

Hypatia of Alexandria

Edited by
DAWN LAVALLE NORMAN
and ALEX PETKAS

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Hypatia of Alexandria

Her Context and Legacy

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Dawn LaValle Norman and Alex Petkas

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DAWN LAVALLE NORMAN, born 1983; 2015 PhD in Classics and Hellenic Studies at Princeton University; Research Fellow at Australian Catholic University's Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry in Melbourne.
orcid.org/0000-0002-3354-1298

ALEX PETKAS, born 1984; 2019 PhD in Classics and Hellenic Studies at Princeton University; Assistant Professor of Classics at California State University, Fresno.
orcid.org/0000-0001-6891-8908

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πάτερ καὶ ἀδελφεὲ καὶ διδάσκαλε καὶ διὰ πάντων τούτων εὐεργετικὲ
καὶ ἅπαν ὅ τι τίμιον καὶ πρᾶγμα καὶ ὄνομα.

(Paraphrase of Synesius, Epistle 16)

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List of Abbreviations

Authors

Ach. Tat.	Achilles Tatius
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus Historicus
Ammon.	Ammonius
Apul.	Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis
Aug.	Augustus
Augustinus	Augustinus Hipponensis
Clem. Al.	Clemens Alexandrinus Theologus
Dam.	Damascius Philosophus
Demetr.	Demetrius Phalereus Rhetor
E.	Euripides Tragicus
Eun.	Eunapius
Eus.	Eusebius Caesariensis Scriptor Ecclesiasticus
Hes.	Hesiodus Epicus
Hierocl.	Hierocles Platonius Philosophus
Hom.	Homer
Joh. Chrys.	John Chrysostom
Lact.	L. Caelius Lactantius Firmianus
Lib.	Libanius Sophista
Livy	Titus Livius
Marin.	Marinus Biographus
Non.	Nonnus of Panopolis
Olymp.	Olympiodorus Philosophus
Orig.	Origen
Phlp.	John Philoponus
Phot.	Photius
Pl.	Plato Philosophus
Plu.	Plutarchus Biographus et Philosophus
Porph.	Porphyry
Procl.	Proclus Philosophus
Procop. Gaz.	Procopius of Gaza
Prudentius	Aurelius Prudentius Clemens
Simp.	Simplicius Philosophus
Socr.	Socrates Scholasticus
Sozom.	Salminius Hermias Sozomenus
Syn.	Synesius of Cyrene
Them.	Themistius

Works

AUGUSTUS

R. G. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

APULEIUS

apol. *Apologia**De deo Socratis*

CASSIDORUS / EPIPHANIUS

Hist. eccl. tripart. *Socrates Ecclesiastical History* (Latin Translation)

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS THEOLOGUS

Protr. *Protrepticus**Strom.* *Stromateis*

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Adv. Iul. *Against Julian*

DAMASCIUS

PH *The Philosophical History*

DEMETRIUS PHALEREUS RHETOR

Eloc. *Demetrius on Style*

EPIGRAMS

AP *Anthologia Palatina*

EUNAPIUS

VS *Vitae Sophistarum*

EURIPIDES

Ba. *Bacchae*

EUSEBIUS

Comm. in Is. *Commentary on Isaiah**Dem. ev.* *Demonstratio Evangelica**De eccl. Theol.* *Ecclesiastical Theology**H. E.* *Ecclesiastical History**Praep. ev.* *Praeparatio evangelica*

HESIODUS EPICUS

Fr. *Fragmenta**Op.* *Opera et Dies**Sc.* *Scutum Herculis**Th.* *Theogonia*

HIEROCLES PLATONICUS PHILOSOPHUS

in CA *in Carmen Aureum*

HOMER

Il. *Illiad**Od.* *Odyssey*

HYMNI HOMERICI

hVen. *hymnus ad Venerem* (Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite)

IAMBlichus

de Anima *De Anima**Commentarius* *Commentary on the Timaeus**in Timaeum*

JEROME

Vir. ill. *De Viris Illustribus*

JOHN OF EPHESUS	
<i>E. H.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
JOHN OF NIKIU	
<i>Chronicle</i>	<i>The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu</i>
LACTANTIUS	
<i>Div. Ins.</i>	<i>Institutiones Divinae</i> [Divine Institutes]
<i>Ps.-Aristeas</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
LIBANIUS	
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
LIVY	
<i>AUC</i>	<i>Ab Urbe Condita</i>
NONNUS OF PANOPOLIS	
<i>D.</i>	<i>Dionysiaca</i>
<i>P.</i>	<i>Paraphrase of John</i>
OLYMPIODORUS	
<i>in Alc.</i>	<i>in Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii</i>
<i>in Grg.</i>	<i>in Platonis Gorgiam commentaria</i>
<i>Proll.</i>	<i>Prolegomena</i>
ORIGEN	
<i>schol. in Lc.</i>	<i>scholia in Luc.</i>
PHILOPONUS	
<i>de aeternitate</i>	<i>On the Eternity of the World, against Proclus</i>
PHILOSTRATUS	
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	<i>Life of Apollonius</i>
PHOTIUS	
<i>Bibl.</i>	<i>Bibliotheca</i>
PLOTINUS	
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>The Enneads</i>
PLATO	
<i>R.</i>	<i>Respublica</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
PLUTARCH	
<i>Pyrrh.</i>	<i>The Life of Pyrrhus</i>
<i>Apoph. lac.</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Laconica</i>
<i>Is. Os.</i>	<i>Isis and Osiris</i>
PORPHYRY	
<i>Abst.</i>	<i>de Abstinencia</i>
<i>Aneb.</i>	<i>Letter to Anebo</i>
<i>de Regressu Animae</i>	<i>On the Return of the Soul</i>
<i>Plot.</i>	<i>Vita Plotini</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Ep. ad Marcellam</i>
PROCLUS PHILOSOPHUS	
<i>in Ti.</i>	<i>in Platonis Timaeum commentarii</i>
<i>in Cra.</i>	<i>in Platonis Cratylum commentaria</i>
PROCOPIUS OF GAZA	
<i>In. Is.</i>	<i>Commentary on Isaiah</i>

PRUDENTIUS	
<i>Ad. Sym.</i>	<i>Contra Symmachum</i>
RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA	
<i>Hist. eccl. l.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History (Latin Edition)</i>
SALMINIUS HERMIAS SOZOMENUS	
<i>HE</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical Histories</i>
SIMPLICIUS PHILOSOPHUS	
<i>in Cat.</i>	<i>in Aristotelis Categorias commentarius</i>
SOCRATES SCHOLASTICUS	
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
SUDA	
<i>Suidae Lexicon</i> (Adler, ed.)	
SYNESIUS OF CYRENE	
<i>Aeg.</i>	<i>de providentia</i>
<i>astrolab.</i>	<i>sermo de dono astrolabii</i>
<i>de Dono.</i>	<i>De dono astrolabii</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistles</i>
<i>insomn.</i>	<i>de insomniis</i>
THEMISTIUS	
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
THEODORET	
<i>Hist. E.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
THEODOSIAN CODE	
<i>Cod. Theod.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
VERGIL	
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>

Journals

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
<i>Acta Antiqua hungaricae</i>	<i>Acta antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>Anabases</i>	<i>Anabases: traditions et réception de l'Antiquité</i>
<i>Apeiron</i>	<i>Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science</i>
ARG	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>Byz. Z</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
BzA	<i>Beiträge zur Altertumskunde</i>
<i>ByzSt</i>	<i>Byzantine Studies/Études byzantines.</i>
<i>Church. Hist.</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CJ	<i>The Classical Journal</i>
<i>Class. Mediaev.</i>	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>Crit. Stud. Media Commun.</i>	<i>Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies</i>
CPG	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i>

CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
DACL	<i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i>
EMWJ	<i>Early Modern Women: an Interdisciplinary Journal</i>
Fem. Stud.	<i>Feminist Studies</i>
Gnomon	<i>Gnomon: Kritische Zeitschrift für die gesamte klassische Altertumswissenschaft</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
Gregorianum	<i>Gregorianum: periodicum trimestre a Pontificia Universitate Gregoriana editum</i>
Gymnasium	<i>Gymnasium: Zeitschrift für Kultur der Antike und humanistische Bildung</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
Hermes	<i>Hermes: Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie</i>
Historia	<i>Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte</i>
Hypatia	<i>Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy</i>
Isis	<i>Isis: An International Review Devoted to the History of Science and Its Cultural Influences</i>
Klio	<i>Klio: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Egyptian Studies</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JMEMS	<i>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</i>
JLA	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LSJ	<i>Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed., rev. H. Stuart Jones (1925–40); Suppl. by E. A. Barber and others (1968)</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
Millennium	<i>Millennium: Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.</i>
Mnemosyne	<i>Mnemosyne: bibliotheca classica Batava.</i>
OLD	<i>Glare, P. G. W. 1982. Oxford Latin Dictionary, Oxford.</i>
OSAPh	<i>Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy</i>
PCP	<i>Pacific Coast Philology</i>
Philologus	<i>Philologus: Zeitschrift für antike Literatur und ihre Rezeption</i>
Phronesis	<i>Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy</i>
PG	<i>Patrologica Graeca</i>
PGL	<i>Lampe, G. W. H. 1961. A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford</i>
PLRE	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
Philologus	<i>Philologus: Zeitschrift für antike Literatur und ihre Rezeption.</i>
Phoenix	<i>Phoenix: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada revue de la Société canadienne des études classiques</i>
P. Oxy.	<i>Oxyrhynchus</i>

<i>Promethius</i>	<i>Prometheus: rivista quadrimestrale di studi classici</i>
<i>PW</i>	“Pauly-Wissowa”, i. e. August Friedrich von Pauly's <i>Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Rivista di archeologia Cristiana</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue des études augustiniennes et patristiques</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>RFIC</i>	<i>Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica</i>
<i>RGRW</i>	<i>Religions in the Greco-Roman World</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TCH</i>	<i>The Transformation of the Classical Heritage</i>
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realencyclopädie</i>
<i>WJb</i>	<i>Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>VChr</i>	<i>Vigilae Christianae</i>
<i>Vic Lit Cult</i>	<i>Victorian Literature and Culture</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Introduction

The Timeliness of Hypatia

DAWN LAVALLE NORMAN and ALEX PETKAS

Hypatia is something of an academic household name. The story is so familiar, the sources for her life so apparently scarce, that one may wonder if there is much left to be said. Even as this volume was being finalized, a new biography of Hypatia appeared (written by one of our contributors).¹ But scholarship and culture continue to develop, and we are confident that each of the essays gathered here have some new perspective to share about Hypatia and her legacy.

To take one example, in early 2017 Hypatia's name was all over the internet, especially in those streets and alleyways of the web frequented by members of the academy. The reason was a controversy over an article published by *Hypatia*, a feminist journal which takes its name and inspiration from the topic of this volume, the fifth-century CE Platonist Hypatia of Alexandria.² The author of the article examined from a philosophical perspective the parallels between transgenderism and transracialism. This provoked a backlash in which many academics demanded that *Hypatia* rescind the article, an action which the editors ultimately did not take.

This controversy stirred discussion on issues relevant to all academics, about the publication, reception, and censorship of peer reviewed scholarship that risks or provokes public backlash. Turning to the historical Hypatia in terms of this debate can help us to approach aspects of her career with fresh eyes: how might she have reacted? Hypatia herself edited and published several school texts of notable mathematicians and astronomers, but she also seems to have published the controversialist intellectual work of her contemporaries, such as those of her student Synesius (see the first essay in this volume). And most vividly, Hypatia was also a female intellectual who faced public ire, albeit of a different sort.

Hypatia is unfortunately most famous for her untimely end, which has often been seen as marking the end of a great age – of learning and free thought, tol-

¹ Edward J. Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² Rebecca Tuvel, "In Defense of Transracialism," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 32.2 (2017): 263–278.

erant multiculturalism, or even classical antiquity itself. In 415 a gang of Christians caught her off-guard in the streets of Alexandria and brutally lynched her.

The essays collected herein were first presented at a conference at Princeton University titled *Hypatia: Behind the Symbol*, which took place in December 2015, and was partly inspired by the 1600-year anniversary of her death. As the title of that conference suggests, the notion that her death was such a symbolic and epoch-making event is itself a viewpoint examined critically, rather than explicitly adopted, by contributors in this volume. The causes and consequences of this gruesome tragedy are indeed examined in detail in many of the essays in this volume, but we hope that, on the whole, this book has succeeded in getting past the age-old pattern of seeing Hypatia's death as the most noteworthy moment in her life.

We felt Hypatia to be a timely subject in 2015, and we believe this to be even more the case upon publication. Public and political interest in women's leadership in the arts and sciences has only increased and shows no signs of waning. In times of change, people often turn to history for ethical examples. Hypatia's life can provide one, for instance, to women interested in lessons for success in a male-dominated political and intellectual climate. Her publishing and teaching achievements matched or exceeded those of many of her noteworthy male contemporaries. But she also grounded her personal effectiveness in skills and activities which are often gendered as female, such as interpersonal charm, relationship cultivation, and (probably) conforming to gender-specific models of virtue enforced by her culture, such as her much-discussed chastity.

But one aspect of her life that deserves particular attention here, because it may be less obvious, is Hypatia's interest as a male role-model. This is not only because men can (of course) learn much from emulating admirable women, but also because Hypatia is a striking example of how many ancient men, too, were at least partially aware of this fact. In the absence, for the most part, of formal certifying bodies, intellectual formation in the ancient world was much more explicitly interpersonal, based on teacher-disciple relationships, and frequently theorized in terms of mimesis (e.g. in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*). Hypatia taught, mentored, and thus left her own ethical imprint on a predominantly male student body – the clearest example is her student Synesius of Cyrene. Indeed, Hypatia and Synesius constitute perhaps the best documented historical example of female-male mentorship surviving from antiquity. Synesius is granted significant space in this volume, but he is not the only evidence one can find herein of men modeling themselves after this woman – see, for instance, Joshua Fincher's treatment of Nonnus' female intellectual figures in Chapter 8 or Edward Watts' discussion of Rev. John Toland in early eighteenth-century England in Chapter 10. We hope readers, regardless of their identity, will find this volume useful in clarifying their own reflections about the continuing timelessness of Hypatia.

Creating Unity from Fragments

Our knowledge of Hypatia herself rests upon a rather thin body of evidence, almost all of which we have collected and translated afresh at the end of this volume (Appendix A). These are followed by an in-depth commentary on some of the difficult parts of one of our most important sources, Socrates Scholasticus' *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Appendix B). As mentioned above, a frequent frustration for interested scholars is both the lack of sources and the outsize role her death plays in many of those we do possess. The only trace of actual textual products we might have from Hypatia are from technical works of mathematics (see the selection of Hesychius from the *Suda* in Appendix A). Most promisingly for our purposes, her father Theon says in his introduction to his commentary on Book III of Ptolemy's *Almagest* that the text was "edited by my daughter the philosopher Hypatia" (παραναγνωσθείσης τῇ φιλοσόφῳ θυγατρὶ μου Ὑπατίᾳ).³ While the surviving version of Theon's mathematical works must owe *something* to Hypatia's editing hand, it is impossible to disentangle with any confidence her *ipsissima verba* from the treatises. In addition to her (probably) text-critical work on the *Almagest*, she also produced her own (lost) commentaries on Diophantus' *Mathematica*, the *Astronomical Canon* of Ptolemy and the *Conics* of Apollonius. It has been suggested that the first six books of Diophantus' work owe their survival in part to her commentary, which ended after book six.⁴

While she would surely be glad to be known by her scholarly and mathematical works, we can gain a more vivid picture of Hypatia by studying her impact on her students, and above all Synesius. Synesius' letters to Hypatia suggest at times that we are glimpsing the relationship between teacher and mentor in action. Like the mathematical traces, they offer a route toward Hypatia *before* her death. Because of their status as our earliest and most intimate evidence for Hypatia's life as a teacher and mentor, we begin the volume with three essays that look specifically at the Synesius-Hypatia epistles. First, Alex Petkas argues that the correspondence between Synesius and Hypatia reveals her investment in contemporary debates about the content of *paideia*, especially an intra-Christian discussion about the role of Classical texts and values. Following on from this social-historical reading come two literary examinations of the Synesius-Hypatia correspondence, which problematize their status as historical sources. Helmut Seng looks at the role Hypatia plays in the correspondence less as an actual historical individual, and more as a symbol of philosophy. The cor-

³ Cited in Alan Cameron, "Isidore of Miletus and Hypatia of Alexandria: On the Editing of Mathematical Texts," *GRBS* 31 (1990): 106.

