

# ΑΡΧΑΙΟΓΝΩΣΙΑ

*Archaiognosia*

## THE GREAT TEACHERS OF LATE ANTIQUE ATHENS

*Athens, 22 March 2005, University of Athens  
Conferral of Doctorate honoris causa*

On this solemn occasion at the center of the Hellenic culture that has nourished the civilizations of the European and Slavonic West—as well as the transplanted populations of the Americas and the Antipodes, it seems only proper to speak of the great teachers who taught here in Athens in the final centuries of what is generally considered the classical age of Mediterranean culture. These are the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries of our era, a time that can be subdivided into two great periods of pedagogy. Rhetoric characterized the first of these periods, and philosophy the second. I begin, as I must, with the first.

Throughout the fourth century at Athens rhetoric dominated the higher schools, and their masters carried on a grand tradition of flamboyant and improvisatory speech that had deep roots in the so-called Second Sophistic, which represents Greek culture from the Flavian age through the Severan. Philostratus, a writer of the third century, had composed brief biographies of the rhetorical virtuosos of the century before him, and he had linked them, with less than compelling logic but an understandable desire for continuity, to the famous sophists of the age of Pericles.<sup>1</sup> It is to Philostratus that we owe the awkward but inescapable expression Second Sophistic. His chronicle provided the model for Eunapius in the fourth century, who recognized a comparable flowering of rhetorical and pedagogical brilliance in his own time. Eunapius appears to have entitled his work “Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists”, but any reader of the biographies he compiled will readily see that rhetoric lay at the heart of the culture he was evoking.

1. See now the text, translation, and commentary by MAURIZIO CIVILETTI: *Filostrato, Vite dei Sofisti*, Milan 2002, with the review by C. P. JONES, in *Classical Review* 55 (2005), 82–83. I am deeply indebted to Professor Jones for valuable comments on the present paper.

Philosophy was a product that came in many different packages, and profound thought was only one of these. Since philosophical ideas had to be expressed in words, the words themselves could sometimes be paramount. Rhetorical philosophers were, of course, nothing new, and readers of Apuleius or Maximus of Tyre will know that performing philosophers were already a feature of the age of the Second Sophistic.<sup>2</sup> The inability of Eunapius to sort out philosophers from public speakers reflected a confusion of the age, when practitioners of all sorts had moved into the schools. Some of the philosophers veered towards a wonder-working mysticism and magic, on the basis of Neoplatonic teachings spawned in Syria by Plotinus and Iamblichus, and in the process they generated a kind of spirituality that provided for many generations a counterweight to Christianity. These Neoplatonists, whom the hypersensitive Julian heard as a young man, practised what was called theurgy, a divine magic that moved objects in the real world, and they served as gurus to the impressionable young.<sup>3</sup>

But the theurgists were only a kind of philosophical sideshow in the days of those teachers known to Eunapius. They were not then a significant part of teaching at Athens. Julian met them in Asia Minor, where they flourished. At Athens it was a mystery religion of a far older vintage that touched him, the Eleusinian mysteries. Although an inscription to a philosopher at Athens called Iamblichus (no relation to the famous Syrian) proves that philosophy was not ignored at this time,<sup>4</sup> teaching in the city was, on the whole, largely rhetorical. Perhaps the most striking difference between the people in Eunapius and those in Philostratus is that in the post-Constantinian age Christians as well as pagans taught rhetoric at Athens, apart from a brief interruption in the reign of Julian.

One of the most renowned and long-lived of the Christian sophists was the teacher of the pagan Eunapius. This was Prohaeresius, who was already in

2. G. W. BOWERSOCK, "Philosophy in the Second Sophistic", in G. CLARK and T. RAJAK (eds.), *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin*, Oxford 2002, 157-170.
3. P. ATHANASSIADI, *Julian. An Intellectual Biography*, London, 1992<sup>2</sup>, 30-38.
4. E. SIRONEN, "Life and Administration of Late Roman Athens in the Light of Public Inscriptions", in P. CASTRÉN (ed.), *Post-Herulian Athens* (Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, vol. 1), Helsinki 1994, 32-3, no. 16. Idem, *The Late Roman and Early Byzantine Inscriptions of Athens and Attica*, Helsinki 1997, 72-74, no. 15.

