέσχετο • δι' εὐκολίαν δὲ γνώμης καὶ πονηρίαν τοῦ πλάνου ταύτης ἐξώσθημεν, καὶ εἰς γῆν ἐπίμοχθον καὶ θλιβεράν παροικίαν ἐρρίφημεν.

<sup>124</sup> τοὺς ἐξ ἡμῶν πάλιν πτεροφύσαντας, καὶ τὴν χαμαίζηλον ζωὴν καταλείψαντας, καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὕψος τῆς οὐρανοῦ πολιτείας ἐγγίσαντας, εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν χῶρον συναγεῖν ὁ ἀγαθὸς Χριστὸς ἐπηγγείλατο. The repetition here of the term χῶρος which earlier refers to Eden in the opening reference to the Fall suggests that Eden is what is meant.



his previous letter, “where the corpse is, there the vultures have gathered,”<sup>125</sup> Isidore contrasts the defeat of the Fall due to immoderation with the victory of the monk’s life of self-control, specifically with regard to food consumption: “where they say the defeat occurred through the intemperate taste [of the apple], there [that is, in the heavenly *politeia*] also is the victory accomplished through fasting and self-mastery.”<sup>126</sup>

Letters testify to the commerce of people, monks, intellectual materials, and even garments between the city and interlinked monastic communes in the environs of Pelusium. If the letters were written when Isidore lived as a monk in retreat, several of them indicate that Isidore received numerous visitors at his monastery.<sup>127</sup> He likely also left the monastery and traveled to meet other monks and friends.<sup>128</sup> Certain letters contain clear language indicating that the site of visits and visitors, as well as the context of letter production, is the monastery. In *Letter* 213 to Sosandrus, a man who has ended his marriage to pursue asceticism, Isidore bids his friend to save his soul at his “mountain” or monastery: “But make haste to save your soul toward our mountain.”<sup>129</sup> In *Letter* 1503 addressed to the monk Strategius, Isidore announces his upcoming visit to see his friend and their colleague Theophilus, whom Isidore says he will embrace upon arrival (περιπτύσσομαι). Isidore specifies that he will shortly travel to Strategius’ monastery:

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<sup>125</sup> <ὅπου τὸ πτώμα, ἐκεῖ συναχθήσονται οἱ ἀετοί.> Cf. *PG* 78:350n94.

<sup>126</sup> ὅπου, φησὶ, το ἥττημα διὰ τὴν ἄκρατον γεῦσιν ἐγένετο, ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ νίκη διὰ νηστείας καὶ ἐγκρατείας . . . κατώρθωται.

<sup>127</sup> Éviéux contends that the following letters mention visitors to Isidore in retreat: 1048, 1356 (*PG* 78:5.114), 1564 (*PG* 78:5.258), 1573 (*PG* 78:5.262), 1682 (*PG* 78:5.344), 1690 (*PG* 78:5.349), 1744 (*PG* 78:5.381), 1969 (*PG* 78:5.551), 1973 (*PG* 78:5.552), 1974 (*PG* 78:5.553). Cf. Éviéux, *Isidore*, 314n62.

<sup>128</sup> Letters containing details suggestive of Isidore’s own sojourns include 58, 1443 (*PG* 4.19), 1503 (*PG* 5.216), 1900 (*PG* 5.494), 1903 (*PG* 5.497). See Éviéux, *Isidore*, 314n63.

<sup>129</sup> ἀλλὰ σώζων σῶζε τὴν σεαυτοῦ ψυχὴν πρὸς τὸ ἡμέτερον ὄρος.

“Get ready to see me soon, let it be said with God, in your monastery.”<sup>130</sup> Letters likely interlinked monks in associated monasteries in the environs of Pelusium into an enmeshed social world and testify to friendly exchange and face-to-face interchange among monks in neighboring retreats.

Letters charting the movement of monks to and from associated monasteries provided opportunities for mutual friends to comment on one another’s spiritual development and social habits. In *Letter* 494 to the monk Elias, Isidore comments how his friend’s conduct bears the clear imprint of intimacy with a monk named Theodosius: “Even if time prepared for you a brief social intercourse with that holy Theodosius, still the monastic discipline (*ponoi*) of the company prepared a fair and noble profit.”<sup>131</sup> In fact, so swiftly were Theodosius’ manners (*tropoi*) and his knowledge of Scripture transformed for the better that he became “a more precise imitator of Theodosius than the painter of portraits.”<sup>132</sup> Such learning by monastic mimesis so bound the two men in companionate intimacy that Theodosius would neither have anyone else nor consider anyone else as a companion, according to Isidore. Referring to the purveyance of monastic discipline by individual monks in their habitations, Isidore marvels “that even if you did not declare whose cell you frequented, then it would still be clear by your conduct.”<sup>133</sup>

Porous boundaries between city and desert meant that social dependents of friends might beseech the monks’ spiritual succor. Such interaction could result in the monk’s mediation in

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<sup>130</sup> ἤδη με, σὺν Θεῷ δὲ εἰρήσθω, προσδόκησον ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ •

<sup>131</sup> εἰ καὶ τὴν συνουσίαν σοι τὴν πρὸς τὸν ἅγιον Θεοδοσίον μικρὰν ὁ χρόνος, ἀλλὰ γε τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ὄνησιν οἱ πόνοι καλὴν καὶ γενναίαν κατεσκεύασαν.

<sup>132</sup> καὶ μιμητῆς ἀκριβέστερος τῶν ζωγράφων κατέστης.

<sup>133</sup> σέ τε, κἂν μὴ φράζοις παρ’ ᾧ ἐφοίτησας, δῆλον εἶναι τοῖς δρωμένοις.

domestic affairs in the form of spiritual advice. *Letter 142* to Eiron *scholasticus* reputedly records the visit of the addressee's slave to Isidore's monastery and the slave's subsequent request for forgiveness for an unspecified sin. This young man met with a guard stationed at the gate of the monastery and requested to meet with Isidore. Isidore relates his eager and kind reception of all visitors: "Since my custom was ready to permit everyone to approach, and to offer the right hand of conversation and rest, he (the visitor) was called in."<sup>134</sup> The domestic cast himself onto the ground crying, and Isidore reports his promise of help to the man in whatever way he could offer. The visitor responded that he was Eiron's slave and that "he had fallen into a false step from ignorance such as he considered to be beyond forgiveness."<sup>135</sup> Isidore marvels at this man's identity and articulates his view that a Christian should not have a slave: "at first it amazed me; for I did not think that the Christ-loving Eiron had a slave, since he knew the grace that has set all free."<sup>136</sup> Isidore shares his grief that the slave considers his transgression unforgiveable. Likely offering a recommendation that Eiron forgive his servant, Isidore explains at length how Christ commanded, taught, and practiced the precept that all human beings must forgive one another's infractions.

Isidore is irritated at a priest named Zeno in *Letter 216* who regards Isidore's gift of a hair shirt to be a relic. Isidore thanks his friend for the gift of a garment (*himation*) and reports that he has sent Zeno the *chiton* or tunic that Zeno had requested, citing with approval how this exchange—presumably Isidore gave Zeno one of the two tunics in his possession—upheld the

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<sup>134</sup> ὡς δὲ ἐτοίμη ἢ ἡμετέρα συνήθεια πάντας οἴκοι προσίεσθαι, καὶ δεξιᾶς μεταδιδόναι ὁμιλίας καὶ ἀναπαύσεως, εἰσεκλήθη.

<sup>135</sup> πταίσματι δὲ ἐξ ἀγνοίας ἐμπεπτωκέναι κρείττονι, ὡς ἐνόμισε, μεταγνώσεως •

<sup>136</sup> καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτῳ [τὸν] ἐξέπληξεν • οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι οἰκέτην ἔχειν τὸν φιλόχριστον Εἴρωννα, εἰδότα τὴν χάριν τὴν πάντας ἐλευθερώσασαν.

injunction of John the Baptist that a man not possess two *chitones*.<sup>137</sup> Isidore indicates that the tunic sent to his friend was in fact a hair shirt (ὁ τριχίνοϛ), which likely confirms that the letter was written during Isidore’s ascetic retreat. Isidore, however, is concerned that Zeno reveres Isidore’s ascetic garment as a relic: “If you were to preserve this (hair shirt) as the things of some saints, you will push me into despair, having proof of my awareness (of what you said).”<sup>138</sup> What seemed like a reciprocal exchange of gifts between friends from Isidore’s perspective—commerce in cloth—has evolved—unwillingly on Isidore’s side—into commerce in cloth that has made contact with a holy man. Zeno trades clothes to access the intercessory power of the contact relic.<sup>139</sup> Viewing this as an exchange of gifts, Isidore may have simply sought from Zeno a mantle or outer garment to keep him warm at the monastery. Isidore relates that, since he has now disclosed in this letter his awareness of Zeno’s intent, he is embarrassed, because if Isidore allows Zeno to keep the relic then Isidore himself would be shown to be proud. Referring to a reciprocal exchange of garments between these men, Isidore closes by chiding Zeno that if he sends another shirt, Isidore will not send him one of his.<sup>140</sup> Zeno has broken with the protocol of traditional gift exchange.

In inter-monastery letter exchange, gifts of produce from monastic gardens may have accompanied missives. In *Letter 58* to Patrimus the monk, Isidore remarks, “you greet me with

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<sup>137</sup> “I received the cloak and I have sent the *chiton* (the undergarment), and I send you much thanks since you asked for me one of these garments, because we fulfilled the law of the Baptist, not having two *chitones*,” ἐδεξάμεθα τὸ ἱμάτιον, καὶ χιτῶνα πεπόμφαμεν, καὶ σοι πάνυ εὐχαριστήσαμεν, τὸ ἐν ἡμῶν ἀπαιτήσαντι σκέπασμα, ὅτι τὸν νόμον τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ ἐπληρώσαμεν, δύο χιτῶνας οὐκ ἔχοντες.

<sup>138</sup> εἰ δὲ καὶ τοῦτον μέλλοις, ὡς τὰ τινων ἀγίων, τηρεῖν, ἐμὲ μὲν εἰς ἀπόγνωσιν ὠθήσεις, ἔλεγχον ἑμαυτοῦ τὴν συνείδησιν ἔχοντα.

<sup>139</sup> On contact relics, see Gary Vikan, *Sacred Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>140</sup> πάλιν δὲ πέμψας, πάλιν αἰτήσεις · ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ δώσομεν.

vegetables, demonstrating wisely the simplicity of your diet, brimming with the fonts of the Lord, showing from your works themselves that you are a cultivator of a garden.”<sup>141</sup> Similar is *Letter 266* which contrasts the immoderate behavior of tasting the apple with the moderation of the ascetic’s Eden, in which Isidore reveals his fixation with the sin of gluttony while demonstrating his approbation for the “simplicity” of Patrimus’ food rations. The term Isidore uses to signify dietary self-control is *aperiergon*, which literally denotes that Patrimus’ diet is not superfluous or elaborate. Paradoxically, this controlled selection of produce overflows with the streams pouring out from God. Employing a double-entendre, Isidore refers to the garden at Patrimus’ monastery as *paradeisos*—which has the double meaning of a park or garden and specifically, the Garden of Eden. As in *Letter 266*, Isidore conceives of the monastery—or parts of its property—in terms of Eden.

Suggesting the inter-permeability of city and monastery, *Letter 162* to Hierax *lamprotatos* ostensibly records the admiration for asceticism of a senator who may have visited Isidore’s monastery or who at least maintained an epistolary relationship with Isidore after his “flight” from the city. The monk speaks freely to this powerful man, advising him that “the food and drink and sleeping quarters of John [the Baptist] do not suffice toward the goal of asceticism, for those who are seeking them, my excellent sir, but there is need also for the intention of John toward its fulfillment.”<sup>142</sup> Adducing John the Baptist once again as a biblical model of asceticism, Isidore underscores that the correct disposition is requisite for the true attainment of asceticism. Referring to Hierax’s previous praises for the simplicity of Isidore and his monastic

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<sup>141</sup> λαχάνοις ἡμᾶς δεξιοῦσαι, σοφῶς τὸ ἀπερίεργον ἐπιδεικνύς τῆς διαίτης, καὶ τὰς τοῦ Κυρίου πηγὰς ἀποβρύων, καὶ ὅπως εἶ τοῦ παραδείσου γεωργὸς ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν δώρων δεικνύς.

<sup>142</sup> οὐκ ἄρκεῖ ἡ βρωσις καὶ πόσις καὶ στρωμνὴ Ἰωάννου πρὸς πέρας ἀσκήσεως, τοῖς ταῦτα ζητοῦσιν, ὃ ἄριστε, ἀλλὰ χρεῖα καὶ τῆς γνώμης Ἰωάννου πρὸς τὴν τελείωσιν.

brethren, Isidore recommends, perhaps somewhat ironically to a man whose very title—*lamprotatos*—was a patently vainglorious superlative, that Hierax also control his intention by eschewing boastfulness: “If nevertheless you praise the simplicity of us, achieve the same level of moderation as I do, which avoids all boasting.”<sup>143</sup>

Other letters are less forthcoming in providing details anchoring the letter within the monastic context of authorship and/or reception. I would like to propose in this section, however, the interrogation of several letters from the perspective that the writing context was Isidore’s final monastic retreat. These letters also suggest the interpermeability of city and interconnected monasteries and testify to the role of missives in initiating and maintaining social engagement between and among monks and laity.

*Letter 224* suggests the role of letters among monks in purveying spiritual intercession in times of need. In this letter, addressed to the monk Kytianus, Isidore relates his own physical sickness, which he likens to traveling a stormy sea. To ensure his recovery, Isidore requests his friend to act as a spiritual ambassador to God on Isidore’s behalf: “Since again the Lord bade that I should remain within the waves [ i.e., to remain sick], help toward my journey with your embassy [to God] that I might not suffer something different from a peaceful sea.”<sup>144</sup> This request of spiritual capital suggests that monks were expected to intervene with God in the same way that Procopius may have asked one of his correspondents to intervene with high-ranking

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<sup>143</sup> εἰ τοίνυν ἡμῶν ἐπαινεῖς τὴν λιτότητα, κατόρθωσον ἡμῖν τὴν πραότητα, ἥπερ πᾶσαν ἐκκλίνει περπερείαν.

<sup>144</sup> ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ πάλιν ὁ θεὸς εἶσω μένειν τῶν κυμάτων ἐκέλευσε βοήθει πρὸς τὸν πλοῦν ταῖς πρεσβείαις, μή τι πάθωμεν ἀλλότριον τῆς γαλήνης.

imperial magistrates. In this way, the rhetorical capital of epistolography marshaled various types of social capital of epistolary interlocutors to diverse ends.

Various letters suggest visitors to Isidore's monastery. *Letter 5.114* to Theophilus, whom Évieux categorizes as “sous-diacre,”<sup>145</sup> refers to men who visited Isidore to ask him about Theophilus:

In short, when it was still the breaking of dawn (for night and day were mixing) one of the respectable men came to me reporting that some of the notables had discovered that you had betaken yourself away from home a great distance not for the sake of virtue and not to lead yourself or someone else to any other philosophy (for verily they would have accepted even that) but for the sake of making money. Altogether they scorned you, having chosen to live a life of quiet [that is, to live as a monk] during your youth, for now as an old man having chosen to depart (from it).<sup>146</sup>

These men Isidore calls “respectable” (*epitēdeioi*) were concerned that Theophilus has gone abroad for the purpose of making money and has quite possibly forsaken his monastic life, here denoted as a life of quiet (*hesychia*). Such visitors might be monks from neighboring monasteries. In what may be a reference to some sort of judicial procedure among monks of interrelated monasteries near Pelusium, Isidore explains that he did not understand why Theophilus went away, nor did he defend it, *nor did he vote in condemnation*.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, language pertaining to the *psēphos* or vote is frequently metaphorical in Late Antique epistolography.

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<sup>145</sup> *Isidore*, 408.

<sup>146</sup> πρὸ βραχέος, ὄρθρου ἔτι ὄντος (ἐκίρνῃτο γὰρ νύξ τε καὶ ἡώς) ἐντυχῶν μοί τις τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἀπήγγελλεν, ὡς πυθόμενοι τινες ἐλλόγιμοι στείλαμένον σε ἀποδημίαν μακρὰν, οὐκ ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς, οὐδὲ ὥστε σαυτὸν ἢ ἄλλον τινὰ εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ἐναγαγεῖν (ἢ γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἀπεδέξαντο), ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρηματίσασθαι, κομιδῇ σου κατεφρόνησαν, εἰ προηρημένους τὸν τῆς νεότητος χρόνον τὰς ἡσυχίας ἄγειν, νῦν ἐπὶ γήρωι ἀποδημεῖν ἐπεχείρησας •

<sup>147</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀκριβῶς μὴ ἐπιστάμενος, δι' ἣν ἐντεῦθεν ἀπῆρας, οὔτε ἀπελογησάμην, οὔτε κατεψηφισάμην.

*Letters* 258 and 262 to Adamantius suggest rhetorically-gifted individuals who visited Isidore at the monastery, engaging in competitive displays with the monks. Isidore relates the visit of Adamantius' unnamed friend whom he describes as "the big-talking word hunter"<sup>148</sup> who was about to return home again, but stayed—possibly at the monastery—"seized by passion for philosophy."<sup>149</sup> Philosophy probably indicates Christianity—the true philosophy in Isidore's opinion. Isidore reports a positive change in this man's behavior: "now he's bridled his tongue and practices judgment, having learned that eloquence is a small thing compared to philosophy."<sup>150</sup> In *Letter* 262, Isidore complains about either the same friend or another friend of Adamantius who has visited apparently to stultify the monks with his erudition: "Your friend came not in order to learn, as he said, but to show off and teach, and to extinguish the pride of those held to know something."<sup>151</sup> Again, the monks have superior wisdom: "But he left, having suffered that which he expected to do to others."<sup>152</sup>

In the desert, Isidore was likely involved in evangelizing activity through meetings and letters. Letters interlinked monks located likely in nearby monasteries and offered vehicles of representing and discussing conversion activities. In *Letter* 1443 to a Pelusian priest Daniel,<sup>153</sup> Isidore laments the absence of his colleague, who has not returned to Isidore's monastery as soon

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<sup>148</sup> ὁ μεγαλήγορος καὶ λεξιθήρας.

<sup>149</sup> ἀλοῦς τῷ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἔρωτι.

<sup>150</sup> καὶ νῦν τὴν γλῶτταν ἐπιστομίζων, τῆς γνώμης ἐπιμελεῖται • μικρὸν πρᾶγμα τὴν εὐγλωττίαν πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν εἶναι παιδευθεῖς.

<sup>151</sup> ὁ φίλος ὁ σὸς ἦλθε μὲν οὐ μαθησόμενος, ὡς ἔλεγεν, ἀλλ' ἐπιδειξόμενος καὶ διδάξων, καὶ τὸ φρόνημα τῶν δοκούντων τι εἰδέναι σβέσων.

<sup>152</sup> ἀπῆλθε δὲ παθὼν, ὃ δρᾶσαι προσεδόκησεν.

<sup>153</sup> Énieux suggests that Daniel lived in the proximity of Isidore—perhaps as a monk—and points out that *Letter* 1441 reveals that Daniel has also converted the children of a mutual acquaintance Domitius at Pelusium. See Énieux, 2:71n5.



as he had promised, and Isidore wonders whether Daniel has been proselytizing. He writes, “you went away saying that you would come back very quickly, and you remained there, and I do not know why, contrary to what you had announced, and it is perhaps to help those who are there, to hunt them and bring them to Christ.”<sup>154</sup> The aggressive language Isidore uses here to conceptualize evangelization—specifically, the future participle of the verb θηρᾶν—to hunt—signifies a position of authority on the part of Isidore and Daniel as righteous predators, perhaps heightening the passionate identification of these associates with their cause and deepening their bond as colleagues. These men shared a common status in pursuit of an “othered” prey. This language of seizing and possessing may also register the perception of the contested status of religious identity in the early fifth century: the identification of an individual as “pagan” or “Christian” was unsettled and yet to be determined. Seeking to ameliorate his sorrow at Daniel’s absence, Isidore explains that his pain might be lessened if Daniel’s conversion activities have been successful: “so, if this assumption is true, clarify so that we may drive away the sorrow of your absence with the expectation of your success.”<sup>155</sup> Isidore concludes that he can forego his friend’s company if such an absence contributes to God’s glory, “for this chagrin will easily pass beyond its limits through the glory of the master.”<sup>156</sup>

In *Letter 381*, superscribed to a city councilman (*politeuomenos*) named Cassianus, Isidore discusses his successful conversion of Cassianus’ brother. Apparently this brother has visited Isidore, and having conversed with him at Isidore’s cell, subsequently converted. Isidore

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<sup>154</sup> ἀπῆρας μὲν ἐντεῦθεν ὡς τάχιστα ἤξων, ἀπέμεινας δ’ ἐκεῖσε οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως παρὰ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, τάχα δ’ ὠφελήσων τοὺς ἐκεῖσε, καὶ θηράσων, καὶ τῷ Χριστῷ προσοίσων.

<sup>155</sup> εἰ τοίνυν ἀληθῆς ἡ ὑπόνοια, δήλου, ἵνα τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἀπουσίας ἀνίαν τῆ προσδοκίᾳ τοῦ κατορθώματος ἀπελάσωμεν.

<sup>156</sup> ὑπερόριος γὰρ ῥαδίως χωρήσει, τῆ δόξῃ τῆ δεσποτικῆ τοὺς ὅρους ἀσμενῶς παραχωρήσασα.

likens the experience of Cassianus' kin to that of the disciples of the Pharisees who visited Jesus hoping to ensnare him (Matthew 22:15-22):

The same thing has happened to your brother as happened to the attendants, the ones sent to arrest Christ, and they came back filled with astonishment. For just as those servants were subdued by public teaching, and having been sent to bind they returned bound by the wonder of it, so he (your brother) was captured by the beauty of the things said, and having opposed the most divine religion he became a herald of it and an advocate.<sup>157</sup>

From this evidence, it seems likely that the brother visited Isidore and the two men had face-to-face conversations. Noteworthy also is the repeated use of aggressive language related to evangelical activity—Isidore uses the verb ἀλίσκεσθαι (to be taken, caught) to refer to the seizure of his interlocutor's mind or resolve, referred to at letter's end as διάνοια. By the use of the words “seized by the beauty of those things that were said,”<sup>158</sup> Isidore presumably signifies that he won this resisting convert by means of the words of Jesus in the Gospels. Through use of the word “beauty” (τὸ κάλλον), Isidore likely signals with Platonizing tinge the force of the meanings hidden beneath the language of the Scriptures. He concludes with a closing reference to his proselytizing activity achieved via conversation, hoping that the conversion will in effect “stick”: “Rejoicing with us, pray accordingly so that those conversing with us may not only not come to any harm but that they will be illuminated in their belief.”<sup>159</sup> As a monk in the desert, Isidore's epistolary relationships with powerful men in the city and their families were likely vital instruments interlinking monks and men in the city. Epistolary conversations were thus en-

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<sup>157</sup> παραπλήσιόν τι πέπονθεν ὁ σὸς ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ὑπηρέταις, τοῖς πεμφθεῖσι μὲν ἀγαγεῖν τὸν Χριστὸν, ἐπανελθοῦσι δὲ μετὰ πολλοῦ τοῦ θαύματος. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι ἐχειρώθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς δημηγορίας, καὶ πεμφθέντες διῆσαι, ἐπανῆλθον δεθέντες τῷ θαύματι· οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς, ὡς ἔφη, ἀλοῦς τῷ κάλλει τῶν εἰρημένων, οὐ μόνον τοῦ ἐναντιοῦσθαι τῇ θειοτάτῃ θρησκείᾳ ἀπέστη, ἀλλὰ καὶ κήρυξ αὐτῆς καὶ συνήγορος κατέστη.

<sup>158</sup> ἀλοῦς τῷ κάλλει τῶν εἰρημένων.

<sup>159</sup> συγχαίρων τοίνυν ἡμῖν εὐχου, ὅπως οἱ ἐντυγχάνοντες μὴ μόνον μὴ βλάπτωνται, ἀλλὰ καὶ φωτίζωνται τὴν διάνοιαν.

clasped in interpersonal negotiations whose tendrils shaped fundamentally religious and social transformation.

Other letters may indicate the intellectual commerce among monks in the desert and men from the city. In *Letter 344* to the sophist Asclepius, Isidore subtly criticizes a speech written by Asclepius sent to Isidore: “And I marveled at its cleverness, but you did not escape notice having stolen flattery, appearing to have written with the purpose of giving advice.”<sup>160</sup> Isidore explains that praise of the powerful in an oration gives the appearance of flattery to those who wield political power. From his position of moral stature in the desert, Isidore offers his wisdom, providing a moralistic judgment of his friend’s obsequious oratory, in which praise represents at root an attempt to secure favor with politically powerful men in the city. Such engagement with his friend’s political machinations illustrates nicely the continued involvement of the monk in epistolary negotiations about the relationships among literati and urban political heavyweights. Isidore closes by marvelling at Asclepius’ rhetorical skill but with resolute moral disapproval of his fawning: “I admire your technique but do not admire your intention.”<sup>161</sup>

Isidore may have offered guidance on how to read Scripture to rhetorician educators in the city who learned from him at his cell and related such teachings to their students. In *Letter 349* to Harpocras the rhetor, Isidore gushes about how his friend’s praises make him blush. He relates how Harpocras came to converse with Isidore after Harpocras himself had been approached with questions—perhaps by his students—and had inquired about the Holy

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<sup>160</sup> καὶ θαυμασθεὶς τῆς δεινότητος, οὐκ ἔλαθε κλέψας τὸ κολακευτικὸν τῷ δοκεῖν συμβουλῆς προσχήματι συγγεγραφέναι.

<sup>161</sup> τὴν γνώμην οὖν οὐκ ἀποδεξάμενοι τὴν τέχνην ἐθαυμάσαμεν.

Scriptures, while Isidore answered as far as he was able.<sup>162</sup> In gratitude, Harpocras sends the monk excessive epistolary praise from himself and perhaps from his students as well.

Presumably, Harpocras has shared Isidore's wisdom regarding Holy Writ with his enthusiastic students, who sent him forth to visit Isidore in the first place.

Another letter suggests the circulation of texts among monks and priests or prospective priests. *Letter* 156 to Eustathius relates Isidore's gift of a scroll that was likely John Chrysostom's treatise "On the Priesthood."<sup>163</sup> Isidore's letter serves as a medium for the representation and discussion of the spiritual and emotional power of this text that goads the reader toward divine love. Isidore avers that "there is no heart which the reading of the book came upon suddenly and did not (inflict a) wound (leading) toward the divine love itself."<sup>164</sup> Isidore continues to describe the subject matter of the text: "the august and difficult-to-enter priesthood" (σεπτὴν μὲν τὴν ἱερωσύνην καὶ δυσπρόσιτον).<sup>165</sup> In this way, letters from the monastery furnished conversational spaces for thoughtful and heartfelt engagement with contemporary texts.

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<sup>162</sup> ἦνίκα γὰρ μετὰ τῶν σῶν φοιτητῶν ἐντυχεῖν ἡμῖν κατηξίωσας καὶ ἐρωτῆσαί τι τῶν ἱερῶν Γραφῶν ἠβουλήθης, ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπον ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν.

<sup>163</sup> Isidore refers to the text's author in the letter as "John the wise interpreter of the ineffable things of God and eye even of the whole church in Byzantium," ὁ γὰρ τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπορρήτων σοφὸς ὑποφήτης Ἰωάννης, ὁ τῆς ἐν Βυζαντίῳ Ἐκκλησίας καὶ πάσης ὀφθαλμὸς.

<sup>164</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, οὐκ ἔστι καρδία, ἣν ἐπῆλθεν ἡ ταύτης ἀνάγνωσις, καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεῖον αὐτὴν οὐκ ἔτρωσεν ἔρωτα.

<sup>165</sup> Évieux, *Isidore*, 314, claims that this text is a manuscript that Isidore copied at the monastery; there is no clear indication, however, that the text of John Chrysostom was copied by Isidore himself. Isidore does not use any language that suggests that he copied this text at his monastery. The use of the term βίβλος to refer to the text does not specifically designate a manuscript but means papyrus or a book regardless of its material; cf. Lampe, 297.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the selected epistolographers' loyalties and affiliations with regard to physical spaces, in particular the city. We have investigated data indicating that the polis or *patris* continued to be the defining spatial identification of literati such as Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas. For Synesius, letters provided vehicles of self-representation and the exploration of how identification with his *patris* informed life decisions, such as his stalwart defense of his home in response to marauding barbarians and his decision to accept the bishopric. The strength of his devotion stems mainly from his perception of Libya as the land of his ancestors. Synesius, however, betrays ambivalent attitudes toward his native home. From his Cyrenaican oasis, he bewails the absence of intellectual comrades of the caliber he encountered during his time spent in Alexandria and Constantinople. There may have been some Hellenes in Cyrenaica, but there was no one to share in his philosophic mania.

Like Synesius, Procopius represented his city loyalty through specific decisions. His protégé Choricus reveals in the Funeral Oration how Procopius declined job offers from various major cities in the Greek East because of his devotion to his birthplace. Procopius' *Letter* 134 to Stephanus likely confirms Choricus' story of the Caesarean job offer, and *Letters* 113 and 114 suggest polite refusals of a job at Berytus. Procopius also offered repeated advice to friends, students, colleagues, and family members concerning the duty owed to one's home city. Letters read publicly, such as *Letter* 91 to Hieronymus, likely encode normative attitudes toward the city shared by literati audiences. Both Procopius and Aeneas also criticized students who chose agrarian employment in the countryside. The city was the beating heart of learning and the intellectual life for these sophists who perceived themselves to be the voice of the city.

By means of his flight from the city, Isidore represents an alternative mode of communal engagement. His paradigm testifies to the emergence of communities who defined themselves in distinction to the polis. Isidore's epistles were both channels of oracular wisdom as well as continued interaction with city associates. By means of letters, Isidore evaluated his decision to abandon his home city of Pelusium and expressed some ambivalence about his choice to renounce his life as a city sophist. Isidore elaborated a monastic vocabulary that erected high boundaries between city and monastery yet his letters demonstrate the permeability of the mountain's limits, charting the movement of people, produce, and clothing in and out of his retreat. Additionally, letters purveyed spiritual succor and fostered intellectual commerce.

In the next chapter, we will continue to address the selected epistolographers' explorations of affiliations and fascinations. Specifically, we will survey how a significant facet of epistolary currency was scientific and medical commentary, as well as discussion of technical gadgets such as astrolabes, waterwheels, and waterclocks.

## Chapter 5

### Scientific, Technical, and Medical Enthusiasms

Fascination with technology and scientific discourse constitutes a dimension of Late Antique epistolography rather neglected in modern scholarly discussion. Interest and commerce in gadgets as well as scientific speculation were vibrant concerns in the intellectual repertoire of educated provincials and the epistolary Republic that interwove them.

At issue with regard to gadgets is the mode of intellectual engagement with these devices. For the sophists Aeneas and Procopius, the means of authorizing scientific fascination were the rhetorical strictures of the *ekphrasis*. For Synesius, a philosopher trained in mathematical and astronomical traditions under Hypatia at Alexandria, who had some role in designing gadgets such as hydrometers, astrolabes, and catapults, gadgets had practical application, yet, probably in part due to the imprinting of Hypatia, they ultimately served the loftiest of sciences, Philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Though each of these men specialized in particular disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy, each took an encyclical view of the sciences and technology, energetically integrating them into their epistolary conversations with other learned men. Engagement with technology and sciences such as astronomy, even for less enthusiastic commentators such as Isidore of Pelusium, constitutes an understudied element of the self-packaging enterprise that was Late Ancient

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<sup>1</sup> *Letter* 133 relates the construction of the hydroscope; *Letter* 15 contains Synesius' request that Hypatia construct and send him a hydrometer, whose design he outlines in the letter. Based upon the letter's opening in which Synesius describes himself as in a most unfortunate state, scholars have proposed the device was intended as a health remedy. Arguments include the suggestion that the device served as a means to test water quality or other liquid medicine; a similar device is still used today in brewing and distilling alcohol, and since alcohol was often a component of ancient medicines, Synesius may have used it to make alcohol for use in a homemade medication. Michael A.B. Deakin and Charles R. Hunter proposed that the device was probably used as a urinometer to analyze the qualities in urine, a routine practice in medical diagnosis in antiquity from the time of Hippocrates (c. 800 years prior to Synesius). For an overview, see Deakin and Hunter, "Synesios' 'Hydroscope,'" *Apeiron* 27 (1994): 39-43.

epistolography. Not unlike the republicans of the Early Modern world, who demonstrated their knowledge of medical writers such as Galen and astronomical teaching exempla, Late Antique letter authors sought to distinguish their culture and sophistication by emphasizing their *polymathia*.

The first section of the chapter investigates the use of *ekphrasis* as a means of authorizing fascination with technical devices in the writings of Aeneas and Procopius. We then examine the different meanings of astronomical speculation in letters written by Isidore and Synesius respectively. Isidore's discussions of cosmology apply the language of astronomical theorists to scriptural interpretation, while Synesius lauds astronomy as a servant of philosophy in his letter to Paeonius accompanying his gift of an astrolabe. In a third section, I will investigate Isidore's epistolary conversations concerning the nature of matter and the soul, one of which demonstrates specific knowledge of a Galenic treatise. As we shall see, both Isidore's Christianity and his attachment to Platonic induction resulted in his repudiation of an early Galenic definition of the soul.

Epistolographers engaged in scientific conversations and pursued friendships and professional relationships not only with associates engaged in the same specialty, but also with a fairly broad prosopography of professionals engaged in medicine and technical fields, such as architects, doctors (*iatroi*), and professors of medicine (*iatrosophists*). The concluding section of this chapter will survey what the selected letters reveal about the nature of the professions and social location of these individuals as well as their relationships with the selected authors.

Gadgets: *ekphrasis* (Aeneas and Procopius)



Aeneas of Gaza *Letter 25* addressed to Julian the architect constitutes a jumping-off point for addressing epistolography as form of sociability in Late Antiquity that had technical enthusiasms. In the letter, Aeneas thanks his architect friend for designing an actual water-lifting device for Aeneas' garden and plumes himself on now possessing the garden of King Alcinous from the island of the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* 7.129-31). The device is not working optimally, however, so Aeneas deploys the rhetorical genre of *ekphrasis* to describe the components of the device and the main defect that Julian should come and correct. Aeneas here deliberately selects the Classical genre of *ekphrasis* because it has the cognitive muscle to convey lucidly to lettered men how a device operated. Though Aeneas writes to elicit Julian's service, he probably wrote also with other literati in mind as potential readers. Presumably, Aeneas intended that he and/or Julian would have the letter copied, circulated, and read publicly among associates and friends. In this way, what Philip Rousseau has termed "lateral address" would instruct and shape Aeneas' crafting of the letter's content. Thus this letter was a moment of sociability as well as a calculated public performance of the sophist conveying a fascination with gadgets through the employment of *ekphrasis* as a literary device explaining the operation of a mechanical device. In this way, *ekphrasis* emerges as a type of coinage in epistolary social networking. Since this letter was likely preserved as well as a teaching model, it continued to inculcate similar perceptions about language and its ability to explain a device generations after Aeneas' death.

For over half a century, the definition of *ekphrasis* as a description of a work of art has dominated scholarly discourse.<sup>2</sup> Much study of *ekphrasis* in Late Antiquity and Byzantium has

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<sup>2</sup> For study of how modern intellectual interests redefined *ekphrasis*, see Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis ancient and modern: the invention of a genre," *Word & Image* 15 (1999): 10-11, 15-17 and eadem, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Surrey, England; Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 13-38. According to Webb, interpreting *ekphrasis* as *Kunstbeschreibung* blossomed in the 1950s from the seedbed of the works of Leo Spitzer and Jean Hagstrum, and from Glanville Downey's entry in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. For a substantial bibliography of classical studies of *ekphrasis* see a special issue of

also focused on works of art and architecture, on what *ekphrasis* reveals about themes undergirding artwork of the period, or about what it might record about works of art and architecture no longer extant. A recent movement in scholarship, spearheaded by Ruth Webb, seeks to carve out a space for the study of ancient understandings of *ekphrasis*, and contends that the modern “redefinition” of *ekphrasis* in Classical studies detaches the genre from the cognitive world of ancient rhetoricians and literati who produced, received, and preserved ancient texts.<sup>3</sup> Webb contends that in order to understand what *ekphrasis* meant to ancient readers, modern commentators must appeal to *scholia*, *progymnasmata*, and rhetorical training, as well as to widespread ancient understandings of language, psychology, and representation.<sup>4</sup> Ancient discussions indicate that *ekphrasis* was a type of speech with an almost intrusive force. It had an immediate effect on the mind of the hearer or reader, painting images in the minds of the audience by means of descriptive speech.<sup>5</sup> A central characteristic of ekphrastic speech in the handbooks was its quality of *enargeia*, that is, the capacity of *ekphrasis* to produce the experience of seeing images in the mind’s eye of the listener. *Ekphrasis*, as a “simulacrum of perception itself,”<sup>6</sup> thus makes absent things seem vibrantly present through its workings on the imagination and emotions. Descriptions of rhetorical visualization encoded ancient perceptions about the physiological and psychological effects of speech that effectively elicited emotions

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*Classical Philology* 102 (2007): 124-35.

<sup>3</sup>Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 5. As Webb asserts in “*Ekphrasis* ancient and modern,” “few literary historians would deny that knowledge of how a genre was defined in a particular period is important if we want to gain some understanding of the production and reception of texts” (8).

<sup>4</sup> This is Webb’s central task in *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*.

<sup>5</sup> Webb, 107-30. For a brief overview of the physiological and psychological dimensions of ekphrastic speech in ancient rhetorical handbooks and related texts, see Simon Goldhill, “What is Ekphrasis For?” Special Issues on Ekphrasis, *Classical Philology* 102 (2007): 3-7.

<sup>6</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 128.

from listeners. According to the rhetor Longinus, *enargeia* not only persuades the hearer but enslaves him.<sup>7</sup> A vivid visualization has the capacity “to astonish” (*ekplēssein*), a term that underscores the power of the dazzling psychological and physical consequences of *enargeia* and the visions it produces.<sup>8</sup>

I wish to apply Webb’s reassertion of the power of *ekphrasis* to Aeneas of Gaza, arguing that Aeneas knowingly crafted his epistolary *ekphrasis* to provide his readers with the feelings of the experience of seeing the actual device which presumably adorned Aeneas’ property. The letter is intended as a work of art in itself, articulating the verbal equivalent of the object and the wonder it evokes.

Positano’s text is as follows<sup>9</sup>:

Τοῦ Ἀλκίνου τὸν κῆπον οἶμαι κεκτηῖσθαι διὰ τὴν καλὴν μηχανὴν, ἣν σὺ μὲν ἐξεῦρες, ἐποίησε δὲ ὁ τέκτων. ἐγὼ δὲ γράψω τῷ λόγῳ · ἥδιστον γὰρ τὸ θέαμα. δύο μὲν οἱ μέγιστοι κύκλοι σανίδι καὶ γόμφοις συναπτόμενοι, ὥστε ἓνα τοῖς ἔξωθεν θεωμένοις δοκεῖν εἶναι. ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ καταστρώματι παιδίον ἔνδοθεν ἐκτρέχει περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν τόπον μακρὸν τινα δρόμον · ὁ δὲ κύκλος συμπαραθεῖ καὶ τοσοῦτον ἀκολουθεῖ ὅσον τὸ παιδίον βούλεται. ὁ δὲ ἄξων, περὶ ὃν ὁ μέγιστος κύκλος αὐτοῦ μένων στρέφεται, καὶ συγκινεῖ μικρὸν ἕτερον κύκλον τὸν ἐπὶ τῷ φρέατι. ἐπὶ τούτῳ τὰ σχοίνια καὶ οἱ χόες ἐπικεῖνται κατὰ μέρος συνδεδεμένοι. ἀλλ’ ὀξυτάτη μὲν ἡ κίνησις, τοῦ δὲ μικροῦ κύκλου τὸ μέσον στενοχωρία, ὥστε μόνον τὰς ἀπαρχὰς τῆς ἐκροῆς ὑποδέχεσθαι. τὸ δὲ πλεον τοῦ ὕδατος ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ ἐκχεόμενον ῥαδίως αὔθις καταδυθὲν μόλις ἀνάγεται. τουτὶ μὲν οὖν ἐπανορθώσασθαι δεῖ · τῷ δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐξευρόντι οὐ χαλεπὸν τὸ τέλος γίνεται. μὴ γὰρ περιίδοιμεν οὕτω καλὸν θέαμα τῆς ἐτέρου σοφίας δεόμενον, μὴ ταῦτὸν πάθοιμεν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ζωγράφος τὴν Ἑλένην εἰς κάλλος γράφων τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐπελάθετο.