⁴ Thomas Heath, *Diophantus of Alexandria: A Study in the History of Greek Algebra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 5–6, 18. Michael A. B. Deakin, "Hypatia and her Mathematics," *The American Mathematical Monthly* 101.3 (1994): 234–243 discusses what we know of her other lost commentaries.

respondence breaks down in-step with the breakdown in Synesius' own hope in finding consolation from philosophy itself. Synesius thus uses Hypatia for his own self-formation and in addressing his rising despair after the deaths of his sons. Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer goes one step further, stepping back to look at the epistolary corpus as a whole and its arrangement by Synesius as an intentional story that develops through the placement of individual letters. As such, it is not a reliable window onto any reality beyond that of the author Synesius' literary intentions. Thus, both Seng and Harich-Schwarzbauer argue that even the evidence which brings us nearest in time and place to Hypatia must be read as through a distorting mirror, or even perhaps more as fiction than fact.

After Synesius, our evidence lies almost exclusively in late ancient historians. Walter Beers takes up the challenge of reading Hypatia's role in our longest testimony, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Socrates Scholasticus. He argues that the story Socrates tells is not really about Hypatia at all, but about Cyril of Alexandria, the man behind her death. And if there is any woman of primary interest to the story, it is the Empress Pulcheria rather than the philosopher Hypatia. Mareile Haase likewise looks to the use of Hypatia by historians, especially (like Beers) to Socrates' *Hist. eccl.* Drawing on the concept of "substitutive image act," she investigates the motifs that literary accounts of Hypatia's murder share with depictions of the destruction of the Alexandrian cult statue of Serapis. Haase concludes that Socrates uses iconoclasm as a metaphor to create a graphic mental image capable of counteracting the authorities' silence about Hypatia's violent death. The final two essays in this section examine different aspects of Hypatia's identity: her religion and her philosophy. David Frankfurter's essay delves into what we can know about the religious life of late-ancient followers of traditional religion, among whom we must number Hypatia, by all accounts. He concludes that in the fourth and fifth centuries there was a privatization of traditional religion, where sacrifices at home took the place of proscribed sacrifices in temples. Such domestication changed what it meant to "do" paganism and allowed a certain merging of traditional religious practices with Christianity. Sebastian Gertz's contribution gathers what we can guess about Hypatia's life as a Neoplatonic philosopher at this time, especially as it relates to her evident focus on mathematics. Gertz suggests that Hypatia's work as a philosopher should be seen in the context of the earlier Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, rather than the next phase in the long and creative development of Neoplatonism. Most likely she would have seen her mathematical projects as necessary preliminary work in a course of Platonic clarification and ascent.

The line between ancient and modern receptions is labile. Already, the letters of Synesius could be fruitfully looked at as a reception of the Hypatia-story in a particular time and place. This is even truer for the historians who wrote in the following centuries, examined primarily in the essays of Part II. Yet Hypatia continued to be important long after late antiquity. Her voice echoes

through the ages, albeit only through the words of others, ancient and modern. We begin Part III by looking at two early receptions of Hypatia. The first is a suggestive argument by Joshua Fincher that echoes of Hypatia can be heard in the fifth-century epic poetry of Nonnus of Panopolis' *Dionysiaca*. The academic women in this poem share important details that could evoke links in the minds of its readers to the most famous recent female philosopher from the same region. Victoria Leonard's essay continues the interest in ancient reception, while also pushing us forward into more recent moments of reception. Leonard looks at the memorable scene, recorded only in Damascius' *Philosophical History*, of Hypatia's display of her menstrual blood to ward off an unwanted suitor. By looking at Damascius' narration of this scene, Leonard argues that the patterns of misogyny which it begins are continued in the use and abuse of Hypatia into the modern era. Edward Watts' essay also pauses over the gendered modern reception of Hypatia's story, especially in her rich eighteenth-century reception in England and France. There he discovers a tussle over Hypatia's legacy. Was she of interest as a pawn in a political game more centrally about Cyril (as we have seen argued in Beers' essay in this volume), or as a model of an educated intellectual woman? While male writers of the eighteenth century tended to focus on the former, female writers from the same period were more interested in the later, which leads Watts to suggest that the main reason that Hypatia's death overshadowed her life for so long is that almost all of our textual descriptions of Hypatia are written by men. The final contribution, by Cédric Scheidegger Laemmle, turns to the cinematic rendition of Hypatia's life in Alejandro Amenábar's *Agora*, and finds there a subtle tug-of-war over how readers (and viewers) take Hypatia's story and remake it to suit their own desires, much like the fictitious slave Davus' flash-back during the scene of Hypatia's death, which constructs a new narrative at odds with Hypatia's self-conception throughout the film.

All of these readers, both ancient and modern, provide us with different angles from which to view our elusive subject, proving her perennial interest and seeming inexhaustability. We hope that this volume contributes to the continuing conversation over Hypatia's life and legacy in yet another phase of her rich reception.

In the process of producing this volume, we have contracted many debts of gratitude. First of all, for Christian Wildberg, who inspired us with the idea for the conference and volume in the first place. Also, to Alan Cameron, who was able to attend the conference and provided valuable feedback on many papers, but who unfortunately did not live to see the outcome of the conference in book-form. Then, to all of the financial sponsors at Princeton University who underwrote the conference from which this volume descends: the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, the Committee for the Study of Late Antiquity, the Classics Department, the Council of the Humanities, the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies, the Center for the Study of Religion, and Classical Philosophy. The

range of sponsors points to how many fields the study of Hypatia necessarily touches. Likewise too, we would like to thank all of the participants and attendees at the original conference who helped create the rich conversation that produced this volume. In the production of the volume we owe especial thanks to Carolyn Alsen, who tirelessly and carefully helped with editing and formatting. Finally, we dedicate this book to the memory of our common mentor, Robert Germany, who was truly a “father, brother, teacher and benefactor” to both of us, and whose conversation we miss daily.

Hypatia and the Desert: A Late Antique Defense of Classicism

ALEX PETKAS

Introduction

Hypatia, as far as we can tell, spent much of her career in the public eye. This is partly because she taught philosophy, a subject generally associated with the leading citizens in late antique society. But it is also because she did not limit her intellectual practice to teaching: She maintained an active patronage network, was a confidante to city councillors, and advised at least one imperial governor in Alexandria. Indeed, it was not so much her purely academic pursuits that led to her death, as the fact that she commanded real political influence, and used it.¹

How did Hypatia's calling as a public philosopher influence her teachings? Many studies have carefully assessed the doctrinal content of her philosophical and mathematical curriculum.² This is an important task, and a challenging one, since we must extract clues from the very limited number of direct sources on Hypatia, as well as comparative evidence of other philosophers, including her student Synesius.

In this essay, however, I will take up a far less examined aspect of Hypatia's teaching, and propose that her role in the history of classicism has been underestimated. I will argue primarily from the writings of her student Synesius of Cyrene. By "classicism" I mean a discourse based around emulation of a set of canonical ancient texts and compositions, which aimed, in its highest registers, to reproduce the Attic Greek literary language.³ This classicism was underpinned,

¹ Edward Watts' account of her death, in *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 121–134, makes this particularly clear.

² Including Gertz's in this volume. See also Watts, *Hypatia*, 37–50; Michael A. B. Deakin, *Hypatia of Alexandria: Mathematician and Martyr* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 77–106; Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 27–65.