his eighties when Eunapius heard him. He had achieved such a formidable reputation that he was honored with statues in both Rome and Athens. If we consider that art historians in recent decades, particularly Paul Zanker and Bert Smith,<sup>5</sup> have often commented on the relative scarcity of images of sophists, by comparison with those of civic worthies and benefactors, it is all the more remarkable that Prohaeresius was the one who broke the mould, exactly as Favorinus had done with two statues in his honor in the age of the Second Sophistic. Eunapius reports that Prohaeresius' statue in Rome bore the grandiloquent inscription: Η ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΥΣΑ ΡΩΜΗ ΤΟΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΛΟΓΩΝ.<sup>6</sup>

The language used to describe Prohaeresius is a key that can be used to unlock the late antique view of higher education in Athens and beyond. For something very similar occurs on a surviving inscription in honor of a clearly important figure of the early fifth century. This is a certain Plutarch, who lived too late to be incorporated in Eunapius' gallery of great teachers. Yet his career can help us to comprehend those Eunapiian figures. He lavished his wealth on taking the Sacred Ship to the temple of Athena three times in the Panathenaic procession, for which this text demonstrates survival into the fifth century. The "people of Erechtheus" honored him with a statue and called him βασιλῆα λόγων.<sup>7</sup> That cannot have been a casual honorific, to judge from the similar phrase applied to Prohaeresius. Hence this Plutarch ought to have been a teacher, and a magisterial one at that. He must therefore be identical with a Plutarch we know from another inscription of the same period to have honored the Praetorian Prefect Herculus.<sup>8</sup> The text is a smart and elegant epigram in which Plutarch contrasts the governor as a θεσμών ταμὴς with himself as a μύθων ταμὴς. The second line ends with the word σοφιστής in apposition to Plutarch's own name. The man is a sophist, exactly what a king of *logoi* would have to be.

5. P. ZANKER, *Die Maske des Sokrates: Das Bild des Intellektuellen in der antiken Kunst*, Munich 1995, English transl. *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Berkeley 1995, with the review by R.R.R. SMITH, *Gnomon* 71 (1999), 448-457.

6. Eun., *Vit. Phil. et Soph.* 492 Boissonade.

7. SIRONEN, op. cit. (1994), n. 4 above, 46-48, no. 29, and op. cit. (1997), 77-78, no. 20.

8. SIRONEN, op. cit. (1994), n. 4 above, 50-51, no. 31, and op. cit. (1997), 81-82, no. 22.

Recent scholars, such as Alison Frantz and Erkki Sironen,<sup>9</sup> have been in agreement about this identification, but there is another step that they have been wary of taking, through, in my view, an excess of caution. Precisely in this age the Platonic school, the so-called Academy, at Athens was re-invigorated by two celebrated successors of Plato, or diadochs (διάδοχοι), of which the philosopher Plutarch was the first in Athens after an apparent hiatus in the fourth century. This man was himself succeeded by Syrianus, who was the predecessor of the great Proclus. There has been some reluctance to identify the sophist Plutarch with the philosopher on the grounds that their two roles were incompatible.<sup>10</sup> But Eunapius himself has instructed us in the fusion of these roles. Eloquence in a philosopher was nothing new or reprehensible, as Maximus of Tyre, Favorinus, and Apuleius demonstrated so brilliantly two hundred years before. Their mastery of rhetoric had entitled them to be called by the most august name of sophist (as Lucian once put it).<sup>11</sup> Fourth-century sophists such as Himerius in Athens, Themistius in Constantinople, and Libanius in Antioch did not hesitate to trespass on philosophical territory when the occasion demanded. So when the Platonic Plutarch recaptured the διαδοχή, he undoubtedly did it with all the resources at his disposal. The sophist, after all, was a man who called himself a μύθων ταμίης, and a Platonist would necessarily have to be such a person.

There is still more to be said in support of bringing together Plutarch the sophist and Plutarch the Platonist into a Hellenic Apuleius of the fifth century. (Let us not forget that the flamboyant Latin orator had been commemorated on an inscription as a *philosophus Platonicus*<sup>12</sup>). The very word sophist by the late antique period had evolved considerably from the complex semantics of the Second Sophistic. Even in Eunapius it is clear that it had become a portmanteau term for great and eloquent teachers. But the teaching role that had been implicit in the word, whether it was used for praise or calumny, seems gradually to have prevailed as the centuries passed. The pure-

9. A. FRANTZ, *The Athenian Agora XXIV. Late Antiquity A.D. 267-700*, Princeton 1988, 63-4. For SIRONEN, see the two preceding notes.