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<sup>7</sup> *On the Sublime* 15.9. Goldhill, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Positano, 53.

My translation:

I imagine myself to possess the garden of Alkinoos on account of the beautiful device that you invented and the craftsman made. And I shall describe it in language, for it is a most pleasing thing to see. Two very large wheels are fastened together by boards and nails, so as to seem to be one to those looking from outside. And on the deck within a slave boy runs in the same place a kind of long course. And the wheel runs along with him so far as the slave boy wishes. There is an axle around which the larger wheel of it is fixed and turns, and another small wheel turns together with it (i.e., the larger wheel) and is positioned above the reservoir. And upon this smaller wheel the ropes and jars lie fastened to it at regular intervals. But the motion is very fast, and in the middle of the small wheel is a narrow place that receives only the beginnings of the outpouring. The greater part of the water pouring out is easily dumped into the cistern but with difficulty brought out again. Accordingly, it is necessary to correct this. For him who discovered the beginning the conclusion will not be difficult. For may we not ignore such a beautiful device needing the skill of another architect, lest we experience the same as a painter wanting to depict fully Helen's beauty who forgot to paint her head!

As Loenertz and Positano observed, the machine consisted of three essential parts: the smaller wheel that received the motion and did the work, secondly the axle connected to that smaller wheel and, last of all, the large wheel inside of which a boy rotated to power the axle, as Positano charmingly put it, “come uno scoiattolo la sua gabbia mobile” or “like a squirrel on his wheel.”<sup>10</sup> The water was scooped up by the action of the smaller wheel upon which ran a system of ropes that had containers attached at regular intervals. These containers descended empty on one side, and as they reached the top, flung out their contents into a collector basin located beneath the wheel. The collector basin and its discharger via which the water was directed toward irrigation channels are not specified in the text. Loenertz and Positano agree this component must have

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<sup>10</sup> R.J. Loenertz, “Observations sur quelques lettres d’Enée de Gaza,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 77 (1958): 438; Positano, 127.

been betrayed in the original, since it is precisely the part of the installation that is not functioning optimally. This omission may indicate a lacuna in the surviving text.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the shield of Achilles, however, Aeneas' waterwheel was a real device adorning his property. Much textual, papyrological, and physical evidence underscore how water-lifting devices were commonplace elements of municipal life in the Greco-Roman world and that this continued to be the case in Late Antiquity.<sup>12</sup> Variants of water wheels provided water for not only irrigation, but also for fish ponds and aquiculture, baths, breweries, and other *loci* of public life. Furthermore, the fact that Aeneas has had one built on his property may suggest that it was a status marker. In this case, the letter as a type of public performance showcased Aeneas' stature as owner of this device.

Aeneas' waterwheel is not a well-documented type of waterwheel in our sources. His device belongs broadly to the category of water-wheels that John Oleson describes as "bucket chain or pot-garland" water-lifting devices. The materials used for the construction of these machines likely varied according to local conditions and needs, which meant that ropes (*schoinia*) like those Aeneas mentions were substituted for chains, and containers of wood, leather, and, by the A.D. fourth century, terracotta jars for bronze buckets.<sup>13</sup>

Aeneas' device, a subtype of the bucket chain type, is a treadwheel-driven bucket-chain powered by a person (in Aeneas' text, a slave) treading inside the treadwheel. Literary texts describe other types of bucket-chain devices, but there are only two literary sources describing a

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<sup>11</sup> Positano, 127-28.

<sup>12</sup> On water-lifting devices in the ancient world, see John Oleson, *Greek and Roman Mechanical Water-Lifting Devices* (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, MA.; Lancaster, U.K.: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1984); Orjan Wikander, ed., *Handbook of Ancient Water Technology* (Leiden, Netherlands; Boston: Brill, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> John Oleson, 353.

treadwheel-driven bucket-chain powered by a runner inside the treadwheel. The first is Vitruvius' description dating to ca. 25-23 B.C. in *De architectura* 10.4.4 of a water-wheel with compartmented rim driven by a treadwheel.<sup>14</sup> The second potential source for an ancient representation of the type Aeneas describes is contained in an appendix of devices in a section of the Oxford manuscript 954. This text itself was probably composed entirely in Arabic, but according to Oleson the treadwheel-bucket chain type in the appendix likely derived from the same tradition as Vitruvius' bucket chain in 10.4.4.<sup>15</sup>

Due to the absence of a developed technical vocabulary, it is difficult to identify bucket-chains in the papyrological evidence. Of those papyri that Oleson claims may refer to components of bucket-chains or pot-garland devices, none of the extant examples clearly indicate a treadwheel-driven bucket-chain. The earliest possible evidence for the bucket chain in the papyri dates to A.D. 78-79.<sup>16</sup> More reliable papyrological evidence dates to A.D. 113 (*P. Lond.* 1177), and twelve other documents potentially refer to the machine from the mid-third to the seventh century. The majority of these sources date to the sixth century.<sup>17</sup> There is strong evidence for the use of the bucket-chain in two papyri dating to A.D. 78/79 in *P. Lond.* 131\* and 131R, which discuss “wheel men” and ropes in a context related to irrigation. Papyrological evidence dating to A.D. 113 (*P.Lond.* 1177) suggests that a bucket-chain likely operated

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Oleson, 70 and 83. In his second appendix (194-205), Bernard Carra de Vaux ed., *Le livre des appareils pneumatiques et des machines hydrauliques par Philon de Byzance* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), includes the first seven of fifteen devices that survive in a section of the Oxford manuscript 954. These are known as the Anonymous Oxford collection. Carra de Vaux presents his own drawings based on the Arabic text, and he does not incorporate the original illustrations in the Arabic text.

<sup>16</sup> *P. Lond.* 131\* and *P. Lond.* 131 R., Oleson, *Water-Lifting Devices*, 353, and Oleson, “Water-Lifting” in Orjan Wikander, *Handbook of Ancient Water Technology*, 258.

<sup>17</sup> Oleson, *Water-Lifting Devices*, 353.

alongside other water-lifting devices in an urban hydraulic complex that served a bath, fountains, a brewery, and a synagogue.<sup>18</sup>

The papyri contain vocabulary similar to Aeneas' letter for device components. One second-century and two third-century papyri employ the word *schoinia* (ropes),<sup>19</sup> a third-century papyrus contains the term *phrear* (cistern),<sup>20</sup> and a papyrus dating to the sixth to seventh century uses the term *axōn*.<sup>21</sup> None of the papyri use the same term Aeneas employs for the water containers. Aeneas is not precise about the vessels attached by rope to the drive wheel—he calls them *choes*, a word that could indicate a vessel of any kind, “a measure of capacity” as LSJ indicate.<sup>22</sup> It could also be that this is part of Aeneas' archaizing language. Perhaps Aeneas knowingly employs the word *choes* because of its Classical usage indicating the drinking-competition-holiday known as *Choes* during the Athenian celebration of the *Anthesteria*.<sup>23</sup>

Installations and the jars affixed to water-wheels, called *saqiya* pots, comprise the bulk of the archaeological evidence for the bucket-chain device.<sup>24</sup> These pots have indented necks and knobbed bases, and were probably first used in Egypt in the late third or early fourth century A.D. *Saqiya* pots have been discovered throughout the Middle East and in Israel at Yavne-Yam

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<sup>18</sup> Oleson, 258.

<sup>19</sup> *P.Lond.* 1177, *P.Harr.* 79, *P. Michael.*19, respectively.

<sup>20</sup> *P.Flor.*16.

<sup>21</sup> *P.Bad.*95. Oleson, 134.

<sup>22</sup> LSJ, 2000.

<sup>23</sup>On the celebration of the Anthesteria, see Walter Burkert's classic discussion in *Homo Necans: the Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 213-26.

<sup>24</sup> Oleson, *Water-Lifting Devices*, 259.

on the coast of Israel about 15 km south of Tel-Aviv, at Kefar-Manda in the Galilee, and at numerous other sites both published and unpublished.<sup>25</sup>

In the environs of Aeneas' wheel in Palestine, no clear evidence for a bucket-chain treadwheel has come to light in the archaeological evidence. At Tel Tanninim on the coast of Israel approximately five km. north of Caesarea, several indications suggest a water-wheel device at Tel Tanninim west of a large fishpond in a 3 meter-diameter well (Area B2). Recesses on the eastern and western side of the well apparently held vertical posts undergirding the wheel. A stone pier at the western limits of the excavated area in B2 supported wooden poles also connected to the device. The final confirmation of the use of a water-wheel in Area B2 was the discovery of several water-wheel jar fragments in the well's proximity.<sup>26</sup>

Archaeologists have unearthed a number of well, water-wheel, and pool combinations in Israel at Kefar Saba and Yavne-Yam. Kefar Saba contained evidence for a waterwheel, cistern, sedimentation basin, and large reservoir in an industrial zone. All elements date to the Late Antique period. Indications of water-lifting installations, wells dating to the Late Antique period and other elements such as the basins and irrigation channels were discovered at Tel Ashdod, Yavne-Yam, and Caesarea (unpublished).<sup>27</sup>

Hence such water-lifting devices were common in the region, yet Aeneas' ekphrastic description of a tread-wheel water-lifting device constitutes the sole literary evidence for this particular type of water wheel in Late Antique Palestine. It also constitutes our clearest literary

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Stieglitz, *Tel Tanninim: Excavations at Krokodeilon Polis 1996-1999* (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2006), 78-79.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>27</sup> Etan Ayalon, "Typology and Chronology of Water-Wheel (*sāqiya*) Pottery Pots from Israel," *Israel Exploration Journal* 50 (2000): 219.



description of this particular type of wheel powered by a runner from inside in the extant literary sources.

As is true of Late Antique letters, Aeneas *Letter 25* had many lives during and subsequent to Aeneas' lifetime. The letters may have been preserved during Aeneas' lifetime and after his death to serve as teaching models for letter writing at the School at Gaza. Bas Ter Haar Romeny has suggested this for the letters of Procopius of Gaza.<sup>28</sup> Similar preservation of *Letter 25* would have provided students with a model of an epistolary *ekphrasis*. Thus, this letter will have had multiple readings as a text in Late Antique Gaza and perhaps in other cities in Palestine. First, the text was originally a communication between Aeneas and the architect of the waterwheel, Julian. Secondly, the text as a moment of epistolary sociability most likely devolved into a number of "lateral address" situations. Julian may have read the letter publicly or had the letter copied and circulated among his circle of friends and associates. Aeneas or his friends in Gaza may also have had the letter read publicly, copied, and/or circulated. Another phase of the lateral reading of the letter most likely took place at the Gaza School itself, when the letter was copied and re-read in the classroom as a model of letter-writing showcasing the Classical rhetorical genre of *ekphrasis*. The letter itself appears to be mostly intact and is not an excerpt. It is similar in length and organization to Aeneas' other letters, which are also brief and do not contain lengthy salutations or closing farewells. Additionally, the opening and concluding lines remarking on the beauty of the water-lifting device and the beauty of Helen respectively suggest a thematic symmetry structuring the letter and making it more probable that the letter survives

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<sup>28</sup> Bas Ter Haar Romeny, "Procopius of Gaza and his library," in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honor of Averil Cameron*, Hagit Amirav and Bas Ter Haar Romeny, eds. (Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 176. Aly earlier suggested that Procopius' letters represented actual correspondence, but were originally preserved to provide models of letter writing for the classroom; see W. Aly, "Prokopios 20" *RE* 23 (1957): 259-273.

intact, or at a minimum that the margins survive intact. There may be a lacuna in the text's body, however, as I will explain more fully below, because the description of the problem Julian needs to correct is not entirely clear.

Aeneas prefaces his description with clear ekphrastic language: for Julian he is going to draw an account of the device (ἐγὼ δὲ γράψω τῷ λόγῳ). Subsequently, he justifies his description as he gushes “for it is the most pleasing spectacle” (ἡδιστον γὰρ τὸ θέαμα). Aeneas craves to describe his hydraulic device because he takes great pleasure in this technology: it fascinates him. Indeed, it is unlikely that Aeneas the sophist should need to educate the device's chief designer about the components and layout of his machine. There would be no reason for Aeneas to sketch out for Julian the device about which Julian presumably knew far more than his rhetorician friend. Presumably, Aeneas' lateral audience was also familiar with this device. Instead Aeneas selected a rhetorical genre that he knew intimately as part of his repertoire as a sophist to describe this most enjoyable sight. If, as Choricus indicated in his funeral oration to his beloved mentor Procopius, the sophist initiated students into the curriculum of the Muses at the School of Gaza,<sup>29</sup> *ekphrasis* was surely one of those initiatory rites over which Aeneas, Procopius, and Choricus presided as hierophants.

As a service request, Aeneas' letter abounds with examples of the linguistic strategy of recipient design. In the case of Aeneas' letter, these are the discursive devices he deploys to prime his correspondent to respond favorably to his message and request. Flattery is a conspicuous example of recipient design in this letter designed to prompt Julian to fix the device. Aeneas frames his ekphrastic description of the architect's device with humorous complimentary

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<sup>29</sup> Or. Fun. In Proc. 5. Litsas, 214.

Classical reference. In the opening lines of the letter, Julian's device has made Aeneas' garden an analogue of Alcinous' garden, and the closing lines of the letter compare the "most delightful sight" of the waterwheel to the beauty of a painting of Helen. Aeneas deploys Classical allusions and the rhetorical genre of *ekphrasis* itself to establish rapport with his architect friend based on their shared *paideia* and identification with Classical culture. Aeneas predicts that Julian can recognize the machine description as an *ekphrasis*, and that this clever manipulation of a rhetorical form will charm and entertain his architect reader. In this way, Aeneas subtly compliments the pedigree of the architect by including him in a type of "insider language," the cultural capital of *paideia* shared only by lettered men of the city.

Aeneas deliberately selects the rhetorical genre of *ekphrasis* to structure his service request. This rhetorical device is one mechanism of the cultural repertoire of *paideia* in the Late Antique polis. Presumably Aeneas took joy in wielding the rhetorical tricks of his trade, and his admiration for the machine and its chief designer is evident. Aeneas anticipated that Julian and his other potential readers—the lateral audience—would recognize the rhetorical genre embedded in the letter from their school days, and, furthermore, would be delighted by Aeneas' clever manipulation of a rhetorical genre to explain a malfunctioning waterwheel. Aeneas' perception of the social horizons of his audience is clear: he writes to lettered men with a rhetorical education, the *literati* of the Late Antique polis.

Writing with lateral address in mind, Aeneas' *Letter 25* becomes a type of public performance through which he articulates his persona as sophist of the city. Through the use of Classical allusions and an epistolary *ekphrasis*, Aeneas presents himself to lettered circles of Gaza, possibly Ascalon, and perhaps even Alexandria where Aeneas had studied and had epistolary contacts. The sophist deliberately selects linguistic signs that dramatically underscore

his erudition and eloquence and assert the publically-verifiable role of the sophist.<sup>30</sup> In this way, epistolary language contributes to a “dramatic realization” whereby Aeneas defines himself in relation to his peers.<sup>31</sup> Aeneas’ letter as lateral address is strategic.<sup>32</sup> That is, Aeneas crafts his letter with careful attention to others’ perceptions of his identity. Via the authorizing discourses of “eloquent speech,” Aeneas molds a socially-recognizable public identity as sophist.

Modern commentators should recall the performatory nature of letters in the ancient world. Recipients likely read aloud received letters. The reader was simultaneously hearer, re-enactor, and interpreter of the speech of the letter author. *Ekphrasis* was itself a skill developed for live and public speech. In the *progymnasmata*, *ekphrasis* appears as one exercise of an oratorical toolkit engineered to generate eloquent and persuasive speakers, and speakers were taught to integrate this form in persuasive oratory of various types, including forensic and epideictic oratory as well as declamation.<sup>33</sup> *Ekphrasis* was thus inherently linked to public oratory and social performance. Aeneas likely understood that his epistolary speech might be “performed” in public venues or “theaters” of lettered sociability, either in the company of Julian or Aeneas’ associates or students. In this way, I suggest that Aeneas’ letter is a type of social performance.

Since letters were the premier form of social media in the ancient world, they operated as modes of sociability as well as public performance. Aeneas’ letter was a living and plastic device of conversation for Julian and subsequent audiences to savor time and time again. The

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<sup>30</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> McLean, 23; Goffman, *Strategic Interaction*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 49; 131-63.

refinement of its speech was the product of years of intellectual cultivation as both student and instructor. The salient features of the epistolary currency of social interaction between Aeneas, Julian, and other potential hearers of the letter are a combination of classical *topoi* and the rhetorical genre of *ekphrasis*, displays of eloquence showcasing the symbolic capital of elite education.<sup>34</sup> Eloquent discourse, as a major signifier of elite status in Late Antiquity, was a “site of social difference and exclusion as well as empowerment and comprehension.”<sup>35</sup> Shared *paideia* defined the social position of Aeneas’ readers at the same time it made vivid its subject matter.

If the goal of *ekphrasis* was to make the absent present through the rhetorical brushstrokes of *enargeia*, an epistolary *ekphrasis* aimed at a double presence. A common feature of Late Antique epistolography was the ancient perception that letters, as a surrogate for shared presence, made present the absent interlocutor. Aeneas’ colleague Procopius of Gaza wrote in *Letter 31* to a correspondent that “you seemed to me to be present in your letters.” In *Letter 27* Procopius exclaimed “having taken your letter into my hands, I seemed to see you present,” and in *Letter 127* Procopius similarly asserted how his interlocutor made himself present through letters. Late Antique epistolographers sometimes averred that the letter author embedded his soul in epistolary *logoi*. Basil of Caesarea disclosed to one addressee, “I saw your soul in your letter.”<sup>36</sup> Likewise Procopius asserts in *Letters 80* and *103* that words are images of the soul. These passages convey the perception that speech grants visibility.

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<sup>34</sup> Gleason, *Making Men*, xxi.

<sup>35</sup> Goldhill, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 134.

Aeneas himself theorizes about the intersections between the language of letters and images in Letter 12 to Epiphanius.<sup>37</sup> According to Aeneas, *logoi*, by which he likely means his letters, have the capacity to produce images (*eikones*) of the individual's soul: "words interpreting clearly without intention trace in outline the soul itself."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Aeneas archaizingly echoes here the language of Plato's *Republic* 9.588b, "by means of speech molding images of the soul" (εἰκόνα πλάσσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ). Adopting the ancient perception that ekphrastic speech in effect painted material images and brought them to life in the mind of the hearer, Aeneas asserts what seems to be a Platonic perception of the power of speech to materialize the immaterial soul.

*Ekphrasis* was thus a natural rhetorical form for literati of the Late Antique polis to employ in articulating a form of scientific enthusiasm. In his *ekphrasis* on the water clock in the city center of Gaza, for example, Aeneas' contemporary Procopius of Gaza extemporizes on the rich mythological lore pertaining to clock imagery in order to analyze the intentions and the imagination of the clock artist.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, Procopius is not particularly interested in the technical aspects of the science animating the clock,<sup>40</sup> but it is noteworthy how he deploys *ekphrasis* to engage his audience in the visual experience of the clock, in order to produce in his audience the experience of seeing the clock by means of the power of ekphrastic speech. His

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<sup>37</sup> Epiphanius is the address of two letters from Aeneas (12, 23). He may be one and the same as the rhetor Epiphanius formerly a pupil of Aeneas. Cf. *PLRE* 2:399.

<sup>38</sup> Positano, 93n4, thinks that this is an allusion to the letters that Aeneas has sent to Epiphanius.

<sup>39</sup> *RDG* contains the most recent publication of the Greek text of Procopius' *ekphrasis* on the water clock along with an Italian translation. For scholarship concerning this text, see H. Diehls, *Über die von Prokop beschriebene Kunstuhr von Gaza mit einem Anhang enthaltend Text und Übersetzung der Ἐκφρασις ὠρολογίου des Prokopios von Gaza* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, in Kommission bei Georg Reimer, 1917). See also the article in the Appendix of *RDG*: Balbina Bäbler and A. Schomberg, "Prokop: Die Kunstuhr in Gaza," 528-59.

<sup>40</sup> Bäbler and Schomberg, 531.

ekphrastic language, however, is so animated that it makes it difficult for the modern reader to discern which parts of the clock were in fact mechanized.

Procopius betrays familiarity with *Progymnasma* of the first century A.D. sophist Aelius Theon of Alexandria in his *ekphrasis* on the waterclock. Procopius carefully selects in his opening passage of his *ekphrasis* the celebrated episode of Hephaestus' fabrication of the arms of Achilles, in particular the shield of Achilles to which Homer devotes some 130 verses (lines 478-608) in Book 18 of the *Iliad*.<sup>41</sup> Procopius cited this passage, which according to Theon constituted the model par excellence of *ekphrasis* of *tropos*, or "the manner in which something is done or made."<sup>42</sup> Theon mentions the shield of Achilles in the context of delimiting the appropriate subjects for *ekphrasis* and categorizes it along with the making of weapons, the construction of siege engines, and military maneuvers such as the description of the building of the fortification at Plataea in Thucydides as an *ekphrasis* of *tropos*.<sup>43</sup>

From the outset of the *ekphrasis*, Procopius employs Homeric descriptions of Hephaestus as analogues for the present builder of the water clock. Procopius writes, "Therefore having knowing mind and body stationed in one place he (Hephaestus) now makes the shield of Achilles for Homer. . ."<sup>44</sup> Thus, Procopius refers here to Theon's class of *ekphrasis* known as the *tropos*

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<sup>41</sup>RDG, 277-78n82. Amato suggests that Procopius, in adducing the shield of Achilles also intends his audience to recall the cosmogonic allegory which was the subject of the shield of Achilles. In Amato's view, this constitutes an indirect invitation on the part of Procopius to his public to decipher the symbolic message and to grasp the allegorical references underlying the figures represented on the clock face at Gaza.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. For a brief overview of the category of *tropos*, see Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 69-70.

<sup>43</sup> Webb, 69; see also Webb's translation of Theon, 197-99.

<sup>44</sup>*Ekphrasis horologiou* 1.8-10: εἰδυίας οὖν ἔχων φρένας καὶ σῶμα ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἰδρυμένον χωρίου νῦν μὲν τὴν ἀσπίδα τὴν Ἀχιλλέως, ἔργον ἐξάριστον Ὀμήρω ποιεῖ . . .

in a discussion of the making of some type of technology. In this case he invokes Hephaestus as the maker of the shield as analogous to the present builder of clock.

Surviving evidence from the School at Gaza also supplies important information about ancient conceptions of the relationship between speech and vision.<sup>45</sup> Following the perceptions of the relationship between speech and vision in the rhetorical handbooks and broader perceptions of language and vision, Procopius comments on the relationship between *theama* and *logos* in his *ekphrasis*:

Accordingly I would wish to put these things into words and boast of it. But the sight of it defeats the verbal account, she herself not having the capability of what is necessary being pulled in different directions. She leaps up and down and wants to catch sight of everything, then moves more quickly than is required and misses the exact details in every case. I know because I have experienced this. For I did not stick with the first things in desire for the following things, and before possessing successive details as was necessary I moved on to look at another thing. And my eyes were convulsing just as those who look upon the labyrinth by the Nile, as a certain Ionic writer said [Herodotus].<sup>46</sup>

Sight prevails over the sophist's capacity to express image by means of words. The nature of the visual field is desultory, and sight is superior to speech to the extent that sight can flit to and fro in every direction it wishes. Vision of the clock overwhelms the onlooker. Procopius expresses his struggle with the undisciplined nature of sense perception and the striking difficulty of rendering intelligibility to his experience of the clock. This passage suggests a perception of the

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<sup>45</sup> An *ekphrasis* entitled "On Beauty" transmitted with the *Progymnasmata* of Libanius but now attributed to the School at Gaza (see Foerster and Münscher, "Libanios," *RE* 12: 2522) attempts to paint in the reader's mind the experience of gazing at a beautiful girl. The author's conceives the mechanics of vision as Eros having shot arrows at him from the girl's eyes. For recent text and translation see, Craig A. Gibson, *Libanius's Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 502-7. Similarly, in *Letter* 131 to Sabinus caudicus, Procopius of Gaza describes Sabinus as "pouring out his gaze," (βλέμμα . . . χεόμενον) as though conceiving vision as stemming from light or energy sent out by the eyes.

<sup>46</sup> *Ekphrasis horologiiou* 3.1-6: νικᾷ γὰρ λόγον ἢ θέα ἀμηχανοῦσα καὶ αὐτὴ πρὸς ὅτι δέοι φερομένη [ἔς] πάντα · μεταπηδᾷ γὰρ ἄνω καὶ κάτω καὶ πάντα βλέπειν ἐθέλει, εἶτα θᾶπτον ἢ περ ἔδει μεθισταμένη τῆς ἐφ' ἑκάστῳ [το]ιούτων ἀκριβείας ἐκπίπτει · οἶδα τοῦτο παθών. οὔτε γὰρ τοῖς πρώτοις ἐνεκαρτέρου ἐπιθυμία τῶν ἄλλων, [τά] τε δεύτερα πρὶν ἔχειν ὡς ἔδει, ἐπὶ θεᾶν ἀνεχώρου ἕτεραν. καὶ ἦσαν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐλιγμοὶ καθὰ τοῖς ὀρῶσι [τὸν πρὸς] Νεῖλω λαβύρινθον, Ἰωνικός τις ἔφησε συγγραφεύς.



shortcomings of speech itself, and is akin to Aphthonius' assertion in his *ekphrasis* in his *progymnasma* on the Serapeum that the Alexandrian acropolis' beauty is greater than can be put into language and if he has omitted anything it is because it defied description (Aphthonius *Progymnasmata* 12.12).<sup>47</sup>

The Gaza clock fascinated and frightened city residents and visitors. Procopius' *ekphrasis* indicates that this urban monument focused the public enthusiasm of Gazan residents and, as a public timepiece, pointed out their commonality. In fact, Procopius describes security measures meant to keep observers at a safe distance and protect the clock from any harm or meddling. Procopius indicates that two pairs of columns stand before the clock and "a fence of marble joins the spaces between the columns, sharp spikes of iron having been driven into the marble, this being a hindrance for any impetuous person who might try to scale the fence."<sup>48</sup> Procopius also suggests that the head of Medusa, located in the upper gable of the clock functioned as a security measure, she who "from on high bars the way fiercely to all who with too willful a resolve dare to approach . . ."<sup>49</sup> Also indicative of the fascination of observers is Procopius' comment subsequent to the description of the Gorgon indicating the effect of the clock's movement on observers: "it surprises you with its unexpected movement, which frightens and pursues the observers."<sup>50</sup> Even though this section of the *ekphrasis* is fraught with lacunae, a modern reader can apprehend the admixture of fear and fascination which beset clock

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Patillon, trans., *Corpus Rhetoricum Anonyme Préambule à la rhétorique Aphthonios Progymnasmata en annexe: Pseudo-Hermogène Progymnasmata* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008), 151.

<sup>48</sup>Section 3: ὁ μαρμάρων πτυχις τῶν κιόνων τὰ μέσα συνέ[χων, ὀξέων πασσάλων] αὐτοῖς ἐμπεπηγότεων σιδήρου, κάλυμα τοῦτο τῶν εἶ τις προπετῆς καὶ ὑπερβῆναι φιλονεικεῖ.

<sup>49</sup> ἀλλὰ καὶ Γοργῶ ἀφ' ὕψους βλοσυρὸν ἀπειλεῖ τοῖς ὅσοι γνώμη προσελθεῖν αὐθαδεστέρᾳ τολμῶσιν . . .

<sup>50</sup> . . . ἀλλὰ προέλαβε τῇ παραδόξῳ κινήσει, ἢ [φοβεῖ τε καὶ διώκει] τοὺς θεατάς.

onlookers. The movements of the clock were literally paradoxical (*paradoxos*), contrary to opinion, incredible.<sup>51</sup> Spectators were both frightened of the clock's motion and were absolutely fascinated by it and wanted to get to it and touch it—hence Medusa and the spikes and pillars.<sup>52</sup> By embedding in his *ekphrasis* a description of spectators' experience of viewing the clock and thereby articulating the viewer's sense of awe and amazement in the presence of the clock, Procopius intensifies the *enargeia* of his *ekphrasis*.<sup>53</sup>

From discussion of the clock gable, Procopius proceeds to describe the mid-section of the clock. Through ekphrastic description, Procopius expresses the movement suggested by clock sculpture, enlivening even static clock components. Examples of Procopius' animating discourse abound in his descriptions in Sections 6, 7, and 9 of the bronze eagles standing above

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<sup>51</sup> Procopius of Caesarea also employs the adjective *paradoxos* and similar language in his *Buildings*. In his panegyric description of the Hagia Sophia, Procopius employs the word *amēchania* at 1.1.49 to articulate the experience of seeing the church [see Philip Rousseau, "Procopius' *Buildings* and Justinian's Pride," *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 122]. Procopius suggests that the sight is not simply "bewildering" but in a sense is impossible, or that the sight defies physical explanation, as Philip Rousseau asserts (122). At 1.1.61, Procopius contends that neither *technē* nor *anthropeia dunamis* can account for the experience of the sight of the building. Later in *Buildings* 5.6.19 Procopius describes Justinian's building work on the so-called "New Church" in Jerusalem and comments regarding the difficult topography of the site, on the "impossibility of the task" (*ergou amēchaniā*). In describing an extension built on the hill on which was to be the site of the New Church, Procopius said that the builders were forced by difficult terrain to employ practices "strange and altogether unknown" (ἐπὶ τὰ παράδοξα καὶ ὅλως ἀγνώτα, 5.16.10).

<sup>52</sup> Other contemporary sources express that technical and scientific knowledge could be inspire fear. Testimony concerning Boethius, a historical contemporary of Procopius of Gaza in the Latin West, conveys the fear and awe Late Antique men sometime felt with regard to scientific and technical knowledge. *Letter* 1.14 drafted by Cassiodorus to petition the help of Boethius in constructing a clock for Gundobad of Burgandy contains remarks that suggest how a man vested with mathematical and mechanical competence was perceived by lettered peers without such training. See Philip Rousseau, "The Death of Boethius and the Charge of Maleficium," *Studi Medievali* 20 (1996): 877. At 8.59-60, Cassiodorus quips, "it is wonder enough that a man might understand these things; what shall we say of him who can perform them?" At lines 7 and 10, Boethius is said to have the power to imitate the heavens and at 10 "what a strange power is that of his art, while it claims to play it has the supreme power to disclose the secrets of nature, "O artis inaeestimabilis virtus, quae dum se dicit ludere, naturae praevallet secreta vulgare!" See Å.J. Fridh and J.W. Halporn, eds., *Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Senatoris Opera Variarum Libri XII* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1973), 53. Hence there is a sort of almost religious wonder and fear Cassiodorus attaches to the craft and knowledge of a mathematician and mechanician.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Goldhill, 5, explains how Longinus credits Thucydides' skill in achieving *enargeia* in his prose with creating in the reader the experience of the same amazement and emotion as that of the historical actors themselves. See also Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 18, 19-20, 38, 71, 103, 116, 129, 195.

each of the doors from which Heracles emerges on the hour. For instance, Procopius enlivens the statuary form of these birds of prey, describing the eagles as placing crowns on the head of Heracles below, unhooking their claws, and placing back their wings having given a good chase but having received no quarry (Section 9). It is most likely that the eagles were sculpted and designed in ways that merely suggested an impetus to movement in their form, and that they were not in fact, animated clock elements. Procopius also describes a statue of Helios as passing before each of the doors encasing images of Heracles. He indicates that Helios measures the hour with his movement. Perhaps Helios moves each hour. Alluding to Helios' mien as a gesture imitating an imperial prerogative, Procopius says that Helios stretches his right hand toward the doors, bidding Heracles to emerge like someone ordering the horses to come out of the starting gates.

Procopius' description of the twelve statues of Heracles focuses mainly upon the mythical accounts of his labors about which he extemporizes in a folksy, almost campy, style. For example, referring to the first and second labors (the Nemean lion and the Lernaean hydra, respectively), he states that "the first contest is the lion and Nemea was the place for it. He [Heracles] also destroyed the hydra even if it was divided into heads each of which was eager to win."<sup>54</sup> Following his summary of the labors, Procopius indicates that each figure pushes back the bronze door before receiving the laurel crown from the eagle above.

After commenting that the eagle ministers to Heracles because it is the bird of Zeus, father of Heracles (Section 9), Procopius turns to describing the attributes of three statues of Heracles located at the base of the clock (Sections 10-14). The first, bearing a club and wearing

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<sup>54</sup>πρῶτον οὖν ἀγώνισμα λέων καὶ ἡ Νεμέα χωρίον αὐτῷ. ἀνεῖλε καὶ τὴν ὕδρα, εἰ καὶ φιλονείκοις ἐτέμνετο κεφαλαῖς.

the lion's skin, holds a drum. The drum is apparently suspended and moves to and fro. Above this statue is constructed a temple atop which stands a shepherd with staff in hand. In the middle of the lowest register stands a statue of Heracles, who strikes a gong with his club to herald the hour. The number of blows indicates the number of the labor in the mythical order Procopius outlined above. Placed above the Heracles who struck the gong, there was a statue of Pan, with shaggy beard and horns. The statue's facial expression may evoke Pan's mythical longing for Echo, says Procopius, yet he may simply look in marvel at Heracles. Procopius next comments that where there is Pan, there must also be satyrs. They stand on either side of him, ridiculing him atop a *naos* constructed above the center Heracles. A third statue depicts Heracles as an archer in pursuit of the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides (Labor 11). Diomedes, whose mares Heracles stole to complete the eighth labor, stands atop the temple encircling this statue of Heracles the archer. After describing the figure of Heracles equipped with the bow, the text unfortunately breaks.

Although he does convey the form and layout of the clock, Procopius' description is not focused upon technical analysis. He celebrates this clock housing solely pagan imagery that stood as an object of communal focus persisting into the late fifth or early sixth century. Spectators evinced responses both of fear and fascination. Security measures, such as marble columns replete with spikes and the head of Medusa in the clock gable, attest to visitors' enthusiasm for the clock. Procopius confronts the perplexity he feels upon attempting to render into speech his visual experience of the clock. His endeavor to produce images in his audience's minds results in such animated speech that it is difficult for the modern reader to determine which elements of the clock actually moved. Mythological extemporizing serves as another device to entertain and draw images in the mind's eye of the clock statues of Heracles

performing the twelve labors. Mythical accounts and lively speech meant to enchant the audience like the sight of the clock itself operated as modes of literary authorizing engagement with a technical device. By means of ekphrastic speech and Classical culture, Procopius commemorates a beloved public timepiece and local attraction from his home city.

### Cosmological Speculation (Synesius and Isidore)

The epistolary discussions of astronomy in the contemporary works of Isidore and Synesius offer instructive counterpoints about the value of scientific exploration in relation to lifestyle and the divine.

Isidore advertises his knowledge of certain astronomical traditions yet is careful to respond to these traditions with his own moral analysis. In *Letter 1435* to John the deacon, Isidore interweaves astronomical traditions into an allegorical exegesis of the meaning of the Epistle of Jude 13: “errant stars for which the obscurity of darkness has been reserved for eternity.”<sup>55</sup> Isidore offers his friend the explanation that the “stars” in Scripture are in fact men who have sinned and reap punishment for all perpetuity. As was discussed above in Chapter 3, in this letter Isidore, by projecting a moral valence onto the physical universe, constructs an exegetical response for his friend that asserts a cosmology created and structured by God, thereby de-sacralizing the cosmos and refuting the pagan theology of astral bodies as divine beings. Along the way, Isidore pursues a discussion of astronomical theory that plays upon a moral meaning in the wandering stars—the planets—as erring. Referring to pagan astronomers (*hoi deinoi*), Isidore states that regarding astronomical bodies experts in the field “offer to the many explanations neither likely nor persuasive; for they [their explanations] fight with the

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<sup>55</sup> ἀστέρες πλανῆται οἷς ὁ ζόφος τοῦ σκότους εἰς αἰῶνα τετήρηται.

visible testimony of the eyes.”<sup>56</sup> He proceeds to explain how these experts say that these planets hasten to complete their own circuits from west to east yet, defeated by the opposing motion of the faster fixed stars, they are carried westward again. These experts, Isidore says, use the following example: “just as when a wheel is moving swiftly, an ant advancing in motion opposite to the wheel will accomplish nothing—for it is carried by the swiftest motion of the wheel—thus also the planets are affected by the motion of the fixed stars.”<sup>57</sup> In adducing the analogy of the ant on a cartwheel, Isidore appears to flaunt his knowledge of this example drawn from an astronomical compendium.<sup>58</sup>

In a brief digression, Isidore seizes this teaching analogy to ridicule pagan practice of associating gods with various animals and hints that the use of this analogy among pagan astronomers embeds in itself a repudiation of their own habits. Mockingly, Isidore comments “that they (i.e., the pagans) are refuted because now they make them into gods, now they compare them to the ants, I am only going to suggest.”<sup>59</sup> Switching gears, Isidore indicates that he will leave that issue unresolved for now, though he continues to pursue astronomical discussion in tandem with aggressive criticism of pagan theology. Confronting the pagan

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<sup>56</sup> οὔτε εἰκότα οὔτε πιθανὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς λέγουσι • τῇ γὰρ ἐναργείᾳ καὶ τῇ διὰ τῶν ὄψεων μαρτυρία μάχονται.

<sup>57</sup> ὥσπερ τροχοῦ ὀξέως κινουμένου, μύρμηξ τὴν ἐναντίαν αὐτῷ κίνησιν πορευόμενος οὐδὲν τοσοῦτον ἀνύει—ἐκνικᾶται γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ τροχοῦ ὠκυτάτης κινήσεως—οὔτω καὶ οἱ πλανῆται πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀπλανῶν διάκεινται κίνησιν.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Posidonius of Apamea, the astronomer Cleomedes, Vitruvius. See also J. Mansfeld and D.T. Runia, *Aëtiana: the Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer* (Leiden; New York, Köln, 1997), 311 and 311 n. 59; Évioux, 2:47n2; Manfred Kertsch, “Isidor von Pelusion in der sog. Catena Andrea (Clavis PG C 176) zu Jud. 12/13,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 40 (1997): 164. Isidore may, however, draw this example from an intervening Christian source rather than a compendium; more below, and see Kertsch, 160-63, on the parallels between Isidore *Letter* 1435 and Origen’s *Philocalia*. Bayer originally argued that Isidore made direct use of the manuals of Arius Didymus and Aëtius, but this cannot be demonstrated definitively; see Mansfeld and Runia, 309; Leo Bayer, “Isidoros von Pelusium klassische Bildung” (PhD diss., Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1915), 66-72.

<sup>59</sup> τὸ μὲν οὖν ἐλέγχειν αὐτούς ὅτι ποτὲ μὲν αὐτούς ὡς θεοὺς ἐκθειάζουσι, ποτὲ δὲ μύρμηξι παραβάλλουσι, μόνον ἐπισημνάμενος.

theological imprint of his own cosmological vocabulary, Isidore discusses why Scripture uses the same words for the sun, moon, and planets as the pagans use for their deities. Isidore states

because Scripture uses this name, either properly or improperly, or by following the general habit, I think, maybe when they rank among the planets the sun and the moon, and five other stars, which many do not know, Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury and Mars, and of course Lucifer (Venus), people more foolish than you have assigned them the names of characters who were powerful on earth, who led a life of shame and died without glory.<sup>60</sup>

Isidore indicates the convention of denoting heavenly bodies with the same words that indicate names of the gods and inserts his own moral assessment of the degeneracy of the pagan deities.