³ The cultural politics of this system are somewhat better studied in the earlier empire: Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17–42. See the introduction to James Porter, ed., *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) in which Porter discusses the difficulty of defining what is classical. Despite the absence of a clear Latin or Greek terminological equivalent, we can find a notion of the classical and classicism at work in antiquity, "existing not as a unified phe-

in the late antique East, by traditional patterns of Greek education, a diverse set of practices which fell under the heading of rhetoric.⁴ The Greek word *paideia* is frequently used in modern scholarly discussions to denote the shared literate culture of east Roman elites, for whom mastery of a classical canon and a code of decorum thought to be found therein was necessary for many types of public persuasion.⁵ Although Synesius does use the word in a very classicizing sense, *paideia* was also a generic term for “education” or the “culture” inherited from one’s upbringing. By the fourth century AD, a time of great debate about the sources of prestige and authority, the word *paideia* had been used by many Christian authors over the centuries to refer to alternative forms of education, such as even monastic and proto-monastic life.⁶

It is likely that Hypatia shared Synesius’ interest in classical *paideia*, given her public-facing career. She would have frequent need of rhetoric in her advisory activity to the governor Orestes and the civic council, as well as in maintaining her patronage network, which included many former students.⁷

In Hypatia’s day, participation at a high level of civic life of Alexandria also meant engaging with Christianity. Scholars have frequently observed that Hypatia’s school was distinctive for the number of students she had from prominent Christian families.⁸ But her involvement in the public culture of Christianity runs deeper than we have hitherto appreciated. In what follows, I will carefully read a few select passages of works Synesius sent to Hypatia, and argue that it makes the most sense to see both their opponents and primary audience as Christians. Hypatia thus emerges as a conscientious participant in civic debate

nomenon ...”, but “as a set of attempts to retrieve, reproduce, and so too to produce a hegemonic cultural signature” based on a canon that we could today recognize as classical (Porter, *Classical Pasts*, 29). Every artist’s classicism will be an idiosyncratic negotiation between personal taste and the canon they sense or select.

⁴ Donald Russell, *Greek Declamation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) is a standard introduction. See also Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁵ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1992) is fundamental. A recent volume by Lieve Van Hoof and Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD: Performing Paideia, Constructing the Present, Presenting the Self* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) aims to bridge the artificial scholarly gap between earlier imperial and late antique rhetorical culture.

⁶ Cf. *PGL* s.v. παιδεία. The more Christian senses were, however, generally secondary extensions of the more traditional semantics of the term. I advocate using “classicism” or “classical *paideia*” instead not so much in order to criticize existing work on late antique *paideia*, as to bring it into tighter theoretical dialogue with studies of classicist literary culture in earlier and later periods.

⁷ The public or political aspects of her career were noted by Socrates and Damascius, and are also borne out by many letters of Synesius, e.g. 81. See also Watts, *Hypatia*, on her philosophical school as a civically minded project (see especially p. 79–92).

⁸ Synesius is the most famous, and concrete information about others is derived from his letter collection. Watts, *Hypatia*, 63–78; Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, 27–46.

about the status of classical literary culture in a Christian dominated Alexandria. In order to provide more detailed picture of the kinds of political issues this debate related to, I present a brief account of the Origenist controversy, a contemporary disturbance which brought Alexandria and the nearby desert ascetic communities into conflict.

Hypatia the Publicist

Towards the end of 404 AD, Synesius sent Hypatia a letter (154 in modern editions) from his native Libya, with three treatises attached.⁹ At the end of the long letter, he makes it clear that he wants her to share one of the treatises, entitled *Dio*, among Alexandrian learned circles. *Dio* is a complex polemical work, and Synesius spends most of the prefatory letter explaining who its targets are, in order to make sure it is interpreted correctly. Epistles of this kind were expected to be shared.¹⁰ Letter 154 thus merits our careful attention, for in it Synesius outlines what could be described as Hypatia's rhetorical mandate with respect to the debate that the *Dio* provokes.

Why was *Dio* worth Hypatia's (and our) consideration? It can be described, in short, as a literary-philosophical manifesto. The treatise takes its name from Synesius' favorite early imperial Greek author, Dio of Prusa, nicknamed "Chrysostom." Synesius presents Dio's *bios* or career in a positive light, as a paradigm according to which he has modeled his own life. The treatise moves on to defend the importance of classical *paideia* to anything worthy of the title of the philosophical life. This included both the (neo-)Platonism common in Hypatia's day, which was particularly interested in theology and salvation, and also other forms of life claiming to be "philosophy," such as Christian asceticism.¹¹ Classical *paideia*, Syn-

⁹ For another approach to this letter and its significance, see also Harich-Schwarzbauer's essay in this volume.

¹⁰ Syn. Ep. 101 and 105 are well-known examples making this common expectation explicit. Cf. Pauline Allen, "Christian Correspondences: The secrets of Letter-writers and letter-bearers" in *The Art of Veiled Speech: Self-Censorship from Aristophanes to Hobbes*, eds. Han Baltussen and Peter Davis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 209–232; Scott Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 19–20; Michael Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

¹¹ On Synesius as a theological and religious figure, Samuel Vollenweider, *Neuplatonische und christliche Theologie bei Synesios von Kyrene* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) and also Donald Russell and Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, *On Prophecy, Dreams, and Human Imagination: Synesius, De Insomniis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Jay Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) is useful on Neoplatonic doctrine in Synesius, though for his religiosity see Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 19–39. For monasticism as "philosophy," Anne-Marie Malingrey "Philosophia: Étude d'un group de mots dans la littérature grecque des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C." (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961).

esius insists, is essential not just as a preparatory exercise but as a lifelong aid to keeping up a contemplative discipline. In articulating his vision, Synesius draws deeply on Plato – not just for the doctrines of the *Republic* and *Phaedo* but also some of the *loci* and literary discussions of the *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus*.¹² He also displays profound classical *paideia* while arguing for it. Letter 154 characterizes the *Dio*, using terms drawn from sophistic culture, as “no less a display of wide learning than a praise of it” (πολυμαθείας οὐχ ἥττον ἐπιδείξας ἢ ἐγκώμιον). The text is filled with references to the classical tradition he is defending, including Homer, Thucydides, and Aristophanes. Synesius also engages with the second sophistic authors Philostratus and Aristides as peers (§ 1–3). The language is high Attic, and ornate even by classical standards. In the treatise he also devotes substantial space to a lampoon of professional teachers, as well as a criticism of “barbarian” ascetics, who are clearly some sort of Christian monks.

Being a manifesto of an already well-established literary author, *Dio* takes up many points Synesius had broached in earlier writings, including arguments and *topoi* he probably learned at Hypatia’s school. In one of his first letters (137), to his fellow student Herculian, he includes a cryptic reference to the mythic shape-shifting god Proteus.¹³ The obscurity and specificity of his comment suggest, in context, that it was a teaching familiar to his addressee from Hypatia’s school, which he expected Herculian to recognize immediately. He returns to the theme more fully in the *Dio* (5.7–6.3). There Synesius makes clear that for him, Proteus was a positive paradigm for a philosopher who knows profound mysteries but can also adjust his self-presentation to disarm and charm the Everyman, who might not be ready to hear hard doctrines. This Proteus allegory thus serves an argument that the philosopher should take rhetoric seriously.

It may also be a window on to how Hypatia conceived of her own public career: she had to control the audience and reputation of her teachings, which posed much more risk to her, as a pagan woman, than to her male Christian students.¹⁴ Synesius elaborates the Proteus principle with another allegory especially suggestive of Hypatia’s situation: if Ixion had not been given a cloud-decoy, he never would have given up chasing Hera (5.7).

¹² Many references can be found in Kurt Treu, *Synesios von Kyrene: ein Kommentar zu seinem “Dion.”* (Berlin, Akademie Verlag 1958) e.g. on § 12 of the text, as well as in the notes to the CUF (Budé) edition of Lamoureux and Aujoulat. Michiel Op de Coul, “Aspects of Paideia in Synesius’ *Dion*,” in *Synesios von Kyrene. Politik – Literatur – Philosophie*, eds. H. Seng, and L. M. Hoffmann, *Byzantios* 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 110–124 is a good starting point for study of the *Dio*. The text runs between 45 and 60 pages in modern editions.

¹³ “I forgot the wise art of Proteus, which was none other than to spend time with people, not as a divinity but as a fellow citizen” (τῆς σοφῆς τοῦ Πρωτέως ἐπελαθόμεν τέχνης (οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη τις ἦν ἢ συνεῖναι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οὐ θεῖως, ἀλλὰ πολιτικῶς). Perhaps not coincidentally, it was on the shores of Egypt that Menelaus met Proteus, on his way home from Troy (*Odyssey* 4.435–570).

¹⁴ The allegory draws both on a passage in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (288b7–c2) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Demosthenes* § 8. Cf also Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 1.4; *Lib. Or.* 18.176.