10. E.g. FRANTZ, loc. cit. (n. 9 above). But SIRONEN, op. cit. (1994), 48-50, no. 30, and op. cit. (1997), 85-87, no. 25 argues, against Frantz, that a different, very fragmentary inscription mentioning a Ploutarchos in a context that also mentions Telesphoros is indeed the Neoplatonist scholar.

11. Cf. Lucian, *Rhet.Pr.* 1: τὸ σεμνότερον τοῦτο καὶ πάντιμον ὄνομα - σοφιστής.

12. S. GSELL, *Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie* 2115.

ly pedagogic sense is palpable already in Eunapius, who once spoke of certain appointed sophists as sophists only in name (τὸ ὄνομα εἶχον),<sup>13</sup> by which he meant that they were teachers but not good ones.

This straightforward meaning must therefore be what Plutarch intended when he called himself a sophist. His expertise lay with *logoi*, of which he was a king, and with myths, of which he was a steward, and such expertise was perfectly compatible with the teaching of philosophy. Indeed it was necessary for teaching philosophy. The word sophist seems to tell us nothing more than that Plutarch was a teacher. Rescripts from 425 in the Theodosian Code imply as much by referring simply to *sofistae* as a comprehensive designation for teachers in the higher educational system (clearly including philosophers, rhetoricians, and crossovers).<sup>14</sup> They alone are contrasted with *grammatici*, who were obviously the elementary teachers.

The semantic evolution implied by this interpretation of the term sophist in Greek higher education is gratifyingly confirmed in the surviving Syriac version of the *Life of Severus* by Zacharias of Mytilene, where *sophist* is glossed precisely as meaning a teacher (*malpana* in Syriac).<sup>15</sup> We cannot say whether this gloss was present in the Greek original of Zacharias, but it hardly matters since it is the gloss, not the author, that counts. The definition is subsequently borne out later in the same life when we hear of a "sophist of the city" at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. The sophist of the city is contrasted in this passage with another official, the regional *scholastikos* (the local lawyer).<sup>16</sup> The city's sophist is its principal school-teacher. In her invaluable edition of Damascius' *Philosophical History*, Polymnia Athanassiadi clearly perceived this late antique meaning of sophist and hence perfectly rendered the phrase σοφιστῆς λόγων ῥητορικῶν in her fragment 49 as "teacher of rhetoric".<sup>17</sup>

Plutarch the diadoch in the Platonic Academy could thus have easily proclaimed himself a sophist in the days of the Prefect Herculus. His clever epigram in the prefect's honor brilliantly demonstrated the skill that made the

13. Eunap., *Vit. Phil. et Soph.* 487 Boissonade.

14. *Cod. Theod.* 14. 9. 3 and 15. 1. 53, both of 27 February 425. The former rescript asserts: *in his etiam, qui facundia Graecitatis pollere noscuntur, quinque numero sint sofistae et grammatici aequae decem*. The second concerns the accommodations (*exsedrae*) for the audiences of these teachers (*supra dictorum consessus*).

15. Zacharias, *Vit. Severi*, ed. Kugener, *Patrol. Orient.* 2 (1907), 14, line 13 of the Syriac text.

16. *Op. cit.*, foregoing note, 39, line 12 of the Syriac.

17. P. ATHANASSIADI, *Damascius. The Philosophical History*, Athens 1999, 141.

Athenians (Erechtheus' *demos*) crown him as a king of eloquence. The conjunction of roles represents a coalescence of lines of pedagogical practice that had been in the process of converging for some two centuries. Even Philostratus acknowledged that some philosophers could be sophists.<sup>18</sup> By the fifth century the great teacher or teachers in a city would naturally be given this title.