Isidore continues to set out astronomical arguments regarding the movements of the fixed bodies and offers explanations for the meanings of their names, but ultimately he asserts that the cosmos is the product of the devising of God the Creator. Referring back to the thoughts of *hoi deinoi*, Isidore adduces the evidence of *Isaiah* 45.12 concerning God’s cosmic hegemony framed in the Platonic language of the Demiurge: “Whether this or that is true, it [i.e., the movements of stars and planets] is the proclamation of the Demiurge who thus ordered and made the laws, as He himself declares ‘I command the stars.’”<sup>61</sup> Compounding this demonstration, Isidore offers with a Platonic overlay the evidence of the Psalmist who, “pointing out how the divine prescription on earth has been infringed when men go off on their own accord into transgression, while in the heavens it is preserved, says ‘for eternity, O Lord, your Word will remain in the

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<sup>60</sup> ἐγὼ δ’ οἶμαι, διὰ τὸ χρήσασθαι καὶ τὴν Γραφὴν τούτῳ τῷ ὀνόματι, ἢ κυριολεκτοῦσαν, ἢ καταχρωμένην, ἢ τῇ τῶν πολλῶν συνηθείᾳ ἐπομένην, ὅτι, ἴσως ἐπειδὴ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην, καὶ ἄλλους πέντε ἀστέρας, οὐ πολλοῖς γνωρίμους, φαίνοντά τε καὶ φαέθοντα, Στίλβοντα τε καὶ Πυρρόεντα, καὶ μὴν καὶ Φωσφόρον εἰς τοὺς πλανήτας τάττουσιν οἱ σοῦ ἀνοητότεροι, τινῶν ἐπὶ γῆς δυναστευσάντων, καὶ αἰσχρῶς βεβιωκότων, καὶ ἀκλεῶς τὸν βίον καταστρεψάντων τὰς προσηγορίας ἐπέθεσαν. Kertsch, “Isidor,” 163, has pointed out that Isidore’s use of the terms κυριολεκτεῖν and καταχρᾶσθαι we see also in Origen *Philocalia* 26.8.9. I would also add that *Philocalia* 26.8, similar to this passage in Isidore *Letter* 1435, is concerned with the topic of understanding names and whether or not to take them literally.

<sup>61</sup> πλὴν εἴτε τοῦτο, εἴτε ἐκεῖνο ἀληθές εἴη, τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ ἀνακηρύττει τὴν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ οὐτοῦ τάξαντος καὶ νομοθετήσαντος ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς μὲν φησιν • << Ἐγὼ τοῖς ἄστροις ἐνετειλάμην >>.

heavens.”<sup>62</sup> God orders not just beings that some claim possess reason and will but all elements of the material universe, as Scripture at *Psalms 77.23* states "The Lord commands the heat," "he commands the clouds," "he commands the worm."<sup>63</sup> Isidore proceeds to aver that astronomical theories contribute nothing to showing us how to live:

That they (the stars and planets) are therefore beings gifted with reason, as some claim, or spheres of fire, or disc-shaped bodes lit by the ethereal fire, or condensations of a fire-shaped sphere, or incandescent masses—this is indeed the opinion of some philosophers—or chariots receiving immaterial and hyper-cosmic light coming from beyond the world, I do not argue forcefully—in fact I think it does nothing to accomplish the good way of life.<sup>64</sup>

The issue of the moral *politeia*, which Isidore uses elsewhere to denote the monastic lifestyle, comprises for him a key frustration with astronomical inquiry. The overriding concern for the moral lifestyle resounds also in *Letter 2.273*, where Isidore faults astronomical speculation for offering nothing for the *aristē politeia*. This *topos* of natural science as useless because it does not contribute to a moral life was a broader discursive trend in patristic authors such as Eusebius and Theodoret.<sup>65</sup> Engaging with scientific texts, Isidore’s treatment of heavenly bodies in this letter may be drawn from primers such as those of Cleomedes, Theon, Smyrnaeus, and

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<sup>62</sup> δεικνύων ὡς ἐν γῆ μὲν παρέβαθη τὸ θεῖον πρόσταγμα, τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς παρανομίας αὐτομολησάντων, ἐν οὐρανῷ δὲ ἐφυλάχθη, ἔφη • <<εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, Κύριε, ὁ λόγος σου διαμένει ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.>> Cf. *Psalms 118.89*; see Énieux, 2:49. The issue of will also corresponds to Origen *Philocalia* 19-20; see also Kertsch 161-62.

<sup>63</sup> <<ἐνετείλατο Κύριος καύσωνι>>, καὶ <<ἐνετείλατο νεφέλαις>>, καὶ <<ἐνετείλατο σκώληκι>>, cf. *John 4.8*, *Psalms 77.23*, and *John 4.7*; see Énieux, 2:51.

<sup>64</sup> εἴτε οὖν λογικὰ ἐστὶ ζῶα, ὧς φασὶ τινες, εἴτε πύρινοι σφαῖραι, εἴτε δισκοειδῆ σώματα, ἐκ τοῦ αἰθερίου πυρὸς ἐξαφθέντα, εἴτε σφαιροειδεῖς πυρὸς πιλήσεις, εἴτε μυδροὶ – τινὲς γὰρ τῶν φιλοσόφων τοῦτ’ ἐδογμάτισαν – εἴτε ὀχήματα δεκτικὰ τοῦ αὐλοῦ καὶ ὑπερκοσμίου φωτός, οὐ σφόδρα ἰσχυρισαίμην – οὐδὲν γὰρ τοῦτο πρὸς ἀρίστην πολιτείαν συντελεῖν ἠγοῦμαι. These six examples bear resemblance to the views of Aëtius in pseudo-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum* and Stobaeus *Eclogae physicae*, but certainly were not derived from these sources. They are closer to the examples Philo provides in *On Dreams* 1.21. See Mansfeld and Runia, 311 and 311n62.

<sup>65</sup> See Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangelica* 15, and Theodoret *Curatio affectionum Graecarum* 4.24; cf., Mansfeld and Runia, 139, 276, 310, and 310n53.



Geminus.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, this letter includes language resembling astronomical language on the shape of the earth in pseudo-Plutarch's *Placita*.<sup>67</sup> For example, Isidore's use of κύλινδρος is reminiscent of Anaximander's language of the earth's column-like shape, and Isidore's use of the comparison "like a winnowing fan" (λικνοειδής) is similar to Democritus' "disc-like in surface but hollow in the middle."<sup>68</sup> These examples, however, Isidore takes from Basil's last *Homily on the Hexaemeron* (9.1.480.10-16).<sup>69</sup> Thus Isidore signals that he is conversant in astronomical traditions and offers a moral parallel to such scientific traditions.

In contrast, for Synesius the natural sciences are important not only because they contribute to the right sort of life, but because astronomy serves philosophy and is a stage in the ascent toward philosophy. To examine this view, we will now turn to Synesius' letter which he sent with the gift of an astrolabe to his friend Paeonius, a military magistrate at Constantinople whom Synesius befriended during his embassy at the imperial center.<sup>70</sup> For Synesius, Paeonius himself has performed the remarkable feat of intermixing the intellectual pursuit of philosophy with its practical application: "How could I not assign a central place in my soul to the wondrous Paeonius, he who contrived to bring philosophy and military science, so long divided from one another by so many walls, and discovered how to bring them together and to join them, having perceived an ancient affinity between them."<sup>71</sup> Harkening back to examples from Magna

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 310 and 310n55.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 310 and 310n56. Apart from a lexical entry in the *Suda*, the term λικνοειδής is found only the *Placita* and Isidore's epistle.

<sup>69</sup> Basil's examples are close to the opinions of Aëtius in the *Placita*; see Mansfeld and Runia, 310-11.

<sup>70</sup> The position Paeonius occupied cannot be securely identified. Giuseppina Stramondo, trans., *A Peonio sul Dono* (Catania, Italy: Centro di studi sull'antico Cristianesimo, Università di Catania, 1964), 22n17. For other analyses of the language Synesius' letter, see Stramondo, 21-30, and Lacombrade, 123-26.

Graecia when men with astronomical knowledge were also civil rulers, Synesius praises the accomplishments actualized by the union of philosophy and statecraft and laments how “time behaved in a youthful manner” (i.e., recklessly),<sup>72</sup> and the double form separated, and now it is no longer considered appropriate for the two sides of this double form to converse. Synesius supposes that this separation is responsible for society’s present ills, inquiring “is it not because of this that other good things have departed from us?”<sup>73</sup> These spheres counterbalance one another in human communities: “for there could be no greater misfortune among cities than to have the element of strength without intelligence, or the ability to reason without force.”<sup>74</sup>

Synesius exhorts his friend to fight for the contemporary relevance of the double form of public affairs and philosophy:

For you seem to be making a beginning of this pairing, for you have the confidence to do public affairs, and you think that you must pursue philosophy. Act thus as if you are engaged in a fair competition for us and for the Muses, so that no one will drive them (the Muses) away from the marketplace or the camp as unpractical and helpless, just as if they were of no advantage for actions under the open sky and were to be chattered about and assigned as dainty things for children’s play.<sup>75</sup>

Alluding to a group of intellectual associates, Synesius claims his gift will actuate an intellectual transformation by awakening latent potentialities native to Paeonius’ own soul: “now, having

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<sup>71</sup> πῶς οὖν οὐ μέλλω τὴν μέσην ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ χώραν τῷ θαυμαστῷ Παιονίῳ νέμειν, ὃς ἐκ πολλοῦ διατετειχισμένας θριγκοῖς μεγάλοις φιλοσοφίαν καὶ στρατείαν ἐξεῦρεν ἐπαναγαγεῖν καὶ συνάψαι, παλαιάν τινα ἐνιδὼν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι τούτοις συγγένειαν ;

<sup>72</sup> ὁ χρόνος ἐνεανιεύσατο.

<sup>73</sup> μὴ γὰρ διότι τοῦτο καὶ τᾶλλα ἡμᾶς ἀπολέλοιπεν ἀγαθὰ ;

<sup>74</sup> ὥς οὐδὲν ἂν γένοιτο πόλεσι δυστύχημα μεῖζον τοῦ τὸ μὲν ἰσχυρὸν ἀνόητον ἔχειν, τὸ δ’ ἔμφρον ἀδύνατον.

<sup>75</sup> ἀλλ’ εἰκας γὰρ αὐτὸς ἄρξων ἐπανάγειν ἡμῖν τὸν συνδυασμὸν τοῦτον • τὰ τε γὰρ κοινὰ πράττειν πιστεύη, καὶ φιλοσοφίαν οἶει δεῖν ἐπιτηδεύειν. Βάλλ’ οὕτως, ὡς ἀγῶνα καλὸν ὑπὲρ τε ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ τε τῶν Μουσῶν ἀγωνίζη, τοῦ μὴ τινα αὐτὰς ὡς ἀπράκτους καὶ ἄχειρας ἀγορᾶς τε καὶ στρατείας ἀπελάνειν, ἅτε μηδὲν μὲν ὄφελος οὔσας εἰς τὰς ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ πράξεις, κομψὰς δὲ παιδαρίοις προσαθύρειν τε καὶ στωμύλλεσθαι.

informed myself about you from those who have known you longer than I have, and having known you myself some little time, I am eager to kindle the astronomical sparks that are in your soul, trying to make them big by means of what is in you.”<sup>76</sup> For Synesius, the study of astronomy is a lofty science that propels one toward the even loftier field of knowledge of the ineffable things about God (*tēs aporrhētou theologiā*). This science “makes available the blessed body of the heavens, for the happy body of heaven has matter underneath it, of which the movement (of the heavens) appeared to the leaders in philosophy to be an imitation of the Mind.”<sup>77</sup> By “Mind” (Nous), Synesius means here the idea of the Demiurge, the first efflux descending from the One in the Neoplatonic hierarchical hypostasis. This intelligible realm is the “self-specification and articulation” of the One.<sup>78</sup> Implying a mystical experience as the *telos* of scientific study of the heavens, Synesius affirms that the spiritual sparks native to the human soul long to seek out their divine source.<sup>79</sup> Astronomy itself discloses the secrets etched in the cosmos which reproduce the noetic realm.

Moving from the ethereal to the practical, Synesius admires how astronomy produces “demonstrations in a manner that is not disputed,” because it employs the auxiliary fields of geometry and arithmetic, “which it would not be improper for someone to call a straight measure

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<sup>76</sup> πυθόμενός τε οὖν περὶ σοῦ παρὰ τῶν προλαβόντων ἐπὶ τὴν σὴν συνήθειαν, καὶ αὐτὸς δι’ ὀλίγου κατανοήσας ἔρω τοὺς ἀστρονομικοὺς σπινθῆρας ἐνόησας σου τῆ ψυχῇ τούτους ἐξάψαι καὶ ἐπὶ μέγα ἄραι διὰ τῶν ἐνόητων ἐπιβαλλόμενος.

<sup>77</sup> ὕλην τε γὰρ ὑποβέβηται τὸ μακάριον οὐρανοῦ σῶμα, οὗ καὶ τὴν κίνησιν νοῦ μίμησιν εἶναι τοῖς κορυφαιοτάτοις ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ δοκεῖ.

<sup>78</sup> Bregman, 36. On Synesius’ various uses of the Nous, including his assimilation of the Neoplatonic Trinity (One, Nous, Soul) to the Christian Trinity, see Bregman, 33, 36, 63, 79-83, 91, 103, 112, 165-66, 179, 180, 183.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid. This is a paraphrase of Bregman’s discussion of the *epistrophē* in Synesius’ Hymn 1.

of truth.”<sup>80</sup> Contending that his gift is fitting both for him to give and Paeonius to receive, Synesius details how the device is of his own contrivance (*dianoia*), including the contributions of his most holy teacher Hypatia, and the device was wrought by the best silversmiths in the country.<sup>81</sup> Synesius then underscores again how the gift will elicit intellectual and spiritual properties native to Paeonius and explains why he encloses a letter with the gift: “conversing with you in advance I might make something advantageous for my purpose, which is to call forth natural beginnings that are in you toward philosophy.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, Synesius hopes “if it should occur that you desire to focus your eyes and cast them on the thing itself, then I will give you a greater gift regarding the science.”<sup>83</sup> In this way, the physical gift will make visible the gift of knowledge itself which stretches the soul in upward ascent to its divine origins in ideas.

Synesius moves to describe the physical design of the device.<sup>84</sup> Of interest for exploring the intellectual culture Synesius crafted to define this device is his description of two engravings inscribed upon it. The second of the two, quoted from Ptolemy, enshrines an earlier view of astronomy and its relation to the divine:

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<sup>80</sup> τὰς ἀποδείξεις οὐκ ἀμφισβητησίμως; ἅς ἀστραβῆ τῆς ἀληθείας κανόνα τις εἰπὼν οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοι τοῦ πρέποντος.

<sup>81</sup>It is not clear how great a role Hypatia had in designing the device. She clearly was a mathematician in training; the Suda ascribes to her authorship of several works dealing with mathematics or astronomy. Her father Theon, “president” of the Museum at Alexandria, was a prolix author of commentaries on Euclid and Ptolemy as well as a lost work on an astrolabe. For an overview, see Michael A.B. Deakin, “Hypatia and her Mathematics,” *The American Mathematical Monthly* 101(1994): 234-243; on Hypatia and Theon’s work on mathematics and astronomy, see *ibid.*, 237-38.

<sup>82</sup> περὶ οὗ προδιαλεχθεὶς προὔργου τι ἂν τῷ σκοπῷ ποιήσαιμι. ὁ δὲ σκοπός, τὰς ἐν σοὶ φυσικὰς περὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὁρμάς ἐκκαλέσασθαι.

<sup>83</sup> εἰ γὰρ ἔφεις σοι παραγένειτο τοῦ συντείνων τὰς ὕψεις ἐπιβαλεῖν τῷ φαινομένῳ, τότε σοι μείζον ὀρέξω δῶρον, τὰ περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης αὐτῆς.

<sup>84</sup>The device and its design cannot be identified with precision based on the textual evidence; for an overview of scholarly arguments on the subject, see Stramondo, 33-41.

I know that I am mortal, a creature of the day; but when I trace out  
the dense orbits of the circling stars  
no longer do my feet touch the earth, but in the company of Zeus himself  
I become full of the god-nourishing ambrosia.<sup>85</sup>

Authorized by the classicizing stamp of the ancient astronomer, these lines reiterate Synesius' perception of the significance of the device and astronomy itself to guide the human soul upward toward divinity. Synesius' Classical pagan engagement with study of the cosmos is here synchronized with his Neoplatonic conceptions of the use of the device and astronomy. This gift of Classical *paideia*<sup>86</sup> celebrates the shared knowledge and philosophical interests between two literati and suggests a group of associates (and see above for Synesius' reference to communication with friends of Paeonius).

Upon reflection, the two modes of engagement with astronomy in the contemporaries Isidore and Synesius appear almost as antinomies. In pursuing a classicizing model of conceptualizing astronomy with marked Neoplatonic philosophical overlays Synesius poses as protector and perpetuator of a continuous intellectual tradition. Isidore demarcates a strikingly different path. Isidore, like other Church Fathers, broadcasts a veneer of astronomical language by including teaching analogies and other *doxai* originally appearing in astronomical texts. He feels compelled to demonstrate some competence in the astronomical lore that he ultimately debunks because of both its serious pagan resonances and his view that it offers nothing for the

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<sup>85</sup> Ptolemy *Anthologia Palatina* 9.577, Lacombrade, 126n20.  
οἶδ' ὅτι θνατὸς ἐγὼ καὶ ἐφάμερος • ἀλλ' ὅταν ἄστρων  
ἰχνεύω πυκινὰς ἀμφιδρόμους ἑλικας,  
οὐκέτ' ἐπιψάύω γαίης ποσίν, ἀλλὰ παρ' αὐτῷ  
Ζηνὶ θεοτρεφέος πίμπλαμαι ἀμβροσίης.

<sup>86</sup> Stramondo, 23.

correct moral lifestyle. For a Neoplatonist like Synesius here we have evidence for the power of a gadget whose heavenward gaze can access the all-subsuming intellect of the demiurge, the blueprint of the One. Such starkly diverging attitudes toward the natural sciences found in two contemporary literati, both of whom either were currently or would become members of the Christian clergy in the Greek East, testify to the cultural shock waves contesting traditional orientations to Classical *paideia*. Though this is only the testimony of two Late Ancient voices, it is time for scholars to place alongside a thinker such as Isidore, whose attitudes often resemble those of the Fathers, those of his non-canonical coeval who weathered contemporary seismic challenges to Classical culture and stood firmly and enthusiastically in its defense and service.

#### Matter and Soul: Isidore

Letters among educated provincials were forums for philosophical and scientific speculation about the relationship between matter and soul and the concomitant issue of the relationship between matters of various forms such as liquids and solids. In *Letter* 1475 to Dorotheus, a doctor and deacon, Isidore responds to a friend who apparently “wished to learn something clear and agreed upon both in the Holy Scriptures and in the more wise writers of those outside (pagans).”<sup>87</sup> The net is cast fairly wide in terms of permitted sources. Isidore pledges that he will endeavor, so far as he is able, to say much in few words. Dorotheus has asked Isidore to explain “wherefore is it clear that the incorporeal things are less likely to undergo change and are stronger than corporeal beings?”<sup>88</sup> Isidore responds that “to the extent

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<sup>87</sup> ἐπειδὴ χρῆμα σαφὲς καὶ ὁμολογούμενον καὶ ταῖς ἱεραῖς Γραφαῖς καὶ τοῖς σοφωτέροις τῶν ἔξωθεν διὰ παραδειγμάτων ἠθέλησας μαθεῖν . . .

<sup>88</sup> ἐπεὶ τοίνυν ἔφης • πόθεν δῆλον ὅτι τὰ ἀσώματα τῶν σωμάτων ἐστὶν ἀπαθέστερα καὶ ἰσχυρότερα ;

that those bodies that are nearer to incorporeality are stronger and less subject to change than those that are denser, the incorporeal things are less likely to undergo change than not only the denser things but also the lighter things.”<sup>89</sup> To support this assertion Isidore cites the example of how a stone, which is denser than water, can no longer be united if it is broken, but water when divided is brought together again, for it is less dense and to this extent it does not undergo change.<sup>90</sup> Density correlates positively with mutability. The lighter example (*paradeigma*) of air, Isidore continues, cannot be separated: “if air is enclosed in a container or a wine skin and is thrown into the depths of water, it does not put up with it, but comes to the surface and swims up and wishes to manifest itself and hunts after that which is like it.”<sup>91</sup> Isidore expresses wonderment that Dorotheus marvels how bodiless things are stronger given Isidore’s proofs that air is less dense than water and water is less dense than stone and therefore is less subject to change.

This discussion of the relationship of bodiless and corporeal entities and their relative densities and vulnerability to change next leads into evidence of the immutability of the soul—an inherently bodiless entity. Isidore contends then that the soul, also bodiless and invisible like air, provides the body with inner strength and physical strength. When the soul departs from the body, however, the body not only remains motionless, dead, but it decomposes. Affirming the power of his friend’s profession and linking its practice to the soul, Isidore next links the art

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<sup>89</sup> φημί ὅσω τὰ ἐγγύς τῆς ἀσωματότητος σώματα ἰσχυρότερα καὶ ἀπαθέστερά ἐστι τῶν παχυτέρων σωμάτων, τοσοῦτω καὶ τὰ ἀσωματα οὐ μόνον τῶν παχυτάτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν λεπτοτάτων ἐστὶν ἀπαθέστερα.

<sup>90</sup> οἷον ἡ πέτρα τοῦ ὕδατος ἐστὶ παχυτέρα, διὸ ῥηγνυμένη οὐκέτι συνάπτεται, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ διαίρεθῆν, πάλιν συναφθὲν ἐνούται • ὅσω γὰρ λεπτότερον, τοσοῦτω ἀπαθέστερον.

<sup>91</sup> ἐὰν γοῦν ἢ εἰς κέραμον ἢ εἰς ἀσκὸν ἀποκλεισθεῖη, καὶ εἰς βυθὸν ριφείη, οὐκ ἀνέχεται, ἀλλ’ ἐπιπολάζει καὶ ἐπινήχεται, καὶ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν ζητεῖ, καὶ τὸ συγγενὲς θηρᾶται.

(*technē*) of the physician to the soul's immutability: the bodiless power (*dunamis*) of Dorotheus' *technē* itself is stronger than the body. As soul has the power to fortify the body, whenever the medical art departs from the body the treatment remains most ineffective (*achrēstotatē*); like the body, a remedy can only live when enlivened by the *dunamis* of the physician's *technē*, and the remedy effectively dies when this *dunamis* departs. In this way, the medical art and the soul itself share the capacity to animate matter itself. By the letter's end, Isidore's conversation interweaving philosophical and scientific ideas about soul and matter engages with his friend's profession as a physician and its very power to manipulate and arrange human bodies.

Isidore was also rankled by specific definitions of the soul offered by Galen. *Letter 1791* (PG 4.125), published so far only in Migne, also preserves Isidore's side of an epistolary discussion with a doctor and *scholasticus* named Prosechius focused on rebuffing a Galenic conception of the soul as mortal, testifying that knowledge of Galen, perhaps even first-hand knowledge, belonged in the repertoire of Late Antique sophists of the Greek East.<sup>92</sup> Isidore opens by adducing the authoritative testimony of "Pythagoras and Plato and those other wise men who were held in high repute following the necessary art of the techniques of demonstration."<sup>93</sup> These men, Isidore avers, "rightly give the opinion that the soul is more of a guide than the body, calling soul the artificer, the body the instrument."<sup>94</sup> Referring collectively to these Greek philosophers as *hoi sophoi*, Isidore remarks that even if these men missed the

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<sup>92</sup>Pace Éviex, *Isidore*, 148n61, who, following PG 78:1197-98n99, reproduced the misidentification of the relevant text of Galen as *De placitis Platonis et Hippocratis*, 1.II. As I indicate below, Isidore is mainly concerned in this letter with Galen's treatise *The Faculties of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body*.

<sup>93</sup> Πυθαγόρας μὲν, καὶ Πλάτων, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἔνδοξοι παρ' Ἑλλήσι σοφοὶ, ἀποδεικτικαῖς ἀνάγκαις ἐπόμενοι.

<sup>94</sup> ἡγεμονικωτέραν τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ σώματος εἰκότως ἀπεφάναντο • καὶ ἐκάλεσαν τὴν μὲν τεχνίτην, τὸ δὲ ὄργανον.



truth concerning some things—probably the error of their paganism—on the issue of the relationship between body and soul, however, they hit the mark (lit. “were led to the target”).<sup>95</sup> Isidore then identifies the scientific interlocutor who irritates him: Galen, who did not escape the notice of those who were reading intelligently (that is, Isidore himself). Deploying the analogues of lyre and lyre-player, Isidore contends that Galen “considering the lyre itself to be harmonious, not the lyre-player, declared the soul to be mortal.”<sup>96</sup> Galen, according to Isidore, asserted that “because the powers of the soul follow the mixture (compounding) of the body, he ended by saying that the soul was not bodiless and immortal but, I do not know how, that the mixture was the soul.”<sup>97</sup>

Isidore refers directly here to Galen’s definition of the soul as a mixture which he articulated in his treatise *The Faculties of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body* (*Quod animi mores sequuntur temperamenta corporis*).<sup>98</sup> In this late pamphlet, one of the two extant Galenic texts which focused on the nature of the soul (the other is *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*), Galen asserted that the soul and its capabilities are dependent on the temperaments or mixtures (*kraseis*) of the body.<sup>99</sup> Following the Aristotelian conception of the soul as the form (*eidos*) of the body, Galen asserts that as the body is comprised of matter (*hylē*) and form (*eidos*), and, as Aristotle also thought, “the physical body comes to be from the inborn four qualities in matter, and it is necessary to regard the form as the mixture of these qualities, so also I suppose the soul

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<sup>95</sup> ἐν τούτῳ κατὰ σκοποῦ ἠνέχθησαν.

<sup>96</sup> ἀρμόνιον αὐτὴν λύραν οὐ λυρωδὸν ἠγησάμενος θνητὴν ἀπεφήνατο.

<sup>97</sup> ὅτι τῇ κράσει τοῦ σώματος ἔπονται αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις, εἰς τὸ φάναι τὸ μὴ εἶναι ψυχὴν ἀσώματον καὶ ἀθάνατον ἐτελεύτησεν, τὴν κράσιν ψυχὴν οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως ὀρισάμενος.

<sup>98</sup>This text will be henceforth abbreviated *QAM*.

<sup>99</sup> For a useful recent overview of Galen’s views of the soul, see Pierluigi Donni, “Psychology,” in R.J. Hankinson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Galen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 184-209.

to be a mixture of the four elements,” or hot, cold, wet, and dry (*QAM* 774).<sup>100</sup> From this, Galen posits “if the reasoning faculty is a form of the soul, it is mortal; for it is itself a certain mixture of the brain” (*QAM* 774-75).<sup>101</sup> On the other hand, “if the soul is immortal, as Plato wished, why is it separated from the body when the brain becomes excessively cold or hot or dry or wet.”<sup>102</sup> That is, why does the soul leave the body when the body undergoes certain physical changes? As will be demonstrated below, Isidore quotes this argument virtually verbatim in *Letter* 1791.

Isidore’s epistolary diatribe aims to steer his learned friend clear from the Galenic nets. Drawing a distinction between Galen’s philosophical and medical contributions, Isidore warns Prosechius “we must not pay attention to him in this!”<sup>103</sup> Concerning Galen’s medical work Isidore recognizes his renown and merit, but with regard to the soul, Isidore rails:

Let him not contend with the wiser men, let him not go into the *agon*, where he does not have the physical training or the skill; nor let someone who is an athlete judge music. Havinh emptied the whole of his intellect concerning bodies, let him not teach concerning the soul, and let him not believe that the bringing about the harmony of the elements is the soul.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> τῶν τεττάρων ποιότητων ἐγγιγνομένων τῇ ὕλῃ τὸ φυσικὸν γίγνεσθαι σῶμα, τὴν ἐκ τούτων κρᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον αὐτοῦ τίθεσθαι τὸ εἶδος, ὥστε πως καὶ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς οὐσία κρᾶσις τις ἔσται τῶν τεττάρων εἴτε ποιότητων.

<sup>101</sup> *QAM* 774-75. εἰ μὲν οὖν τὸ λογιζόμενον εἶδος τῆς ψυχῆς ἔστι, θνητὸν ἔσται • καὶ γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸ κρᾶσις τις ἐγκεφάλου . . .

<sup>102</sup> *QAM* 775. εἰ δ’ ἀθάνατον ἔσται, ὡς ὁ Πλάτων βούλεται, διὰ τί χωρίζεται ψυχθέντος σφοδρῶς ἢ ὑπερθερμανθέντος ἢ ὑπερξηρανθέντος ἢ ὑπερυγρανθέντος τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου.

<sup>103</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐ προσεκτέον αὐτῷ ἐν τούτῳ.

<sup>104</sup> μὴ ἀμιλλάσθω τοῖς σοφωτέροις, μηδὲ καταβαινέτω εἰς ἀγῶνα, οὗ καὶ ἀνάσκητός ἐστι καὶ ἀμελέτητος • μηδὲ ἀθλητῆς ὢν τὴν μουσικὴν κρινέτω • μηδὲ περὶ τὰ σώματα ὅλην ἑαυτοῦ κενώσας τὴν σύνεσιν, περὶ ψυχῆς δογματιζέτω • μηδὲ πιστευέτω, ἐν τῷ κατασκευάζειν τὴν ἀρμονίαν τῶν στοιχείων εἶναι ψυχήν.

Isidore registers his offense at Galen's philosophical forays into *agones* for which he has no experience or capability with curt minatory imperative phrases framed by Classical analogies of competition.

If Galen's hypothesis were really true, reasons Isidore, then with the body the soul would be extinguished. Applying a superlative address ironically, Isidore wonders "what would this good man (*beltistos*) say to the poets and philosophers and speechwriters, how in every way and by every means there will be punishments in the (last) judgment; for what kind of reward does he rightly contrive for those living in this world?"<sup>105</sup> If the soul is mortal, Galen obviates the possibility of rewards or punishments in the afterlife. Similar to his concerns in *Letter* 1435 and 2.273 discussed above regarding the uselessness of astronomical theory for living the good life, Isidore here perceives Galen's "mortal soul" as an assault on his entire lifestyle. Employing the terms *ponoi* and *politeuein*, the verbal form of *politeia*, which we have seen above as denoting the monastic lifestyle, Isidore quips "thus for those who live in this manner, for the most part, contests are provided filled with the greatest of labors and sweats, until the end."<sup>106</sup> What is the meaning of these trials for the virtuous if the soul is mortal? And what about those who live without virtue: "how is the punishment determined for those who pursue every evil until death and enjoy wealth and fame?"<sup>107</sup> Isidore wonders how Galen would interpret the Homeric poet's assertion that "the spirit remains, and it has gone to the House of Hades"; how would he translate

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<sup>105</sup> τί οὖν φαίη ὁ βέλτιστος περὶ τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς καὶ φιλοσόφοις καὶ λογογράφοις φιλοσοφηθέντων, ὡς πάντη τε καὶ πάντως ἐσομένων ἐν τῇ κρίσει κολαστηρίων; Ποῖον δὲ γέρας τοῖς τῆδε βιοῦσιν ὀρθῶς ἐπινοήσῃ;

<sup>106</sup> τοῖς γὰρ οὕτω πολιτευομένοις, ὡς τὰ πολλὰ, ἄθλα μεγίστων πόνων καὶ ἰδρώτων μεστὰ, ἕως τῆς ἐνθάδε τελευτῆς προετέθη.

<sup>107</sup> ποῖ δὲ τὴν τιμωρίαν ὀριεῖ, τοῖς κακίαν μὲν πᾶσαν μεταδιώκουσιν ἕως θανάτου, καὶ πλούτοι καὶ τιμῆς ἀπολαύουσι;

“there thus also is a dwelling place in Hades.”<sup>108</sup> Invoking also Euripides’ *Alcestis*, Isidore asks how Galen would interpret Euripides whom Prosechius determines to be wise, who said “May it be good for you in the House of Hades also.”<sup>109</sup>

Isidore asks how, if the soul is an order (*harmonia*), “how does it change to discord, and accomplish an inelegant and discordant song?”<sup>110</sup> The soul presides over various types of conduct which Isidore classes as either harmonious or discordant. Moral behavior—virtue (*aretē*)—generates harmonious song and moral baseness a discordant song. Why, wonders Isidore, would Galen himself consider it necessary to praise or censure those pursuing wisdom and frivolous arts respectively if indeed the soul were simply a mixture?

Isidore suggests that the soul has an agency over the body for which Galen does not account and is puzzled that Galen cites in his own defense the changes that happen every day between soul and body. Isidore observes how individuals often reverse former habits, since “many licentious men take wing and fly up to moderation. And many men fly down to lasciviousness. For the mixture would not change.”<sup>111</sup> Why, contends Isidore, if the soul were a mixture or order would it change as in the examples of many men who were licentious in their

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<sup>108</sup> ψυχὴ τε μένει, Αἰδόσθε βεβήκει ; ἢ ῥά τί ἐστι καὶ εἰν Αἴδαο δόμοισιν. In a manner not unlike Galen’s invocation of brief testimony from Homer and Theognis in the *QAM* at 778, Isidore selects in this passage quotations from Homer and Euripides.

<sup>109</sup> εὖ σοι γένοιτο καὶ ἐν αἴδος δόμοις ;

<sup>110</sup> εἰς ἀναρμοστίαν μεταπίπτει, καὶ ἄμουσον καὶ ἀπηχὲς ἀποτελεῖ μέλος ;

<sup>111</sup> πολλοὶ μὲν γὰρ ἀσελγεῖς εἰς σωφροσύνην ἀνέπτησαν • πολλοὶ δὲ σώφρονες εἰς λαγνεῖαν καταπεπτώκασιν • οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἡ κρᾶσις μετέπεσε.

youth but return to decorum at the prime of life? Isidore reasons “the mixture would not alter itself thus but would bring to successful issue its resolve.”<sup>112</sup>

With concern for the length of his letter, Isidore transitions to what he considers to be his strongest refutation of Galen. At this point Isidore provides a quotation of Galen almost identical to the passage quoted above at *QAM* 775: “If the soul is immortal as Plato wished, why is it separated from the body when the brain grows excessively hot or cold or dry or wet?”<sup>113</sup> Isidore then leaves this statement and proceeds to attack the deductive methods of Galen’s inquiry, citing how on the basis of the pulse Galen proclaims to some people that they will die and to others that they will live, but he makes a mistake because some of these individuals come back to life and some die. Declaring his hostility to empirical experimentation and endorsing the inductive method of Plato, Isidore asserts that by Galen’s approach “the truth escapes the art which proceeds by guesswork.”<sup>114</sup>

Harm to the body does not necessarily result in the destruction of the soul. Formidable pharmacological assaults, such as “noxious drugs administered by a sorcerer, do not make the soul go away.”<sup>115</sup> Deploying this argument in response to Galen’s assertion at *QAM* 776 that the drinking of hemlock cools the body, Isidore retorts “in this way, the soul does not always depart from the body having grown cold.”<sup>116</sup> Defending his philosophical ally, Isidore speculates that

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<sup>112</sup> οὐ τῆς κράσεως ἐν ταυτῷ μεταβηθείσεις, ἀλλὰ τῆς προαιρέσεως κατορθωσάσης.

<sup>113</sup> εἰ δ’ ἀθάνατος, φησὶν, ἡ ψυχὴ, ὡς ὁ Πλάτων βούλεται, διὰ τί χωρίζεται ψυχθέντως σφοδρῶς ἢ ὑπερθερμανθέντος ἢ ὑπερξηρανθέντος ἢ ὑπερυγρανθέντος τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου. The omega in ψυχθέντως is most likely the result of a scribal error; the cod. Vat. contains ψυχθέντος, see *PG* 78:1202n9.

<sup>114</sup> οὕτως τὴν τέχνην στοχαστικὴν οὕσαν ἀληθῆς διαφεύγει.

<sup>115</sup> ὅτι πολλῶν δηλητηρίοις φαρμάκοις καταρητηθεντων αἱ ψυχαὶ οὐκ ἀπέστησαν.

<sup>116</sup> οὕτως οὐ πάντως ψυχθέντος τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου χωρίζεται ἡ ψυχὴ.

there exists “a divine bond that binds together things that are much different from each other and an unsaid partnership of soul toward the body, and ineffable fellow-feeling (*sympatheia*) of the divine being toward the mortal instrument, as it seemed to Plato himself.”<sup>117</sup> Such a partnership operates “so that the soul will seriously take care of the body, not so that the soul will be puffed up with fleshiness, but so that it will be healthy.”<sup>118</sup> If the soul does not care for the body it shares in the bad temperament (*dyskrasia*, “ill-mixing”) of the body due to its fellow-feeling (*sympatheia*). In this way, the soul exercises its agency over the body and suffers if it shows poor regard for it. Likely alluding to Platonic examples drawn from Galen’s quotation at *QAM* 811-12 of Plato’s *Laws* 674a-b, Isidore alleges that “the bad temperament of the body (*dyskrasia*) and drunkenness transmit the misfortune to the soul, just like a helmsman in heavy sea does not show off his own knowledge and is inundated.”<sup>119</sup> In this way, Isidore argues that the soul is not inextricably bound to matter. If the soul is the proper mixture of the body, one cannot account for the failures that occur between the body and the psyche. Isidore is careful to acknowledge, however, that these demonstrations do indicate that the soul’s capacities are hindered by the body, “since neither the best musician having a muse-less lyre, or when he has fallen into the sea, will perform a harmonious song.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> ὅτι θεῖός ἐστι δεσμὸς συνδέων τὰ πολὺ ἀλλήλων διαφέροντα, καὶ κοινωνία ἄρρητος ἀσωμάτου ψυχῆς πρὸς σῶμα, καὶ συμπάθεια ἄλεκτος ἀθανάτου οὐσίας πρὸς θνητὸν ὄργανον ὡς καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ Πλάτῳ δοκεῖ.

<sup>118</sup> ἴν’ ἡ ψυχὴ περὶ πολλοῦ ποιῆσθαι τὸ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τοῦ σώματος, οὐχ ὥστε πολυσαρκία ἐξογκοῦσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὥστε ὑγιαίνειν.

<sup>119</sup> ἢ δὲ, καθάπερ κυβερνήτης ἐν πολλῷ κλύδωνι, ταραττέται, καὶ τὴν οἰκείαν ἐπιστήμην οὐκ ἐπιδείκνυται βυθισθεῖσα. In particular, the discussion of drunkenness and the image of the helmsman (κυβερνήτης) steering a ship likely corresponds to Galen’s use at *QAM* 811-12 of these Platonic examples from *Laws* 674a-b.

<sup>120</sup> ἐπειδὴ μήτε μουσικὸς ἄριστος, ἄμουσον λύρον ἔχων, ἢ εἰς πέλαγος ἐμπεσὼν ἐναρμόνιαν ἀποτελέσει μέλος.

In conclusion, Isidore authorizes his arguments via the vote of the Creator (*Demiourgos*), whose words in Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4 place their seal on the soul's immortality: "don't have fear before those who are killing the body but do not have the power to kill the soul."<sup>121</sup> Underscoring again a concern about the interconnection between the soul's immortality and one's lifestyle, Isidore exhorts his friend, "as the soul is immortal, let us live and act accordingly."<sup>122</sup>

This epistolary harangue offers an instructive register of the fierce grip of the Platonic worldview on Isidore and like-minded Early Christian contemporaries. Isidore was not only offended by the idea that Galen's definition of the soul as mortal undermined his *politeia*, specifically his monastic lifestyle, but also in part because he preferred the idealism of the Platonic model. In his criticism of Galen's empirical method, Isidore reveals a discomfort and perceived threat—likely shared by many of his contemporaries—with observation and experimentation as paths to knowledge. For Isidore, one of the problems with empiricism was that it appeared like guesswork; observable data offered a bewildering complexity of results that seemed inconsistent and thus untrustworthy. This letter also registers the emotional quality of Isidore's response to Galen. Markers, such as the flow of his epistolary speech punctuated by curt imperatives and the patronizing use of the superlative *beltistos* (my good sir), articulate Isidore's cognitive dissonance in rejecting the definitions offered by the premier ancient medical expert in Late Antiquity and beyond.<sup>123</sup> Competence in medical theory contributed to epistolary currency.