The *Dio* is more broadly a sustained reflection on how classical literature (including Old Comedy) is important for all “serious” people, speculative philosophers no exception, precisely because it is pleasurable (*Dio* § 5–8.). It thus may give us some hint about how enjoyable it was to study at Hypatia’s school. Success of the sort she achieved in her world must have required, besides determination and political intelligence, a great deal of charm and wit – in ancient terms, rhetorical skill.¹⁵

Synesius discusses the other two treatises, *On Dreams* and *On the Gift*, much more briefly in the letter, but it is most probable that he wanted her to publish them as well. Is there any significance to the fact that he published all three, together, to Hypatia, in late 404? The question cannot be treated satisfactorily here, but I will highlight a few connections between them in the conclusion; it is likely that they also contributed to the same project.

Various proposals have been made about the opponents of the *Dio*, though its audience has not been treated as often. The two have not always been distinguished. In the remainder of this section I will argue, against most modern interpretations, that both opponents and audience were predominantly Christians, or, at the very least, participants in a cultural debate dominated by Christianity on either side. For the sake of clarity, I will confine to the footnotes some of the more specialized details of the argument.

“This year I have finished two books, the one after being inspired by God, the other by the calumny of men.” So Synesius begins his letter; the first book he refers to is *On Dreams*, the second is the *Dio* (he mentions *On the Gift* at the end of the letter). He immediately launches into an explanation of the calumny (λοιδορία) which brought it about. The obliqueness of his description of the calumniators is one of the reasons why it has been so challenging to determine their identity. The obscurity is probably intentional, as Synesius is talking about contemporary figures. He nonetheless expects Hypatia, and the people she shares the letter with, to recognize them. His opponents are divided into two groups:¹⁶

Some of those in white robes and some of those in grey robes (τῶν ἐν λευκοῖς ἔνιοι τρίβωσι καὶ τῶν ἐν φαιοῖς) claimed that I was committing a crime against philosophy, by developing expertise in beauty of diction and rhythm, and by considering it worthwhile to make a point about Homer and about rhetorical figures in speeches – alleging that a lover of wisdom ought to be a hater of the word, and only occupy himself with the superhuman realm (τὰ δαιμόνια πράγματα). As if they themselves have already become contemplators of the Noetic (θεωροὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ), while such a thing is impossible for me, since I devote some free time out of my life to purify my tongue and to sweeten

¹⁵ On rhetoric in the teaching of contemporary philosophers, see Malcolm Heath, “Platonists and the teaching of rhetoric in late antiquity,” in *Late Antique Epistemology: Other Ways to Truth*, eds. Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Stephen Clark (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 143–159.

¹⁶ All translations are my own, based on the text and line numbers of the Garzya-Roques Budé edition (2003).

my thought! What led them to condemn me as being suited only for play was that my *Hunting with Dogs* (τὰς Κυνηγετικάς), after escaping my household in some unknown manner, has become a serious object of interest for a group of youths who are interested in Hellenism and charm; that, and some pieces of poetry carefully crafted and displaying “something of an archaic touch,” as we often say of statues. (*Ep* 154.2–18)

The “grey robes” have been variously identified as desert dwelling Christian monks, city dwelling Christian monks, pagan Cynic street preacher-philosophers, or a mix of Christian and pagan Cynics. The “white robes” have almost exclusively been identified as pagans, whether philosophers or rhetoricians.¹⁷

From the passage just quoted, a few facts emerge. First, it is not just reading classical literature which these critics frown upon, but producing classicizing literary works, since they were apparently provoked by an earlier act of publication by Synesius. The (lost) *Hunting with Dogs* was probably a prose treatise, and bore some resemblance to Dio’s *Euboicus* (*Oration* 7).¹⁸ It did not slip from its author’s house accidentally as Synesius coyly suggests, for he almost certainly refers to publishing it in Letter 74.¹⁹ The poetic works are likely the *Hymns* or at least a selection of some of them.²⁰ Secondly, both groups of detractors make some kind of claim to “philosophy,” and their criticism of Synesius amounts more concretely to questioning his philosophical seriousness.

Continuing on, Synesius begins to address the grey robes specifically:

But some of them, with ignorance guiding their boldness, are readiest of all to discuss God (if you run into anyone, you will immediately hear something about their unsyllogistic syllogisms) and they drain out their words upon people even unsolicited. This seems to serve their private interests: for these people are the source of those popular teachers (δημοδιδάσκαλοι) in the cities, who are the “Horn of Amalthea” which they [i.e. the grey robes] think fit to use. I think you recognize (ἐπιγινώσκεις) this slack tribe which slanders a noble theme (γενναίαν ὑπόθεσιν). These people expect me to want to be their student,²¹ and claim that they will in a very short time render me a most daring fellow in matters of God, able to hold forth day and night continually. (*Ep* 154.19–30)

¹⁷ Op de Coul, “Aspects of Paideia in Synesius’ *Dion*,” argues that nothing in their description bears specifically on religion, and there may therefore be Christians in their number as well. I agree with his critique of earlier scholars’ over-reading of the ἑτέρα ἀγωγή at *Dio* 11, but in my view religion has much to do with it. Vollenweider, *Neuplatonische und christliche* (p. 19 ff), followed by many, sees both groups as pagans. Aldo Brancacci (*Rhetorike Philosophousa: Dione Crisostomo nella cultura antica e bizantina* (Rome: Bibliopolis, 1985), 149–151, however, sees the “white robes” as the monks of the Dio (and the grey robes as Iamblichan pagan philosophers).

¹⁸ Helmut Seng, “Die Kontroverse um Dion von Prusa und Synesios von Kyrene,” *Hermes* 134 (2006): 110. The *Euboian Oration*, one of Dio’s most beloved, is discussed in Synesius’ *Dio* at § 2.

¹⁹ Synesius mentions the text in Letter 101 to Pylaemenes and sends an “*attikourgos logos*” to the same in Letter 74.

²⁰ Idalgo Baldi, *Gli Inni di Sinesio di Cirene: vicende testuali di un corpus tardoantico* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 25–35.

²¹ μαθητιάω: a rare desiderative form memorably used by Aristophanes at *Nu.* 183 of the way students want to sit at the feet of a quack (Socrates).

Following many scholars, I take these “grey robes” to be Christian ascetics – Synesius was himself a Christian, and they are somehow trying to recruit him.²² But the grey robes seem to be a civic phenomenon, and are therefore not to be identified strictly with monastics living in the desert outside the city: for one thing, it is unlikely that anyone on a trip to Nitria, Scetis, or Kellia would be surprised or bothered by unsolicited theologoumena. Synesius’ exasperation suggests the casual encounters of city life.²³ He does use the word “cities” in the plural so there may be such people in Cyrenaica as well; but the passage indicates he is referring to the Alexandrian context which Hypatia is most familiar with – perhaps she recognizes them because they have slandered her own “noble themes” or those of other students of hers.

Furthermore, the grey robes seem obsessed with theology beyond all other subjects. The δημοδιδάσκαλοι, “popular teachers” that seem to be a separate group who follow their lead, may be providing them financial support, if this is what the cryptic Horn of Amalthea reference means.²⁴ The presence of patrons who support the grey robes would fit a well-documented late antique pattern of Christian ascetics with lay admirers.²⁵ City-dwelling ascetics are attested for Alexandria by contemporaries John Cassian and Jerome, who view them as degenerate forms of the true monasticism found in the desert.²⁶ If the grey robes are these sort of people, they were apparently unpopular among some “serious” Christians, and Synesius may be treading on rather safe ground when he dismissively criticizes them and their supporters.

Then there are the men dressed in white robes:

But the other ones, who have better taste, are sophists much more godforsaken than the former. And they would like to be congratulated for the same accomplishments (ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς εὐδοκμεῖν), but aren’t lucky enough to do even that. And you know of some people who have been despoiled in the tax office (οἷσθ’ αἰνας ἐν λογιστηρίοις ἀποδύνας),

²² Synesius a Christian: Cameron and Long, *Barbarians and Politics*, 19–28; 62–70. Grey robes signifying Christian monks: Eun. VS 476.

²³ Aglae Pizzzone, “Christliche und heidnische Träume: versteckte Polemik in Synesius, De In-somniis” in *Synesios von Kyrene: Politik, Literatur, Philosophie*, eds. Helmut Seng and Lars Martin Hoffmann (Brepols: Turnhout, 2012), 255, sees them as desert monks, and the *demodidaskaloi* as a subset of them who visit the city.