The instructive hints about the word sophist in Zacharias' *Life of Severus* took us to Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, and that points to another important characteristic of the great teachers at Athens. This is the international character of late antique pedagogy, which spanned three continents. It is conspicuous in the careers of Isidore and Damascius, Proclus' successors in the Platonic school at Athens, who passed from Egypt to Asia Minor by way of Syria, and thence to Athens. The migration of teachers and students across the sea is one of the miracles of late paganism. Every reader of Libanius will be mindful of the close ties he maintained with many other schools through a network of students and colleagues in Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Athens.<sup>19</sup>

Both Zacharias' *Life of Severus* and Damascius' *Philosophical History* offer memorable testimony on the late antique movement of teachers and students. The pagan Paralios went from Aphrodisias to Alexandria and was catapulted into the vigorous debates between Christian and pagan that are best known from the lurid career of the learned woman teacher, Hypatia, who was literally torn to pieces in Alexandria at the end of a distinguished career.<sup>20</sup> The pagan Alexandrian Asclepiodotus went in the other direction, to Aphrodisias, where he built an important career in teaching philosophy – a career that he owed to the distinction of being the best pupil of Proclus in Athens.<sup>21</sup> A late antique funerary inscription at Aphrodisias, in highly philosophical language, commemorates a young girl who came from 'Ρώμης καὶ Φαρίνης, in other words at this date Constantinople (not old Rome) and Alexandria.<sup>22</sup>

18. Philostr., *Vit. Soph.* I. 492 Olearius: Τοσαῦτα μὲν ὑπὲρ τῶν φιλοσοφούντων ἐν δόξῃ τοῦ σοφιστεῖσσι.

19. See the valuable account by R. CRIBIORE, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*, Princeton, forthcoming.

20. Zachar., op. cit. (n. 15 above), 15-37, together with the testimonia in M. DZIŁSKA, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, Cambridge MA, 1995. See also R.R.R. SMITH, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits from Aphrodisias", *JRS* 80 (1990), 129-155.

21. ATHANASSIADI, op. cit. (n. 17 above), 348-349.

22. C. ROUECHÉ, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, London 1989, 201, no. 154, without comment on the name Rome, which must mean Constantinople here: G.W. BOWERSOCK, "Rome in the Late Antique Near East", forthcoming in a Festschrift for Peter Brown.

After the death of Libanius, who had, through his teaching and international contacts, built up Syrian Antioch as a great center of pagan rhetorical pedagogy, the city of Antioch seems to have vanished from the map of late antique Hellenism – that precious construct of classical Greek tradition and pagan conviction that co-existed with Christianity longer and more vigorously than had once been imagined. Antioch survived as a major center of Christianity and as home of a patriarch, but its days as a bastion of pagan education were over. Similarly after the death of Themistius in Constantinople the city continued to be a locus of pagan rhetoric and philosophy, but less conspicuously than before. When Kavafis wrote his poem on a sophist leaving Syria (Σοφιστὴς ἀπερχόμενος ἐκ Συρίας), he named as exemplary centers of the sophist's profession Rome and Alexandria.<sup>23</sup> Here Rome is the Italian *urbs*, since the time of this imagined episode had to be, as the poet would have known, the early fourth century, when Antioch, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, and Constantinople were all predominant centers of higher education.<sup>24</sup> Berytus (Beirut) offered instruction in that most Roman of disciplines, law.<sup>25</sup> But from the fifth century onwards the map of late antique Hellenism was reduced to three nodal points where great teachers could be found. Old Rome had faded, and Constantinople's university had shrunk. What remained were the points of an international triangulation, Alexandria - Aphrodisias - Athens.

The teaching at these three cities, on three continents at the Mediterranean's edge, was now dominated by philosophy, as it had not been in the fourth century. The resurgence of serious reflection in Neoplatonism, spawned by Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus in the last decades of the pre-Christian Roman Empire, eclipsed rhetoric and provided the chief theological foundation for paganism in its co-existence with Christianity. No educated person, least of all a Christian, would have forgotten the debt of early Christian theology to Plato, above all in the writings of Clement and Origen. Although this debt became something of an embarrassment in the centuries of late antique Neoplatonism, it nevertheless furnished one of the many links that held late antique society together. The miracle-working, or theurgic, side

23. G.P. SABBIDIS, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: Τά Ποιήματα 1919-1933*, Athens 1991, 60.

24. See discussion of the Esquiline statuettes of cities and the Madaba mosaic with Rome and Gregoria in G.W. BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Early Islam*, Cambridge MA, forthcoming.