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<sup>121</sup> μὴ φοβηθῆτε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτεινόντων τὸ σῶμα, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν μὴ δυναμένων ἀποκτεῖναι.

<sup>122</sup> ὡς ἀθανάτου τοιγαροῦν οὔσης τῆς ψυχῆς, οὕτω καὶ διαγώμεθα καὶ διαπραττώμεθα.

<sup>123</sup> On Galenism and its dominating role in medical theory in Late Antiquity, see Vivian Nutton, *Ancient*

## Professionals: *Architectones, Iatroi, Iatrosophistai*

In the final section of this chapter I will address the social dynamics of the epistolary friendships among sophists with other lettered provincials specializing in scientific and technical fields, such as architects, doctors, and professors of medicine. Among the professionals in the rolodex of Aeneas, Isidore, and Procopius, there were an architect (*architectōn*) named Julian, six doctors (*iatroi*), and one professor of medicine (iatrosophist). This section will focus on what can be known about the training, social location, and professions of these literati engaged in technical and medical fields, starting with Julian, addressee of Aeneas *Letter 25*, who was titled “architect.”

Arguably, the expertise of the architect in Late Antiquity requires further scholarly clarification, and thorough analysis of the uses of the terms *architectōn* and *mēchanikos* in surviving texts from various periods of antiquity remains a topic for future inquiry. Online databases now offer unprecedented opportunities to identify and scrutinize textual occurrences in extant sources. Examination of the usages of these terms and their declensions in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, for example, yields a copious spectrum of sources indicating a range of meanings prior to the sixth century. Authors of scientific, medical, and engineering texts employ *architectōn*, including fairly well-studied figures such as Galen, Heron, Philo, as well as more obscure writers such as Athenaeus *mēchanicus* (1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C., not to be confused the author of the *Deipnosophistae*), Geminus (1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D.), and Oribasius (c. A.D. 320-400). Non-technical authors also employ the term in various ways.<sup>124</sup> Both *mēchanikos* and *architectōn* drop from

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*Medicine* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 292-309.

<sup>124</sup> In brief sketch, sources range across the span of Greco-Roman antiquity from Church Fathers, such as Eusebius, Athanasius, and the Cappadocian Fathers (in various genres including scriptural commentary, paschal letters, and orations), Classical authors such as Pausanias, Diodorus Siculus, Herodotus, Aristotle and Plato, as well



extant sources dating to the sixth century onwards in Byzantium, although *architecton* was still employed as a term for God.<sup>125</sup>

As Jones wrote nearly fifty years ago, architects, like surveyors (*geōmetrai*) and engineers (*mēchanikoi*), were professionals belonging to the higher strata of Late Roman society, though architects appear to have the lowest rank, to judge from the teaching rates set in Diocletian tax edict. Architects offering instruction could charge only 100 denarii per month per pupil, relatively little more than the 75 denarii fee exacted by teachers of mathematics and shorthand. By contrast, surveyors could demand the same fees as grammarians: 200 denarii. Constantine ostensibly laments a shortage of architects for his needs and provided incentives for young men to join the profession by offering immunity to their parents and scholarships to students. Prospective pupils were expected to have already attained a liberal arts education.<sup>126</sup> As Jones points out, the high social standing enjoyed by architects, engineers, and surveyors was rooted in the fact that their professional expertise could only be attained by way of a literary training.<sup>127</sup> In this way, the overwhelming social capital of linguistic skill authorized these technical mathematical fields.

Over half a century ago, Glanville Downey established the prevailing scholarly distinction between these terms, arguing that *mēchanikos* designated a fully-trained “architect” and that the *architektōn* was a “master builder.”<sup>128</sup> In this view, the *mēchanikos* possessed

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as Late Antique figures such as Libanius, Julian the Apostate, Procopius of Caesarea, Procopius of Gaza.

<sup>125</sup> ODB 1:157.

<sup>126</sup> Cod.Theod. 13.14.1. 334. Jones 2:1013-14 and 1013n62.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 1014.

<sup>128</sup> Glanville Downey, “Byzantine architects: their training and methods,” *Byzantion* 18 (1948): 99-118.

superior knowledge and higher standing. Downey’s argument pivoted around several statements the geometer Pappus of Alexandria made in Book 8 of his *Synagogē* ca. A.D. 325 concerning the science of mechanics. Pappus devotes his 8<sup>th</sup> book to the topic of mechanics, writing:

The *mēchanikoi* around Hero say of the science of mechanics that it is one part logical and one part handiwork, and that the logical part consists of geometry, mathematics, astronomy, and accounts of nature, while the handiwork part consists of metallurgy, building, construction, carpentry, and painting, and in all of these the practice of handwork.

He who has been involved in the aforesaid sciences since he was a child and has acquired a capacity in the aforesaid skills, and who has a nature inclined toward these, they say will be a most capable contriver of mechanical devices and architect. Since it is not possible to master the study of such sciences and to have learned at the same time the aforesaid skills, they declare to the one wishing to work with mechanical devices to use his innate skills adeptly in each particular case.<sup>129</sup>

On the basis of this passage, Downey contends that a *mēchanikos* would have been a man who had mastered the entire *mēchanikē theōria*, thus earning the right to be called a *mēchanikos*. As *mēchnanikos*, this individual would have been “qualified to perform all the functions, in design, planning and construction, which we consider to be the competence of a fully-trained architect.”<sup>130</sup> If an individual could not master the complete curriculum he would be called *architectōn* (master-builder) or a *mēchanikōn ergōn heuretēs*, depending on which part of the

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<sup>129</sup> My translation. The text: οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἡρώνα μηχανικοὶ λέγουσιν • καὶ τὸ μὲν λογικὸν συνεστάναι μέρος ἕκ τε γεωμετρίας καὶ ἀριθμητικῆς καὶ ἀστρονομίας καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν λόγων, τὸ δὲ χειρουργικὸν ἕκ τε χαλκευτικῆς καὶ οἰκοδομικῆς καὶ τεκτονικῆς καὶ ζωγραφικῆς καὶ τῆς ἐν τούτοις κατὰ χεῖρα ἀσκήσεως • τὸν μὲν οὖν ἐν ταῖς προειρημέναις ἐπιστήμαις ἐκ παιδὸς γενόμενον κὰν ταῖς προειρημέναις τέχναις ἔξιν εἰληφότα πρὸς δὲ τούτοις φύσιν εὐκίνητον ἔχοντα, κράτιστον ἔσεσθαι μηχανικῶν ἔργων εὐρετὴν καὶ ἀρχιτέκτονα φασιν. μὴ δυνατοῦ δ’ ὄντος τὸν αὐτὸν μαθημάτων τε τοσούτων περγενέσθαι καὶ μαθεῖν ἅμα τὰς προειρημένας τέχνας παραγγέλλουσι τῷ τὰ μηχανικὰ ἔργα μεταχειρίζεσθαι βουλομένῳ χρῆσθαι ταῖς οἰκείαις τέχναις ὑποχειρίοις ἐν ταῖς παρ’ ἕκαστα χρείαις. See Friedrich Hultsch, ed., *Pappi Alexandrini Collectionis quae supersunt*, 3 (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1965), 1022-24.

<sup>130</sup> Downey, 109.

course he had mastered. A *mēchanikos* was someone who had mastered both realms of the curriculum and more, according to Downey. Concurring with Downey's delineation, Judith McKenzie recently explained this passage as signifying that "*mēchanikoi* were skilled in both the theoretical and practical aspects of their discipline and could act as architects. A *mēchanikos* was the equivalent of a modern structural engineer, while also being an architect."<sup>131</sup>

Pappus, however, does not state explicitly from the outset that these were formal titles typically applied to individuals specializing in the elements of the mechanical training he describes. He says that someone who masters both realms of study will be, literally, a most capable inventor of devices and architect (*architectōn*).<sup>132</sup> Nowhere does he state that such a person would be titled *mēchanikos*. In fact, he calls the individual mastering both spheres of study an inventor and an architect, and he does not specify in the passage that a person only able to master the handiwork component of study is called an architect. Pappus does not provide here an explicit systematic distinction between *mēchanikos* and *architektōn*. Downey's reading draws from the text answers to modern scholarly questions and thereby may force meanings on Pappus' text, taking it as a systematic definition when there is no clear reason to believe that Pappus intended to provide a systematic definition, or, at minimum, that he unwittingly implied one. In fact, Downey's interpretation is an argument that Pappus implies a distinction between two terms that Pappus himself never explicitly uses. Pappus' text does not offer clear data that a systematic distinction from the point of view of the educational curricula existed in Late Antiquity between *architectones* and *mēchanikoi*.

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<sup>131</sup>Judith McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt: c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 326.

<sup>132</sup>Downey notes that Hultsch, in his study of this thought that *kai architektōna* was a later addition by a scribe or editor. He claims that Hultsch's assertion about the addition has no basis. See Glanville Downey, "Pappus of Alexandria on Architectural Studies," *Isis* 38 (1948): 200.

The case of Julian the architect in Aeneas *Letter 25* suggests that Downey's distinction between *architects* and *mēchanikoi* may be misleading. As Catherine Saliou recently pointed out, the fact that Aeneas' friend Julian the architect designed the hydraulic machine for Aeneas' property—according to *Letter 25*, Julian is the inventor of the device: ἦν σὺ μὲν ἐξεῦρες—signifies that architects in Late Antiquity could have the mechanical training scholars ascribe to *mēchanikoi*.<sup>133</sup>

The details of Aeneas' *Letter 25* to the architect Julian also indicate something of the intellectual repertoire of the Late Ancient architect. The education of Julian as an *architektōn* is suggested by the Classical references with which Aeneas flanks his request in *Letter 25*. At the letter's opening, he boasts that he now has the garden of Alcinous, king of the island of the Phaiacians.<sup>134</sup> Such a reference, however, could also be aimed at the lateral addressees. As he closes the letter, in order to add force to his request and also subtly to complement Julian's water-lifting device as a form of artwork, Aeneas asserts that if the machine is not mended, it will be as though a painter, wishing to depict the beauty of Helen, has forgotten to paint her head. Aeneas views his waterwheel as a work of art analogous to a painting of Helen.

Aeneas expects Julian to understand his Homeric reference at the beginning of the letter; Aeneas' reference to the description of Alcinous' garden, the king of the Phaiacians, is particularly appropriate because this garden is described in *Odyssey* 7.129-131 as containing two springs, one whose water flows throughout the garden, and another from which local residents draw water for use. Thus, with the benefit of his water-lifting device, Aeneas can hydrate his

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<sup>133</sup> Catherine Saliou, *Le Traité d'urbanisme de Julien d'Ascalon: Droit et architecture en Palestine au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: De Boccard, 1996), 85.

<sup>134</sup> Geiger, 45, has also suggested this, and comments that this "modicum of classical upbringing" would indicate Julian's likely origins from a city such as Ascalon.

garden as Alcinous' garden was hydrated by its ever-gushing spring. Aeneas anticipates that Julian has had the grammatical training requisite to recognize this Homeric reference that Aeneas draws from memory and to understand fully Aeneas' comparison.<sup>135</sup>

Joseph Geiger has recently suggested that Julian the architect in Aeneas *Letter 25* was in fact Julian of Ascalon,<sup>136</sup> an architect from the coastal city of Ascalon in Palestine whose life corresponded roughly with Justinian (late fifth to mid sixth century).<sup>137</sup> Geiger notes that the relative proximity of Ascalon to Gaza—around 22 km.—would be a manageable distance for Julian to travel to visit Aeneas to correct the waterwheel's defect.<sup>138</sup>

Even if Julian the architect in Aeneas' letter is not the same as Julian of Ascalon, the design rules attributed to Julian of Ascalon, who is also titled "architect," may provide some sense of the civil functions and educational culture of Late Antique architects. The architect in the Later Empire probably had some degree of civil authority in the city. Though the Classical practice of electing salaried city architects who supervised public works virtually disappeared by the Roman period, the technical assistance of architects could benefit the tasks managed by diverse city magistrates and judges.<sup>139</sup> Augustine (*Confessions* 6.9.5) relates how an architect at

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<sup>135</sup> Geiger, 42, also notes that "some education of the correspondent can also be inferred from the letter of Aeneas with its classical allusions."

<sup>136</sup>This had also been suggested earlier by Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz-Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods* (Jerusalem: Hotsaat Yad Yitshak Ben-Tsevi, 1984), 182 (Hebrew), and N. van der Wal and J.H.A. Lokin, *Historiae iuris Graeco-romani delineatio: les sources du droit byzantine de 300 à 1453* (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1985), 50. Van der Wal and Lokin date the letter between September 531 and December 533. Geiger reasons that though Aeneas' dates are far from certain, if Aeneas was born ca. 450 (see Legier, 353), Julian's date of birth could range between c. 420 and 480. See Geiger, 41.

<sup>137</sup> Besim S. Hakim, "Julian of Ascalon's Treatise of Construction and Design Rules from Sixth-Century Palestine," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (2001): 4.

<sup>138</sup> Geiger, 41.

<sup>139</sup> Saliou, 86. Egypt constitutes an exception; cf. eadem 86n35.

Carthage who “was the highest in charge of public buildings” was asked to resolve an informal investigation concerning a young thief who had cut into a balustrade over a silversmith’s shop in the forum with an axe.<sup>140</sup> In the sixth century data emerges for the existence of a post of architect at Rome in charge of public buildings and subordinated to the prefect of the city.<sup>141</sup> This burden, created by Theodoric, appears to be a continuation of the *curatores operum publicorum*.<sup>142</sup>

Independently of their expertise, architects in the Later Empire could assume high civic functions. An architect served as governor in Cilicia, and an architect and an architect-mēchanikos held the title of *comes*.<sup>143</sup> Theoretically, these men must have seen their positions as corresponding to their professional training.<sup>144</sup> Architects in our sources hail from families who had access to professional training in medicine and law, that is, from the very class of individuals who might fill civil posts at the local and even the imperial level. Anthemios of Tralles, builder of the Hagia Sophia, came from a family of doctors, and his brother was a renowned lawyer. In the second or third century A.D., there is testimony of an architect whose brother was a lawyer.<sup>145</sup> Julian the architect likely came from a notable family and was himself capable of eventually assuming a post of judgment.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid. Augustine describes the architect as “architectus cuius maxima erat cura publicorum fabricarum.”

<sup>141</sup> Cod. Just. 8.10.4.2; cf Saliou 86n38.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., nn47, 48, and 49.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., nn52, 53.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

Julian's compilation of design rules bears a regulatory value and appears to be related to a burgeoning literary genre of juridical collections known especially in Egypt, but also in Syria by the *Liber syro-romanus*, and in Palestine by the rabbinic literature.<sup>147</sup> Julian's compilation also bears the imprint of scientific literature. To structure his urban construction and design rules, Julian chose the rubric of the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth—as organizational themes. He writes, “there are four elements, fire, air, water, and earth, and from these disputes arise among human beings; wherefore, I consider it necessary to arrange well those things in each case and what most quickly occurs from these things, establishing well the causes and legal solutions or damages.”<sup>148</sup> Julian frames the first and second categories of cases in his design rules with the headings “fire” and “air,” respectively, but the cases pertaining to water and earth lack corresponding headings. The titles may have been excised or lost in the process of textual transmission.<sup>149</sup>

The significance Julian attaches to climatic conditions in his compilation is a heritage of a Classical and Hellenistic tradition of reflection on city planning associated in antiquity with the medical tradition integrated in the Hippocratic corpus and entitled “air, water, places.” Julian thus inserts himself into the continuation of this tradition.<sup>150</sup> If wind plays an important role in Julian, as it does in the Vitruvian discussion of urban planning, the role is applied differently in the two authors. For Vitruvius, the orientation of different elements of urban space should be

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>148</sup> τεσσάρων ὄντων τῶν στοιχείων, πυρός, ἀέρος, ὕδατος, γῆς, ἀπὸ δὴ τούτων ἀμφισβητήσεις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγγίνονται· ὅθεν ἀναγκαῖον ἠγησάμεθα τὰ κατὰ μέρος ἐκ τούτων καὶ ταχυμερέστερον συμβαίνοντα εἶ τάξαι, εἶ θέντες καὶ τὰς αἰτίας καὶ τὰς δικαίας διαλύσεις ἢ βλάβας. Greek text from Saliou, 33.

<sup>149</sup> Hakim, 8.

<sup>150</sup> Saliou., 90-91.

defined according to the specific characteristics of climate. For Julian, it is in the layout of shops as part of a pre-existing urban space that one must take the wind into account. In his application of the four elements, Julian's approach most closely approximates that of Athenaeus of Attalia, quoted in Oribasius.<sup>151</sup>

This invocation of the four elements may also suggest Julian's exposure to a modicum of Classical philosophy, perhaps exposure to Empedocles who assumed the existence of four eternal roots.<sup>152</sup> Besim Hakim recently suggested that Julian's selection of the four elements as a structuring device for his treatise implies Julian's awareness of the philosophy of Empedocles. According to Empedocles, the four "roots" or elements moved under the influence of the cosmic organizing principles of Love and Strife (*Eros* and *Chaos*). Though Julian does not refer directly to Empedocles' theory of Love and Strife, Hakim contends that a major concern in the treatise relates to change in the city which elicits these opposing principles.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, it is not altogether clear what the proficiencies of the ancient architect were. Architects in the Late Roman city may have possessed some level of civil authority, and they could assume high civic roles. These professionals usually hailed from families who had access to schooling in law and medicine. They came from the class of men who might serve civil posts at both the local and imperial level. Aeneas' Julian was capable of designing a waterwheel, and apparently lived close enough to Gaza to travel and repair the device. Aeneas flanks his service request with Classical references he anticipates that Julian and his lateral audience would enjoy.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 91 and 91n71. On Oribasius, see *Collectionum medicarum reliquiae* 9.5, J. Raeder II, ed., 2 (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964) 8-9.

<sup>152</sup> Hakim, 8.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



The Julian who built Aeneas' waterwheel may have been Julian of Ascalon, author of a treatise on urban planning whose structure signals Julian's familiarity with atomistic traditions and whose language may indicate also his knowledge of philosophical traditions stemming from Empedocles.

Six individuals bearing the title of *iatros*, or medical doctor, appear in the letters of Isidore. These are Domitius (391), Dorotheus (1475=PG 78:5.191), Hierax (668), Nilammon (871), Oribasius (437) and Prosechius (1791=PG 78:4.125, 1792=PG 78:5.412.).<sup>154</sup> As Évieux has observed, there is no clear indication that these men were all doctors from Pelusium. No recipient bears the title of *iatrosophist* or *archiatros*; thus, these men are not professors of medicine such as those found in Alexandria at this time (a topic to be addressed below). They are probably public doctors, who, like sophists and grammarians, were elected by the Pelusian city council or *boulē*.<sup>155</sup> Also remarkable is the fact that among these six doctors who corresponded with Isidore, two are also titled "deacon" (Dorotheus and Nilammon), and one, is also called a *scholasticus*. Évieux notes that the accumulation of multiple offices was not rare in cities of middling importance.<sup>156</sup> This reasoning strengthens the hypothesis that Prosechius, in particular, who is also titled *scholasticus*, practiced at Pelusium.<sup>157</sup> As was discussed above, two of the letters addressed to *iatroi* explore the relationship between matter and soul, one drawing upon examples from physics and the other critiquing Galen's views of the soul in *The Faculties of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body (QAM)*.

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<sup>154</sup> Évieux, *Isidore*, 147.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, and cf. 140n34.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

As Jones noted, except for rhetors, grammarians, and lawyers, little is known of the training of the professional classes.<sup>158</sup> Doctors who held official appointments received the immunities and privileges enjoyed by professors and seem to have held roughly the same social standing. The highest rungs of the profession were the court physicians (*archiatri sacri palatii*) who often received administrative posts as rewards. The city of Rome had posts for public doctors representing each of its regions save two. Public doctors maintained at the city's expense ranked below the Roman posts. Compensation for public doctors likely varied in accord with the relative wealth of individual cities. These physicians also exacted fees from clients. There must also have been private practitioners in addition to these public doctors, yet little is known of them.<sup>159</sup>

The extant data for the life of the public physician—papyri and hagiography—tend to emphasize respectively the administrative activities as well as the high fees and ineffective remedies of these professionals. Such a picture is highly misleading. Some sought training at Alexandria, the established hub of medical studies in antiquity from the Hellenistic world until the Arab conquest, yet most doctors probably were trained from the public doctor of their native cities or provincial capitals. The *Theodosian Code* expects that public doctors in cities had students and that teaching was one of their official obligations.<sup>160</sup>

The list of prominent *iatroi* who hobnobbed with provincial literati and even emperors in the fourth century included Oribasius, whom Eunapius (*Lives of the Sophists* 476) claims

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<sup>158</sup> *LRE*, 2:1012.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* On medicine in Late Antiquity, see Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, and John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

<sup>160</sup> *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.3.333; cf. *LRE*, 2:1013, 1406n.61.

cooperated with a certain Libyan Euhemerus to help Julian overthrow Constantius.<sup>161</sup> A good number of other fourth century *iatroi* in our sources were pagan, including Eustochius, Plotinus' protégé and the only person present at his teacher's death. Heraclides, a doctor and epic poet, and Olympius, who excelled in medicine, grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy, feature in the correspondence circle of Libanius.<sup>162</sup> By the late fourth century, two doctors who rose to distinction in imperial offices, Vindicianus and Marcellus of Bordeaux, appear as rather different medical professionals than the types who supped with sophists in Eunapius' portrait. Serving as proconsul of Africa from 379-82, Vindicianus steered Augustine away from astrology. Marcellus was appointed *magister officiorum* of the East (394-95) under Theodosius I. Though high-profile physicians were increasingly Christian by the fifth century onward, a number of these were converts.<sup>163</sup> There were notable exceptions. In the mid-fifth century a certain Jacobus, called *Psychristus*, a pagan physician with apparently no bedside manner, treated Emperor Leo and was appointed *comes* and *archiatros* and honored by statues commissioned by senators.<sup>164</sup>

Like the *diakonoi-iatroi* among Isidore's correspondents, doctors could continue to practice medicine post ordination.<sup>165</sup> The fourth-century bishop Theodotus of Laodicea was

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<sup>161</sup> Barry Baldwin, "Beyond the House Call: Doctors in Early Byzantine History and Politics," *DOP* 38 (1984): 17. Of the letters of Isidore, only MSS P and μ indicate that the correspondent Oribasius is an *iatros*. Évieux wonders if this title was original to the corpus or if it were added later, perhaps to partake of the celebrity of the famous doctor Oribasius; cf. *Isidore*, 147. In *Letter 437* addressed to Oribasius, Isidore views his interlocutor as an experienced doctor and sage, but urges him to acquire the health of the soul that he lacks. This depiction suggests that the Oribasius' of Isidore's acquaintance was pagan (see *Isidore*, 147-48).

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Nutton, 303 and 303n67.

renowned for his skill in medicine applied to both soul and body. In the fourth century, Gerontius, titled both deacon and doctor, sought refuge in Constantinople after a conflict with his bishop Ambrose in Milan. He was subsequently ordained bishop of Constantinople, and when Ambrose plotted by letter with the Constantinopolitan bishop to depose Gerontius, the Nicomedians resisted, noting his generosity as a healer among them.<sup>166</sup> In the late third and early fourth century numerous individuals with medical training came to be regarded as saints.<sup>167</sup> A fifth century grave marker of Dionysius, a doctor taken captive by the Goths in the late fifth century, reports that he was a priest and that his treatment of his captors was a demonstration of his piety.<sup>168</sup>

Another type of medical professional who features in the correspondence circles of Aeneas and Procopius is the iatrosophist. The iatrosophist was a professor of medicine who seems to have both lectured in the *auditorium*, offering solid grounding in the thought systems of Hippocrates and Galen to students, and conducted consultations with patients.<sup>169</sup> As a class, these medical experts survived through the seventh century.<sup>170</sup> The term *iatrosophistēs* appears in extant sources, however, rather rarely.<sup>171</sup> Surviving sources confirm the ancient perception of Alexandria as the epicenter of medical studies and medical sophists in antiquity from the third century B.C. until the Arab conquest almost a millennium later. The commentaries or lecture

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., and 303n70; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.6.

<sup>167</sup> Nutton, 303 and 303nn71-72. Nutton mentions the examples of Zenobius (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 8.13), St. Julian of Emesa, Saint Pantaleon, and Saints Cosmas and Damian.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> John Duffy, "Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries: Aspects of Teaching and Practice," *DOP* 38 (1984): 23.

<sup>170</sup> *ODB* 2:970.

<sup>171</sup> Elzbieta Szabat, "Teachers in the Eastern Roman Empire," in Derda, 198.

notes which survive from the Alexandrian classrooms of the sixth and seventh centuries constitute key testimony regarding the curricula of the iatrosophists and give us a good picture of classroom methods and pedagogy.<sup>172</sup> Arab sources such as Ḥunayn Ibn Ishâq (9<sup>th</sup> c.) and Ibn Riḍwân (11<sup>th</sup> c.) also assist with the reconstruction of the Alexandrian curriculum.<sup>173</sup> This course of study encompassed writings of Galen and Hippocrates delivered in a fixed sequence that offered introduction to key problems in the field.<sup>174</sup> Also noteworthy of this corpus is the use of didactic methods borrowed from philosophers, such as the use of *diairesis*, or repeated subdivisions of a topic as an organizing principle for exhausting a particular subject.<sup>175</sup> Students likely entered this stage with training in logic, and teachers themselves must have received a solid grounding in philosophy.<sup>176</sup>

Despite the carping on iatrosophists as “good in word but not in deed” that survives in our sources, other evidence indicates that iatrosophists were also typically fluent with common techniques of medical treatment and the prescription of drugs. Sophronius of Jerusalem’s early

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<sup>172</sup> Duffy, 21-22.

<sup>173</sup> Szabat, 202.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Duffy, 22.

<sup>176</sup> Szabat, 202 and 202n159. In addition to the case of Gessius, the medical sophist Asclepius frequented the lectures of Ammonius at Alexandria. Szabat (199n144) also discusses the argument of W. Wolska-Collins that Stephanus of Alexandria and Stephanus of Athens are one and the same person (cf. “Stephanos d’Athènes et Stephanos d’Alexandrie,” *Revue des études byzantines* 47 [1989]: 5-89). The former was author of Aristotelian commentaries and works encompassing arithmetic, astronomy, astrology, and alchemy; the second (of Athens) was a professor of medicine and author of medical commentaries who is always titled philosopher. Szabat (203n163) also suggests that two Agapioi distinguished in the *Suda* and the *Life of Isidore*, the first an Athenian philosopher, the second an exegete of medical sciences and Alexandrian native who founded a school at Constantinople, may also be one and the same based upon evidence in John Lydos and other passages of the *Life of Isidore*. John Lydos states that he studied Plato and Aristotle under Agapios at Constantinople and also claims that Agapios was the last student of Proclus at Athens (*De magistratibus reipublicae Romanae* 3.26). Damascius writes that Agapios was arrested “with the other philosophers” under the persecutions of Zeno (ed. Athanassiadi 126 C, fr. 328), and that he was renowned at Alexandria and Constantinople for his learning, broad knowledge, and capabilities in rhetoric and grammar (fr. 331, ed. Athanassiadi 127 A). See the translation of Polynia Athanassiadi, *Damascius: The Philosophical History text with translation and notes* (Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999).

seventh century depiction of iatrosophists in his *Miracles of Cyrus and John* confirms the reputation of Alexandrian medical sophists as the leading medical experts in the Late Roman world who were sought automatically by individuals in need. Miracle no. 60 relates that a certain Theodore suffering from a fever was visited by iatrosophists accompanied by young students who presumably learned first-hand from their teacher at the patient's bedside.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Miracle no. 33 tells the story of a woman who dreamt of a visitation by Saints Cyrus and John dressed as medical personnel and said to be teacher and student. Such data suggest that an iatrosophist was a healer who applied to patients the medical training and theoretical framework about which he lectured in the auditorium.<sup>178</sup> Szabat, on the other hand, asserts that medical sophists were more likely theorists and exegetes of medical texts rather than true experts in medical practice, and when our surviving sources, such as Damascius' testimony of Gessius (fr. 335, ed. Athanassiadi, 128), praise simultaneous skill in theory and practice it was remarkable for its rarity.<sup>179</sup>

The academic study of medicine in the ancient world was interwoven with the related fields of philosophy and rhetoric. The inclusion of doctors, for example, alongside sophists at the banquet of Athenaeus, and Eunapius' discussion of doctors in his biography of philosophers and sophists implies the close concatenation of medical professionals alongside sophists and philosophers as occupying contiguous fields.<sup>180</sup> Eunapius reports that the fourth century iatrosophist Magnus of Nisibis was praised more highly for his rhetorical abilities than his

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<sup>177</sup> Duffy, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>179</sup> Szabat, 200 and 200n146.

<sup>180</sup> RDG, 480n494. See also 449n94.

practical skill as a doctor.<sup>181</sup> According to Eunapius, the medical sophist Ionicus excelled in a dazzling array of fields: anatomy, pharmacy, amputation, dissection, post-operative bandaging as well as philosophy, oratory, poetry, and divination.<sup>182</sup> A sophist of medicine did not actually teach rhetoric, but may have delivered lectures in a rhetorical style. The methods these teachers used for textual exegesis included techniques drawn from rhetoric and philosophy. The writings of Alexandrian medical professors that survive from the sixth to seventh centuries—those of Palladius, Stephanus of Athens, and Johannes of Alexandria—employ exegetical devices similar to philosophical commentaries, such as specific stages of argumentation, introductions, and terminology, and subdivisions and organization.<sup>183</sup> The fuzzy boundaries and intermixing between the disciplines of philosophy, rhetoric, and medicine at Alexandria likely reflect the polymathy idealized by its intellectual networks.<sup>184</sup>

In the context of debates about the locus of healing in an increasingly Christian-dominated society, iatrosophists in the fifth-seventh centuries were subject to accusations of paganism in addition to the traditional *topos* of incompetence. By the fourth century, the medical skill of iatrosophists is associated with magic by Epiphanius of Salamis in *Panarion* 64.67.5.<sup>185</sup> In his *Miracles* of Cyrus and John, Sophronius dedicates a whole chapter to criticizing Gessius and his reputation.<sup>186</sup> Cults of healing martyrs such as Cyrus and John or

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<sup>181</sup> M. Platira-Valkanou, “A.P. II.281: A Satirical Epitaph on Magnus of Nisibis,” *L’antiquité classique* 72 (2003): 188.

<sup>182</sup> *The Lives of the Sophists*, 499.2-3; Baldwin, 16.

<sup>183</sup> Szabat, 201 and 201nn150-52.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>185</sup> Trombley, 970; see also Frank Williams, trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1987-94).

<sup>186</sup> Duffy, 24. See chapter 1 above concerning the traditions of Gessius’ paganism and “conversion” to

Artemius vied for patients with the iatrosophists by issuing miracle accounts which, at their worst, depict their iatrosophist competitors as negligent, more likely to worsen the patient's condition than to improve it, and mainly interested in fees.<sup>187</sup> Duffy, however, attributes this hostility to the traditional pose of the genre. Such artificial vitriol was a means of emphasizing the common piety of Christ as the true healer. Virtually all of the cases in the miracle stories involve incurable conditions only curable through the intercessory power of the saints. Sophronius and his cohorts probably did not advocate the universal boycott of physicians and did, in fact, expect that the sick would seek medical help.

The most fully-documented iatrosophist in our extant texts is Gessius, who features in the correspondence circles of Aeneas (*Letters* 19 and 20) and Procopius of Gaza (*Letters* 16, 102, 122, 125, and 164). These letters provide evidence for the epistolary perpetuation of friendships between these intellectuals educated at Alexandria, and for the continuing professional networking between these literati, as well as indications of the profession of iatrosophistry. According to the information Damascius provides about Gessius in his *Life of Isidore* (A.D. 520s), Gessius, native to Petra, studied philosophy at Alexandria with Ammonius and medicine with the Jewish physician Domnus (ed. Athanassiadi 128).<sup>188</sup> Damascius reports that Gessius deposed Domnus at the school, took it over, and gained great recognition for his medical skill in pedagogy and in practice. Gessius also acquired great wealth due to his medical success and rare honors from the Roman state itself.<sup>189</sup>

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Christianity.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., and Duffy, 24.

<sup>188</sup> E.J. Watts, "The Enduring Legacy of the Iatrosophist Gessius," *Journal of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49 (2009): 113 and 118.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.



Within a larger narrative delineating key figures in pagan intellectual circles of the late fifth and early sixth century, the paradigm of Gessius in the *Life of Isidore* explores the concept that philosophical learning was not always coterminous with philosophical behavior.<sup>190</sup> In particular, Damascius commends Gessius' philosophical behavior in the midst of an imperial campaign in 488 investigating the religious behavior of pagan teachers in Alexandrian schools. Damascius reports how many accomplished and revered philosophers lost their composure in the face of imperial questioning. Gessius, however, remained true to his convictions in this context: endangering himself, he hid in his own home Heraiscus, a philosopher wanted by Emperor Zeno. When Heraiscus grew sick and died under Gessius' care, Gessius executed all the customary rites of a proper burial. In Damascius' account, Gessius becomes "a hero of philosophical resistance."<sup>191</sup>

In *The Life of Isidore*, Gessius' example emerges in clear contraposition to the likes of his former philosophy instructor Ammonius and the philosopher Horapollon, who both reneged on their own values and cooperated with Christian officials during Zeno's persecution. In acts that Damascius judges unphilosophical and unseemly, Ammonius cut a deal with the Alexandrian patriarch, and Horapollon even agreed to convert to Christianity.<sup>192</sup>

Other evidence more or less contemporary with Gessius' lifetime also locates him within the context of philosophical intellectual communities at Alexandria. Written around the same

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 118 and 118n18. For the imperial investigation and events preceding it described in the *Life of Isidore*, frs. 106-131, see E.J. Watts, *City and School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 220-22; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 260-62; C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 326.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

time as *The Life of Isidore* (A.D. 520s), the fictional dialogue *Ammonius* by Zacharias Scholasticus showcased Gessius as an interlocutor in a debate concerning the eternity of the universe. Launching philosophical and personal arguments alike to denigrate the authority of Ammonius, Alexandria's leading proponent of eternalism, Zacharias depicts Gessius, Ammonius' student, as a presumptuous buffoon.<sup>193</sup>

Numerous links embed Procopius, Aeneas, and Gessius in inter-related intellectual circles at Alexandria. While Procopius studied rhetoric at Alexandria, Aeneas first studied philosophy at Alexandria under Hierocles, a figure with noteworthy rhetorical skill whom Damascius describes as “an adornment to the Alexandrian scholastic scene with his lofty spirit and eloquence.”<sup>194</sup> According to Damascius, Gessius' philosophical mentor Ammonius, who distinguished himself particularly in sciences such as geometry and astronomy, studied philosophy under Proclus (ed. Athanassiadi 57 B). Contending that the universe was temporally finite, a stance opposite that supported by Gessius in Zacharias' depiction in the *Ammonius*, Procopius wrote a refutation of Proclus' *De aeternitate mundi*, a treatise defending the Aristotelian view of the cosmos as eternal. Also engaged with pro-Christian philosophical polemic, a Platonic dialogue named the *Theophrastus*, in which Theophrastus becomes convinced of the immortality of the soul and its resurrection, is attributed to Aeneas. Despite any philosophical differences of opinion they may have had with Gessius, Procopius and Gessius continued to develop their friendships with this pagan philosopher and doctor from afar via letters written largely in the linguistic currency of a pagan cultural universe. The letters these

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<sup>193</sup> Watts, 120-21.

<sup>194</sup> Ed. Athanassiadi 45 A.

men wrote to Gessius testify to the lively friendships and enduring respect they shared for one another.<sup>195</sup>

Aeneas' *Letters* 19 and 20 addressed to Gessius seek medical amelioration for kidney pain and beseech Gessius' aid on the basis of friendship.<sup>196</sup> From these texts it emerges that an iatrosophist, though not a surgeon, can prescribe drug treatments. Aeneas laments in Letter 19 how "it is difficult to be fond of labor concerning speech and while preserving bodily health."<sup>197</sup> In this letter he complains he has already written a prior letter describing his condition to Gessius, who has become spectator of Aeneas' suffering,<sup>198</sup> and now wonders what he can do in the face of sharp and grievous kidney pains. To cajole his friend to respond and send a palliative drug, Aeneas repeatedly charges that Gessius' neglect amounts to a betrayal of friendship. Playing upon Gessius' training as a philosopher, Aeneas wonders whether Gessius even thinks that suffering is serious to someone who is not a philosopher.

Aeneas continues to characterize Gessius' neglect as tantamount to disloyalty to a friend in *Letter* 20. To incite Gessius' response, he opens with the example of a loyal friend Nemesius, who is admired not only for his legal knowledge but even more so for his conduct. Nemesius "knows how to hunt friends and rejoices together with those doing well, and to those who have

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<sup>195</sup> *Pace* Nutton, 305, who does not acknowledge the high regard of Procopius for Gessius and asserts that Procopius' explication of the biblical tale of the death of King Asa which places blame on the "chants and mumbo-jumbo" of his physicians bears some relation to Procopius' view of Gessius' techniques or vocation. The broader theological lesson of this tale is that Asa placed his care solely in the hands of doctors and not in the Lord (Nutton, 285). Procopius' unfavorable depiction of physicians may also invoke a common caricature. The *topos* of the incompetent and deadly doctor is widely-represented in our sources, ranging from epigrams in the Greek anthology to the fifth or sixth century Philogelos, to comments Athenaeus makes in his *Deinosophists*. See, e.g., Baldwin, 16. Additionally, Nutton's designation of Procopius as "bishop" is unsubstantiated and likely inaccurate.

<sup>196</sup> See also E.J. Watts, 115-16, for a discussion of these letters.

<sup>197</sup> ἀλλὰ γὰρ χαλεπὸν περὶ τοὺς λόγους φιλοπονεῖν καὶ τὸ σῶμα καλὸν διασώζειν.

<sup>198</sup> ὑμεῖς δὲ ὥσπερ θεαταὶ τοῦ πάθους γεγόνατε.

suffering he grieves with them in a manner that would not be expected.”<sup>199</sup> Aeneas quips, “I would have wished that you would have practiced this in addition to another philosophy.”<sup>200</sup> Aeneas bids Gessius to practice Nemesius’ concern for friends, regardless of whether they are away or present. Charging Gessius with malpractice, Aeneas writes “so long as the suffering escapes notice, and the drugs lying in front of you escape notice, the error regarding treatment is at its height.”<sup>201</sup> Aiming to elicit palliation from Gessius successfully, Aeneas heightens the urgency of his appeal by including in this letter an even more specific description of his symptoms in this letter and indicates by name the drug remedy: “a pill mixed with grass that doctors call very solemnly ‘physallis.’”<sup>202</sup>

Sophists and iatrosophists corresponded with one another about prospective students. Procopius wrote two recommendation letters on behalf of students he sent to study with Gessius. *Letter 102* contains vivacious praise for Gessius and suggests the rhetorical component of Gessius’ profession. Apparently a fair (*kalos*) Dorotheus has visited Procopius. This Dorotheus was a former student of Procopius, whom Procopius had previously introduced to Gessius by letter (*Letter 16*), while Gessius simultaneously has written Procopius introducing the same Dorotheus. Dorotheus brims with Gessius’ praises, and Procopius reports, “he carried on and on about you, that you are well-minded, that you are good, and that you have around you Asclepius in tongue and in hand, and that the harshness of the doctor’s art the graces of your tongue

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<sup>199</sup> φίλους οἶδε θηρεύειν, καὶ εὖ πράττουσι μὲν συνήδεται, πεπονθόσι δὲ οἷά περ οὐκ ἔδει συνάχθεται. Positano, 114, suggests that Nemesius may have been the letter carrier.