²⁴ Argued by, Ewa Wipszycka, “Le monachisme égyptien et les villes,” *Travaux et Memoirs* (1994): 1–44. Repr. in *Etudes sur le christianisme dans l’Egypte de l’antiquité tardive*, 1996), 144. Synesius may also somehow have in mind Philostratus’ description of Dio Chrysostom’s virtuosic eloquence, indicating especially his skill at of *inventio* (Phil. V.S. 486–487: Ἀμαλθείας γὰρ κέρας ἦν). The δημοδιδάσκαλοι may in fact be the “white robes” of the following section.

²⁵ Melania the Elder, for example, visited Pambo and lavished him with a chest filled with three hundred pounds of silver, which he then ordered to be distributed to support the poorer monasteries in Libya: the ones in fertile Egypt, he claimed, were already doing well enough (Palladius. *Hist. Laus*. 10).

²⁶ Cassian *Coll.* 18.4–7; Jerome *ad Eustochium* 22.34, Labourt. Referred to in the sources variously as Sarabaitae and Remnuoth; Wipszycka, “Le monachisme égyptien et les villes,” 286.

or at any rate convinced by some single misfortune to turn to philosophy at the noon-time of their life, from previously only using the gods' names to swear in affirmations and denials like Plato; their shadow would sooner say something pertinent than they would. Nevertheless their pretension is forceful (δεινὴ ἢ προσποιήσις). For wow (βαβαί), how high their eyebrow is stretched! And their hand props up their beard, and in other respects they go around more serious-faced (σεμνοπροσωποῦσιν) than the busts of Xenocrates. These people presume to legislate to us something that rather benefits themselves, i.e. that nobody seem to know anything good in public (μηδένα μηδὲν ἀγαθὸν εἰδὸτα φανερόν εἶναι): for they think that it will impugn their own credibility if someone who *is* a philosopher knows how to speak. And they suppose that they can hide behind this pretension and seem like they are brimming with wisdom inside. (154.31–47)

Xenocrates succeeded Plato's heir Speusippus in order to become the third head of the Academy. He was famous for his joyless demeanor.²⁷ The word Synesius uses to compare them to Xenocrates' busts, σεμνοπροσωπεῖν, "put on a stern face," appears first in Aristophanes, in his description of Socrates in the *Clouds* (Nu. 363), a play Synesius praises in the *Dio* (3.5). Through this comparison, Synesius criticizes the "white robes" for assuming the bodily *habitus* of a serious philosopher without any of the intellectual substance. That he calls their affectation "δεινὴ" has an ironic force in the context of people who reject rhetoric: *deinos* is a standard adjective for describing an eloquent person (as in the common expression δεινὸς λέγειν).²⁸

The fact that these people wish to be recognized on the same grounds as the "grey robes" is telling. For this would suggest that they share a common interest with them in what might be described as pop theology. This, I believe, is a strong indication that they are Christians, rather than pagan philosophers as the most common view holds.²⁹ But he suggests they are like the grey robes not just because they say similar things, but also because they are interested in influencing public opinion – εὐδοκμεῖν and φανερόν εἶναι emphasize that there is an audience to the competition between them and Synesius.

Synesius' description of some people suffering what appears to be a loss of wealth in the tax office suggests people of the lower end of the curial class who were on the one hand personally liable for shortfalls in imperial tax reve-

²⁷ Xenocrates as σεμνός and σκυθρωπός ἀεί: D.L. 4.7. Plato was reported to have told him, "Xenocrates, sacrifice to the Graces!" He was also famed (and parodied) for his chastity (D.L. 4.7). Cf. Phil. V.S. 528 on the relation of Marcus of Ephesus' solemn countenance and sophistic profession.

²⁸ LSJ s.v. δεινός III. Phil. V.S. 499 comments on the term's ambiguity.

²⁹ E.g. Pizzzone, "Christliche und heidnische Träume." But this popularizing version of philosophy/theology, since it dispenses with the prerequisite of rigorous philosophical training and which Synesius marks explicitly as sub-elite, does not seem to fit the usual Neoplatonists very well. That the white robes used to use the gods' names in swearing affirmations and denials like Plato (μὰ τὸν Δία!), on my reading then, suggests that Synesius is portraying people who were not particularly religious before some sort of mid-life conversion. They have become not just earnest Christians but amateur religion hobbyists.

nues and yet not well connected enough to obtain a pardon or exemption, nor wealthy enough to absorb a fine and maintain their social status.³⁰ Bankrupt curials could flee to monasteries in order to escape financial burdens or seek alternative forms of respectability, and Synesius accuses the white robes' turn to "philosophy" as something similar (and expects Hypatia to recognize the pattern).³¹

That he calls them "sophists" and that the *Dio* contains memorable tableaux of unfortunate grammarians, rhetoric teachers, and other types of literate professionals, has led many interpreters to see the white robes of 154 as teachers.³² However, later on in the letter, Synesius caricatures their "silence" (i.e. lack of eloquence) and alleges that they are jealous of his skill with words. He also later goes on to identify the white robes as the main opponents of the *Dio*, and in the work he blames them for their rejection of good *paideia*.³³ This does, I think, allow for people who have been to the *grammaticus*, who perhaps have not had a full rhetorical training but are certainly literate; but it definitely seems to exclude professional rhetoricians. Synesius' description of them as "sophists," rather than indicating their profession, makes more sense as a caricaturing reproach for their baseless intellectual pretensions.³⁴ Moreover, he charges them with having no genuine philosophical or theological training (which are seen as integral to each other) – this is another strong indication against their being pagan philosophers.

So far, we have been dealing with what this letter says about the opponents of the *Dio*, but we must take care to distinguish these from the intended audience that Synesius hoped Hypatia would help him reach. One detail emerges about

³⁰ The *logisterion* here most likely refers to the local collection depots of the tax system, well attested in Egyptian papyri (RE XIII s.v. λογιστήριον). Alternatively and less likely it may be a classicism, for in democratic Athens this was the place where the λογισταί met, who were the people responsible for conducting financial audits of public officers (LSJ s.v. λογιστής, λογιστήριον); in this case its meaning would be less clear, though possibly referring to minor officials who were fired after failing an audit. Under Valentinian and Valens (364) the collection of taxes was transferred from local curials to the office staff of the governors (*CTh* 12.6.7), though this arrangement seems not to have lasted past 390; Noel Lenski, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the fourth century A.D.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 297–298.

³¹ Cf. οἰσθα; τινας has a generalizing connotation. *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.63 for (fears and rumors of, at least) Egyptian curials fleeing to monasteries to avoid liturgies. Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 180, for similar suspicions in Asia Minor (in Nilus of Ancyra).

³² E.g. Cameron and Long, *Barbarians and Politics*, 63.

³³ See in agreement also Seng, "Die Kontroverse"; Treu, *Synesios von Kyrene*, however, identifies the addressees of much of *Dio* § 4–11 as the grey robes. But compare what Synesius says further on in *Ep.* 154: "The treatise was composed against these people, and it opposes the voice of the one group (the grey) and the silence of the other (the white)." (ἐπὶ τοῦτοις συνετέθη τὸ σύγγραμμα, καὶ ἀπήντησε τῶν μὲν τῇ φωνῇ, τῶν δὲ τῇ σιγῇ.) (154.51–53)

³⁴ Cf. *Letter* 104.35 for someone characterized as a sophist, but as a pejorative epithet for a braggart rather than a professional designation.

the likely audience from a section further on in the letter. He has just compared his *Dio*, with its polygenericity, unity of purpose, and deceptively relaxed style, to Plato's *Phaedrus*. Drawing on another famous Platonic passage from the *Symposium*, he goes on to say:

But whoever does not lack training (ὅστις δὲ οὐκ ἀγύμναστος) in ferreting out also some divine personage hidden under a cheaper form, just like in Athens the craftsmen used to do, enclosing Aphrodite and the Graces and other such beautiful works of the gods within statues of Silenuses and Satyrs, it will not escape this man that the text reveals many of the inviolable doctrines (τῶν ἀβεβήλων ἀποκαλύψαν δογμάτων), hiding under the pretense of being extraneously added to other things, and by being scattered in the discourse quite capriciously (εἰκῇ) and – so it would seem – artlessly.³⁵ (154.75–83)