25. L. JONES HALL, *Roman Berytus. Beirut in Late Antiquity*, London 2004.



of Neoplatonism was an unmistakable competitor with Christian miracles, even if the miracles of the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana were sometimes invoked in anti-Christian debates of this epoch.<sup>26</sup> With Proclus, in succession to Plutarch and Syrianus, as the diadoch of the Platonic school in Athens, Neoplatonism achieved a level of philosophical subtlety not seen since Plotinus, and Proclus boasted theurgic power as well. Neoplatonism was the philosophy of all three great schools – Alexandria, Aphrodisias, and Athens.

Proclus reigned as diadoch in Athens, but he had begun his work as a philosopher in Alexandria. The reigning teacher in Aphrodisias, Asclepiodotus, was himself an Alexandrian who had studied in Athens before he passed to the city of Aphrodite in Asia Minor. Zacharias' biography of Severus describes, as we have already observed, a reverse movement from Aphrodisias to Alexandria among the young in pagan families. The traffic went both ways. Meanwhile, the successors to Proclus in Athens, Isidore and Damascius, reached the city after sojourns in both Alexandria and Aphrodisias. The literary record, particularly in Damascius' *Greek Philosophical History* and Zacharias' *Syriac Life of Severus* (originally written in Greek), leaves no room for doubt about the international triangulation in the careers of the great teachers of late antique Hellenism.

Furthermore, we know from Proclus' biographer Marinus that the great man himself spent a highly productive year in Asia Minor after an embarrassment over pagan worship in Athens,<sup>27</sup> and I have no doubt that it was to Aphrodisias that Proclus repaired for this year of leave from his duties in Athens. Marinus says that he spent his time in the area of Lydia,<sup>28</sup> whereas Aphrodisias was in northern Caria, but since, as Stephanus of Byzantium asserted,<sup>29</sup> Aphrodisias lay on the border of Lydia and Caria Marinus could

26. See the new two-volume Loeb edition of Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, by C.P. JONES, with an excellent introduction (Cambridge MA 2005). A third volume will follow in 2006, containing Eusebius' riposte *contra Hieroclem*, the letters of Apollonius, and testimonia. The dogged analysis of this Loeb by Flintermann and Boter in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2005 mistakes inevitable typographical errors for editorial decisions. We patiently await their edition.

27. Marinus, *Vit. Procli* 15, ll. 19-35 in Budé ed. of Saffrey and Segonds (2001), 18. The embarrassment, presumably caused by Christians, emerges from the oblique and bizarre expression ἐν περιστάσει τινὶ γυνογιγάντων ἐξέτασθεις.

28. Loc. cit., preceding note: ἐνιαυτὸν δὲ μόνον περὶ Λυδίαν διατρίψας.

29. Steph. Byz., s.v. Aphrodisias: μεταξύ Λυδίας καὶ Καρίας.

easily have thought of the Lydians rather than the Carians as Proclus' companions. The regional identity of border towns was often unclear to the outside world, as Louis Robert famously pointed out in the case of Laodicea on the Lycos.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the geographer Ptolemy actually included Aphrodisias and some other northern Carian cities in his list of the cities of Lydia. Proclus in Aphrodisias seems to me an arresting and plausible idea.

What these literary texts reveal has, in recent decades, been dramatically reinforced by archaeology on the ground in all three cities. The first signs of the philosophical schools turned up in Athens during the years of Homer Thompson's excavations in and around the Agora, and the discoveries were splendidly interpreted by Alison Frantz in her volume on the Agora in late antiquity. The revelations came in two parts. First, a re-alignment of the road on the south side of the Acropolis exposed a house that appeared to match the location and description of the house of Proclus as given in the biography of him by Marinus. It was said to lie between the Theater of Dionysus and the Asclepieion.<sup>31</sup> The second part was the emergence of three substantial private houses on the north side of the Areopagus. All four of these houses – Proclus' house and the three Areopagus houses – contained distinctive rooms with an apse at one end providing accommodation for a small number of auditors in a semi-circle. There were niches for the display of sculpture. Fragments of these pieces as well as an altar in Proclus' house led to the immediate assumption that we had recovered various teaching venues of the Hellenic (or pagan) professors of Athens in late antiquity.<sup>32</sup>