<sup>200</sup> βουλοίμην δὲ καὶ σὲ πρὸς τῆς ἄλλης φιλοσοφίας καὶ τοῦτο μελετᾶν.

<sup>201</sup> ἕως μὲν γὰρ ἂν τὰ πάθη λανθάνη, καὶ τὰ φάρμακα ἐν μέσῳ κείμενα λανθάνει, καὶ ἀκμάζει περὶ τὴν θεραπείαν ἢ πλάνη.

<sup>202</sup> ὁ διὰ τῆς πόας συμπεπλεγμένος κύκλος, ἦν φυσαλλίδα μάλα σεμνῶς ὀνομάζουσι τῶν ἰατρῶν οἱ παῖδες. Positano comments that *physallis* was an herbal medicine mentioned in ancient authors for the treatment of renal or bladder diseases. For a discussion of these authors, see pp. 116-17. See also *LSJ*, 1963.

console.”<sup>203</sup> Such extended laudation suggests that the identification of an iatrosophist as a “professor of medicine,” falls short. The iatrosophist provides healing with his speech and his nimble hands—the iatrosophist was an intellectual with medical training whose expertise included linguistic skill. This comment on Gessius’ rhetorical prowess seems to signify a perception of the healing quality of language and the gifts of the Muses. Such a perception is reminiscent of the tale of Telesilla of Argos who healed her own illness by obeying an oracle’s instruction that she dedicate herself to the Muses.<sup>204</sup> As Ciccolella contends, this passage may indicate that instruction in the technical ideas of medicine was expressed in a rhetorical style.<sup>205</sup>

The idea that the iatrosophist would help a prospective student with his linguistic skill is also suggested by *Letter 122*, the second recommendation letter preserved from Procopius to Gessius. Procopius requests that Gessius direct the fortune of a young man conveying the letter: “he loves speaking and urges himself toward your tongue, as it is sufficient for a solution to the things that bother him to look to you. By your teaching he is straightening out his hopes for the future.”<sup>206</sup> The role of Gessius’ speech in cultivating the student at issue implies his rhetorical prowess, particularly when such a claim is coming from Procopius!

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<sup>203</sup> καί σε πολὺν ἐπὶ στόματος ἤγεν ὡς εὖνον ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὡς γλώττη καὶ χειρὶ τὸν Ἀσκληπιὸν περικείμενον, καὶ ὅτι δὴ τὸ τῆς ἰατρικῆς αὐστηρὸν αἰ τῆς ὑμετέρας γλώττης παρεμυθήσαντο χάριτες.

<sup>204</sup> Telesilla’s devotion to poetry cured her illness; see Plutarch *Moralia* 2.245c.

<sup>205</sup> *RDG*, 479-80n494.

<sup>206</sup> λόγων ἐρᾷ καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὑμετέραν γλῶτταν ἐπείγεται, ἀρκοῦσαν ἀφορμὴν πρὸς εὐσχίμονα βίον ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀρυσόμενος, ὡς ἀρκοῦν ἐς ὑμᾶς ἰδεῖν καὶ τῶν λυπούντων ἔχειν τὴν λύσιν, τῇ παρ’ ὑμῶν διδασκαλίᾳ τὰς πρὸς τὸ μέλλον ἐλπίδας ἐπανορθούμενος.

*Letter 16* to Gessius also preserves evidence of Procopius’ admiration for the rhetorical design of Gessius’ letters. Gessius’ prose is tantamount to receiving the Muses themselves.

Procopius eulogizes Gessius’ prior letter in the classicizing language of a spiritual possession:

Having scarcely taken your letter into my hands I seemed to have received the Muses themselves, and I became possessed by pleasure and I do not know what happened to me, it was as when the Delphians, after Apollo came back from the Hyperboreans, fell silent at first but then suddenly became filled with the god! That was me as I admired every detail: the flowering of your words, the harmony of the words with each other, the beauty appearing through every part, and that which is the great thing, your character, from which the letter sprang. May many good things happen to you for having given us this feast!<sup>207</sup>

Gessius’ epistolary speech is beautiful, harmonious, and conveys Gessius himself. The use of the term “feast” (*heortē*)—a commonplace in Late Antique letters—is likely figurative,<sup>208</sup> but it suggests that the iatrosophist’s preceding letter was read at a venue of epistolary theater before Procopius’ friends and suggests the broader social exchange between the iatrosophist and his interlinked literati friends in cities of the Greek East.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the scientific, medical, and technical engagements of the selected epistolographers. Proficiency in addressing contemporary scientific and medical ideas emerges as an underexamined strand of epistolary currency. Epistolographers rhapsodized in texts addressed to literati audiences about technical devices through the strictures of the genre of

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<sup>207</sup> τὴν ὑμετέραν ἐπιστολὴν εἰς χεῖρας λαβὼν αὐτὰς ἔδοξα μόλις ἀπειληθέναι τὰς Μούσας, ἔνθους τε ἦν ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς καὶ οὐκ εἶχον ὅ τι καὶ γένωμαι, ὥσπερ οἱ Δελφοὶ ἐπειδὴν ὡς ἐξ Ὑπερβορέων ἐλθόντος Ἀπόλλωνος τὸ πρὶν σιγῶντες πλήρεις ἐξαίφνης γένωνται τοῦ θεοῦ. τοιοῦτος ἦν τις ἐγώ, πάντα θαυμάζων, τῶν ὀνομάτων τὴν ὥραν, τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα τούτων ἀρμονίαν, τὸ διὰ πάντων κάλλος ἐπιφαινόμενον, καὶ τὸ δὴ μέγιστον, τοὺς ὑμετέρους τρόπους, ἐξ ὧν ἡμῖν προῆλθε τὰ γράμματα. καὶ σοι πολλὰ κάγαθὰ γένοιτο τοιαύτην ἡμῖν ἀποδεδωκότι τὴν ἑορτήν. According to the myth, Apollo sojourned a year with the Hyperboreans, a mythical people who dwelled beyond the North wind. Upon his return the inhabitants of Delphi celebrated with a paeon. See *RDG*, 449n96.

<sup>208</sup> For references, see *RDG*, 450n100.

*ekphrasis*. While texts like Aeneas' *Letter 25* and Procopius' *ekphrasis* on the waterclock were likely preserved as teaching models, these authors also likely addressed lateral interlocutors with ekphrastic speech in order to paint images in their minds of their audience and provide them with the experience of seeing such wondrous devices. They sought to translate the awe that sight of such devices produced into awe produced by speech.

Knowledge about astronomy was part of epistolary commerce. The letters of Isidore and Synesius both engage with contemporary astronomical ideas, yet exhibit quite contrasting attitudes with regard to these traditions. Isidore adduces astronomical theory to criticize pagan theology and, similar to other patristic texts, declares such speculation ultimately unimportant because it does not contribute to a moral lifestyle. Synesius, on the other hand, conceives of astronomy as a servant of philosophy that can convey the human soul toward its divine source.

Epistolographers such as Isidore also deployed letters as philosophical and scientific conversations regarding topics such as the nature of matter and the soul. By means of these discussions, Isidore affirmed the immutability of soul. He suggests that a component of the repertoire of a sophist was knowledge of scientific ideas as well as Galenic thought. In *Letter 1791* addressed to a doctor-scholasticus named Prosechius, Isidore engages specifically with the Galen's treatise *The Faculties of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body*. Isidore makes use of an epistolary platform to rail against Galen. Galen's definition is thoroughly repugnant because of Isidore's antipathy toward empirical "guesswork," and his perception that Galen's definition questioned his devotion to the *ponoi* of monasticism.

The last section of this chapter addressed the epistolary friendships among men of literary training and men with scientific, medical, and technical training. We surveyed extant data

concerning the training and professional life of architects, doctors, and iatrosophists. In addition to discourses of scientific speculation addressed to doctors, our epistolographers wrote to iatrosophists such as Gessius to procure medical treatment and to discuss prospective students. Procopius' *Letter* 16 to Gessius suggests that the letters of iatrosophists were included in epistolary theaters and took their place among doctors, architects, lawyers, and officials, as lettered associates linked by epistolary webs.



## Chapter 6

### Pagan or Christian?

This chapter investigates the letter authors' language of identification with religion. Evaluation of the underexamined corpora of Synesius, Procopius, and Aeneas presents a different vision of religious identity than the voices of the Fathers that often dominate scholarly treatments. We will engage here the historiographical binary of "pagan or Christian" which conceptualizes the two artificially as clear-cut separate spheres. This binary collapses in the face of the epistolary evidence of Synesius and the two Gazan sophists. A more fruitful reading of their letters analyzes them with a view to the contexts undergirding epistolary production. The letters of Aeneas and Procopius articulate a pagan epistolary currency with scarce reference to Christianity in their contemporary context. This pagan sociolect constructs an archaizing dreamscape and suggests compartmentalization. Likewise, Synesius tends to employ Christian speech only in letters addressed to clergy members and/or those letters likely dating to the period after he accepted the bishopric. Letters written during this same period but addressed to friends or his mentor Hypatia were wrought in pagan currency. Additionally, during his spiritual lowpoints near his life's end, Synesius turned not to Christian sentiments in his letters but to the philosophical and spiritual succor of Hypatia.

By contrast, the understudied case of Isidore preserves an oppositional identity harmonizable with identity claims made by patristic sources, such as his contemporary John Chrysostom. A defining element of Isidore's religious identity is that it is asserted through opposition to other groups whose characteristics and boundaries are conceived as rigid and unchanging. Isidore's letter speech defines all non-Christians (including heretics) as *hoi exōthen*.

Thus outsiders are delimited spatially. The former Pelusian sophist, however, betrays personal ambivalence toward the views of the outsiders. Sometimes he includes as authorizing support the intellectual traditions of *hoi exōthen*; other passages preserve clear repudiation of the outsiders' views. Isidore's complex dialectic of inclusion and exclusion with regard to *hoi exōthen* likely suggests the continuing authority of these traditions for Isidore's interlocutors and horizontal audience.

### The Dreamscape of the Pagan Sociolect: Aeneas and Procopius

One of the scholarly issues in the study of the writings of Procopius is that of the seemingly pure opposition in the extant texts between openly and clearly Christian writings, on the one hand, and on the other, those texts devoid of any trace of Christian thought or tradition.<sup>1</sup> The scholarly consensus has supported this bifurcation of Procopius' texts according to genre and argued that in Procopius the seeming oscillation between pagan and Christian content corresponded largely to genre constraints.<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Amato, however, has recently asserted an interpretation of sections of Procopius' *dialexeis* as allegorical representations of Christian concepts.<sup>3</sup>

As I will argue below, however, genre is not some sort of extra-historical force dictating the conduct of historical actors. Procopius and Aeneas made specific choices to represent their various affiliations and concerns and thereby to compartmentalize their different enthusiasms. They were deliberative about which parts of their identity were operative in particular discursive

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Amato, "Discorso figurato ed allegoria Cristiana negli scritti retorico-sofistici di Procopio," in *RDG*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, see 46 and 46nn1-6.

<sup>3</sup> See Amato *supra*.

situations. Unlike Church Fathers such as Augustine or Isidore of Pelusium (as we will explore below), Procopius and Aeneas did not inscribe their Christian identities into all of their writings as representing their single most important identity. For whatever reasons, they were content for that part of themselves to be silent and understood while they pursued deliberately archaizing conversations wrought in pagan currency with friends and lateral audiences. This sort of posturing is significant because it may point to different attitudes concerning religious identity among these men in comparison with Church Fathers who held exclusivist and oppositional Christian identities. On the other hand, this silence may also indicate that these men felt confident in their Christian identities and saw no need to defend themselves. The language of emotional intimacy in their letters is not specifically Christian but Classical and pagan. In this section, I will examine the scant language pertaining to Christianity and the features of the pagan sociolect constructed by Aeneas and Procopius respectively.

Aeneas' letters contain scant information about contemporary religious life. One example appears in *Letter 15* addressed to Stephanus presbyter. In this text, Aeneas likely recalls his school day *agones* at Alexandria, writing “long ago I had a conversation with you. And the conversation was by the side of the Nile, on whose banks we then had sport with the Muses.”<sup>4</sup> This vivacious public discourse “delighted in subtlety and seemed to laugh.”<sup>5</sup> The contest between the performers focused upon beauty, specifically on a classicizing beauty contest between the Homeric warrior “Nireus who was the most beautiful ‘of human beings on

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<sup>4</sup> σοὶ πάλαι διελέχθην. ἦν δὲ ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος παρὰ τῷ Νείλῳ, οὗ παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τότε ταῖς Μούσαις συνέπαιζον.

<sup>5</sup> ἐκεκόμψευτο δὲ καὶ γελαῖν ἐδόκει σπουδάζων ὁ λόγος.

the earth' and Thersites who 'was the ugliest to come before Illium.'"<sup>6</sup> Aeneas continues to describe what seems to be Stephanus' professional and personal transformation:

Such things you made sport of then for the hearers, and now I hear that you are serious and you proclaim the fair teaching by means of sacred things, and by your speech you refashion the character of citizens. And now the builder and the carpenter have something to say concerning sacred things, and they speak about virtue in the middle of their labor while before they chattered about stones and wood.<sup>7</sup>

Aeneas contrasts Stephanus' previous rhetorical play, his "sport with the Muses," as frivolity compared with his current zeal for the "fair teaching" (*kalon dogma*) of Christianity.

Underscored also is Stephanus' re-assertion of his Classical oratorical training in order to remodel the habits of his peers, who are now trained to speak about sacred things and virtue with their coworkers rather than the prosaic *minutiae* of their trade. Aeneas highlights the oratorical *dunamis* of evangelism, the power of language to provide conceptual tools that educate and even change behavior in the Late Ancient city.

This passage marks one of the few passages in the letters where Aeneas offers any indication of his religious identity as a Christian. We have seen above in *Letter 16* to Sarapion (without title) a reference to what may have been some sort of doctrinal controversy among Christian priests, and Aeneas' friendly advice orbits not around specific Scriptural consolations but generically Stoic exhortations:

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<sup>6</sup>Νιρεύς, ὃς κάλλιστος <<γένετ' ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων>>, καὶ Θερσίτης, ὃς <<αἰσχιστος ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθεν>>. Aeneas refers here to the tale of Nireus (*Il.* 2.673) and to Thersites, "ugliest man (of the Greeks) who went to Ilium" (*Il.* 2.216). The phrase <<γένετ' ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων>> is a Homeric formula that Aeneas injects to impart Homeric tincture to the story of the beauty contest between these *paradeigma* of beauty and ugliness. The story of the beauty contest between these figures Aeneas derived not from Homer but probably from Lucian *Infer Dial.* 25; see Positano, *Epistole*, 98-99, for references. Procopius *Letter 44* to his brother Zacharias also contains a reference to Thersites and Nireus.

<sup>7</sup>τὰ μὲν οὖν τότε συνέπαιζες τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς, νῦν δέ σε σπουδάζειν ἀκούω κἀν τοῖς ἱεροῖς τὸ καλὸν δόγμα κηρύττειν καὶ λόγῳ μεταρρυθμίζειν τῶν πολιτῶν τὸν τρόπον. Καὶ νῦν ὁ οἰκοδόμος καὶ τέκτων ἔχουσί τι περὶ τῶν θείων εἰπεῖν, καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς μεταξὺ τῆς ἐργασίας διαλέγονται οἱ πρὸ τῶν σῶν λόγων λίθους καὶ ξύλα λαλοῦντες.

I heard the tragedy that has happened among you, and I cried at the earth itself, if the war is begun by the priests among whom the teaching is peace. For if from where salvation should come, from there we are destroyed, what means of deliverance is left for us? For such things I suppose someone may say lamenting, and I grieve with them and rejoice with them; for grievous is the experience of danger, and the most accurate touchstone of magnanimity is good courage. For what possession of virtue is there before which struggle did not lead the way? You would not call a general the best who has never yet caught sight of the enemy. It is necessary to endure and not be disheartened, “for from war peace is confirmed;”<sup>8</sup>

Aeneas’ Stoic commonplaces [e.g., “the most accurate touchstone of magnanimity is good courage; for what possession of virtue is there before which struggle did not lead the way?”] do not offer explicitly Christian advising. Noteworthy also is his verbatim quotation of Thucydides 1.124.2, “for from war peace is confirmed.”<sup>9</sup> Stoic platitudes and a Classical quotation—that Aeneas likely expects his Christian friend to recognize—supply the content of his epistolary advice.

If this letter were preserved as a teaching model, the Stoic and Classical framing of the text would explain its preservation at the Gaza school and might account for the absence of specifically Christian content. The letter text may be an excerpt, and we cannot be certain that the margins of the letter survive intact. Near the letter’s closing, Aeneas indicates that he likely organized a public gathering [*theatron*] in which Sarapion’s previous letter was recited and was met with applause. He concludes with the question, “for therefore who would dishonor that

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<sup>8</sup>τὸ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀκήκοα δράμα, καὶ αὐτὴν ἐδάκρυσα τὴν γῆν, εἰ ἐκ τῶν ἱερέων ὁ πόλεμος ἄρχεται, παρ’ οἷς εἰρήνη τὸ κήρυγμα. εἰ γὰρ ὄθεν ἔδει σεσῶσθαι, ἐντεῦθεν ἀπολλύμεθα, τίς πόρος σωτηρίας ἡμῖν καταλείπεται; ταῦτα μὲν οὖν εἴποι τις ἂν οἰῆμαι θηρῶν, ἐγὼ δὲ συνάχθομαι καὶ συνήδομαι • ἀνιαρὸν μὲν γὰρ τῶν κινδύνων ἢ πείρα, ἀκριβεστάτη δὲ μεγαλοψυχίας βάσανος ἢ ἐν τοῖς κινδύνοις εὐψυχία. ποία γὰρ ἀρετῆς κτήσις, ἧς ἀγὼν μὴ προηγῆσατο; εἰ μὴ καὶ στρατηγὸν φαίης ἄριστον τὸν μηδεπώποτε κατιδόντα πολέμιον. φέρειν δὲ δεῖ καὶ μὴ ἀθυμεῖν • <<ἐκ πολέμου γὰρ ἡμῖν εἰρήνη βεβαιοῦται >>.

<sup>9</sup><<ἐκ πολέμου γὰρ ἡμῖν εἰρήνη βεβαιοῦται >>.

which is praised by your side?”<sup>10</sup> This may not have been the original closing, but the whole tenor of Aeneas’ epistolary counsel to his Christian friend, likely a priest, lacks specifically Christian content. The Stoic exhortations, a Classical reference, and absence of Scriptural citations and reference to Christian theology are consistent with Aeneas’ other surviving letters.

Sophists sought favors from clergy on behalf of ascetics. *Letter 21* to Dorotheus presbyter preserves Aeneas’ request of his priest friend to intercede on behalf of an ascetic in need. Priming his correspondent to grant his request, Aeneas opens with praise authorized by an example from Plato *Republic* 6.495e:

As the saying goes, the many plunge into sacrifices without clean feet just like the bald metalworker of Plato, who still smelling of smoke and foul-smelling things approaches his patroness. But you, on the other hand, move from holy thing to holy thing, from philosophy to priesthood.<sup>11</sup>

Contrasting the ill-preparation of *hoi polloi* and servants like the bald metalworker who neglect to tend even personal hygiene with the cultivation of Dorotheus, Aeneas regards Dorotheus’ training in philosophy as a worthy prelude to the priesthood. In fact, Aeneas does not assert that philosophy and service in the clergy are asymmetrical categories, contending, for example, that philosophy serves as preparation for the priesthood. Aeneas does not juxtapose them as competitors—they are both holy things—but he certainly differentiates them.

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<sup>10</sup> πῶς ἂν τις ἀτιμάσει τὸ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἐπαινούμενον ;

<sup>11</sup> οἱ μὲν πολλοί, τὸ δὴ λεγόμενον, ἀνίπτοις ποσὶν ἐπιπηδῶσι τοῖς ἱεροῖς, καθάπερ ὁ τοῦ Πλάτωνος χαλκεὺς ἐκεῖνος ὁ φαλακρός, ὃς ἔτι καπνοῦ καὶ δυσωδίας ὄζων ἐπανεστή τῇ δεσποίνῃ. σὺ δὲ ἐξ ἱεροῦ διαβαίνεις εἰς ἱερόν, ἐκ φιλοσοφίας εἰς ἱερωσύνην. The first saying is a proverb that has a wide dissemination in later antiquity; see Positano, 118. The Platonic passage is not exactly the same as Aeneas cites it here. In the *Republic*, the little bald metalworker takes a bath and, dressing in a new cloak, is prepared to marry the daughter of his master; cf. Positano, 118-19.

Aeneas next turns his attention to the request, referring to the letter carrier as “a servant of holy things; yes such a one is yours.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, Aeneas distinguishes himself as a sophist from men in the service of the Church, whom he lumps together under a common heading. Employing a monastic vocabulary, Aeneas indicates that the carrier in need is a monk travelling to a monastery: “he loves quiet, and learning—I know not how—about a mountain dedicated to God, suitable on account of its isolation for quietude, he makes his way there.”<sup>13</sup> Certain unspecified difficulties hinder the carrier’s transit, and Aeneas asks Dorotheus to intercede on the carrier’s behalf by bidding priests of Dorotheus’ acquaintance located in the region (unspecified) where the carrier must travel “to protect him as far as the mountain,”<sup>14</sup> that is, the monastery.

Like Aeneas’ surviving correspondence, the letters of Procopius lack distinctively Christian content. As will be examined below, Procopius does present himself as a philosopher-sophist championing poverty and observing virtue and moderation with regard to earthly possessions and bodily pleasures. To judge from Procopius’ language and use of sources, however, this persona is not specifically Christian but is elaborated generally in the medium of a vague Stoicism and, less frequently, Stoic authorities. Stoic commonplaces abound in the letters that may be harmonized with Christian ideas theoretically, yet when Procopius offers references for his assertions he only draws in Classical texts. One potential case for a Christian usage in the Procopian letters is the Greek concept of providence (*pronoia*), but reflection on this idea and its relation to fate (*tychē*) had a long history in classical and Hellenistic philosophers, including Plato, Stoics, and Neo-Platonists such as Plotinus, prior to its Christian iterations in authors such

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<sup>12</sup> ὁ δὲ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν κομίζων ἱερῶν ἐστὶν ὑπηρέτης • οὐκοῦν σὸς οὗτος.

<sup>13</sup> ἔρᾳ δὲ ἡσυχίας, καὶ οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως μαθὼν ὄρος εἶναι Θεῷ κεχαρισμένον δι’ ἐρημίαν εἰς ἡσυχίαν ἐπιτήδειον πρὸς ἐκεῖνο πορεύεται.

<sup>14</sup> μέχρι τοῦ ὄρους διασώζειν.

as Clement of Rome, Athenagoras, Origen, and Nemesius of Emesa.<sup>15</sup> Given this wide-ranging usage, it is difficult to isolate Procopius' use as specifically Christian, particularly against the backdrop of his predominantly Classical and non-Christian epistolary currency. Procopius uses *pronoia* three times in the letters, and in one of these it may have a specifically Christian meaning tailored to reflect not Procopius' tastes but those of his interlocutor. In *Letter 15* to Nephalius, who, according to *Letter 67* may in fact be a churchman,<sup>16</sup> Procopius refers vaguely to an unspecified but presumably understood outcome, asserting "I would not say the reason is fate, and especially to you, but it is altogether the providence of God who governs our affairs as he wishes."<sup>17</sup> Thus, Procopius distinguishes between *tychē*, a concept he might be inclined to use as explanatory of particular circumstances, and opts instead to use *pronoia* when speaking to a Christian he seems to think would disapprove of *tychē*. In this text Procopius seems to set *tychē* and *pronoia* in opposition and may thereby reflect his knowledge of the Christian practice of rejecting fate and embracing providence as a religious doctrine.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of *Letter 15*, Procopius does not oppose *tychē* to *pronoia* in the extant letters, but he clearly employs the word *tychē* and related terms far more often than he uses the word *pronoia*. Procopius prefers to use the term *tychē* and like concepts.

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Louth, "Pagans and Christians on providence," in J.H.D. Scourfield, ed., *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2007), 279-97.

<sup>16</sup> Procopius *Letter 67* is likely addressed to the same Nephalius, of whom Procopius requests a favor on behalf of a deacon friend; Procopius claims that Nephalius has influence with local bishops to help the friend in need.

<sup>17</sup> τὸ δ' αἴτιον τύχην μὲν οὐκ ἂν ποτε εἴποιμι, καὶ μάλιστα πρὸς ὑμᾶς, θεοῦ δὲ πάντως πρόνοιαν, κυβερνῶσαν ὡς βούλεται τὰ ἡμέτερα.

<sup>18</sup> Louth, 285-92. The pendulum in favor of providence's authority may have swung by the period of the Neoplatonists; Porphyry in *Enneads* 3.1-3 prioritizes providence and represents fate (εἰμαρμένη) as a lower providence (see Louth, 292-93).



The other two uses of *pronoia* appear in letters of consolation (*Letters* 69 and 125). *Letter* 125 is addressed to the pagan iatrosophist Gessius and contains much generic Stoic language (see discussion in Chapter 3 above) but no specifically Christian content. Likewise, *Letter* 69, a consolation to Palladius on the death of his wife, contains generic Stoicisms and employs *pronoia* toward the end of a discussion of human circumstances shaped by Fortune (Tychē). Articulating the conventional wisdom that the experiences of friends are common, Procopius pledges in this letter that he shares in common with his friend both his successes and now his present pain. The bulk of his condolences focus on Stoic consolations, many of which are generic, as is typical of Procopius. Adducing Fortune, Procopius remarks that She behaves recklessly (lit. like a young man—*neanieuetai*) who draws no distinction whether she aims to hit the bad ones or the good ones. Procopius offers the wisdom of the Attic orator Isocrates: “I am persuaded that heeding Isocrates, before having suffered something, you already trained yourself for the situation, seeing many such occurrences and hearing many such related by others.”<sup>19</sup> Palladius knew of this sort of loss through the experiences of others before experiencing it himself. Procopius continues to observe the inscrutability of Fortune’s devising, providing examples such as “one person reaches old age, calling upon death as a comfort, and the other is snatched away before he reaches the prime of life. One man marries and another is lamenting his wife.”<sup>20</sup> Life abounds with such unpredictable outcomes, and “such things tend to confirm the judgment of Homer that ‘the earth rears nothing feebler than human beings.’”<sup>21</sup> Framing human

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<sup>19</sup> πέπεισμαι γὰρ ὡς Ἰσοκράτει πειθόμενος, πρὶν τι παθεῖν, αὐτὸς ἐγυμνάσω τοῖς πράγμασι, πολλὰ μὲν ὀρῶν τοιαῦτα, πολλὰ δὲ διηγουμένων ἀκούων. πρὶν . . . ἀκούων: see Isoc.1.21, *RDG*, 467n334.

<sup>20</sup> καὶ ὁ μὲν γηρᾷ τὸν θάνατον εἰς παραμυθίαν αἰτῶν, ὁ δὲ πρὸ τῆς ἡβῆς ἀνήρπασται. γαμῆ τις ἕτερος, ὁ δὲ τὴν συνοικοῦσαν ὀδύρεται.

<sup>21</sup> ταῦτα τὸν βίον πληροῖ, καὶ τὴν Ὀμήρου βεβαιοῦν ἐπιέγεται γνώμην, ὡς “οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον γαῖα τρέφει ἀνθρώποιο,” *Odyssey* 18.129; *RDG*, 467n335.

circumstances now in the Platonic guise of the *daimonion* or divine will,<sup>22</sup> Procopius asserts that “in all cases the divine will allows nothing to remain as it was originally, for if something seems to happen that seems reasonable to human beings, merely wait a little and the current situation will disappear entirely.”<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to discern here how Procopius distinguishes *daimonion* from *Tychē*, but his usages here do not seem specifically Christian, and the word *daimonion* does not seem to indicate a signal from a demon or malignant spirit. Complicating things further, Procopius next adds the concept of providence into the mix, stating “let suffering be ascribed to divine providence and to a divine will that is in every way conducting our affairs well, but to bear nobly whatever God gives us is to win the victory by virtue and not to ascribe everything to *Tychē*.”<sup>24</sup> Procopius does not resolutely distinguish here between Fortune and providence but seems to inter-mix these ideas—along with the concept of the *daimonion*—in a colloquial and generic fashion.

Predominantly, however, the gods, and not God, run rampant throughout the extant letters. Procopius’ classicizing epistolary sociolect includes vivacious embrace of pagan myth, and references to the old gods, including oaths, swearing, and prayers to the gods, as formulae of friendship.<sup>25</sup> These “paganizing” features are ostensibly markers of the imitation of classical

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<sup>22</sup>In Plato the term occurs in numerous places: e.g., *Euthyphro* 3b, *Theaetetus* 151a ; cf. *RDG*, 467n336. On the meaning of ὁ δαίμων see above, Chapter 4.

<sup>23</sup> πανταχόθεν γὰρ ψηφίζεται τὸ δαιμόνιον μηδὲν μένειν οἷον καὶ γέγονεν, ἀλλ’ εἴ τι κατὰ νοῦν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώποις, “μικρόν” φησὶν “ἀνάμεινον, καὶ πάντως οἰχήσεται”.

<sup>24</sup> τὸ μὲν οὖν παθεῖν θεοῦ προνοία δεδοσθω καὶ νεύματι πάντως καλῶς ἄγοντι τὰ ἡμέτερα, τὸ δὲ φέρειν ὃ τι ἂν ὁ θεὸς διδῶ γυναιίως, νικᾶν ἐστὶν ἀρετῆ καὶ μὴ πάντα διδόναι τῇ Τυχῆ.

<sup>25</sup> For vocative formulae and oaths, see, e.g. *Letter* 6 to brother Zacharias, “Oh Zeus!” (ὦ Ζεῦ); *Letter* 12 to Zacharias, “Oh Zeus!” (ὦ Ζεῦ); *Letter* 18 to Zacharias, “Hear me, all the gods!” (ὦ πάντες θεοί); *Letter* 26 to Eusebius, “Oh gods!” (ὦ θεοί); *Letter* 28 to brother Victor, “By Zeus” (μὰ Δία); *Letter* 29 to Diodorus, “By Zeus the god of friendship!” (πρὸς Φιλίου); *Letter* 42 to Thomas, “By Zeus and the other gods!” (Ζεῦ ἄλλοι τε θεοί); *Letter* 46 to Zacharias, “May it be said to god!” (σὺν θεῷ δὲ εἰρησθω); *Letter* 52 to Silanus, “Oh Zeus, may such things occur!” (ὦ Ζεῦ, γένοιτα ταῦτα); *Letter* 55 to Epiphanius “Oh, saying by Zeus god of Friendship and of

texts and almost suggest that such rhetorical units persisted as elements of the linguistic *habitus* of many Late Antique provincials. There is a sense in which Procopius' archaizing sociolect creates an alternate antiquarian dream world in which Late Antique literati made themselves contemporaries of the authors of their beloved classical texts, actualizing through *logoi* a pre-Christian dreamscape of continuous rhetorical infatuation whose lyre strains trilled honeyed Atticisms and the eloquence of the Muses.

Such archaizing sound bites are conversational devices that percolate through the letters as earmarks of shared Classical *paideia* fomenting *philia*. References to the old gods construct a vocabulary of emotional intimacy. In *Letter* 4 to his former student Germanus, Procopius expresses in a prayer to the gods his longing that Germanus visit him soon: “but would that some one of the gods might be favorable to me and bear you swiftly to me again.”<sup>26</sup> Reference to the supremacy of the gods in human affairs strengthens expressions of commitment. Marshalling an Iliadic phrase in *Letter* 78 to Irenaeus, Procopius affirms his resolve to teach

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*Logoi!*” (ὡς Ζεῦ λέγων καὶ Φιλία καὶ Λόγοι); *Letter* 66 to Nestorius, “Oh Fortune, Fortune!” (ὦ Τύχη, Τύχη); *Letter* 71 to Stephanus, “By the god of friendship!” (πρὸς Φιλίου); *Letter* 91 to Hieronymus, “By the god of friendship!” (πρὸς Φιλίου); *Letter* 91 to Hieronymus, “Oh Zeus!” (ὦ Ζεῦ); *Letter* 101 to Zacharias, “By Zeus!” (πρὸς Διός); *Letter* 106 to Stephanus, “By Zeus!” (πρὸς Διός); *Letter* 109 to Silanus, “Oh Zeus!” (ὦ Ζεῦ); *Letter* 117 to Dorotheus, “By the god of friendship!” (πρὸς Φιλίου); *Letter* 140 to Diodorus, “By Zeus!” (μὰ Δία), *Letter* 153 to Zosimus and Macarius, “May it be said with god!” (σὺν θεῷ δὲ εἰρήσθω); *Letter* 165 to Musaeus, “By Zeus!” (μὰ Δία); *Letter* 167 addressee unclear (see *RDG*, 500 n. 786), “Oh Dionysus!” (ὦ Διόνυσε); *Letter* 172 to Megethios, “By the god of friendship!” (πρὸς Φιλίου). For vocatives of the Erotes (Cupids), see e.g., *Letter* 11 to brother Philip, “But by all the Erotes!” (ἀλλ’ ὦ πάντες Ἔρωτες); *Letter* 34 to Philip “Oh how many things are possible and the Erotes transform (ὦ πόσα δύναται καὶ μεταβάλλουσιν Ἔρωτες); *Letter* 34 to to Philip, “Oh dear Erotes! (ὦ φίλοι Ἔρωτες); *Letter* 56 to Johannes, “Oh Zeus and the Erotes and all who watch over friendship!” (ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ Ἔρωτες καὶ ὅσοι φιλίας ἐπόπτται).

<sup>26</sup> ἀλλ’ εἴθε γὰρ τις θεῶν εὐμενῆς ἡμῖν γένοιτο καὶ σε θᾶπτον ὡς ἡμᾶς αὐθις ἐνέγκοι. On Germanus, see *RDG*, 442n32.

Zonaeus and other young men of ability in the family of Irenaeus, averring “if I have the capability to render service by means of my zeal, let it lie on the knees of the gods.”<sup>27</sup>

Oaths to the gods mark expressions of friendship and its integral relationship to self-knowledge. References to the Eroses underscored the friendship bond between sender and recipient, while invocations of Zeus the god of friendship, as protector of cosmic order, also represented a protector of hospitality and friendship.<sup>28</sup> In *Letter 56* to Johannes,<sup>29</sup> Procopius defends himself against his friend’s accusation of silence and swears that he remains a steadfast friend despite neglecting to write: “But Oh Zeus, and Eroses, and whoever watches over friendship, persuade my accusers that never have I arrived at forgetfulness of such things, but I am in presence of mind and I seem to say something and to hear others speaking, and that if I ignore such (accusers), I have also forgotten myself.”<sup>30</sup> Procopius attests despite his silence, that forgetfulness of the intimacy between Johannes and himself would be tantamount to forgetting his own self. In this way, Procopius highlights how friendship contributes to his self-understanding and is inseparable from his identity.

Intellectual devotion and sodality is framed in the pagan currency of the service of the Muses. In *Letter 3* to Pythius, Procopius marvels at his friend’s intellectual commitment: “it seems to me that indeed the Muses live in your soul. Accordingly, bound to the Muses you have

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<sup>27</sup> εἰ δὲ καὶ δύναμιν ὑπουργοῦσαν ἔχω τῇ προθυμίᾳ θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κείσθω. The phrase θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κείσθω appears at *Iliad* 17.514, 20.435 and elsewhere; see *RDG*, 469n371.

<sup>28</sup>*RDG*, 445n65 and 455n167.

<sup>29</sup> Addressee of *Letter 22*, 56, 126, 149, 156 (?), and 158, Johannes was a lawyer with literary and philosophical interests who practiced at Alexandria and Caesarea; cf. *RDG*, 442n36 and *PLRE*, 2:606.

<sup>30</sup> ἀλλ’ ὃ Ζεῦ καὶ Ἔρωτες καὶ ὅσοι φιλίας ἐπόπται, πείθοιτε τοὺς ἐμοὺς κατηγοροῦς, ὡς οὔποτε πρὸς λήθην αὐτῶν ἀφικόμην, ἀλλὰ σύνειμι τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ λέγειν τι δοκῶ καὶ λεγόντων ἀκούειν, καὶ ὡς εἰ τούτους ἀγνοῶ, καὶ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέησμαι.

a way of life that is devoted to the goddesses, and nothing is wondrous to you that is not books and discourses and all that leads the soul toward betterment.”<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, however, such eloquent compliments are meant to goad Pythius to return a treatise to Procopius’ library. With charming references to the divine as guarantors of the text’s safe transit to Gaza, Procopius affirms that “with the help of Hermes and the Muses it will be brought from Alexandria.”<sup>32</sup>

Jocular citations of prayers from Classical texts express concern for traveling friends. In *Letter 132 to Dorotheus*<sup>33</sup> Procopius describes his anguish at his friend’s apparent departure from Gaza, relating “from the time when you swiftly left me, I did not stop going around with you in my thoughts and describing within myself the harbors and the sea.”<sup>34</sup> Invoking a prayer from *Odyssey 3.55*<sup>35</sup> Procopius wishes that Dorotheus’ transit might be safe: “And I said often, ‘Hear oh earth-shaker Poseidon,’ and I demanded that he furnish for you a kindly sea, and the days of your journey I placed on my fingers [i.e., counting the days on his fingers] and thus was I altogether by your side.”<sup>36</sup> Constantly on the lookout for his dearly-missed friend, Procopius intensifies his expressions of longing by swearing upon the gods, exclaiming, “Often having caught sight of someone coming toward me, I thought, by the gods, to have seen you, my eyes

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<sup>31</sup> ἔμοι δοκεῖς ὡς ἄρα τὴν σὴν ψυχὴν ὄντως οἰκοῦσιν αἱ Μοῦσαι • εἶτα κάτοχος ὢν ταῖς θεαῖς βίον ἔχεις αὐταῖς ἀνειμένον, καὶ οὐδέν σοι θαυμαστὸν ὅ τι μὴ βιβλία καὶ λόγοι καὶ ὅσα ψυχὴν ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ἀνάγει.

<sup>32</sup> ἀλλὰ σὺν Ἑρμῇ καὶ Μούσαις εἰρήσθω—ἐκ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου κομισθήσεται.

<sup>33</sup> Garzya and Loenertz surmised that a lively friendship between the addressee and Procopius developed during Dorotheus’ trip to Gaza; see *Procopii epistulae*, XXX and *RDG*, 489n635.

<sup>34</sup> ἔξ οὗ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ὄχου καταλιπὼν, οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην μετὰ σοῦ τῇ διανοίᾳ περινοστῶν καὶ λιμένας καὶ θάλατταν διαγράφων ἐν ἑμαυτῷ.

<sup>35</sup> *RDG*, 489n636.

<sup>36</sup> καὶ “κλυθι, Ποσειδάον γαιήοχε” πολλάκις εἰπὼν ἠξίου εὐμενῆ σοι παρέχειν τὴν θάλατταν, καὶ τοῦ πλοῦ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐπὶ τῶν δακτύλων ἐτίθουν, καὶ οὕτως ὅλος ἐτύγχανον παρὰ σοί.

having been deceived easily in accord with the wish of my mind.”<sup>37</sup> In this thoughtfully-wrought gift epistle expressing affection for a missed friend, oaths and prayers to the gods operate as brief intensifiers articulating and affirming friendship.

Procopius occasionally refers to oracles, usually joking about consulting them for information about his friends. In *Letter 71* he jests that his friend Stephanus is silent despite living beside the “babbling waters” of the spring of the oracle at Daphne near Antioch.<sup>38</sup> Eager to uncover the reason, Procopius quips, “maybe I can divine the matter, even though I have not drunk of your Daphne.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, as we have seen above, Procopius in *Letter 94* chides his friend Diodorus for his illegible handwriting in his previous letter, jeering that he is going to show the letter to the Delphic priestess in order to discover the text’s meaning. In these instances, Procopius does not deride the oracle but seems merely to adopt references as a humorous classicizing gesture underscoring shared knowledge of the pagan texts.