Synesius' critics cloak intellectual shallowness with a serious garment, but his *Dio* does the opposite. Whether or not such a single vision unifies the seemingly disparate parts of the *Dio* has been debated.³⁶ But it is clear that Synesius hoped his readers, contemporary and otherwise, would exercise themselves in just that search for the unifying (and divine) truth beneath. The audience which he hypothesizes here therefore is a learned one and one that probably enjoys reading things which challenge and affirm their ability to decipher messages hidden in the interstices.³⁷ Readers trained in Neoplatonic schools such as Hypatia's would have been well versed in Homeric, Orphic, Chaldean and even Platonic allegories, and a similar thing could be said about Christians who might have learned biblical exegesis at the feet of a figure such as the Alexandrian teacher Didymus the Blind (d. 398).³⁸ Had Hypatia once tried to express to Synesius the underlying meaning of the *Phaedrus*? He speaks matter-of-factly about such latent doctrines, as if they were included in the lessons at her school. What might he or Hypatia have made of the famous palinode speech (*Phaedrus*

³⁵ So Alcibiades describes Socrates in the *Symposium* (215b). Here however, the body of the Satyr or Silenus is relevant less for its ugliness than for its hybridity, and the comparison is no longer between bodies and likenesses of bodies, but between likenesses of bodies and texts. The analogous Graces and Aphrodite inside the *Dio* correspond, perhaps, to the riches of Synesius' own mind.

³⁶ Op de Coul, "Aspects of Paideia in Synesius' *Dion*," most recently pro; Antonio Garzya against ("Il Dione di Sinesio nel quadro del dibattito culturale del iv secolo d.C." *RFIC* (1972): 32–45).

³⁷ Compare William Johnson's account of the role of reading in taste display and communal identity construction in the high empire in *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 9–16; 42–56; 200–202.

³⁸ Didymus followed a heavily allegorical method of biblical exegesis. He was made head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria by Athanasius; Norma Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 24. For Homeric allegorical interpretation, Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Sebastian Gertz, *Death and Immortality in Late Neoplatonism* (Brill: Leiden, 2011), 174–188, provides examples of how exegeting Platonic myth was a serious interest of later Neoplatonists. See also Fincher's essay in this volume for allegory in Nonnus.

243–257)? What of the friendship depicted therein between the pupil and the philosopher-mystagogue?

The classical culture of late antique Greeks generally acknowledged that high philosophy should require or reward some sort of textual *askesis*. In this climate, the author of such multi-layered works as *Dio* and the highly allegorical *De Providentia* might expect an avid and sympathetic readership. Most forms of higher education would have reinforced such hermeneutical skills, along with the metaphysical and political presuppositions that informed them, and we should not underestimate their usefulness in late antique public life.³⁹ The majority of Alexandria's elite classes would have been aware (at least) of such modes of reading and writing. Such then is the general class to which the *Dio* was addressed.

Towards the end of the letter, Synesius wraps up his discussion of the *Dio* thus:

About all these things, we will wait for you to judge (σε κρίνουσιν περιμενοῦμεν). And if you decree that it should be made public, it will be laid before rhetors together with philosophers. It will delight some, and it will benefit others, at least, that is, if it does not end up withdrawn by you, who are able to judge (δυναμένης κρίνειν). But if it does not in your view seem worthy of the audience of the Hellenes, and if you, as I suppose, like Aristotle, place the truth above a friend, a thick and deep darkness will cover it and humans will never know that it was composed. (154.91–99)

By leaving the text's publication up to Hypatia, and specifically by using the verb κρίνειν ("judge, criticize"), Synesius casts Hypatia in the role of literary critic (κριτικός, usually masculine), a role she is not commonly associated with in scholarship, but which fits well her public persona. This role suggests a range of things in Greek intellectual tradition: not just the ability to judge style and content, but also to have one's opinion taken seriously by peers – in other words, a prominent position, even a position of leadership, in an intellectual network. The "critic" represented a venerable tradition in Alexandria in particular, where publicly funded cultural institutions such as the Mouseion, established under the early Ptolemies, still existed – Hypatia's father Theon had been a member.⁴⁰ Famous Alexandrian critics of the Hellenistic period such as Aristarchus and

³⁹ The imperial panegyrics of Themistius, for instance, are filled with important messages intended for both emperor and his elite audiences that often assume subtle attention from the listener. For irony and intertexts in Synesius' *De Regno*, see Alex Petkas "The King in Words: Performance and Fiction in Synesius' *De regno*," *AJP* 139.1 (2018): 123–151.

⁴⁰ *Suda*, © 205. The nature of the late antique *Museion* is uncertain, though it implied financial support, and was an honor dispensed by imperial officials. See Edward Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13–15, 62. Its Ptolemaic status was common knowledge in Greek intellectual culture: Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginning to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) 96–7.

Callimachus had enjoyed a tight relationship with the state.⁴¹ Synesius explicitly invokes the latter in *Epistle* 154 by referring to his critics as “Telchines,” a mythical race of technician-dwarfs with which Callimachus caricatured his own anonymous detractors in the opening of his *Aetia*.⁴²

Synesius politely phrases his request that she publish the treatise, if she approves, in the form of a future more vivid conditional.⁴³ If the request wasn’t clear enough to her, the letter carrier could make Synesius’ instructions much more explicit.⁴⁴ This passage refers to the treatise’s destinees as “Hellenes.”⁴⁵ In the author’s writings, this term lacks the religious meaning of “pagan” which we find in other Christian authors. It designates, in a broad sense, Greek-speaking individuals, and (usually) in a more narrow sense, people educated in classical Greek *paideia*.⁴⁶ He also speaks of it reaching the attention of “rhetors and philosophers” – two groups which represent the dichotomy he is trying to overcome in the *Dio*.⁴⁷ But there is no reason to suppose that he expected his treatise’s reach to stop there. He is singling out these people as the most coherent, representative, and judicious group among his audience, the influential opinion-setters who will hopefully be the first stop for the *Dio* after it is approved by Hypatia.

The Encroaching Desert: Contemporary Debates in the Christian Community

Let us turn now to the cultural debates within Alexandrian Christianity that I propose *Letter* 154 and its attached treatises address. I will do this by examining certain aspects of the ecclesiastical controversy surrounding Origenism,

⁴¹ Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 123–4; 210–11. There is no evidence that Hypatia was a member of the Mouseion (a loud silence among our sources), and it is unlikely, given that she was a woman (Watts, *Hypatia*, 64–5). Imperial Mouseion members also included sophists; Phil. V.S. 524 (the sophist Dionysius of Miletus); 532 (Polemo).

⁴² Apparently, they had found orthographical errors in some of his writings: οὐδὲ γὰρ τοιούτων οἱ Τελχῖνες ἀπέσχοντο (*Epistle* 154.64–65); cf. Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 1. (μοι Τελχῖνες ἐπιτρύζουσιν ἀοιδῇ / νήιδες οἱ Μούσης οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλοι).

⁴³ He does not directly specify a single agent (i.e. Hypatia) as the publisher here, probably because once he secures her approval he will circulate it through other channels as well, such as his brother Euoptius (cf. Ep. 105). For a similar use of the future cf. Synesius, *De regno* 9.5 “φέρε δὴ σοι γράψω λόγῳ τὸν βασιλέα, ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα στήσας· σὺ δὲ μοι τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦτο κινούμενον ἐπιδείξεις”

⁴⁴ On the epistle carrier, Allen “Christian Correspondences”; Adam Schor, *Theodoret’s People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 37.

⁴⁵ Cf. also further on in the letter δόγματα τῶν οὐπω φιλοσοφηθέντων Ἑλλήσι (154.103–4).

⁴⁶ Cameron and Long, *Barbarians and Politics*, 62–69. The usage is also common in Philostratus (e.g. V.S. § 571).