Eunapius had reported that already in the early fourth century, in the days when the teacher of Prohaeresius, Julian of Cappadocia, had been working in Athens there had been such violent disturbances caused by unruly students that the teachers decided not to descend into the city but to teach in their own homes.<sup>33</sup> "Not one of the sophists", wrote Eunapius (and here I believe he is using the term "sophists" simply to mean "teachers"), "dared to go down publicly to lecture, but stayed in their own private theaters (ἐν τοῖς ἰδιωτικοῖς

30. E.g. L. ROBERT, *Laodicée du Lycos*, Paris 1969, 322 ; *La Carie* II, Paris 1954, 161-2 on Heraclea Salbacensis in relation to Laodicea, Kolossai, and Aphrodisias.

31. Marinus, *Vit. Procli* 29, ll. 32-39, 35 Budé, with A. FRANTZ, op. cit. (n. 9 above), 42-44.

32. FRANTZ, op. cit. (n. 9 above), 44-48. ATHANASSIADI, op. cit. (n. 17 above), 343-347 ("The House of Damascius?").

33. Eunap., *Vit. Phil. et Soph.* 483 Boissonade.

θεάτρους) and gave utterance to the young there." The house in which Julian of Cappadocia taught, which he later bequeathed to Prohaeresius, contained statues and a theater of polished marble. Eunapius says explicitly that it was constructed on the model of public theaters (τῶν δημοσίων θεάτρων εἰς μίμνσιν) but was smaller and suitable for the interior of a house. Perhaps this means that it had semicircular rows of seats, but since professors seem normally to have sat upon a chair (θρόνος) in front of standing students Eunapius' remark may only refer to the shape of the space.

What he describes is strikingly similar to what turned up in the House of Proclus and what the excavators subsequently found in the three fine houses on the slopes of the Areopagus in Athens. The apsidal room would correspond with Eunapius' allusion to a domestic theater, but without seating. In all the houses (especially the one known as House C) substantial pieces of pagan sculpture were discovered. Clearly these objects had constituted the interior adornment of the houses until a desperate moment, perhaps on the occasion of the notorious edict that Justinian issued in 529 against philosophical teaching, when much of the sculpture was concealed in wells. The Athenian houses, both the one on the south side of the Acropolis and the three on the Areopagus seem, to the satisfaction of most scholars, to give us several of the most important venues for philosophical teaching in the city.

In view of the pedagogical links among Athens, Aphrodisias, and Alexandria it becomes, therefore, significant that similar lecture venues have been discovered in both Aphrodisias and Alexandria. The parallel design and size is unlikely to be pure coincidence. In Aphrodisias, just to the northeast of the Sebasteion,<sup>34</sup> an elegant house with an atrium was enlarged in the late third century to accommodate a large peristyle court connected, to the north, with an apsidal space which could function as lecture hall, conceivably like the facilities installed by Julian of Cappadocia at Athens in the early fourth century. A smaller apsidal room off the peristyle court backed up against the north wall of the Sebasteion and had its own separate entrance. Its wall had alternating square and round niches. In the little alleyway between the back wall of the smaller apsidal room and the wall of the Sebasteion the excavators discovered a substantial group of tondo portraits of Greek figures of the classical age and later, such as Pythagoras, Pindar, Socrates, Alcibiades (Socrates'

34. SMITH, *op. cit.* (n. 20 above).

eternally famous pupil), and the ever popular Apollonius of Tyana, to say nothing of a statue of a Muse and a statue of an intellectual of some kind, identified by Bert Smith of Oxford as a sophist.<sup>35</sup> The shape of the tondo apse and the lecture hall, as well as the subject of the sculptures and the proximity of the whole ensemble to a renovated private house, appears to indicate, as Smith suggested, the location of the philosophical school of Aphrodisias – the preserve of Asclepiodotus of Alexandria and the scene of the sojourn of Isidore and Damascius. It may also have been, as I have suggested, the residence of Proclus during his one year abroad. The dumping of the sculpture parallels exactly, if less tidily, what was done in the wells of House C in Athens, and it presumably happened at the same time.