In *Letter 13* jointly addressed to three grammarian friends visiting Daphne—Alypius, Stephanus (same addressee as *Letter 71* above), and the Latin grammarian Hierius—Procopius rhapsodizes about the beauties and physical pleasures associated with the sacred site:

And you are filled with those myths of old, thinking of the passion of the god (i.e., Apollo), of the moderation and humanity of Daphne that persuaded even a natural lover; and for you alone the sight of visible things affords witness of the word. And if closely-packed groves of cypresses have sprung up in gratitude for her who was loved by Apollo and copious water flows, and cicadas sing, and the road has been strewn with grass, and

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<sup>37</sup> πολλάκις δὲ προσιόντα τινὰ πόρρωθεν θεασάμενος, σέ, μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἔδόκουν ὄραϊν, πρὸς τὸ τῆς διανοίας βούλημα τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ῥαδίως ἀπατωμένων.

<sup>38</sup> σὺ μὲν ἔτι σιγᾶς, καὶ ταῦτα τὴν Δάφνην οἰκῶν, τὸ λάλον ὕδωρ ἐκεῖνο καὶ μαντικόν. The “chatty and prophetic water” Procopius refers to here is likely the spring at Daphne, known in antiquity as the Castalia, which was considered the home of the oracle. There were apparently three such fountains at Daphne in antiquity; see *RDG*, 448n81.

<sup>39</sup> ἀλλ’ ἤδη που τάχα τὸ πρᾶγμα μαντεύομαι, μηδὲ τῆς ὑμετέρας Δάφνης πιῶν.

(there are) trees one upon the other and the houses between them hidden by their height, and temperate breeze and commingled odor, and the shade shutting out the harmful rays of the sun, your job is as soon as possible to report or to relate in letters. Except I prefer to see you coming to me, so that I might hear in addition to other things your oracles, for this I think Daphne has granted to you.<sup>40</sup>

Procopius sounds envious of his colleagues who have the opportunity to experience for themselves the renowned delights of the famous oracle of Apollo at Daphne, a suburb of Antioch. In the sociolectic reality of his letters, Procopius revels in Daphne's wonders and expresses no derogatory attitudes toward the pagan site. His rapture at Daphne's marvels poses no articulated problems for his Christian identity. While Daphne babbles, his Christian self is apparently silent.

Yet there are fissures in this linguistic antiquarian "other dimension" that point to Procopius' engagement with a real contemporary context of Christian interlocutors. These are quite few, however, and Procopius is not engaged with theological controversy nor focused generally on any element of Christian theology or practice. There is scant reference to contemporary religious life, Christian or otherwise, in the letters. *Letter 77* to the Caesarean lawyer and *Letter 95* to the magnate Nephalius contain mention of festivals, but, as Federica Ciccolella suggests, the use of the term *panēgyris* in each may simply refer generically to a

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<sup>40</sup> ἡμεῖς δὲ που καὶ παλαιῶν μυθολογημάτων ἐμπίπλασθε, παρ' αὐτὴν ἤδη τὴν Δάφνην λογιζόμενοι τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ πάθος, τῆς Δάφνης τὴν σωφροσύνην καὶ τὸ φιλόφρονον, καὶ φυτὸν παραμυθούμενον ἐραστήν • καὶ παρ' ὑμῖν μόνοις τῶν ὀρωμένων ἢ θέα τῷ λόγῳ τὴν μαρτυρίαν χαρίζεται. εἰ δὲ καὶ κυπάριττοι πυκναὶ πρὸς χάριν ἀνεῖνται τῆς ἐρωμένης Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ ὕδωρ ἄφθονον, καὶ τέττιγες ἄδουσι καὶ ὁδὸς τῇ πόσῃ μαλθακὴ παρακέχεται, καὶ δένδρα ἄλλ' ἐπ' ἄλλοις καὶ οἰκίαι τῷ τούτων ὕψει κατὰ μέσον κρυπτόμεναι, αὐτὰ τε μετρία καὶ ὁσμὴ συμμιγῆς καὶ σκιά τοῦ ἡλίου τὸ λυπηρὸν ἀποκλείουσα, ὑμέτερον ἢ ὡς τάχος ἀγγέλλειν ἢ διηγεῖσθαι τοῖς γράμμασι. πλὴν βουλομένη εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐλθόντας ἰδεῖν, ἵνα πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ μαντευομένων ἀκούσωμαι. καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν οἶμαι δεδωκέναι τὴν Δάφνην.

celebration and not a specific festival.<sup>41</sup> *Letter 77* opens with what may be Procopius' comic fiction regarding the reason Diodorus is not coming to Gaza.<sup>42</sup> Procopius gibes:

I would have thought that you would have celebrated the feast of the martyrs with us and would at last have granted us to rejoice in the sight. You, though, as if you saw a dream, took offense, it appears, at the Maioumas festival, and fearing the bird of evil omen you are calling it a day on which no business is to be done (*apophras*).<sup>43</sup>

Procopius may mean here that Diodorus is not coming to visit because he thought he was going to see the Maioumas festival; this made Diodorus unhappy and made him declare the day one of the *dies nefasti*. Unfortunately, the extant letters reveal little about contemporary religious observance.

Two letters mention members of the clergy, and one letter bearing no distinctively Christian content (as will be examined below) is addressed to a bishop. Of the former category, in *Letter 112* Procopius teases his young friend Nonnus for choosing marriage over the priesthood.<sup>44</sup> Procopius, joking about Nonnus' vanity, quips "may you have turned down the desired goal, longing for greater things and aiming for the priesthood. I have always marveled at your beautiful hair, and now I fear that it will get in the way of your zeal [i.e., for becoming a priest]." <sup>45</sup> Jesting that Nonnus is so attached to his locks that he would rather dash to the altar

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<sup>41</sup> *RDG*, 469n365 and 477n459. In *Letter 95*, Procopius' first use of πανήγυρις signifies a celebration or feast and his second use refers figuratively to the feast of receiving Nephalius' preceding letter.

<sup>42</sup> Ciccolella, cf. *RDG*, 444n53, thinks this passage signifies that Diodorus was a pagan; on the other hand, the opening lines of *Letter 77* may simply be a joke and bear little resemblance to Diodorus' actual identity.

<sup>43</sup> οἶμην σε τὴν τῶν μαρτύρων παρ' ἡμῖν ἐπιτελέσαι πανήγυριν καὶ διδόναι μόλις ἡμῖν εὐτυχήσαι τῇ θέᾳ • σὺ δὲ κἄν ὄναρ ἴδης Μαΐουμᾶν, ὡς ἔοικε, δυσχεραίνεις καὶ τὸν οἰωνὸν δεδιῶς ἀποφράδα τὴν ἡμέραν καλεῖς.

<sup>44</sup> It is not clear whether Nonnus aspired to be a priest or a bishop. Procopius uses here the terms ἱερωσύνη and ἱερεύς, which indicate either a priest or a bishop in this period. See *RGD*, 482n536.

<sup>45</sup> σὺ μὲν ὑμῖν τὴν ἱερωμένην ἠρνήσω, τὰ μείζω ποθῶν καὶ πρὸς ἱερωσύνην κατεπειγόμενος • ἐγὼ δὲ σου τὴν καλὴν κόμην θαυμάσας αἰεὶ, νῦν δέδοικα μή σου παρεμποδῶν γένηται τῇ προθυμίᾳ.



than endure the tonsure of the priesthood, Procopius mocks “for when you see the occasion arrive and your sung-of hair about to fall, having wept, I suppose, you will flee that treatment and will seek instead of a priest to be seen as a fair bridegroom.”<sup>46</sup> Teasing Nonnus for his indecisiveness, Procopius suggests, on the other hand, that when Nonnus actually faces the wedding, he may find that his desire swings back away from matrimony to the priesthood: “And again, if it may happen thus, you will woo the girl, and when your wedding is about to happen you will acquire a desire leaping toward the priesthood.”<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, the corruption of the text prevents us from determining Procopius’ final punch lines in the concluding two sentences, yet the letter contains no references to theology or Scripture, and is not really interested in Christian ideas as such but is a friendly joke written upon learning news of a friend’s or perhaps former student’s change of profession due to his choice to marry.

In *Letter 67* addressed to Nephalius, Procopius asks his friend to intercede with a group of bishops on behalf of a deacon acquaintance.<sup>48</sup> Procopius begins his request with a description of a certain Stephanus who has succumbed to poverty: “The extent of difficulty at which Stephanus has arrived, has not, I suppose escaped your notice, that he is not able to take into his hands the hope of living [i.e., cannot make a living with his hands] and by misfortune nearly been deprived of an eye.”<sup>49</sup> This man had contrived to earn his living as a deacon, yet “nothing

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<sup>46</sup> ἐπειδὴν γὰρ ἴδης παρόντα τὸν καιρὸν καὶ τὰς ἀδομένας τρίχας μελλούσας πεσεῖν, δακρύσας, οἶμαι, τὸ πάθος οἰχήσῃ φυγῶν, καὶ ζητήσεις ἀνθ’ ἱερέως νυμφίος ὀφθῆναι καλός.

<sup>47</sup> καὶ πάλιν, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, μνηστεύσεις κόρην, καὶ τοῦ γάμου παρόντος πρὸς ἱερωσύνην σχήσεις μεταπηδῶντα τὸν ἔρωτα.

<sup>48</sup> Nephalius is the addressee of six extant Procopian letters. He seems to have been a clergy member or a governor because Procopius claims that Nephalius has sway with local bishops. This addressee may be one and the same as the monk Nephalius from Alexandria who opposed Severus of Antioch and other followers of Monophysitism in 508; see *RDG*, 449n91, for references.

<sup>49</sup> εἰς ὅσον ἦκει τῆς ἀπορίας ὁ Στέφανος, οὐδ’ ὑμᾶς οἶμαι λανθάνειν, καὶ ὅτι μὴ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ δύναται ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ βίου μικροῦ δεῖν καὶ τὸν οφθαλμὸν ὑπὸ τῆς Τύχης ἀφηρημένος.

might not help him, unless he gets assistance from you, which I believe is available for those who want to get it.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Procopius aims to persuade Nephalius in the first place by complimenting Nephalius’ ability to offer aid. Procopius does not specify what exactly Nephalius is to do but expects that Nephalius anticipates his meaning. Remarking that Nephalius has authority to influence a group of local bishops, Procopius explains, “for if you make the request, someone of the bishops by your side will nod and he will either have him as an assistant or only take care of him.”<sup>51</sup> Thus Procopius’ second reason for insisting that Nephalius should help Stephanus is that Nephalius has the power to influence bishops; Nephalius is likely either a bishop or a powerful magistrate such as a governor.<sup>52</sup> Commenting that Stephanus is ever a babbling,<sup>53</sup> Procopius strengthens his request in closing by indicating that if Nephalius helps Stephanus, Stephanus’ loquacity will broadcast to others Nephalius’ beneficence: “If however he gets a certain kindness, how is it likely that he will not proclaim his gratitude? For he will lavish, I think, his natural loquaciousness on remembering your kindness.”<sup>54</sup> The final reason Nephalius should help Stephanus is the public praise Stephanus will offer, thereby magnifying Nephalius’ influence and generosity.

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<sup>50</sup> κινδυνεύει δὲ μηδὲν αὐτὸν ὀνήσαι τὸ σόφισμα, πλὴν εἰ μὴ τῆς ἐπικουρίας τύχοι τῆς παρὰ σοῦ, ἦν καὶ πᾶσι προκεῖσθαι πείθομαι τοῖς βουλομένοις τυχεῖν •

<sup>51</sup> ὑμῶν γὰρ αἰτούντων ἐπιτεύσει τις οἶμαι τῶν παρ’ ὑμῖν ἐπισκόπων ἢ λειτουργούντων τοῦτον ἔξειν ἢ καὶ μόνον τρεφόμενον.

<sup>52</sup> See also *RDG*, 449n91.

<sup>53</sup> According to Ciccolella, Procopius’ description may indicate that Stephanus was a sophist and perhaps a former student of Procopius, a fact that would explain Procopius’ concern for Stephanus; see *RDG*, 466n329.

<sup>54</sup> εἰ δὲ τύχοι τινὸς εὐεργεσίας, ποῦ τοῦτον οὐκ εἰκὸς ἀνακηρῦξαι τὴν χάριν; ἀναλώσει γὰρ, οἶμαι, τὴν ἔμφυτον φλυαρίαν εἰς τὸ μεμνήσθαι τῆς χάριτος.

*Letters* 111 and 118 addressed to Diodorus preserve Procopius' requests for aid for monks or members of the clergy. In *Letter* 111, Procopius suggests that Diodorus provide legal persuasion for the relation of the monk who has fallen into debt.<sup>55</sup> *Letter* 118 also contains a brief departure from his typical classicizing vocabulary wherein Procopius uses language similar to the Desert Fathers to indicate the person in need. Procopius beseeches Diodorus' help based upon the reciprocity that obtained between them, opening with the words, "Again there is an occasion for piety and there is turning toward your advice (lit. *sophiā*)."<sup>56</sup> Procopius writes on behalf of "one of those fellows dedicating themselves to God and known for his philosophy,"<sup>57</sup> who was unjustly arrested and apparently angered a judge by resisting arrest. Procopius promises that if Diodorus intervenes "you will receive the praise of all as both the first and, having asked fervently, you will also have become the model of noble philanthropy among all others."<sup>58</sup>

Procopius *Letter* 159 to Elias, his only surviving letter superscribed to a bishop, bristles with Stoic commonplaces and does not articulate any specifically Christian content.<sup>59</sup> Commenting on the impermanent nature of human experience as like productions of tragedy, Procopius acknowledges that "such things I will pass over in silence toward a man who long ago

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<sup>55</sup> By the end of the fourth century, monasticism at Gaza had become a social and cultural reality of great importance in the region. See *RDG*, 481-82n530-31.

<sup>56</sup> πάλιν εὐσεβείας καιρὸς καὶ πάλιν πρὸς τὴν ὑμετέραν σοφίαν ὁ δρόμος.

<sup>57</sup> ἀνὴρ γὰρ τις τῶν ἑαυτοῦς ἀναθέντων θεῷ καὶ ἐκ φιλοσοφίας γνωριζομένων

<sup>58</sup> ἀλλ' οὖν αὐτὸς πάντων ἀναδέξῃ τὸν ἔπαινον ὡς καὶ πρῶτος καὶ λίαν αἰτήσας καὶ τῆς καλῆς φιλανθρωπίας γεγωνῶς τοῖς ἄλλοις παράδειγμα.

<sup>59</sup> It is unclear here whether the Elias of *Letter* 159 is the same as the recipient of *Letter* 79 (also addressed to Eusebius), a relative of Eusebius and of the young Megalus. Ciccolella argues that one must take into account that the tone of *Letter* 27 is far warmer and less formal than that of *Letter* 159, as well as *Letter* 36 in which Procopius thanks Elias for a gift and describes Elias as a generous but powerful person. *Letter* 36 lacks the address of "bishop." See *RDG*, 453n150.

formed the correct judgments concerning things upon the earth and is victorious over fortune on account of disdainful matters.”<sup>60</sup> That is, Elias has already forged an intellectual means of mastering the endless mutations of Fortune. Yet he wishes to reiterate several Stoic consolations:

Such a thing only do I want to call to mind, that nothing is mine in the same way that I am mine. For what are we? Certainly not this body which is in a state of flux, and not the nonsense of possessions, and whatever by chance creates power, but the logical soul shackled in the body on whatever accounts.<sup>61</sup>

Procopius’ invocation of generic Stoicism employs here the rich concept of the “logical soul” (*psuchē logikē*) as the living part of a person engaged with *logoi*—that is, speech, thought, and analysis all at once. Procopius affirms that the logical soul, not the body or one’s possessions, is the single unassailable identity and possession of learned men. Men who run back to themselves were free men,

Wherefore those who have perceived the necessary views have separated themselves from everything other than this as an extraneous burden, thinking that these things [i.e., possessions, the body] do not pertain at all to one’s own being, and they have considered as nothing anything that hindered this perception, not torture of the body, not loss of possession, not difficulty of circumstances.<sup>62</sup>

Men who can dissociate from fleshly experience recognize that the life of the body and possessions pertains not at all to their true being. Suggesting the violence of men bent on acquiring wealth, Procopius praises as free those who “were cautious of one thing, not to fall

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<sup>60</sup> ταῦτα μὲν σιωπήσω πρὸς ἄνδρα πάλαι κατεγνωκότα τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ τὴν τύχην νικῶντα δι’ ὧν ὑπερορᾷ, μηδὲν ἐκείνης θαυμάζειν ἐθέλων.

<sup>61</sup> τοσοῦτον δὲ μόνον ὑπομηΐσω, ὡς οὐδὲν οὕτως ἡμέτερον ὡς ἡμεῖς ἑαυτῶν. τί δὲ ἡμεῖς ; οὐ σῶμα δήπου τοῦτό γε τὸ ρευστόν, οὐδὲ χρημάτων ὕθλος, οὐδ’ ὅσα τὴν ἰσχὺν παρασκευάζει τῇ τύχῃ, ἀλλὰ ψυχὴ λογικὴ δι’ οὐστῖνας δὴ λόγους πεπεδημένη τῷ σώματι.

<sup>62</sup> ὅθεν οἱ φρονεῖν ἐγνωκότες τὰ δέοντα πᾶν ὀτιοῦν παρὰ ταύτην ἀπεσκευάζοντο ὥσπερ ἄχθος ἀλλότριον, μηδὲν πρὸς ἰδίαν οὐσίαν ταῦτα τείνειν ἠγούμενοι, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐποιοῦντο τῆς γνώμης ἐμπόδιον, οὐ σώματος αἰκισμὸν, οὐ χρημάτων ἀποβολήν, οὐ καιροῦ δυσκολίαν.

from virtue, and were cautious also to count the desire for wealth and care for the body as slavish, subordinating the better thing unworthily to the inferior, and admiring violent men and especially those all the more wealthy than yourself.”<sup>63</sup> Subverting the traditional Roman elite model of the grasping *dunamenoι*, Procopius asserts that the wealthy and powerful men of the city are in fact slaves to that which is less than the mind itself.

Quoting a phrase apparently uttered by Anaxarchus of Abdera<sup>64</sup> upon being crushed to death by mortar at the order of the Cyprian tyrant Nicoreontos or Timocreontos in the fourth century B.C., Procopius praises the man who “treating the body as foreign, utters that liberal saying, ‘crush, crush the sack of Anaxarchus, for you will never crush Anaxarchus himself.’”<sup>65</sup> Flashing a pedantic phrase in which Anaxarchus apostrophizes himself, Procopius affirms the alienation of the soul from the body and the indestructibility of the soul itself. He launches next a proverbial quotation, writing that “another person having voluntarily cast away all of his possessions, says ‘Krates is the one who frees Krates;’ such things and other such things are typical of the noble soul, which treads upon its own pleasures and does not know how to change in changing circumstances.”<sup>66</sup> The noble logical soul alters not relative to external conditions. Referring to a general Stoic precept urging the individual’s indifference to the fluxes of temporal

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<sup>63</sup> καὶ μίαν ἠύλαβουῖντο ζημίαν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐκπεσεῖν καὶ χρημάτων πόθῳ καὶ φειδοῖ τοῦ σώματος ἐν ἀνδραπόδου λόγῳ τετάχθαι, τὸ κρεῖττον ἀναξίως ὑποβαλόντες τῷ χεῖρονι καὶ θαυμάζοντες ἄνδρας ὕβριστὰς πάντα μᾶλλον πλουτοῦντας ἢπερ αὐτούς.

<sup>64</sup>The phrase cited by Procopius appears in Diogenes Laertius’ biography of Anaxarchus (9.58). No works survives of Anaxarchus who Diogenes Laertius reports was a student of Diogenes of Smyrna. Commonly considered a leading figure of skepticism, Anaxarchus allegedly practiced indifference to external conditions and regarded life as both dream and insanity. For further references, see *RDG*, 498n751.

<sup>65</sup> ὁ μὲν ὡς ἀλλοτρίῳ κεχρημένος τῷ σώματι τὴν ἐλευθέραν ἐκείνην φωνὴν “πτίσσε” λέγων “πτίσσε τὸν Ἀνάξαρχου θύλακον, αὐτὸν γὰρ Ἀνάξαρχον οὔποτε πτίσσεις.”

<sup>66</sup> ὁ δὲ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἐκβολὴν αὐθαίρετον ποιησάμενος “Κράτης” ἔλεγε “Κράτητα ἐλευθεροῦ”. ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα γενναίας ὄντως ψυχῆς, ἥτις ἑαυτῆς ἐστὶ πατοῦσα τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ τοῖς καιροῖς οὐκ οἶδε συμμετατίθεσθαι.

conditions, Procopius draws upon the example of Crates of Thebes, a wealthy citizen who converted all of his wealth into money, which he dispersed among his fellow citizens and then proceeded to live in poverty on the Athenian streets accompanied by his wife Hipparchia.<sup>67</sup> Procopius next shifts to a Stoic exhortation from Epictetus invoking a theatrical metaphor and kindred ideas in Plato: “Remember accordingly, as it seemed to Epictetus, that you are an actor in a drama that the poet desires; and it seemed good to Plato, I suppose, that even if everything went badly, that did not affect him.”<sup>68</sup> Suggesting the similarity between the dissociative attitudes toward external reality in Epictetus and Plato, Procopius reiterates his epistolary advice with additional authority from Greco-Roman traditions. At this point, Procopius resolutely concludes his Stoic diatribe, reminding his bishop friend, reiterating its pith: “For even if it goes well for us, whatever is outside of us concerns us but little. For those things are carried along by another stream.”<sup>69</sup> The logical soul in its nobility is a fortress impenetrable from the outside world.

Although the Stoic commonplaces and specific citations in this letter may be harmonized with various elements of late-ancient Christian thought and passages from Scripture, the sheer absence of any specifically Christian testimony must be considered. Such a letter flaunting erudition of Classical sources with no reference to Christian theology or Scripture addressed to a bishop interlocutor looks strikingly different in its choice of authorities from other Christian

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<sup>67</sup> Crates endorsed and practiced a simple life detached from material goods, and anecdotes pertaining to him resound with humor. A Cynic philosopher and student of Diogenes, Crates taught Zeno of Cyzicus, the founder of Stoicism. The phrase quoted from Procopius here, apparently proverbial, was also recorded by the *Suda* and in the lexicon attributed to Zonarus. See *RDG*, 498n752, for references.

<sup>68</sup> μεμνήσω τοίνυν, ὡς Ἐπικτήτῳ δοκεῖ, ὅτι ὑποκριτῆς εἶ δράματος οὗ ἂν ἐθέλη ὁ ποιητής • καὶ Πλάτωνι δὲ που δοκεῖ, ὡς ὁ σοφὸς εὐδαίμων, κἂν πάντα δὴ τὰ μὴ ἐπὶ τούτῳ πράττη κακῶς. See Epictetus *Enchiridion* 16; Plato *Gorgias* 507c-e (cf. *RDG*, 498nn753-54).

<sup>69</sup> ἦνικα γὰρ τὰ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν εὐπραγῆ, τῶν ἕξωθεν δῆτουθεν ὀλίγη φροντίς. ἑτέρῳ γὰρ ἐκεῖνα φέρεται ρεύματι.

letters such as those of the Cappadocian Fathers, Theodoret, John Chrysostom, and Isidore of Pelusium. All texts authorizing Procopius' Stoic directives stem from pagan sources. Also noteworthy is Procopius' attitude to the body as a husk containing the soul. There is no sense of the body as created for the resurrection. If the extant letter essentially preserves the original, this text reflects Procopius' decision to advise a bishop in purely pagan currency and suggests a flexible approach to religious identity in which his identity as a carrier of the Classical tradition came to the fore and all elements of his Christian identity were submerged. Here emerges the antiquarian dreamscape wrought by *logoi*. Perhaps Procopius did not draw such a distinction or cite an oppositional relationship between his devotion to pagan texts and his affiliation with Christianity, but he did make specific choices of self-representation in this letter and elsewhere to claim that a particular antiquarian discursive identity is currently "active." In this way, Procopius selects from his multiple identities and engagements and provides linguistic cues or "identity qualifiers" specifying which identity is at play in a given conversational context.<sup>70</sup> By means of a dense classicizing sociolect, Procopius forges "aligning statements" articulating one of his many affiliations.<sup>71</sup> This strategy expresses compartmentalization of affiliative commitments.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, we must not overlook the recipient design evident in this letter. Not only does Procopius represent his own identities in his text, but he artfully shapes his letter with his interlocutor's tastes and affiliations in mind. Procopius wrote to a bishop friend in this style because he perceived that Elias desired to be addressed in these terms and would find it pleasing.

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<sup>70</sup> On the use of identity qualifying in study of social movement networks, see Ann Mische, "Cross-talk in Movements: Reconciling the Culture-Network Link," in Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, eds., *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69-70.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 270.

Procopius anticipates that Elias will be flattered by these references and will find them more enjoyable than citations of Scripture or Christian theology. The letter as a finely-tailored gift represents simultaneously the tastes of recipient and author. This letter suggests in particular a bishop rather dissimilar to those sources that scholars traditionally select as representatives of the profession by the late fifth and early sixth century. We must take seriously the possibility that a bishop in the environs of Gaza as late as the sixth century preferred to be addressed in the Stoic pagan currency of conventional ancient moralizing rather than the currency of the Sermon on the Mount. Christians such as Procopius and Elias, nominally Christian, yet exhibiting a flexible engagement with pagan speech different in their preferences from a Chrysostom or a Theodoret, suggest the diversity of Christian identities in the final century of Roman rule in the Greek East.

In his epistolary speech, Procopius delineates himself as a philosopher-sophist and teacher of virtue, a living paradigm of renunciation of wealth and excess.<sup>73</sup> The *topos* of the sophist as philosopher had its roots in the Second Sophistic, and forged a bridge between the two disciplines, and Procopius' epistolary posturing likely reflects the longevity of this *topos*.<sup>74</sup> There is nothing specifically Christian, however, in this self representation. In fact, Procopius usually defends his poverty with appeals that it befits a true philosopher.

Procopius lambasts his associates' devotion to wealth. In *Letter* 146 to Nephalius, a man who allegedly has sway with local bishops and was likely a Christian, Procopius chides his wealthy friend for apparently speaking ill of poverty. He jabs, "you in abundance of wealth lament poverty and I look down on money and wealth even though I am implicated in admirable

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<sup>73</sup> Ciccolella, "Le Epistole," *RDG*, 128-34.

<sup>74</sup> See *RDG*, 129.



poverty.”<sup>75</sup> Defending the virtue of his poverty, Procopius bids Nephalius to “stop mean-spiritedly lamenting for me, and consider nothing great unless it leads toward virtue. For whatever is not such (i.e., leading toward virtue) belongs to another and leads toward guile.”<sup>76</sup>

For Procopius, poverty and the intellectual life are inseparable. As we have addressed above in Chapter 4, in *Letter 75* to Nestorius, Procopius laments that his former student has selected to pursue wealth through agriculture, “having said adieu to philosophy.”<sup>77</sup> Procopius mourns that the cultivation he produced in Nestorius, who once “philosophized beyond poverty,”<sup>78</sup> is now lost. *Letter 106* to Stephanus contains similar disparagement of material pursuits. Procopius complains, “you seem to see nothing but gold, and it leads you and makes you elated, and it has filled your mind with images of gold.”<sup>79</sup>

In *Letter 131* to his former pupil Sabinus, Procopius defends his “impoverished” life of the mind and criticizes his student, now an advocate, for pursuing wealth and physical pleasures to the detriment of the development of the mind and virtue, its concomitant value. Invoking Irus, the Homeric figure symbolizing extreme poverty, Procopius begins: “You bring forth poverty against me as blameworthy and as the most cursed quarry, and what is more, Irus I am, perhaps,

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<sup>75</sup> σὺ μὲν ἐν πλήθει χρημάτων τὴν ἀπορίαν θρηνεῖς, ἐγὼ δὲ τὰ χρήματα καὶ τοὺς πλουτοῦντας περιφρονῶ, καίτοι πενία θαυμαστῇ συνεχόμενος.

<sup>76</sup> τοιγαροῦν παῦσαι μικροψύχως ἡμῖν ὀδυρόμενος, μηδὲν μέγα νομίζων, πλὴν εἰ μὴ τι φέροι πρὸς ἀρετὴν. ὅ τι γὰρ μὴ τοιοῦτον, ἀλλότριόν τέ ἐστι καὶ πρὸς ἀπάτην ἐφέλκεται.

<sup>77</sup> τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ χαίρειν εἰπών.

<sup>78</sup> ὁ παρὰ τὴν πενίαν πάλαι φιλοσοφῶν.

<sup>79</sup> οὐδὲν ὡς ἔοικεν ὅ τι μὴ χρυσίον ὄραξ, ἄγει δέ σε αὐτὸ καὶ ποιεῖ μετάρσιον, καὶ χρυσῶν εἰδώλων ἀνέπλησέ σου τὸν νοῦν.

in your eyes, in want of all daily needs.”<sup>80</sup> Procopius admonishes his pupil for “having fallen away from both virtue and philosophy, pitying what you ought to admire. . .”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, does Sabinus now consider those who like Procopius live in the rarefied atmosphere of intellectual devotion to be deprived of great things, “the one who has not been borne to the things below by the weight of material things?”<sup>82</sup>

In the remainder of the letter Procopius disparages the motivation and habits of Sabinus, a power-grasping provincial hunting pleasure and influence. Procopius declares, “measuring happiness by the stomach, inclining toward the common opinion, you let out your tongue for hire for unlawful purposes and stir up the courts, and [corrupt] public officials are the by-products of your delusion.”<sup>83</sup> As defender of intellectual treasures, Procopius does not desist from speaking truth to the power-hungry. Captious of Sabinus’ habits of consumption and comportment, Procopius rails that “your dinners are splendid, your clothes colorful, and your gait pompous; you pour out your gaze hither and thither, and your ears are everywhere, just like Midas, if some little woman astonished by the scene you make should cry out.”<sup>84</sup> Sabinus is an Endymion unconscious of virtue: “But after being fettered by a great sleep like an Endymion, will you not

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<sup>80</sup> σὺ μὲν ὡς ἐπ’ ὄνειδεις πενίαν προφέρεις ἐμοί, καὶ θηρίον ἐξωλέστατον εἶναι σοὶ τὸ χρῆμα δοκεῖ, καί, τὸ δὴ μέγιστον, Ἴτρος ἐγὼ παρὰ σοὶ καὶ τῶν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἴσως ἐπιδηῖς. Odysseus fights against this beggar and kills him in *Odyssey* 18.1-107; see *RDG*, 468n358.

<sup>81</sup> καὶ τί γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴποις ἀρετῆς ὁμοῦ καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἐκπεπτωκῶς, ἐλεῶν μὲν ἅ γε θαυμάζειν ἐχρήν . . .

<sup>82</sup> καὶ μὴ τῷ βάρει τῆς ὕλης πρὸς τὰ κάτω φερόμενον ;

<sup>83</sup> τῇ γαστρὶ γὰρ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν μετρῶν καὶ δόξαις ἀνθρώπων προκείμενος ἐκμισθοῖς μὲν εἰς ἅ μὴ θέμις τὴν γλῶτταν, κυκᾶς δὲ τὰ δικαστήρια, πάρεργον δέ σου τῆς ἀπάτης οἱ δῆμιοι.

<sup>84</sup> ἑορτὴ δέ σου λαμπρὰ ἐσθῆς ποικίλη καὶ βάδισμα σοβαρὸν καὶ βλέμμα τῆδε κάκεῖσε χεόμενον, καὶ πανταχοῦ σοὶ τὰ ὄψα, καθάπερ ὁ Μίδαας, εἴ ποῦ τι φθέβξαιτο γύναιον τὴν σὴν σκηνὴν ἐκπληττόμενον.

wake up to virtue?”<sup>85</sup> Procopius pleads that Sabinus free himself: “Stop now gaping at your poor body and nourishing a prison for yourself. Stop dreaming about gold and always imagining a wealth of silver, and holding one (public) office after another in your mind.”<sup>86</sup> The way that Sabinus conducts himself now, “the interior things are such as not any of your dear things.”<sup>87</sup> Procopius closes with his final archaizing advising, wrought in the pagan currency of worship of the goddess of poverty (Penia): “But come of your own accord to me if it seems good, worship the goddess of poverty that you and I share and recognize that she loves you. She will follow you around more than me, and it has been proclaimed that she will love you.”<sup>88</sup> Drawing upon mythical figures from the Classical heritage such as Irus, Midas, Endymion, and the goddess of Poverty herself, Procopius frames his counsel in the antiquarian tropes of a pagan currency.

It is impossible to verify Ciccolella’s assertion that Procopius’ public embrace of poverty and austerity—an overturning of the public postures of ostentation among sophists such as Philostratus and Lucian—was “due in part to the spiritual climate created with the establishment of Christianity and, above all, of monasticism.”<sup>89</sup> Typically the justifications Procopius provides in the letters preserve the sociolect’s ideal reality by repeating general Stoic statements and arguments interlinking philosophy and poverty. His posturing is wrought altogether from standard Greco-Roman moralizing and is often colloquial and without clear sources despite the

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<sup>85</sup> ἀλλὰ μέχρι δὴ τίνος ὑπνω μακρῶ πεδηθεὶς οἶά τις Ἐνδυμίων πρὸς ἀρετὴν οὐκ ἀνίστασαι ;

<sup>86</sup> παῦσαι λοιπὸν πρὸς τὸ σωματίον κεχηνῶς καὶ κατὰ σαυτοῦ τρέφων τὸ δεσμωτήριον. παῦσαι χρυσίον ὄνειροπολῶν καὶ ἀργύρου πλῆθος αἰεὶ φανταζόμενος καὶ πολλὰς ἀρχὰς τῆ διανοία περινοστῶν.

<sup>87</sup> τὰ ἔνδον οἶα μηδενὶ τῶν φίλων.

<sup>88</sup> ἀλλ’ αὐτομόλησον πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰ δοκεῖ, καὶ τὴν κοινὴν θεὸν τὴν Πενίαν προσκύνει καὶ φιλοῦσαν ἐπίγνωθι. καὶ γὰρ σέ περιέπει μᾶλλον ἢπερ ἡμᾶς, καὶ φιλήσειν ἔτι κατεπήγγελται.

<sup>89</sup> “. . . in parte dovuto alla temperie spirituale creatasi con l’affermarsi del Cristianesimo e soprattutto del monachesimo,” *RDG*, 132.

highly compressed, artful, and strategic nature of his epistolary speech. Ciccolella's approach in her essay on the letters in *Rose di Gaza* is to assign Christian meanings to these un-Christian letters. Ciccolella contends that "despite the lack of any specific reference in the letters to the Bible and to the Gospel message, Procopius approximates a Christian teacher in his moral rectitude, his condemnation of excesses, and his rigor in unmasking the pitfalls of inconsistent behaviors, easy money, and abuse."<sup>90</sup> The modern reader may overlay the model of a Christian teacher onto Procopius' letters, but his careful posturing before his peers involves the deliberate decision to showcase his immersion in the classical texts. Ciccolella's interpretation forces an unwarranted reading between the lines. For Ciccolella, "the Procopian letters indicate that the model of the pagan philosopher sophist and the figure of the Christian spiritual teacher could merge harmoniously with one another."<sup>91</sup> Judging from the extant epistolary corpus, to impute the *persona* of a Christian spiritual teacher to Procopius' epistolary self-fashioning is to Christianize unnecessarily texts which were deliberately left un-Christianized by their author and/or the corpus creator(s). We cannot argue that the surviving letters necessarily typify all the letters Procopius penned, but we can make certain assertions based on the surviving evidence that the letters as we have them do indicate that particular types of social interactions occurred and that these interactions tell us about the social patterns and values of a group of provincials. Additionally, the preservation of these texts underscores that Procopius' immediate descendants revered and treasured this type of epistolary interaction.

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<sup>90</sup> "Nonostante manchi nelle lettere qualsiasi preciso riferimento alla Bibbia e al messaggio evangelico, Procopio si avvicina ad un maestro cristiano per la dirittura morale, la condanna degli eccessi e il rigore nello smascherare le insidie di comportamenti incoerenti, facili guadagni e sopraffazioni," *RDG*, 134.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*: "In sostanza, l'epistolario procopiano indica che il modello del sofista-filosofo pagano e la figura dell'intellettuale cristiano maestro spiritual potevano fondersi armonicamente tra loro."

Not only did he choose to write in a Classical pagan epistolary prose, but Procopius likely did not have the proficiency in biblical texts to quote from memory in letters. When we turn to evaluate Procopius' Christian writings, the absence of specifically Christian vocabulary suggests Procopius' idiosyncratic engagement with these texts via generic idioms of Classical thought. His work on the catena was mainly editorial in nature, collecting commentaries and stringing together various commentaries and their related verses. Arguably, Procopius had not internalized and memorized Scripture; he was a sophist and specialist in the Classical texts first and foremost. Choricus, however, was careful to point out in his funeral oration of his mentor that Procopius attained excellence in specifically Christian genres of writing. Choricus anticipates that someone listening to Procopius' many achievements could respond by carping, "but the deceased, as he seems to me, has never touched the holy writings. In what sort of leisure did he live that he had a share of so many virtues?"<sup>92</sup> Choricus proceeds to assure his audience that Procopius, with the exception of his dress, was so ensconced in the study of Scripture that he resembled a priest. In this defensive sidebar, Choricus may have responded to contemporary opposition to those whose writing proficiency was solely within the sphere of classical genres.

When we turn to his identifiable language in the extant catenae, Procopius' interjections sound rather distinct from the discourses of the Fathers. The following constitutes Procopius' proem under the MSS heading "the same author's subject under discussion"<sup>93</sup> to his Catena on the Book of Ecclesiastes:

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<sup>92</sup> *Or. Fun. In Proc.* 21. ἄνθρωπος οὗτος, τὸν τελευτήσαντα λέγων, οὐ πρόποτε θείων, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἦψατο συγγραμμάτων, ποίαν γὰρ ἦγε σχολὴν τοσαύταις μεριζόμενος ἀρεταῖς.

<sup>93</sup> Ὑπόθεσις τοῦ αὐτοῦ.

The proverbial thoughts having exercised the mind, the approach now is to the loftier contemplation which requires greater efforts still. Nevertheless as far as it lies in our power we must make room for the search for these things, we who are persuaded by the Savior when he says, “Examine the Scriptures.” For the Savior also furnishes for us the ability to do this. Accordingly, in all the other Scriptures, the historical and prophetic books, the aim looks toward other things that are not totally useful for the church, but the teaching of this book (Ecclesiastes) looks only toward the *politeia* of the Church, instructing (a person) in those things through which one might accomplish the life in virtue, setting the mind beyond sense-perception and things thought according to the sense to be glorious, the book casts into us desire for what you cannot attain through the senses.<sup>94</sup>

Procopius identifies Ecclesiastes as contributing to understanding of the political organization (*politeia*) of the Church. Selecting a mainly classicizing vocabulary, Procopius contends that Ecclesiastes instructs the reader in virtue (*aretē*) which he opposes to “sense perception” (*aisthēsis*). This type of antinomy is not derived from the Scriptural language but is a sort of generic and colloquial speech with resonances from Classical philosophy and pagan texts. Procopius does not engage with the text in terms of biblical language or contemporary theological conceptualizations.