⁴⁷ This might include lawyers, elsewhere referred to with the term ῥήτωρ in Synesius’ writings (cf. Ep 101, 103 to the ῥήτωρ Pylaemenes).

a high profile series of events involving the Egyptian church, that transpired over the decade before the publication of the *Dio*.⁴⁸ The Origenist controversy's importance for understanding Hypatia and her political world has not been fully appreciated, and this treatment will not be exhaustive. I will focus on some key issues at stake in the controversy, as well as how it illuminates the relationship of church politics and public opinion, desert and city.⁴⁹

One of the main protagonists of Origenist controversy was Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, who later ordained Synesius metropolitan of Ptolemais, the see responsible for all of the Libyan Pentapolis. Theophilus' involvement in the controversy begins with a dispute in Jerusalem in 396 between John, the holy city's bishop, on one side, and on the other Jerome, (resident in Bethlehem) and Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus. The bishop of Jerusalem had objected to Epiphanius ordaining Jerome's brother as a deacon uncanonically – i.e. outside of his own episcopal territory. The controversy quickly turned theological, with the other two accusing John of excessive fondness for the doctrines of the two-centuries dead Origen. Origen had been controversial more or less since his own lifetime and Epiphanius had already directed some of his considerable heresy-hunting prowess towards rooting out the Alexandrian exegete's perceived errors. Bishop John called in, as a mediator, Theophilus, who sent his trusty envoy Isidore to Jerusalem. Isidore failed miserably, but Theophilus was nonetheless soon able to quench Jerome's wrath with a letter and reconcile him reluctantly to his bishop.⁵⁰

Isidore however soon fell out of favor with his superior for other reasons involving a somewhat obscure scandal in 399, and Theophilus indicted him in order to be tried in an ecclesiastical court. But he fled to the nearby monastic community of Nitria before the trial could take place, and a monk named Ammonius came thence to Alexandria with a delegation, in order to try to change Theophilus' mind about Isidore. Theophilus speaks about this occasion in a synodal letter.⁵¹ According to his version of the story, Ammonius and his

⁴⁸ This controversy, its lead-ups and spin-offs, comprises a complex set of issues and I will only select certain immediately relevant aspects. I am reliant on the work of Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* in interpreting the sources and reconstructing the events. For the basic ancient narrative of the Egyptian events, see Socr. *Hist. eccl.* VI.7; Sozom. *HE* VIII.11–13.

⁴⁹ An important beginning has been made, in drawing connections between the Origenist controversy and Synesius, by Pizzzone, "Christliche und heidnische Träume." I differ with points of her treatment, however, and her main focus is on *De Insomniis*. I am also encouraged and influenced at points by an unpublished lecture by Peter Brown on the subject, and I am very grateful to him for sharing this piece with me.

⁵⁰ Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 23 for an overview of these events with additional primary sources.

⁵¹ For Theophilus' version of these events, see the *Second Synodal Letter* (= Jerome *Ep* 92, CSEL 55, 147–55, trans. in Russell *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 93–99 esp. 95–97). Other versions

assistants produced witnesses who publicly countered Theophilus' allegations in a densely populated district of the city, and then, as Theophilus explains, "They bawled out whatever they believed to be prejudicial to us, inciting the pagan populace against us with the kind of things that unbelievers will readily give ear to." Among which, they reminded the "unbelieving rabble" of the destruction of the Serapeum and "other idols," adding the claim that the Nitrian monasteries had never infringed on the rights of temples. Ammonius and company did this, Theophilus observes, in order to win the support of the (allegedly pagan) masses, in order to stir up public hostility against Theophilus himself and to forcibly prevent Isidore from ever standing trial. If we trust the bishop's account at least as far as the basics, this event illustrates the civic character of some ecclesiastical disputes – especially if prominent Christians were willing to enlist the support of pagans in influencing their outcome (this was apparently a plausible accusation, at least).

Ammonius happened to be the most respected of a family of four very influential monks called the "Tall Brothers," one of whom, Dioscorus, was a bishop of Hermopolis, the see responsible for Nitria, and the other two younger brothers held ecclesiastical posts in Alexandria.⁵² In response to Theophilus' dispute with Ammonius and Isidore, the younger brothers had resigned their posts in Alexandria and gone to join the elder in the desert. Theophilus took this opportunity, according to Socrates, to stir up tensions between two groups of monks who were respectively labelled by their opponents as "Origenists" and "Anthropomorphites." The so-called Anthropomorphites are described by some of our sources as holding that God has a body, although what seems to have been more at stake was affirming the validity of visions and images used or encountered in both ecstatic experiences and the apocryphal literature which claims to recount them.⁵³ The "Origenists," of whom the Tall Brothers were in fact leading figures at this time, stressed both the incorporeality of God and the necessity to purge the mind of all images, as being distracting deceptions in prayer – a sort of "mental iconoclasm," to borrow Clark's phrase.⁵⁴

Theophilus convoked a synod on site in Nitria which condemned certain of the writings of Origen. The Origenists refused to comply and hand over their books, and so the bishop soon returned with military support from the pre-

of the story: Palladius, *Dialogue on the life of John Chrysostom* 6; Socr. *Hist. eccl.* VI.7.9, Sozom. *HE* VIII. 8.12.

⁵² Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 27.

⁵³ Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 43–50; Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 23.

⁵⁴ The insistence on imageless prayer prevalent among the Origenists might have given Synesius something to complain about: his hymns, cast as acts of prayer, are filled with vivid imagery, though not so much that he imagines God (the Father) to have a body. See especially *Hymn* 8 on the resurrection of Christ and his ascent through the spheres, greeted as he goes by the various heavenly bodies. We have already seen in *Ep.* 154 how certain poetic compositions, probably the Hymns, allegedly ignited the controversy around his writings.

fect in order to arrest the Tall Brothers, who had meanwhile fled with many of their supporters. Their cells were burned. The Origenist delegation escaped to Constantinople to pursue an appeal with the Emperor Arcadius and the Patriarch John Chrysostom. The latter's hospitality for the monks earned him the ire of Theophilus, who eventually effected his deposition in 403.⁵⁵ This was, then, a controversy which spanned three continents and rocked three of the most important episcopal sees of the Eastern Empire. The tumult began with a contention about the authority of the bishop of Alexandria over ascetic groups, and quickly raised the issue not just of which theological or exegetical position was correct but also what sort of people are qualified to pronounce on these matters and fit to have their views guide popular opinion.

Clark's work on the Origenist controversy has moreover shown the importance of lay people – many of them women – in shaping the debate, receiving and circulating polemical writings, and supporting the figures involved. Evidence is plentiful in the cases of Jerome and Rufinus.⁵⁶ Lay patrons and enthusiasts were important threads in the economic and social fabric of ascetic communities in Alexandria and its orbit: in places like Nitria, Kellia, and Scetis, there was close interaction between monks, lay people, ecclesiastics and secular society. Pilgrims went to visit the desert, monks came to town on various errands, and they would return to their respective bases with new ideas, desires, and texts.⁵⁷

Origenism also continued to be an issue of concern for the Alexandrian church even after its initial paroxysm: Theophilus, in his paschal letter of 404, explicitly attacks the Origenists, as he had in the letters of 401 and 402.⁵⁸ On the most plausible reconstruction, Synesius' Letter 154 was sent to Alexandria, with its accompanying treatises, towards the end of 404.⁵⁹ By this time he had been married – he addresses the *Dio* to his son (e.g. § 4.1). The wedding most

⁵⁵ Synesius alludes to John Chrysostom's deposition in a letter he later wrote as bishop to Theophilus (*Ep.* 67). While on embassy in Constantinople from 397–400, he probably saw John preach.

⁵⁶ Pammachius (a senator at Rome), Macarius, Paula and Melania were among Jerome's associates; Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 11–42, esp 19–21; also see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 366–362. Melania had also been a close associate of Evagrius (Palladius *Hist. Laus.* 38.8–9). Rufinus of Aquileia was an influential monk, to whom we owe the Latin translation of Origen's *On First Principles* (the majority of the treatise is only available today through this translation).

⁵⁷ Examples abound in Palladius and the *Historia Monachorum*. For instance, Palladius' account of Apollonius, a desert entrepreneur who ran a profitable business conveying goods to and from Nitria: *Hist. Laus.* 13.

⁵⁸ Translation in Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 152–3 (starting at § 11) of Jerome's Latin translation (Jerome *Ep.* 100, CSEL 55 213–33). Also see the earlier festal letters in the same volume. The letter of 403 does not survive.

⁵⁹ On dating 154 and the *Dio*: see Noël Aujoulat's introduction in the Budé edition, pp. 96–101.