Finally Alexandria, where Proclus and Asclepiodotus both were trained. The recent Polish excavations in the vicinity of a large theater at Qom al Dikka have now exposed more than seventeen lecture auditoria. Professor Gawlikowski believes that the actual number will come closer to twenty.<sup>36</sup> Most of these auditoria incorporate the distinctive apsidal shape for auditors that is familiar from Athens and Aphrodisias, although they are distinct in providing a few rows of stepped circular seating built against the apse wall. These little lecture “theaters” are reminiscent of Eunapius’ account of Julian of Cappadocia, but most are obviously not domestic anymore. At Qom al Dikka we are clearly in the center of the schools of late antique Alexandria. The auditoria are grouped around an extensive public area, surrounded by a colonnaded portico and including substantial baths as well as an odeon. This area has been provisionally identified as an agora. Unlike the Athenian lecture rooms, which were in the vicinity of the Agora but not in it, the Alexandrian auditoria are actually enclosed within the portico. For the most part, they are not parts of a house but free-standing rooms, one placed after another. One clearly apsidal auditorium with a vestibule may possibly be connected with a private house (as in Athens and Aphrodisias), but this is not yet clear. It might even have been the home of the chief sophist of the city.

35. SMITH, *op. cit.* (n. 20 above). See also K.T. ERIM, *Aphrodisias. A Guide to the Site and its Museum*, Istanbul 1990, 66 for photographs.

36. G. MAJCHEREK, “Kom el-dikka. Excavations and Preservation Work, 2002/2003”, *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 15 (2004), 25-38, plus cover photograph. The colloquium held in Alexandria in March of 2005 provided ample opportunity to examine the auditoria and to exchange views. Prof. Gawlikowski expressed his view about the number at that time. A report on the colloquium is anticipated in a forthcoming issue of *PAM*.

What surprises is the sheer number of auditoria. We might have guessed from Zacharias that many teachers were lecturing in Alexandria in the fifth century, but it is doubtful that anyone would have inferred that there were between seventeen and twenty separate lecture halls. The centrality of these rooms in a large and important public space seems to show the importance of Hellenic teaching in this city. The archaeologists' dating of these auditoria to the late fifth and early sixth centuries suggests that this was a deliberate expansion of the Alexandrian schools at that time.

In other words, the buildings we now see in Alexandria seem to represent the culmination of what was already the characteristic shape for teaching venues in Athens and Aphrodisias. Although the auditoria in Alexandria show both curved and rectilinear seating for the listeners, often inside a strictly rectangular space an apsidal design was introduced. One auditorium actually has rectilinear seating, as do the rows of seats outside the apse in the complex house with a vestibule. The juxtaposition of one lecture hall after another along the sides of the Agora is a departure from the privacy of the domestic auditoria of the sophists in Athens and Aphrodisias. But the exceptionally narrow size of these spaces, most of which could hold no more than thirty people, sometimes less – according to the estimate of our Polish colleagues – suggests an architectural filiation with the house auditoria of Athens and Aphrodisias. These had taken their origins from the fourth-century initiative at Athens in the time of Julian of Cappadocia. The great sophists before him had clearly lectured to large crowds in conspicuous public spaces such as the Odeum of Agrippa in the Agora. The small apsidal house theater for teaching, with or without modest seating, was an Athenian innovation that passed first to Aphrodisias. It then reached Alexandria divorced from its domestic context but equipped by now with seats for students.

The relatively late date of construction of this large educational complex at Alexandria – a kind of university campus – suggests both confidence and fiscal support. It may represent a bid for supremacy in Hellenic education after the death of Proclus at Athens. If so, with the departure of the Neoplatonists from Athens for Persia in 529 in the wake of Justinian's prohibition the Alexandrians may well have achieved their ambition. Alexandria shows no sign of having suffered the ignominious dismissal of pagan teachers, that is implied at both Athens and Aphrodisias by the precipitous concealment or dumping of pagan objects and images.

The instruction that went on in these late Alexandrian auditoria must certainly have been dedicated to philosophical, rhetorical, and perhaps mathe-

matical texts of the polytheist tradition. But it is easy to imagine Christians among the auditors. Christian theological teaching took place elsewhere, particularly outside the cities in the many monasteries of the region, as is already clear from the narrative of Zacharias. But, like Prohaeresius at Athens in the fourth century, Alexandrian professors in the sixth century could just as well be Christian as pagan, and one of the greatest of them, John Philoponus, who challenged Proclus on points of Neoplatonism and commented on Aristotle, was definitely a Christian. So too were the Alexandrians Aphthonius, Thomas, and Theodorus.<sup>37</sup> We may, therefore, assume that these Christians joined their pagan counterparts in taking the podium before students in the Agora.