### Synesius: Identity Qualifying

Like bishop Elias addressed in Procopius *Letter* 159, Synesius likely signals the diversity of bishops and Christians, the many “flavors” of Late Ancient urban literati who self-identified with Christianity in some way, even if only by serving in an elected ecclesiastical office. The extant writings of this reluctant bishop suggest that the pagan-Christian binary—itsself a creation

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<sup>94</sup> τῶν παροιμιακῶν νοημάτων γυμνασάντων τὸν νοῦν, ἡ ἀνοδος νῦν ἐπὶ τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν γίνεται θεωρίαν, πόνων ἔτι δεομένη μειζόνων. πλὴν ὅμως κατὰ δύναμιν τῆ περι τούτων ἐγχωρητέον ζητήσει, τῷ σωτήρι πειθομένοις εἰπόντι • ἐρευνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς. αὐτὸς γὰρ ἡμῖν χορηγήσει καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο τὴν δύναμιν. ταῖς μὲν οὖν ἄλλαις ἀπάσαις γραφαῖς, ἱστορίαις τε καὶ προφητείαις, καὶ πρὸς ἄλλα τινὰ τῶν μὴ πάνυ τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ χρησίμων ὁ σκοπὸς βλέπει • ἡ δὲ τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου διδασκαλία πρὸς μόνην βλέπει τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν πολιτείαν, δι’ ὧν ἂν τις τὸν ἐν ἀρετῇ κατορθώσει βίον ὑψηλομένη, ὑπερτιθεῖσα τὸν νοῦν τῆς αἰσθήσεως καὶ τῶν κατ’ αἰσθησιν εἶναι δοκούντων λαμπρῶν, τῶν ἀνεφίκτων αἰσθήσει τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐμβαλλουσα.

of particular ecclesiastical discourses—falls short in mapping the religious and spiritual engagements of LateAntique individuals. In a sort of “supermarket” approach, we must remain open to the diverse ways in which individuals, both reflectingly and unreflectingly, embraced and discarded various elements of Christian and pagan thought simultaneously.

Synesius’ data has garnered diverse scholarly opinions regarding his true religious identity. As we have already investigated in Chapter 5, “Letters and Places,” Synesius was a self-proclaimed philosopher who accepted the office of the bishop of Ptolemais in 411 despite his documented misgivings about orthodox Christianity conveyed in *Letter* 105 to his brother Euoptius.<sup>95</sup> Synesius refused to accept the idea of the Resurrection of Jesus which he regarded as “common,” nor could he abandon his Neoplatonic perception that the world was temporally infinite. *Letters* 11 and 96 record Synesius’ view that he “would have preferred many deaths to the bishopric.” This was not a man eager for ecclesiastical service, to judge from his own self-portrayal.

Scholars have envisaged various models of Synesius’ religious identity. Wilamowitz judged Synesius to be more of a political than a religious convert who never deserted his devotion to Neoplatonic philosophy. Augustine Fitzgerald, lone translator of Synesius’ written corpus into English, viewed Synesius as a practical mind, as opposed to a “mystic” like the other Neoplatonists: Synesius was more a man of action than a thinker. Lacombrade approached Synesius’ religious development as a sort of slow-moving “pilgrim’s progress.” For

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<sup>95</sup> On the date of Synesius’ ordination, see Roques, *Études*, 47-64. Roques contends that the date of Synesius’ election was at the beginning of 411 and his consecration in 412.

Lacombrade, Synesius moved systematically toward Christianity but died before full conversion could take place.<sup>96</sup>

Two of the more recent discussions of Synesius' religious identity include Jay Bregman's monograph, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher Bishop*, and Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long's discussions in *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*.<sup>97</sup> In Bregman's view, Synesius self-identified primarily as a philosopher, and Neoplatonism was the path to salvation and was the religious orientation to which he subordinated all other views. Synesius was not a Christian in the "commonly accepted sense of the term, even by fourth and fifth century standards,"<sup>98</sup> nor did he wish to become one. Of course what Bregman assumes here—the fourth and fifth century standards of "being Christian"—illustrates a significant problem. These "standards" appear to be very different depending on where you look.

Employing archaeological evidence, inscriptions, and Synesius' written corpus, Cameron and Long argue against what they cite as the traditional scholarly consensus that Synesius was a pagan. Rather anachronistically, Cameron and Long assert that Synesius' Hellenism was a cultural and not a religious identity.<sup>99</sup> Such a tidy use of the modern categories "culture" and "religion," however, begs intervention. Not only is the unreflecting use of culture "dangerously capacious, semantically vague and confused, and finally, taken as a whole, inconsistent,"<sup>100</sup> but

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<sup>96</sup> For a useful overview, see Bregman, 5-8.

<sup>97</sup> Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long, *Barbarians and Bishops at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>98</sup> Bregman, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Cameron and Long, 62.

<sup>100</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa, "Culture," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Credo e-book.



retrojection of the term to the ancient context demands acknowledgement of the term's embeddedness in historical and ideological processes undergirding peculiar modern ideologies of selfhood.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, culture and religion in modern thought are hopelessly interdependent, and even when the two are conceived as separate there is “typically a presumption of an intimate relation or complicity between the two, or of a commanding and controlling influence over the other.”<sup>102</sup>

The ancients had neither of these categories. More than *paideia*, the closest global term in Greek for culture in Late Antiquity—Hellenism—arguably intermixed what we call “culture” and “religion” in multifarious complex ways and constitutes an excellent example highlighting the collapse of modern conceptual delineations vis-à-vis the ancient categories.<sup>103</sup> Cameron and Long neglect the fact that philosophy often was what we call religion in antiquity, a phenomenon with roots beginning before the Classical world and penetrating into Late Antiquity with vigor. Philosophical traditions had complex relationships with early Christian communities and Christian thought. Synesius' letters, hymns, treatises, and homilies attest to the fact that he clearly had philosophical commitments that were inextricably spiritual and intellectual in nature. Privileging the binary proclaimed by patristic sources, Cameron and Long envisage an imaginary uncrossable line between the spheres “pagan” and “Christian.” This binary may get us closer to understanding ourselves as well as the Fathers, but it does not get us closer to understanding Synesius as he represented himself and his commitments.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> For an excellent recent discussion of Hellenism and its relationship to paganism see Yannis Papadogiannakis, *Christianity and Hellenism in the Fifth-Century Greek East: Theodoret's Apologetics Against the Greeks in Context* (Washington D.C: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012), 23-28.

For Long and Cameron, it was not so much the conflict between philosophy and Christianity that made Synesius wary of accepting the role of bishop but his fears about the demand it would place on his time. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, however, Synesius' letters attest to profound personal ambivalence regarding loyalty to philosophy and obligation to civic duties. Cameron and Long underestimated how Synesius' abiding attachment and sense of obligation to his homeland may have motivated his acceptance of the bishopric. Synesius reveals in the letters his continuing personal struggles over balancing philosophy with an unwavering loyalty to the land of his ancestors and a sense of civic responsibility befitting a curial magnate. Thus, Synesius' ordination was not likely inherently "religious" in nature.

I want to suggest an alternative model for ferreting out Synesius' religious identity, but it is one that does not lead to a definitive answer. Synesius did not represent himself as having a definite identity. Not only should we exclude the "pagan or Christian" binary imposed by certain loud voices among the Fathers, but we should interrogate the issue of religious identification in the letters from the perspective of how Synesius strategically deploys language to represent his affiliations with his interlocutors and lateral parties.

Synesius' written corpus may well represent a much-needed heuristic opportunity to circumvent and marginalize for a little while those voices scholarship has made so dominant, the "oppositional identities" of Fathers such as Augustine or John Chrysostom, Synesius' contemporaries. Like Aeneas and Procopius, Synesius suggests to us that there were alternative ways of conceptualizing religious engagement among Late Antique literati. Like most of us, Synesius wore different hats. He had diverse foci of loyalty, including some sort of self-wrought Christian identity as well as an enduring spiritual devotion to the Neoplatonism he imbibed at the feet of his mentor Hypatia. Depending upon his interlocutor, the context of the letter, and

Synesius' perception of the language demanded by that context, Synesius chose to represent his affections and obligations in different ways. I propose that the best empirical approach to studying Synesius and his religious positions is to view his letters through the lens of "identity qualifying." The man suggested by the letters must be interpreted on the basis of what we can know about the context undergirding the letter's production. An undeniable element of Synesius' acceptance of the bishopric was his sense of civic duty and loyalty to his besieged homeland. To some extent, his own representations of his Christianity must always be read with that context in mind. Ultimately, as we will explore below, we cannot ignore the role of Hypatia as a spiritual mentor and holy woman for Synesius.

When we turn to the language of the letters—overwhelmingly contrived in the idioms of *paideia*—it becomes evident that Synesius' representation of himself as a Christian corresponded directly to a letter's contextual demands. The living tools of Synesius' epistolary intimacy overwhelmingly derived from pagan theories of friendship. In her study of Christian friendship, Caroline White found that Synesius only rarely intermixes pagan friendship tropes with references to Scripture, and overall his views of friendship are solidly pagan and devoid of Christian content.<sup>104</sup>

According to the principle of identity qualifying, Synesius' use of Christian language appears to be mainly strategic in nature. That is, the preponderance of Synesius' Christian language operates to articulate his role as a bishop in conversations with other ecclesiastical figures. Of Synesius' 156 extant letters, those which include quotations, paraphrase, or discussion of Scripture are *Letters* 4, 11, 28, 41, 90, and 128. The recipients of these letters are

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<sup>104</sup> Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105; on Synesius, see 98-110.

all members of the clergy with the exception of *Letter 28* addressed to Simplicius, who is otherwise unknown.<sup>105</sup> Synesius most likely invokes Scripture deliberately to showcase his knowledge of Holy Writ before Christian interlocutors. Synesius abstains from using Scriptural language in his conversations with his close Hellene friends such as Pylaemenes, Nicander, and Troilus, as well as his letters to his brother and his letters to Hypatia. Synesius uses language pertaining to Fortune and chance far more than language pertaining to providence, though he does use God in the singular more often than he swears by the pagan gods, though this can be either a Christian or pagan usage. With the exception of *Letter 4* in which Synesius opposes himself to a local Arian by the name of Quintianus, Synesius' letters lack specific discussion of theology.

In *Letter 4*, which Roques dates to 412-13,<sup>106</sup> Synesius staunchly throws his weight behind the Orthodox Church and depicts Quintianus and his peers as threats to security such as bandits and brigands. In this case we cannot exclude the interpretation that Synesius, grudgingly accepting the office of bishop out of loyalty to his homeland and a sense of curial duty, strove to defend the church in this way mainly as a means of protecting an institution providing order and community in a besieged province. The Scriptural references punctuating this letter—a range of quotations from Psalms 97.8, Matthew 16.4, Matthew 13.25, Numbers 25.10-13, and 1 Samuel 15.11—operate as rhetorical devices accentuating a shared culture between Synesius and the bishops he addresses, building rapport and thereby increasing the chance that his request for aid will be granted. In this case, Synesius seeks help in removing these Arian upstarts from the territory of Ptolemaïs. Synesius selectively and strategically

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<sup>105</sup> See Roques, 2:121n2.

<sup>106</sup> Roques, 2:90n1.

deploys Christian language. This is a culture he typically only marshalls in discussions with churchmen.

Virtually all the letters in which Synesius broadcasts a clearly-recognizable element of Christian identity are those addressed to other members of the clergy or holy orders and/or those letters written, according to Roques, in the period after Synesius had accepted the episcopate, during the years 411-13. One cannot prove, however, that this only signifies, as Lacombrade proposed, Synesius' waxing Christian identity later in life. The evidence of the letters Synesius wrote to Hypatia delineating her as a holy woman written while he was bishop, as well as the letters Synesius penned during his spiritual lowpoints (also coinciding with his bishopric), suggest that philosophy remained one of Synesius' deepest intellectual and religious devotions and a source of spiritual and psychological amelioration until the end of his life.

Unlike the letters of Procopius or Aeneas, through Synesius' letters we can glimpse pieces of his life's trajectory, and the language he uses in his times of personal crisis may serve as a metric of his innermost spiritual concerns and values. In his spiritual nadirs, Synesius turns not to Christian sentiments but to the consoling presence of Hypatia. In the seven letters addressed to her, Hypatia emerges as a holy person and mentor, a spiritual guide. Synesius thinks of Hypatia as being a holy person, similar to the literary type of holy man (*theios anēr*) in writers such as Marinus and Proclus.<sup>107</sup> Thus, when Synesius attributes a divine nature to his teacher, he follows a broader Late Antique trend of associating holiness with philosophical knowledge.<sup>108</sup> Though Synesius does not explicitly trace her as the divine offspring in a philosophical succession from Plato or Pythagoras like the writers Proclus or Marinus, in Letter

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<sup>107</sup> Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 190.

<sup>108</sup> Idem, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982): 34.

10 he writes to Hypatia of “her most divine soul.”<sup>109</sup> As we have seen above in Chapter 5, Synesius writes in his letter to Paeonius accompanying the astrolabe that she is the most holy teacher, and in *Letter* 137 he refers to Hypatia as presiding over the mysteries of philosophy. As in the language of mysteries applied to education, Synesius’ speech may express the residue of a linguistic habitus he used to highlight connection with the divine learning of philosophy, which Hypatia represented during the spiritual abysses of his life. A major theme in the letters to her is Synesius’ analysis of the domain of Fortune and those forces outside of his control which shape certain life conditions, versus the domain of his *gnomē*, or his own mental faculties and power to make decisions. Synesius seeks to align himself with Hypatia’s devotion to philosophy as a means of enduring the difficult experiences of losing his sons and confronting barbarian invasion of his home city and region. For Synesius, Hypatia’s soul represents an entity which cannot be transgressed by the forces of Fortune. Hypatia has served as a hierophant initiating Synesius into the divine secrets of philosophy, and he retreats to a sort of philosophical Neverland whenever he corresponds with her through letters.

Many of Synesius’ extant letters addressed to Hypatia serve as a means of personal disclosure for Synesius confiding in his mentor and seeking her emotional and spiritual guidance. Synesius writes to Hypatia of his most profound personal troubles. In particular, Synesius confides in Hypatia his intense spiritual pain in grieving for the deaths of his young sons in *Letter* 16: “it is like a stream held in check burst out all at once, and the sweetness of life vanished. May I cease either to live or to remember the tomb of my sons.”<sup>110</sup> In *Letter* 10, Synesius opens with warm greetings to Hypatia and her friends, but remarks that her silence—

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<sup>109</sup> τῆς θειοτάτης σου ψυχῆς.

<sup>110</sup> εἶτα ὥσπερ ῥεῦμα ἐπισχεθὲν ἀθρόον ἐρρήη, καὶ μετέβαλεν ἡ γλυκύτης τοῦ βίου. Πασαίμην ἢ ζῶν ἢ μεμνημένος τῶν υἱέων τοῦ τάφου.

perhaps she has not written for a longer period of time than was usual—compounds his own sorrows. If only he might hear from her, he would be relieved of half his own troubles to rejoice in Hypatia’s happiness. He pleads with Hypatia to respond to his letters: “I have lost my boys and my friends, and the favor of everyone, and the greatest loss is of your most divine soul, which alone I hoped would remain to me stronger than the spiteful treatments of heaven and that which flows from fate.”<sup>111</sup> In Synesius’ view, Hypatia’s divine soul has strength and power over those forces outside of human control. It is through letters that Synesius can access the power of this divine soul and cling to it in the midst of devastating personal suffering.

Synesius’ letters to Hypatia provide for him a means to confide not only his emotional distress, but his attitudes of how to confront circumstances beyond his control. In *Letter 81*, Synesius writes that the *daimōn*—meaning here a force transcending human control (see Chapter 5 above)—who has made him bereaved of many brave sons wishes to take away from Synesius all that he can. Synesius declares that the *daimōn* “will not take from me the ability to choose the best course and inflict the right penalty on those who do injustice. For let him not prevail over our ability to make reasoned choices.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, Synesius asserts the inviolability of the power of his *gnomē*—or his capability to use his reason and make decisions for himself.<sup>113</sup> Intertwining the capacities of reason, choice, and intent, the *gnomē* is the inner fortress where Synesius can withstand the assaults of Fortune. Likening himself to the Milesians who were

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<sup>111</sup> ἀπεστέρημαι μετὰ τῶν παιδίων καὶ τῶν φίλων καὶ τῆς παρὰ πάντων εὐνοίας καί, τὸ μέγιστον, τῆς θειοτάτης σου ψυχῆς, ἣν ἐγὼ μόνην ἐμαυτῷ ἐμμένειν ἤλπισα κρείττω καὶ δαιμονίας ἐπηρείας καὶ τῶν ἐξ εἰμαρμενης ῥευμάτων.

<sup>112</sup> ἀλλὰ τό γε προαιρεῖσθαι τὰ βέλτιστα καὶ τίθεσθαι τοῖς ἀδικουμένοις οὐκ ἀφαιρήσεται • μὴ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τῆς γνώμης ἡμῶν κατισχύσειε.

<sup>113</sup> *Gnomē* can indicate a range of mental capacities, including a means of knowing something or the organ by which something is known. It can also signify thought, judgment, as well as one’s will, purpose, resolve, intent, or opinion. See *LSJ*, 166.

strong long ago,<sup>114</sup> Synesius mourns how he was once a help to his friends, and how Hypatia used to call him goodness in another person. Synesius feels abandoned by everyone, unless Hypatia can help. He wails, “but now I am left behind alone by all, unless you are able to help in some way; for I count you as an inviolate good along with your virtue.”<sup>115</sup> In recognizing the inviolability of both his own reason and the good of Hypatia, Synesius affirms to his mentor a philosopher’s commitment to the invisible inner world of thought and reason, the philosophical Neverland.

#### Isidore: a Vocabulary of Exclusion

Like the most dominant voices of the Fathers who have traditionally told the story of Christianization in the Later Empire, Isidore’s religious identity is oppositional in nature and is represented as supreme above all of his other identities. He does not compartmentalize, like John Chrysostom, who constructed a Christian identity in opposition to other identities—such as Greeks and Jews—that he perceived as fixed and clear-cut entities.<sup>116</sup> Like Chrysostom, Isidore perpetuates the Christian discursive construction of distinct religious identities that did not in fact exist objectively in their contemporary world.<sup>117</sup> Unlike the extant letters of Aeneas, Procopius, or Synesius, Isidore enunciates a vocabulary of exclusion in order to erect high boundaries between Christian and other fixed groups.

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<sup>114</sup> Aristophanes *Plutus* 1002.

<sup>115</sup> νυνὶ δὲ ἀπάντων ἔρημος ὑπολείπομαι πλὴν εἴ τι σὺ δύνη • καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ σὲ μετὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀγαθὸν ἄσυλον ἀριθμῶ.

<sup>116</sup> Sandwell, 6.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.



In Isidore's epistolary speech, what is Christian is the default insider setting, and the distinguished parties are *hoi exōthen*, the Greeks and the Jews. The very defining of pagans in Isidore's approach is to demarcate them spatially as "outsiders" (*hoi exōthen*). Alternately, Isidore also employs "Hellenes" to denote pagans. Yet, as a former city sophist, the Pelusian betrays significant ambivalence concerning when and where lines should be drawn. He often displays a sort of repudiating embrace of pagan ideas and literary traditions. On a case-by-case basis, Isidore's attitudes toward the ideas of the outsiders vary. Sometimes he demonstrates outright hostility and alienation from *hoi exōthen*; sometimes he assimilates and praises *hoi exōthen*. His complex relationship to *hoi exōthen* simultaneously inter-mingles elements of exclusion—they are the outsiders—but also inclusion—their ideas are adduced for some reason. This discursive dialectic of inclusion and exclusion likely underscores the fact that the ideas of *hoi exōthen* and the Hellenes continued to be authoritative guides shaping attitudes and identities in the context of Isidore's interlocutors and wider lateral-address audience.

In *Letter 1276* addressed to Olympius the presbyter-scholasticus, Isidore responds to his friend's request in a preceding letter to correct a group of depraved clergy in Pelusium: namely, Eusebius, Martinianus, Zosimus, and Maron. According to Isidore, Eusebius, current bishop of Pelusium, had ordained as clergymen a number of candidates judged unworthy for office by the former Pelusian bishop Ammonios, including Martinianus, Zosimus, and Maron. In Isidore's epistolary depictions, Eusebius furthermore plundered Church property, exhibited unbridled avarice, sold the priesthood indiscriminately for a fee, diverted alms, and appropriated property intended for the poor, among other transgressions.<sup>118</sup> *Letter 1276* represents Isidore's defense of

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<sup>118</sup> Évieux, *Isidore*, 208-9.

his failure to change the behavior of these men, insisting that the one who tries to correct his neighbor but fails cannot be held responsible for another's wrongdoing.

In his extended apology, Isidore first marshalls a discussion of the example of Jesus and then turns to inquire “whether either the Greeks (*hoi Hellēnoi*) or the Jews (*hoi Ioudaioi*) might dispute”<sup>119</sup> whether the responsibility for wrongdoers resides with the neighbor who failed to correct them. He justifies his selection of the testimony of the Hellenes and the Jews by reasoning “for it is necessary to examine the opposition by means of myriad perspectives and overturn it by means of twenty calculations.”<sup>120</sup> Having examined stories pertaining to the Greek gods and the prophets, Isidore wonders specifically if the reason that Moses was stoned to death, Isaiah was sawed in half, Jeremiah was dropped in a tank of mud, and Paul was decapitated was because they were in fact punished for those who failed to pay attention to their words and advice. Possibly indicating Olympius' preferences, Isidore interjects, “but if you may say that they (Moses *et al.*) experienced such things because they were unacquainted with the arguments of rhetoric or its syllogisms, I will turn to the pagans (*hoi exōthen*), those who had the highest reputation for their speech, their cleverness, and their persuasiveness.”<sup>121</sup> Isidore proceeds to examine the examples of Plato, Aristotle, Pericles, Demosthenes, and Aeschines.

These passages suggest a complex relationship with the authority of Classical *paideia* and traditions of the Jewish patriarchs. Isidore simultaneously demarcates the Hellenes and the Jews as separate, as outsiders, yet he considers their evidence useful testimony in support of his

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<sup>119</sup> εἰ δ' Ἕλληνας ἢ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς τοῦτο ἀντείποιεν.

<sup>120</sup> χρὴ γὰρ μυρίοις ὀφθαλμοῖς τὰς ἀντιθέσεις περισκοπεῖν, καὶ εἰκόσι λογισμοῖς ἀνατρέπειν.

<sup>121</sup> εἰ δὲ διὰ τὸ λόγων ῥητορικῶν ἢ συλλογιστικῶν ἀπίρους εἶναι φαίης ταῦτα πεπονθέναι, εἰς τοὺς ἕξωθεν, τοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ λόγῳ. καὶ δεινότητι, καὶ πειθοῖ μεγίστην δόξαν ἐσχηκότας, τρέψομαι.

claims. When he adduces wordsmiths such as Classical philosophers, orators like Pericles, and towering figures of Attic oratory, Isidore seems to hint at the recipient design of his letter. He anticipates that Olympius may make the argument that the Jewish patriarchs lacked the argumentative prowess of Classical rhetors, and this may suggest to Olympius the lawyer's fondness for Classical rhetoric. At minimum, Isidore acknowledges the validity of the cognitive strategies of these Classical voices. Isidore's vocabulary of exclusion betrays some measure of ambivalence; to depict the pagans as "outsiders" involves alienation, but his citation of them as authoritative implies his assimilation of elements of their thought. Alternatively, in the horizontal dissemination of epistolary texts, possibly from monastery to city, Isidore's deployment of pagan authorities may indicate his recognition that these sources were viewed as authoritative guides to thought and behavior by his interlocutor and his potential audiences.

In *Letter 1221* to Palladius the deacon, Isidore offers the advice of *hoi exothen* to discourage an acquaintance from seeking the office of bishop. It seems that Palladius had joined the ranks of the malevolent group of clergy ordained by their ringleader Eusebius. According to Isidore, Palladius is driven by this troupe of brigands who devour the little people, traffic in the misfortune of others, and attack good men (*Letter 1205*, cf. 678, 953).<sup>122</sup> Isidore opens by asserting:

If neither the greatness (*megethos*) of the episcopate, nor (your) accomplishing nothing that is worthy of the office, nor the apostolic voice<sup>123</sup> which has shaped how a bishop should be, nor the imbricable jury which cannot be refuted having brought its verdict, nor nothing else will separate you from this madness (*mania*), through which having been

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<sup>122</sup>Évieux, *Isidore*, 221-22.

<sup>123</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Évieux, 1:191.

aroused by an unreasonable desire to Bacchic frenzy you expect to buy this dignity, then at least may you be shamed by the pagans (*hoi exōthen*).<sup>124</sup>

Isidore depicts Palladius as stung by the *mania* of the Bacchantes with his unyielding desire for the episcopate, as one who will not be dissuaded by a number of reasonable arguments, including the office's stature (for which Palladius is unfit) and the apostolic strictures that define the office. If Palladius will not heed counsel along these lines, Isidore reasons that pagan testimony may persuade. He then offers the paradigm of Pittacus of Mytilene (c. 640-568 B.C.), who, having defeated Phrynon, commander of the forces of Rhegium, in a single battle, received sole power from the Mytileneans. He attempted to give back the power. They did not want to take it back, but he forced it back. Pittacus did not want to be a tyrant and resigned the office.<sup>125</sup> The upshot is that Palladius should imitate this Classical example and renounce all claims to the episcopate.

The invocation of a “pagan” outside tradition in this letter seems to operate slightly differently than the similar citations in *Letter 1276*. Though Isidore grants persuasive power to the example he likely drew from Diogenes Laertius, the function of his citation is to persuade when considerations that Isidore considers reasonable, moral, just, and within the bounds acknowledged by apostolic prescriptions fail to convince his interlocutor. Isidore's selection of Pittacus, one of the Seven Sages and revered figure of Classical heritage, provides a paradigm for Palladius as well as an insult. The contrast between the two men is clear. Unlike Pittacus, who in Isidore's account repeatedly had to refuse an office for which he was qualified, Palladius

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<sup>124</sup> εἰ οὔτε τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς τὸ μέγεθος, οὔτε τὸ μηδὲν ἄξιον αὐτῆς διαπράττεσθαι, οὔτε ἡ ἀποστολικὴ γλῶττα ἢ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ὅποιον εἶναι χρὴ διαπλάσασα, οὔτε τὸ ἀδέκαστον δικαστήριον τὸ ἀπαραλόγιστον τὴν ψῆφον οἴσον, οὔτε ἄλλο οὐδὲν τῆς μανίας σε ταύτης ἀπείργει, δι' ἧς ὑπὸ παραλόγου ἐπιθυμίας ἐκβακχευθεὶς τὴν ἀξίαν ἐξαγοράσαι προσδοκᾷ, κἂν ὑπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν δυσωπήθητι.

<sup>125</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 1.75; Diogenes' account states that Pittacus ruled Mytilene for ten years before resigning. Cf., also, Évieux, *Isidore*, 191-92n1.

seeks an office he has not been offered and for which he is most decidedly unqualified. Isidore hopes that if he cannot prevail by reason and Christian tradition a pagan model who so outshines Palladius might shame this wicked deacon to reassess his choice.

Other passages indicate more strongly Isidore's repudiation of the practices and ideas of "the outsiders." In *Letter* 1535, in the midst of a discussion of the legislation of Moses contained within the Torah, Isidore mentions the prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:18 forbidding the earnings of male and female prostitutes from entering the Temple, commenting that "if adultery is by far more severe a transgression than prostitution, and beyond pardon, and already prostitution is worthy of punishment, even this, I do not know how, is neglected by the pagan lawgivers."<sup>126</sup> Isidore is critical of the shortcomings of pre-Christian Greco-Roman attitudes toward prostitution and may also be making a comment about temple prostitutes. We have already explored above Isidore's ridicule of pagan theology in his astronomical exploration in *Letter* 1435. Sometimes Isidore subdivides *hoi exōthen* into parts worthy of respect and parts unworthy of respect. As we have seen earlier, in a discussion of the relationship between various types of matter and the soul in *Letter* 1475 to the deacon-iatros Dorotheus, Isidore opens by acknowledging his friend's request to learn "something clear and agreed-upon through the examples in both the divine Scriptures and by the wiser pagans."<sup>127</sup>

Betraying his approval of some pagan ideas, Isidore also appropriates these ideas to authorize what he perceives as Christian arguments. In *Letter* 1618 to Heron scholasticus, Isidore urges his litigator friend to demonstrate his Christian identity not solely in word but by

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<sup>126</sup> εἰ γὰρ καὶ χαλεπώτερα πολλῶ ἢ μοιχεία τῆς πορνείας καὶ συγγνώμης μείζων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πορνεία τιμωριῶν ἀξία, εἰ καὶ τοῦτο τοῖς ἔξωθεν νομοθέταις, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως, παραλέλειπται.

<sup>127</sup> χρῆμα σαφές καὶ ὁμολογούμενον καὶ ταῖς ἱεραῖς Γραφαῖς καὶ τοῖς σοφωτέροις τῶν ἔξωθεν διὰ παραδειγμάτων

deed. Isidore seems to disapprove of his friend’s nominal attachment left unconfirmed by behavior. He then quotes Demosthenes who maintained that “any speech, if works are lacking, appears vain and empty.”<sup>128</sup> Isidore adds more Classical support, stating “even the pagan lawgivers punished those judged for treason based not on words but on deeds.”<sup>129</sup> In the context of an epistolary disquisition concerning divine *logos* in *Letter* 1440 addressed to the sophist Harpocras, Isidore draws upon the testimony of Job and the apostle Paul before also appealing to pagan opinion. He contends that the manifestation of faith is virtue put into practice, and he observes that “piety if it does not manifest itself in acts as in instruments passes for dead and inoperative, in the opinion not only of the pagans, but also of divine Scripture: Faith, in fact, it says, without works is dead.”<sup>130</sup> Pagan authority here has the paradoxical function again of both supporting Isidore’s advising to his friend but also serving as a lesser form of authority.

Isidore is determined to disparage the cults of the old gods and thereby propagate Christianization via letters. In *Letter* 1538 addressed to Heron the presbyter, Isidore discusses certain traditions concerning the artists who constructed statues of pagan deities. In this text, Isidore explicitly articulates his attitude toward these artists and thereby suggests a polemical impetus to articulate the truth in a context in which the old gods probably were still held to be powerful forces in the Nile delta. Isidore begins by asserting that his letter responds to a question Heron raised in his preceding letter. Demarcating himself as apart from the Hellenes,

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<sup>128</sup> ἅπας μὲν λόγος, ἂν ἀπὴ τὰ ἔργα, μάταιόν τι φαίνεται καὶ κενόν. *Olynthiac* 2.12; cf. *Énieux*, 2:346.

<sup>129</sup> καὶ οἱ ἔξωθεν δὲ νομοθεταὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ ῥημάτων, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ πραγμάτων τοὺς ἐπὶ καθοσιώσει κρινομένους κολάζουσιν.

<sup>130</sup> καὶ ἡ εὐσέβεια μὴ δι’ ἔργων καθάπερ ὀργάνων δεικνυμένη, νεκρὰ καὶ ἀνεέργητος εἶναι δοκεῖ, οὐ τοῖς ἔξωθεν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς θεαῖς Γραφαῖς • “ἡ πίστις γάρ, φησί, χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων νεκρὰ ἐστι.” Cf. James 2:26; *Énieux*, 1:64.

who are here synonymous with pagans, Isidore explains that “among the Greeks those who manufactured statues, wishing to create fear in the viewers, argued that the statue was sent from heaven by Zeus or that it arrived from flying because it was outside the ability of any human hand.”<sup>131</sup> Isidore explains that this falsehood and deception was authorized by pagans: “the manufacturers of statues, either they were killed or they were exiled so that no one could say that the statue was the work of a human hand.”<sup>132</sup>

As an illustration of the Hellenes’ deception, Isidore shares an Egyptian vignette concerning the cult of Sarapis:

It is true that the manufacturers of statues were either killed or exiled: the proof is what happened long ago in Alexandria of Egypt. Ptolemy brought together artisans to make the statue of Serapis. After this work he ordered them to dig a huge hole and, designing a bed of leaves and covering the trap, Ptolemy invited them to dinner. While they were dining, they were cast down into that chasm and they died, justly punished, in my view, having paid the just penalty because they undertook to make statues that would deceive those who happened to come to see. Nevertheless, Ptolemy did this because he wanted to get rid of craftsmen, so that the pretend god would appear not to be defiled by human hand [*acheiromianton*]. But it did not escape notice. We discovered the drama, and each year by lamentations they who died thus were compensated.<sup>133</sup>

Framing the deceiving artists within the deception of Ptolemy’s trap, Isidore applauds what he regards as the just rebuke of the fraud (*apatē*). Statues of the old gods are fraudulent deceptions.

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<sup>131</sup> οἱ παρ’ Ἑλλήσι τὰ ξόανα κατασκευάσαντες, φόβον ἐμποιῆσαι τοῖς ὀρθῶσι βουλόμενοι, ἔφασκον ὅτι τὸ ἄγαλμα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ παρὰ τοῦ Διὸς ἐπέμφη ἢ κατέπτη, κρεῖττον ὄν ἀπάσης ἀνθρωπίνης χειρός.

<sup>132</sup> ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἀγαματοποιούς ἢ ἀποκτένοντες ἢ φυγαδεύοντες, ἵνα μηδεὶς εἰπεῖν ἔχοι ὅτι χειροποίητόν ἐστι τὸ ξόανον.

<sup>133</sup> ὅτι δὲ ἀληθές ἐστι τὸ ἢ ἀποκτίνυσθαι τοὺς ἀγαματοποιούς ἢ φυγαδεύεσθαι, μαρτυρεῖ τὸ ἐχθές καὶ πρῶν ἐν Ἀλεξάνδρεια τῇ πρὸς Αἴγυπτον γεγενημένον. Πτολεμαῖος γὰρ συναγαγὼν τοὺς τεχνίτας ὥστε τὸν τοῦ Σαράπιδος ἀνδριάντα δημιουργῆσαι, μετὰ τὸ ἔργον βόθρον μέγιστον κελεύσας ὀρυγῆναι καὶ στιβάδα μηχανησάμενος καὶ κρύψας τὸν δόλον, ἐκέλευσεν αὐτοὺς δεῖπνεῖν. οἱ δὲ δεῖπνοῦντες εἰς τὸ χάσμα ἐκεῖνο κατενεχθέντες ἀπέθανον, δίκαιαν, ὡς γε ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, δεδωκότες δίκην ὅτι πλάττειν ἐπεχείρουν ξόανα πρὸς ἀπάτην τῶν ἐντευξομένων • ὅμως δ’ ἐκεῖνος βουλόμενος ἐκποδῶν ποιῆσαι τοὺς τεχνίτας, ἵν’ ἀχειροποίητος δοξῇ ὁ νομιζόμενος θεὸς ὄν καὶ ἀχειρομιάnton γενομένου τοῦ δράματος, κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν θρήνοις τοὺς οὕτω τεθνεῶτας ἡμεῖβοντο.

This rather unflattering portrayal of pagan practice was likely written not long after the destruction of the premier cultic center of Sarapic cult in 391 under the leadership of the patriarch Theophilus: the Sarapeum at Alexandria. In his continuation of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian Rufinus of Aquileia provides the fullest surviving account of this profoundly powerful event that spawned Christian conversions in its wake.<sup>134</sup> This ornately-decorated temple was fitted out with various mechanical devices to awe suppliants, one of which included a moving image of the Sun that greeted with a kiss a huge statue of Sarapis made of various metals and woods.<sup>135</sup> Isidore may well have known of these mechanisms that Rufinus, agreeing with Isidore's view of pagan statues, regarded as a type of deception.<sup>136</sup> When the head of the statue of Sarapis was ripped off, Theodoret, recording that mice poured out from it, commented, "for the god of the Egyptians was the home of mice."<sup>137</sup> Yet, contrary to the hopes of gleeful Christians such as Rufinus and Theodoret, the destruction of this cultic site did not mean the death of the cult of Sarapis and related deities. As Frank Trombley points out regarding the enduring prestige of the cult after the Sarapeum's destruction, "Theodoret's sophistries attest to that cultural fact, as does the survival of the Nile river cults in certain localities for another century and beyond."<sup>138</sup> Given this greater context of challenges to the cult of Sarapis, coupled with the enduring power of the cult, we can observe how keenly

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<sup>134</sup> On the destruction of the Sarapeum and Rufinus, see Frank Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization* 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 1:129-45.

<sup>135</sup> Rufinus *Ecclesiastical History* 11.22; Theodoret *Ecclesiastical History* 5.22 in Trombley, 1:130-31.

<sup>136</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* 11.23: "But many devices were constructed by the ancients in this place for the cause of deceiving which it is now tedious to enumerate in individual cases," "sed et multa alia decipiendi causa a veteribus in loco fuerant constructa, quae nunc longum est enumerare per singula." Trombley's translation; see 133-34.

<sup>137</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* 5.22, cf. Trombley, 1:133 and 133n150. μῶν γὰρ οἰκτῆριον ἦν ὁ Αἰγυπτίων θεός.

<sup>138</sup> Trombley, 1:135 and 135n161; see also idem, 2: 215-17.



Christians of Isidore's generation perceived the need to speak the truth about the cults of the pagans.

Like his contemporaries Jerome and Augustine, Isidore wrestled with the issue of the relationship between Hellenism—inextricably a religious and cultural phenomenon—and his Christian identity. Isidore's letters attest to his enduring attention to the discursive exploration of this theme in conversations with friends, and these ideas were horizontal re-tweets of these letters as copied and disseminated texts. Additionally, the great models of Greek literature supplied Isidore with a ready toolkit for analysis, commentary, and instruction of Christian ideas.<sup>139</sup> Both his overt formulations regarding the relationship between Hellenism and his Christian identity and the linguistic hybrid he forges by intermixing Classical language and references with Christian concepts, texts, and theology continued to provide a model for his descendents into the Early Modern world, molding their perceptions of the interplay between linguistic traditions Hellenic and Christian.

As was discussed above in Chapter 4, Isidore's decision to abandon his profession as a sophist and devote himself to the teachings of Christianity and Scripture likely entailed some measure of cognitive dissonance and personal unrest. He is eager to demonstrate that the highest type of wisdom resides not with the Classical authors—though their language is beautiful and complex—but with the Christian teaching and texts. A keen ambivalence characterizes Isidore's appraisals of Hellenism. He continues to quote and draw wisdom from the Classical examples, yet is careful that such sources remain subsidiary to Christian wisdom. We also observed in Chapter 5 how Isidore ridicules the ideas and teaching analogies of Greek astronomical traditions

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<sup>139</sup> Évieux, *Isidore*, 327.

when they do not harmonize with Christian visions of the cosmos. To some extent, Isidore rejects the scientific and technical enthusiasms that his learned peers vivaciously embraced and advertised in their epistolary self-representations.

Attempting resolutely to cast off his former life, Isidore expresses derisive attitudes toward professional sophists as mere “word hunters.” We have already noted this attitude on display in Chapter 4 when in *Letter 258* Isidore mocks the “big-talking word hunter” (ὁ μεγαλήγορος καὶ λεξιθήρας) who plagued his monastery but whose empty eloquence was subdued by the wisdom of the true philosophy, Christianity. Similarly, in *Letter 1487* to Olympiodorus,<sup>140</sup> Isidore urges his philosopher friend to forsake the airy meaninglessness of rhetoric and related sophistries: “Leaving behind, O my wise friend, the things that lie in the clouds and the things above that sophists talk about and the word hunters, who have nothing more than words, attend to the practical virtue that makes those who love it blessed.”<sup>141</sup> Isidore then quotes verbatim Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.11-14, where Xenophon describes Socrates as avoiding speculation concerning the cosmos, observing the folly of those men who neglected knowledge of human affairs to consider only divine matters (*ta dēmonia*).<sup>142</sup> Socrates marvels how such men are unaware that solving such riddles is impossible, and how even the most conceited among these thinkers do not agree and all related to one other as if all were crazy.

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<sup>140</sup> Évieux, 2:150-51n1, identifies Olympiodorus as a pagan man of letters and philosopher.

<sup>141</sup> ἀφέμενος ὃ σοφέ, τῶν μεταρσιολεσχῶν, καὶ μετεωροσοφιστῶν, καὶ λεξιθήρων, τῶν πλέον λόγων ἔχόντων μηδέν, εἰς τὴν πρακτικὴν ἀρετὴν σαυτὸν σύντεινον, τὴν μακαρίου ἀποφαίνουσας τοὺς ἐραστάς.