It is worth observing that one of the Alexandrian lecture halls has a most imposing set of steps leading up to the lofty eminence where the professor would have spoken.<sup>38</sup> Around him, to his right and to his left, were rows of stepped seating. He ascended what might be described as a pagan pulpit, a natural architectural extension of the raised places in the sophists' house on the Areopagus and yet, at the same time, an evocation of the high place for preaching in churches and, later, in mosques. These steps suggest a kind of proto-minbar. If the Alexandrian auditoria were late bastions of Hellenism they were also symbols of the coexistence of religions. A marvelous passage in the Arabic author Yakut seems to refer to these very auditoria in his account of the old Alexandrian Museum. I am grateful to Judith MacKenzie for drawing my attention to Yakut's words: This is "a place where scholars and alchemists sit... The place of their sessions was like stairs, where they sit divided into classes."<sup>39</sup>

The Polish excavators have succeeded in showing us, as the literary texts have not, the golden twilight of late antique education in Alexandria during

37 Zachar., op.cit. (n. 15 above), p. 25 on Aphthonius. Note also the Christian sophist Thomas in Alexandria at the top of the preceding page in the *Vit. Severi*. On Theodorus, John Moschos, *Prat. Spirit.* 171. See Marinus, *Vit. Procli* 9, 4 for another Theodorus at Alexandria (φιλοσοφίας ἐραστής), on whom, possibly a Christian, see the Budé note on p. 89 of the edition cited above in n. 27. Generally on Alexandrian "Christian intellectuals, trained in classical *paideia*," see C. HAAS, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, Baltimore 1997, 230.

38. This is illustrated in the cover photograph of the *PAM* volume cited for 2004 in note 36 above.

39. *Yāqūt, Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, vol. 1. 254-5, as cited by S. HARMARNEH in his article "The Ancient Monuments of Alexandria According to Accounts by Medieval Arab Authors (IX-XV Century)," *Folia Orientalia* 13 (1971), 80.

the uncertain years between the reign of Justinian and the conquests of Muhammad. The only writers to inform us about the city at this time are John of Nikiu, whose precious Greek narrative survives only in an Ethiopic translation, and Leontios of Neapolis' *Life of John the Almoner*.<sup>40</sup> But the story of uninterrupted Greek urbanism, with a civic life ultimately disrupted by refugees to this center of old Hellenism as they fled westwards from Jerusalem before the Persian invaders, needed a Kavafis to sing of it. This point was not lost on Kavafis himself, as we can see from an unfinished poem extolling Alexandria in the sixth and seventh centuries down to the conquest:

Εἶναι ἐνδιαφέρουσα πολὺ καὶ συγκινητικὴ  
ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρεια τοῦ ἔκτου αἰῶνος,  
ἢ τοῦ ἑβδόμου στές ἀρχές  
πρὶν ἔλθει ὁ κραταῖος Ἀραβισμός.<sup>41</sup>

During the period after Justinian Athens had relinquished its leadership in Greek philosophy, but at least it was not prey to the conquerors who swept over the Near East and Egypt. The Alexandrians had an extra century of Hellenic pedagogy after the schools were closed in Athens, and during that time they clearly kept alive the traditions they had shared with late antique Athens at its most vigorous. The Christian John Philoponus, in contentious dialogue with the works of the polytheist Proclus, is proof of this. The newly uncovered auditoria in Alexandria's Agora are mute but eloquent witnesses of the leadership that Athens and her great teachers gave to that ancient city in Egypt, where teaching continued long after 529, the fateful year of Justinian's interdict. These lecture halls at Alexandria incorporate in their very stones models that came from Athens. They represent an Athenian heritage of learned teaching and commentary that endured and still endures today.

G.W. BOWERSOCK  
Institute for Advanced Study  
School of Historical Studies  
Einstein Drive  
Princeton, NJ 08540/ USA

40. See G. W. BOWERSOCK, "Late Antique Alexandria", *Alexandria and Alexandrianism*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California 1996, 263-272.

41. R. LAVAGNINI, *Κ.Π. Καβάφης, Ατελή Ποιήματα*, Athens 1994, 255.