<sup>142</sup> Évieux, 2:150.

Isidore may mean Christianity by the term “practical virtue,” but at the letter’s conclusion he indicates that practical virtue also seemed to Plato to be “the most beautiful path.”<sup>143</sup>

Not unlike his contemporary Jerome, Isidore is defensive about the simplicity of Scriptural language compared with the complex eloquence of Classical *paideia*. A major strategy Isidore adopts to palliate his ambivalence is to assert the superior wisdom of the humble speech of Scripture:

The language of divine wisdom may be mundane, but the thought which it contains is as high as heaven. The enunciation of the pagan wisdom is magnificent, but its application is at ground level. If one might have the meaning of the former, and the formulation of the latter, one would rightly be judged most wise; for eloquence can be the instrument of other-worldly wisdom, just as the body is subject to the soul or the lyre to the lyre player, if it innovates nothing newer of its own, but interprets the high-as-heaven thoughts it contains; but if eloquence changes its position and considers that it can lead or rather reign when it should be serving (the truth), it would be just if it (i.e., the eloquence) were banned (*Letter* 1601).<sup>144</sup>

In this letter addressed to a monk named Primus, Isidore openly acknowledges his affinity for the beauty of the elevated language of the Classical texts of the pagans (*hoi exōthen*) and admits the shortcoming of Scripture in this regard. Again using the analogy of the relationship between soul and body as like lyre player to lyre, Isidore asserts that inner meaning and not outer veneer is what counts most. Scripture is superior in terms of its wisdom, but the eloquence of the

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<sup>143</sup> καλλίστη ἐστὶν ὁδός. *Pace* Évioux, 2:151n1, who considers this letter to be Isidore’s attempt to persuade Olympiodorus to practice Christianity. It is not entirely clear that “practical wisdom” indicates Christianity in this letter.

<sup>144</sup> τῆς θείας σοφίας ἡ μὲν λέξις πεζή, ἡ δ’ ἔννοια οὐρανομήκης • τῆς δὲ ἔξωθεν λαμπρὰ μὲν ἡ φράσις, χαμαιπετῆς δὲ ἡ πρᾶξις. εἰ δὲ τις δυναθεῖ τῆς μὲν ἔχειν τὴν ἔννοιαν, τῆς δὲ τὴν φράσιν, σοφώτατος ἂν δικαίως κριθεῖ • δύναται γὰρ ὄργανον εἶναι τῆς ὑπερκοσμίου σοφίας ἡ εὐγλωττία, εἰ καθάπερ σῶμα ψυχῇ ὑποκέοιτο ἢ ὡσπερ λύρα λυρωδῶ, μηδὲν μὲν οἰκοθεν καινοτομοῦσα νεώτερον, ἐρμηνεύουσα δὲ τὰ οὐρανομήκη ἐκείνης νοήματα • εἰ δ’ ἀντιστρέφοι τὴν τάξιν καὶ δουλεύειν ὀφείλουσα ἡγεῖσθαι, μᾶλλον δὲ τυραννεῖν, οἷα τε εἶναι νομίζοι, ἐξοστρακισθῆναι ἂν εἴη δικαία.

pagans can be used insofar as the proper hierarchy is maintained at all times. Eloquence is the servant of truth; the goal of eloquence is to articulate truth, and it is not an end in itself. This is one clear example of how Isidore negotiates between what he conceptualizes as two distinctive types of speech.

Isidore's defensive need to demonstrate the shortcomings of the speech of "the outsiders" is rooted in part in his own admiration for the complexity and sophistication of the language of the Classical texts. In *Letter 1555* addressed to the sophist Asclepius,<sup>145</sup> Isidore repeats his criticism discussed above in Chapter 6 that pagan speech is self-refuting. Excluding himself from the Hellenes, who here seem to be synonymous with "pagans" (*hoi exōthen*), Isidore asserts to his learned friend that "Greek children do not realize that they refute themselves in what they say."<sup>146</sup> Isidore is sore about the Hellenes' attacks: "They disparage the divine Scripture as barbarous sounding and composed of words coined in imitations of sounds, leaving out necessary conjunctions, and with redundant additions obscuring the meaning of what was said."<sup>147</sup> Isidore quips, "yet it is they who need to learn the truth in full force!" He then vehemently defends the power of the speech of Scripture: "How did something so boorish persuade the eloquent one? Let these wise men explain how, with her barbarizing and solecizing, She (i.e. Scripture) subdued with all her strength the Attic error, how Plato, the koryphant of the pagan philosophers, did not prevail over any tyrant, but She herself won over

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<sup>145</sup>On Asclepius, a friend and possibly a former student of Isidore who was elected sophist of Pelusium following the term of Harpocras, another friend of Isidore, see Évieux, *Isidore*, 142-44. Based upon references to Scripture and the Gospels in Isidore's letters addressed to these men, Évieux hypothesizes that both of these sophists were Christian.

<sup>146</sup> λαυθάουσιβ ἐλλήνων παῖδες δι' ὧν λέγουσιν ἑαυτοῦς ἀνατρέποντες.

<sup>147</sup>ἐξευτελίζουσι γὰρ τὴν θεῖαν Γραφήν, ὡς βαρβαρόφωνον καὶ ὀνοματοποιίαις ξέναις συντεταμημένην, συνδέσμων τε ἀναγκαίων ἐλλείψει καὶ περιττῶν παρενθήκη τὸν νοῦν τῶν λεγομένων ἐκταράττουσαν.

land and sea!<sup>148</sup> Scripture with its prosaic and Semitic “barbarisms” has overcome the entire universe, whereas Plato, the leader of the chorus of pagan philosophers, could not even convince the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse.<sup>149</sup>

In other letters to his sophist friends Isidore seeks to demonstrate the superiority of Scripture and the hollow motivations of the Hellenes. In *Letter 1697* to the sophist Harpocras, Isidore remarks “men have many ways to be passionate about speech.”<sup>150</sup> Contrasting the obfuscatory nature of Attic, Isidore likely champions the clarity of Scripture: “for some love to Atticize in the ancient style, while others put clarity before Attic speech, saying ‘What profit is there from an Atticizer, when the content of the speech is as though it has been hidden in the dark and there is need of other words to lead to the light?’”<sup>151</sup> He continues to outline various literary tastes among learned men, remarking how some find their pleasure in epic, some in the solemnity of tragedy, others in the playfulness of comedy and others in the subtleties of rhetoric. Yet there is no consensus among these enthusiasts, and Isidore observes that “some take up the loftiness of Plato, others the solemnity of Thucydides, others the smoothness of Isocrates, the cleverness of Demosthenes, and they suppose that he himself has nourished all of the arts of

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<sup>148</sup> ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τούτων μανθανέτωσαν τῆς ἀληθείας τὴν ἰσχύν. πῶς γὰρ ἔπεισεν ἡ ἀγροικιζομένη τὴν εὐγλωττον, εἰπάτωσαν οἱ σοφοί, πῶς βαρβαρίζουσα καὶ κατὰ κράτος σολοικίζουσα νενίκηκε τὴν ἀττικίζουσαν πλάνην, πῶς Πλάτων μὲν, ὁ τῶν ἔξωθεν φιλοσόφον κορυφαῖος, οὐδενὸς περιεγένετο τυράννου, αὐτὴ δὲ γῆν τε καὶ θάλατταν ἐπηγάγετο.

<sup>149</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.21-23.

<sup>150</sup> πολύτροποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ αἱ περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐπιθυμῖαι.

<sup>151</sup> οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἀγαπῶσι τὸ παλαιῶς ἀττικίζειν, οἱ δὲ τὸ σαφῶς εἰπεῖν τοῦ ἀττικισμοῦ πρότερον ἄγουσι, λέγοντες • τί τὸ κέρδος ἐκ τοῦ ἀττικίζειν, ὅταν τὰ λεγόμενα ὡσπερ ἐν σκότῳ κρύπτηται καὶ ἄλλων δέηται πῶς εἰς φῶς αὐτὰ ἀξόντων ;

speech, in terms of cleverness, sharpness, pathos, and fierceness.”<sup>152</sup> Isidore then remarks that with so many contradictory opinions, he cannot say how a writer could appeal to all.

Dismissing these multifarious voices, Isidore contends, “Let those who are looking for glory write as they wish!”<sup>153</sup> Thus, these pedants are really only concerned about their own reputations. Affirming the universal audience of Scripture, Isidore vaunts how “the sacred and heavenly oracles, since they were uttered and written with regard to utility of all of humanity, were tempered by clarity.”<sup>154</sup> Thanks to this clarity, even those few people who delight in the other virtues of language are not offended, and all those who dedicate themselves to other pursuits such as agriculture, crafts, and all the other pursuits of life, learn in a fraction of time what is seemly, just, and useful. Indeed, Isidore wonders what in the Platonic dialogues, the works of Homer, legislative codes, Demosthenes, and the subjects of tragedy can compare with the virtue, brevity, and clarity of Scripture. Isidore then proceeds to malign the success of Plato’s speech, Aristotle’s opposition and ridicule of Plato, and the writings of Stoics concerning Aristotle. Isidore challenges, “let them accordingly compare these wise writings to the clarity of the sacred texts, and may they cease prattling, and may they welcome the divine expression of the prophets, looking not toward the love of honor but toward its usefulness.”<sup>155</sup> In this final set of curt imperatives directed toward those who revere the pagan texts over Scripture, Isidore

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<sup>152</sup> οἱ γὰρ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ Πλάτωνος ὑποδέχονται, οἱ δὲ τὴν Θουκυδίδου σεμνότητα • καὶ οἱ μὲν τὴν Ἰσοκράτους λειότητα, οἱ δὲ τὴν Δημοσθένους δεινότητα • πάσας γὰρ αὐτὸν σεσιτίσθαι τὰς τῶν λόγων τέχνας οἴονται, καὶ ἐν τῷ δεινῷ, καὶ πικρῷ, καὶ παθητικῷ, καὶ ἐναγωνίῳ πάντας ὑπερβάλλεσθαι.

<sup>153</sup> οἱ μὲν οὖν πρὸς δόξαν ὀρῶντες ὡς βούλονται γραφέτωσαν.

<sup>154</sup> οἱ δὲ ἱεροὶ καὶ οὐράνιοι χρησμοί, ἐπειδὴ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν πάσης τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος καὶ ἐρρέθησαν καὶ ἐγράφησαν, τῇ σαφηνείᾳ ἐκράθησαν.

<sup>155</sup> συγκρινέτωσαν τοίνυν τοῖς λεγομένοις σοφοῖς τὴν τῶν θείων λογίων σαφήνειαν, καὶ παυέσθωσαν φλυαροῦντες, καὶ τὴν θείαν τῶν χρησιμῶν φράσιν ἀποδεχέσθωσαν, οὐ πρὸς φιλοτιμίαν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν τῶν ἀκουόντων βλέψωσαν.

again repeats his conviction that these savants are mainly driven by their own greed for glory as opposed to concern for the Truth. The Hellenes are simply playing mind games.

An element of Isidore's criticism of the wisdom of *hoi exōthen*, similar to Socrates' dismissal of the unending contention among so-called experts in Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.11-14, is their lack of consensus. Isidore's Christianity represents a firm truth that offers a type of universality that the dissenting voices of the Hellenes cannot. Though Isidore identifies the diversity of viewpoints as undesirable and a demonstration in itself of error, he in turn collapses the diversity of his competitors in order to construct a monolithic "other." Characteristic of Isidore's "othering" of *hoi exōthen* is the discursive subsuming of the diverse viewpoints of the "others" into a single category. Language about heresy—"choosings"—constitutes another subset of boundary-constructing devices in Isidore's repertoire.

In *Letter* 1602 to Adamantios, whom Évieux identifies as probably a sophist or an *iatrosophistēs*,<sup>156</sup> Isidore again complains about the absence of unanimity among humankind in terms of diverse practices and opinions. He opens by responding to his interlocutor's apparent wonder at the vast number of heresies:

Why are you so amazed if after the Incarnation of the Savior so many heresies were produced, seeing as the devil heard clearly and distinctly that he would by all means be subjected to judgment and punished, he having sown such things [i.e., the heresies] so that he would have many to share in his punishment, when even before the Incarnation his heresies were not few?"<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> See Évieux, 2:247n4.

<sup>157</sup> τί θαυμάζεις εἰ μετὰ τὴν τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἔνσαρκον παρουσίαν πολλὰ αἰρέσεις ἐτέχθησαν, τοῦ διαβόλου ἄτε δὴ σαφῶς καὶ διαρρηδὴν ἀκούσαντος ὅτι πάντως κρίσει καθυποβληθήσεται καὶ δίκην δώσει, ταῦτα κατασπείραντος ἵν' ἔχοι πολλοὺς τοὺς συγκολασθησομένους, ὅποτε καὶ πρὸ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ὀλίγοι ἦσαν αἰρέσεις ;

In this way, Isidore associates the dissension among humankind caused by the devil with dissension preceding and continuing after the coming of Christ. Isidore may thus stitch together a sort of historical unity and continuity between contemporary *hairēseis* and *hoi exōthen*. Isidore continues to describe the diversity preceding the Incarnation, citing how “among humankind some held that the Divine did not even exist; others considered that it existed, but that it was not provident; others that it was provident but only for the heavenly realm, and others not only for the heavenly realm but also for the earthly realm, others only for the eminent such as kings and rulers.”<sup>158</sup> Probably referring to various conceptions of providence among *hoi exōthen*, Isidore explains that diversity has been the norm and not the exception. He continues to explain that some people claimed that everything happened of its own accord (*automatismos*), others that it happened by fate (*heimarmenē*), and others that the universe was brought about by reason (*to eikos*).<sup>159</sup> Some considered it pious to worship idols, and others to marry their mother; others sacrificed human beings or some slaughtered oxen or sheep, some of them ate one another, and some of them ate grass.

Isidore avers that “if I bring forth all (this) forward, perhaps I will be disbelieved, but I will not be refuted.”<sup>160</sup> In fact, dissidence is ubiquitous in the human story:

If nevertheless the human race is always in strife with itself and holds different opinions—for in each epoch men who were revolutionaries and troublemakers came to prevail, upsetting what had been established, and making laws as they saw fit—why are

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<sup>158</sup> τῶν γὰρ ἀνθρώπων οἱ μὲν μηδὲ εἶναι τὸ Θεῖον ἐνόμιζον, οἱ δὲ εἶναι μὲν, μὴ προνοεῖν δέ • καὶ οἱ μὲν προνοεῖν μὲν, τῶν οὐρανίων μόνον, οἱ δ' οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐπουρανίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων μὲν, οὐ πάντων δέ, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐξόχων, οἷον βασιλέων τε καὶ ἀρχόντων.

<sup>159</sup> καὶ οἱ μὲν αὐτοματισμόν, οἱ δ' εἰμαρμένην, οἱ δ' εἰκῆ φέρεσθαι τὰ πάντα ἀπεφήναντο.

<sup>160</sup> ἀλλ' εἰ πάντα εἰς μέσον ἀγάγοιμι, ἴσως ἂν ἀπιστηθήσομαι μὲν, οὐκ ἐλεγχθήσομαι δέ.



you amazed if even now those who love power rage like Bacchantes claiming to disagree concerning the issue of divinity and that which is beyond reason?<sup>161</sup>

Isidore thus links the perennial upheavals and insurrections characterizing human political history with heresy itself and places the blame for such disagreement and unrest upon those who are frenzied like Dionysian revelers in their love of power (*philarchiā*). Employing the verb *bakkeuesthai* pertaining to pagan practice, possibly to emphasize difference and/or to mock his “others” by means of a pejorative, Isidore again differentiates himself from his “others” by critiquing and contrasting the motivations of the “others” with his own unstated motivation that is opposite to the grasping for power and influence. Like the Hellenes who are greedy for renown, Isidore defines the heretic “others” in terms of their relationship to political power.

Isidore contends elsewhere that the cause of heresy is the desire for power among heretics. In *Letter 1533 to Peter the scholasticus*, Isidore pronounces “I consider that heresies are born from either the love of power (*philarchiā*) or from a mental preconception, two pathologies that are difficult to overcome.”<sup>162</sup> Speaking from a position of self-arrogated superior knowledge, Isidore explains that “some of these heretics do not consider it worthy of themselves to be submissive, while others, as a result of their mental preconception, have not agreed to be instructed, and having sewn the seeds of new teachings, they do not deem it worthy to abide by what has been established.”<sup>163</sup> Isidore identifies his “others” as motivated by

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<sup>161</sup> εἰ τοίνυν ἀεὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἐστασίαζε τὸ γένος καὶ οὐ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐδόξαζε—κατὰ καιροῦς γὰρ ἄνθρωποι νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ στασιασταὶ ἐπιπολάζοντες τὰ καθεστηκότα μὲν ἐκίνουν, ἐνομοθέτουν δὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα—τί θαυμάζεις εἰ καὶ νῦν περὶ πρᾶγμα θεῖον καὶ λόγου κρεῖττον διαφωνεῖν προσποιοῦνται ὑπὸ φιλαρχίας ἐκβακχευόμενοι ;

<sup>162</sup> ἢ ἐκ φιλαρχίας, οἶμαι, ἢ ἐκ προλήψεως, δύο δυσκαταγωνίστων παθῶν, τὰς αἱρέσεις τετέχθαι.

<sup>163</sup> οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις μὴ ἀξιώσαντες εἶναι, οἱ μετὰ τὸ προληφθῆναι, διδαχθῆναι μὴ καταδεξάμενοι, νεωτέρας διδασκαλίας σπέρματα καταβεβλήκασιν, τοῖς καθεστηκόσιν ἐμμεῖναι μὴ ἀξιώσαντες.

*prolēpsis*, or a mental picture preceding experience,<sup>164</sup> a form of cognitive obstinancy among heretics, as well as the invention of new doctrines, the sowing of *neōterai didaskaliai*. The latter subgroup of “other” is characterized by sedition again with regard to what is established. In claiming his identification with “the established things” Isidore authorizes his position by aligning himself with a normative consensus.

Though this discussion is by no means exhaustive, and Isidore’s letters offer manifold opportunities for future research on the discursive elaboration of the “other” in Late Antique Christian letters, we have thus far examined some critical strategies deployed by the Pelusian to construct his Christian self vis-à-vis his pagan “other.”

### Conclusion

This chapter engages with one of the defining topics of Late Antiquity: the nature of Christianization. I consider the testimony of epistolography indicative of certain patterns of sociability in Late Antiquity and assess what this data may indicate about religious identity. Applying a sociological approach to reading the contexts of letter communication, I confront the continuing use of pagan epistolary currency deep in the Late Empire. The Aenean and Procopian letters testify to the fact that certain literati in the fifth to sixth centuries likely compartmentalized their various affiliations and selected pagan and classicizing speech as the vehicle of their emotional and intellectual engagement with their peers. Their Christian identities were largely silent in the letters. Since it is highly likely that the extant letters were originally preserved as teaching models at the Gaza School, this epistolary dialect is not surprising. The corpus may exclude letters not preserved that had a more specifically Christian content. Yet it is

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<sup>164</sup> See the gloss in *LSJ*, 1488.

undeniable that the existing letters point to a mode of epistolary sociability, including larger lateral circles, articulating an alternate pre-Christian antiquarian dreamscape. For whatever reasons, these men were comfortable with a type of sodality which rankled many of their Christian peers.

Like Procopius' bishop friend Elias, who likely enjoyed receiving letters wrought in pagan currency, the case of Synesius suggests the many "flavors" of Christian clergy in the Later Empire. As a local magnate, Synesius accepted the office of bishop because of his perception that it was his responsibility to accept this munus befitting a man of curial rank descended from an ancient aristocratic Cyrenean family. Synesius' letters likely testify to a high degree of identity qualifying, in which his speech and selection of references vary depending on his interlocutor and the needs of the context. He only uses Christian speech in letters addressed to clergy members and/or letters written after he accepts the episcopate. After becoming bishop, Synesius continues to use pagan epistolary currency in letters addressed to his dearest friends and his philosophical "holy woman," Hypatia.

By contrast, Isidore represents the oppositional Christian identity often emphasized by modern commentators. As we have analyzed above, Isidore constructs his commitments by means of a negative dialectic with the oppositional identity of *hoi exōthen* (a category inclusive of pagans, Jews, and heretics). He demonstrates, however, a certain measure of ambivalence toward pagan intellectual traditions because he adduces them as containing some wisdom and authority useful for offering epistolary advice to friends and enemies alike. Letters denigrating the traditions of pagan cult such as that of Sarapis may have served as instruments of evangelization among lateral audiences.

Although he frequently recognizes the merit of Classical thought, Isidore strives to prove that the highest source of wisdom resides with Christian texts and teachings. This may stem in part from his own dissonance due to deserting his teaching position and/or his acknowledgement of the authority of Classical learning among his communicants. One of the things Isidore finds particularly vexing about Classical *paideia* is the beauty of its language compared with Scripture. He is also annoyed at the great variety of opinions regarding the merits of various Classical authors whom he derides as motivated by greed for glory. Pagan experts offer no consensus and fail to provide a universal truth. Dissension irritates Isidore. Employing language regarding heresy, Isidore blames the devil for the diversity of viewpoints among pagans. The ongoing insurrection and dissension of human political history—driven by greed for power—is a direct outgrowth of heresy itself. In fact, the cause of heresy is precisely the desire for power. Study of such discursive methods provides an entry-point for study of Isidore’s oppositional construction of his Christian identity.

## Conclusions

This study has explored how the epistolography of Procopius, Aeneas, Synesius, and Isidore, forged channels of intellectual sociability and exchange transcending regional limits of Empire and affirming their shared participation in a common culture of erudition. Letters among these lettered men occupying a particular corner of the Greek East in Late Antiquity offered vicarious shared presence as well as opportunities for lateral conversation among lettered provincials united by a common behavioral code and convinced of the moral dimension of learning. The figurative model of a Republic of Letters provides a fruitful organizational heuristic because it underscores the social phenomena to which these letters point, namely, intellectual sodality characterized by a distinctive classicizing sociolect regulated by strictures of genteel behavior and the common perception of the morality of the pursuit of knowledge. Understood as forming a Republic of Letters, these under-examined letters cast new light on historical issues of major consequence.

This dissertation has contributed to the study of the dynamics of social networking in Late Antiquity by elucidating specific communications mechanisms epistolographers deployed in order to build and maintain their social capital via letters. Applying a sociological approach to philological analysis of these neglected letters, this project has explored the specific conversational devices that each letter author employed in order to build ever-shifting networks of friends and colleagues. My study has examined and decoded the symbolic language and carefully calibrated manners of the letter writers drawn from the cultural toolkit of Classical Greek texts and linguistic traditions. Unlike most recent scholarship studying Late Antique

letters, I have interrogated the speech of our epistolographers to make vivid and intelligible to the modern reader the social processes of epistolary exchange. Through elucidation of the cultural work of social networking, I have demonstrated that cultural resources played a salient role in formatting the specific communicative choices epistolographers used to accrete their social capital. Through the insider language of letter speech, Late Antique provincials constructed a shared idioculture, or a system of ideas, understandings and traditions by which they articulated their identity discursively and created a sense of unity and social cohesion.

Letters were the premier form of social media in Late Antiquity. This project confronts the complex issue of the audience of Late Antique letters and has analyzed the social contexts of epistolary address. Though these letters were originally contrived for a specific purpose between two parties, authors understood that their letters, often oozing with honeyed speech, would be shared with others at various venues throughout the city, such as *bouleuteria*, classrooms, the agora, and the domestic dining hall. The letters that we have were likely recirculated and re-read among the interlocutors' peers. Epistolographers probably contrived their art-letters normally with a larger lateral audience of provincial literati in mind. Letters were thus social performances through which letter authors strategically presented the erudition and eloquence which confirmed their social location. Epistolographers' deliberative and strategic linguistic choices testify to the role of the principle of "recipient design" in letter commerce. Through rhetorical artistry, letter authors molded their interlocutors' favorable response to communications and requests. Flattery, polite address, and uniquely-tailored uses of classicizing speech served as devices aimed at interpersonal control.

The model of the Republic of Letters also represents a useful lens for conceptualizing the nature of political power in the Late Empire because it elucidates the enduring force of

persuasion as a means to power among provincial and imperial elites. The Late Empire was still an empire forged by means of epistolary correspondence. Letters were the genre of petitions and requests as well as the promulgation of legislation. Letters catalyzed and maintained the machinery of imperial and local government.

The selected letters reveal that epistolary communicants and lateral address audiences were comprised of a broad prosopography of educated provincials, including lawyers, imperial officials, sophists, grammarians, priests, bishops, doctors, architects, and iatrosophists. These men were the provincial elites from whose ranks local and imperial leaders were drawn. For these men sharing a common educational culture, the artificial sociolect of Late Antique epistolography was the time-honored currency of Greco-Roman persuasion. The strategic speech of letter authors negotiated governance and justice between center and periphery, leaders and subjects. In this way, this project contends that one means of accessing the nature of political power at the provincial margins is epistolography. In response to Christopher Kelly's recent center-focused study of new techniques of accessing power in the Late Empire, my treatise represents an approach from the vantage of the imperial margins that illuminates the continuing function of clout and connections among provincial elites in accessing both local and imperial power.

This project has also mapped the topography of identities and affiliations that these Late Antique men developed through epistolary conversations. Investigation of the discursive representations of the identities of epistolographers suggests their participation in greater rhythms of change in the Late Empire. Underscoring the vivacity of classical traditions in the Late Antique provinces on the eve of Islamic conquest, this dissertation also takes a position contrary to the recent theories of decline in the later Empire. The letter authors' language of

affiliation with physical places attests to the enduring centrality of the *polis* as an engrossing focus of communal identity for Late Antique men such as Synesius and Procopius. The loyalty of these men for their local urban communities is not simply a literary device; their perception of duty owed to the *polis* of their ancestors actuated major professional decisions. These epistolographers understood that the beloved intellectual life with which they so closely identified belonged to the urban world of men sharing their unique idioculture. As Aeneas pointed out, “trees do not teach.” Isidore’s letters, on the other hand, testify to another distinctive Late Antique trend: the development of alternative ascetic communities defined in opposition to the Greco-Roman city. The Pelusian monk and former sophist’s missives point to the porous boundaries between city and monastery, and the discursive construction of the desert flight as a type of anti-*polis*.

Like the literati of Early Modern epistolary webs, Late Roman provincial elites were polymaths who shared diverse intellectual enthusiasms. As we have observed above, a significant facet of epistolary currency was the invocation of contemporary scientific and medical speculation in letter conversations about the nature of the universe, different types of physical matter, and the relationship between the soul and matter. Proficiency in astronomical and Galenic theory furnished a dimension of epistolary competence. This is largely unacknowledged in the scholarship and deserves future attention with regard to other corpora from our period. Provincial literati were also fascinated with mechanical devices. Sometimes they strove to understand their technical operation and how they could be used to understand the physical world, yet they also conceptualized gadgets as works of art. Imparting the psychological perception that words grant visibility, letter authors endeavored to translate the



awe they experienced upon gazing at a waterclock on one's property or a waterwheel in the Gazan city-center into rhetorical gifts to be circulated among friends.

This dissertation rejects a view of religious identity in Late Antiquity according to the discrete binaries of "pagan" versus "Christian." The largely overlooked "uncanonical" letters of Procopius, Aeneas, and Synesius look unusual set next to many of the sources that have traditionally told the story of religious and cultural changes in the later Empire—changes that led to the victories of both Christianity and Islam. Procopius and Aeneas conduct their epistolary commerce largely in a pagan archaizing coin that little acknowledges the Christian domination of their contemporary world. The language of emotional intimacy with Synesius' closest Hellene friends was written in a pagan sociolect, yet he unleashed Scriptural quotations and Christian references when writing to clergy. Isidore's oppositional religious identity looks similar to that of the Church Fathers, yet his huge corpus merits much future study in this regard and comparison with other patristic sources would also be illuminating.

For far too long these rich corpora have been neglected by scholars. These three sophists and one Neoplatonist bishop were voices of the city embodying its cultural energy. Though data from Synesius' written works have begun to enter discussions among modern commentators, scant attention has been offered to the letters and writings of Isidore, Procopius, and Aeneas. The recent publications of a small group of Italian scholars focused upon the two Gazan sophists have yet to rouse much attention among Anglo-American scholars, particularly among historians. It is my sincere hope that my project may contribute toward providing a voice for these muted sources.

This project's sociological analysis of philological phenomena and its focus upon provincial strategies of accessing political power have great applicability for other sources from Late Antiquity, even those that are well-titled and even those that are not letters. Ultimately, even if some of the letters of Aeneas or Procopius, for example, were wholly fictitious, the very use of the letters as teaching models means that they preserve a great deal of information about the ideals of comportment and the content of provincial sociability. Such data socialized provincial leaders for generations to come. It was the cultural patrimony of the city.

Appendix I: Procopius *Ekphrasis tou horologiou*

1. Various people, seeing different things, if they wished might speak of them, some of the pyramids of Egypt as being renowned among Egyptian sights, while another visiting Babylon might see the temple of Zeus-Bel, and eight towers, each one built upon another.

Nevertheless, let us imagine Hephaestus, and let us assign to him to fabricate the houses of the gods, “the ones that Hephaestus made with a knowing mind,” and let us say this god is “ambidextrous,” and always knows that his art requires toils and attention, for so great a thing it is not to be distracted and to persist obstinately in the work. Therefore, having knowing mind and body, and being fixed in one place, now he makes for Homer the shield of Achilles, an extraordinary work, and these (mind and body) supply for him, as needed, images that appear to live and fire that flames with its own impetus [Homer *Il.* 478-608]. Having arrived at the island of the Phaeacians, guard dogs were there at the courtyard of Alcinous, but these were not ordinary ones but (dogs) of gold, by Zeus!, and silver, possessing from Hephaestus their ability to move.

2. Such things then were a story (*muthos*), and I considered them to be a tale (*logos*), and Homer luxuriated in his art, declaring freely that which neither was nor ever yet had been. But now, seeing the things made by our present Hephaestus and his craftsmanship., I marvel and concede both the former (of Homer’s Hephaestus) and the latter (of our own Hephaestus) to be true.

3. Accordingly, I would wish to put these deeds into words and boast of them. But the sight of things defeats the verbal account, sight herself not having the necessary capability, being pulled in different directions. She leaps up and down and wants to catch sight of everything, then moves more quickly than required and misses the exact details in every case. I know because I

have experienced this. For I did not stick with the first things (I saw) out of desire for the following things, and before possessing successive details as necessary I moved on to look at another thing. And my eyes convulsed just as those who look upon the labyrinth by the Nile, as a certain Ionic writer said [Herodotus 2.148].

So where shall I begin? What limit, my dear friend, shall I set for my account?

4. In the middle of the city there is a building of moderate size, opposite the royal stoa, and to the left is an open space where numberless people gather in summer. In front of this stand two pairs of columns, divided toward the east and west by a distance that exposes the building behind, so that no one can disturb those who are looking at it. A fence of marbles joins the spaces between the columns, sharp spikes of iron having been driven into the marbles, this being a hindrance for any impetuous person who might try to scale the fence.

But also Gorgon threatens fiercely from on high all who with too willful a resolve dare to approach, she at any hour of the day adjusting her eyes—as when Perseus had slain her, cutting off her head, (and) anyone who disturbed her had to change into stone if he should look upon her. This is she whom the tragedy would call “bloody-faced and snake-like maiden . . .” [Euripedes *Orestes* 255-56], if she had such piercing [eyes?]. [Since she?] presents the signs of having been stricken, she is bound to frighten those who see the present work.

5. . . . I have touched upon the works. The doors are above, and those of the day [are?] hidden. . . . writing . . . them. Wherefore if someone should see . . . he would praise those that they opened, if . . . begin from those above . . . the hymn . . . will be first spoken of. Therefore let it await the evening and the . . . but she forestalled with the unexpected motion that frightens and pursues the viewers.

6. Let us examine how it is with the things in the middle. Bronze eagles stand in a row equal in number to the underlying hours. All of them bear wreaths, not wearing them on their heads and not declaring their own victory; but at the end of their feet the talons brought together clasp the crowns, each eagle watching eagerly for the Heracles beneath him, for the time when he (Heracles) emerges from the closed doors, as Helios, passing by (the doors), stands in front (of each). Helios strides along, measuring the hour with his movement. As if ruling these, he assumes a kingly attitude, holding up the globe in his left hand, by raising the right hand bidding the doors to release (Heracles), just like those ordering the horses to come out of the starting gates.

7. An eagle therefore stands waiting whenever Heracles, son of Zeus, comes out of the closed doors announcing the hours, the first Heracles announcing the first hour and the remainder announcing according to the number (of each). For there are twelve hours, and all are Heracles, not idle and doing nothing, for to do nothing was not a dear thing to Heracles. His ancient labors are still a work for him, no longer (imposed by) Eurystheus but instead by the requirements of art, for he is assigned here to the labors, carrying out a double six.

8. The first contest is the lion, and Nemea is the place for it. He also destroyed the hydra, if (indeed) she was decapitated of her competing heads. He blushed to vanquish the boar, but nevertheless he prevailed. Golden antlers grew upon a deer, and they fell to Heracles. And see the birds distressing the heart, and they were the work of the bow. And he did not let the Amazons go unharmed—looking for some girdle I would not say—but he did despise them, hearing that they were women “who competed with men.” The manure grieved Augeas, and he was free of it. And Crete had a terrible bull, but not so terrible as to defeat Heracles. And what would you say about the mares of Diomedes? Were they not deadly and equal to wild beasts

until he came along? But did not Geryon plume himself with his cattle, and had he not three heads? He was robbed, I think, along with the cattle also of (the heads). Hades did not let him (Heracles) go without testing his excellence, making a fight there (in the underworld) with the dog and displaying the monster to the sun. And he also needed for Eurystheus the golden apples lying at the farthest reaches of the world; those were the apples of the Hesperides, and guarding them was a dragon guard of unbearable strength. Struck, he lay prostrate, and the apples were for Eurystheus. Such were the deeds and the labors of Heracles. Whence are the hours, and the wreaths, and the bronze is given wings contrary to nature.

9. For each figure that pushes open the bronze doors and appears with its labor there follows from above an eagle, spreading its wings and with both claws placing a crown on the corresponding head. The eagle lingers a little as if taking pleasure from the heroic head. Then he leaves the crown for Heracles, and separating both feet (from it) takes off and returns to his place, returning his wings to his sides and bringing (them) back together to himself, having bestowed a good quarry, without having gotten any himself. Heracles lowers his head toward the crown, as to be seen by all in the middle of a stadium, and then turns toward his own place, having what he wanted (the crown). An eagle ministers to the crowning, because Zeus is the father of Heracles, and the eagle is the bird of Zeus. Thus from the heaven and his father does Zeus crown him (Heracles) victorious with the reward of his toils, in memory of his suffering. And he outflies and dominates the birds, just as he (Heracles) elevated himself by his fame. For there is no need of a herald to proclaim his crowns.

10. In another place, in a large space, able to amaze and set forward in front of the others, (Heracles) wears no beard but stands naked except insofar as a lion's skin hangs behind on his shoulders, and he holds up a gong. This one is called "lion," the artist asserted. It is suspended

from the center, and it moves about. He is armed in the right hand with a club, instead of the appropriate roar (of the lion), and he raises the club and strikes a blow on the gong. Suspended in air and struck with such great strength, (the gong) sounds and draws forth the echo. For one labor there is one stroke, and for the second hour it is doubled. For he combines the number of each labor with those that have preceded until he has completed . . . these . . . would confuse the hearing, thinks the seventh is the first and resounds one . . . meaning the others, the bronze would sound as many times until the second six . . . than the view would permit.

11. For those who chance to be far away, to know . . . of the time . . . the shaggy beard and double horns on his forehead show him to be. To . . . you would give these things to Pan. And desiring Echo he hears the bronze and . . . and turning his face, he twists about quickly so that somehow he might see the girl, an unfortunate passion for such a one having filled him. You might also say that he marvels at Heracles, being such a one and of such a type.

12. And where Pan is present the satyrs cannot be absent. And they laugh at him mockingly, putting him in the middle, seeing his enamored and brutish face and his mixed disposition, both gentle and harsh. But they are at the top of the temple, below which the naked son of Alcmena is seen.

And the son of Tydeus positioned on the right is here likewise the friend of the trumpet, for he sounded it for Heracles having come for his final labor just when he had found the son of Peleus in Scyros. For then too did he sound such a (trumpet blast) equal to the length of the day.

13. Hearing the sound a house slave brings the equipment for a bath for his master, as one would expect, the victuals already having been prepared. Another hastens bringing these from the marketplace as the day begins. They both appear to be ministering to a grumpy master—for

otherwise their haste would not have been so great. And that shepherd on the opposite side entrusts his staff to his left hand (to put it poetically) and he rejoices and smiles and raises up his right hand at the sight.

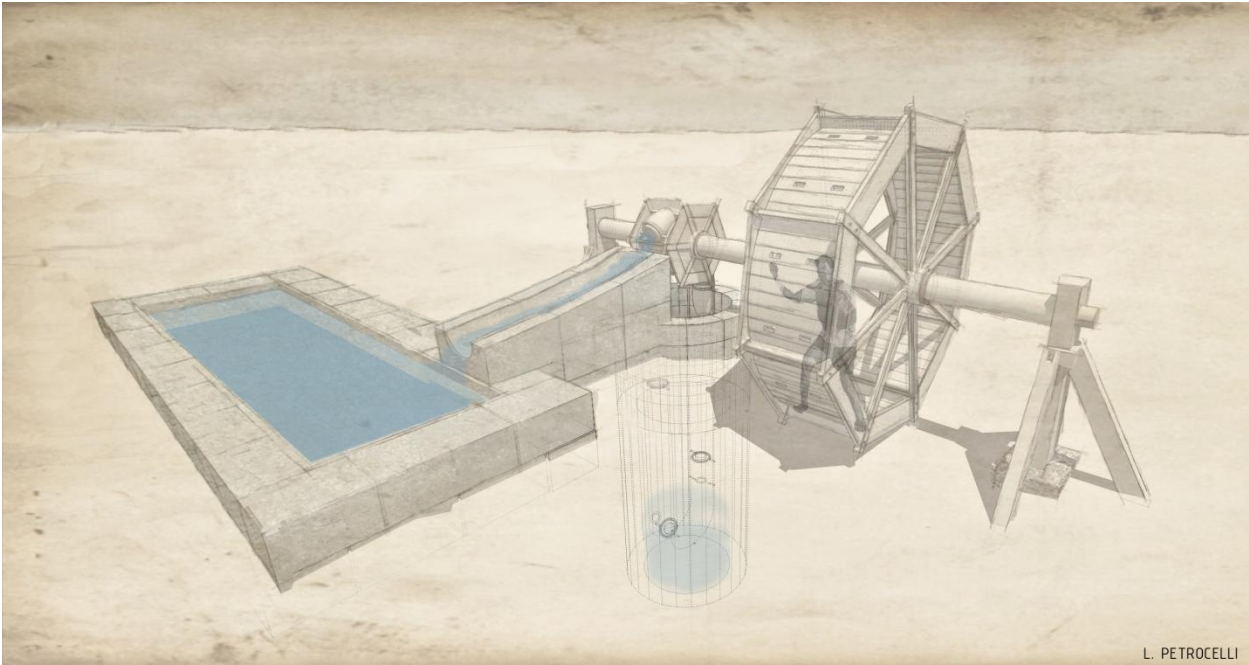
And in this manner regarding the labors there is applause, and marvel, and the trumpet call.

14. But being allotted one of the above contests, this skillful (artist) gives it to a larger Heracles.

This is an archer positioned beneath Diomedes, and the labor is again the golden apples. Now the arrow is placed on the string that is drawn against his chest with the right hand, and his left hand pushes the bow across the distance between both hands so far with the arrow that only the pushed-forward arrowhead protrudes (beyond the bow). Fixing his glance upon an exact point, he is ready to shoot the arrow at a small target . . .



Appendix II: Reconstruction of Aeneas of Gaza's Waterwheel



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