

Menas and Thomas: Notes on the *Dialogus de scientia politica*

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SCHOLARLY ATTENTION has recently been redrawn¹ to the sixth-century text known as the *Dialogue on Political Science* (hereafter *DPS*).² When and where was it composed? Perhaps written in the decade to decade and a half before A.D. 565, in the latter part of Justinian's reign,³ the dialogue has a dramatic date of ca. 528/9.⁴ Its two speakers were called, according to Photius' reading,⁵ Menas⁶ and Thomas⁷: while in the actual text their names read Menodoros (Μηνόδωρος) and

¹ D. O'Meara, "The Justinianic Dialogue *On Political Science* and Its Neoplatonic Sources," in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2002) 49–62; idem, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2003) 171–184, part of ch. 13 (159–184) "Ideals of Church and State in the Sixth Century."

² *Menae patricii cum Thoma referendario De scientia politica dialogus*, ed. C. Mazzucchi (Milan 1982). C. Pazdernik, "Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past," in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2005) 185–212, esp. 195, 208, also uses its Greek designation, *Peri politikês epistêmês*.

³ Earlier dated before A.D. 532 (A. Sheppard, "Philosophy and Philosophical Schools," *CAH*² XIV [2000] 835–854, here 853; cf. A. S. Fotiou, "Plato's Philosopher King in the Political Thought of Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Florilegium* 7 [1985] 17–29, here 17), but the later dating seems preferable to most recent scholars.

⁴ O'Meara, "Dialogue" 49, 50; year of the cessation of Platonic teaching at Athens and of John Philoponus' *Contra Proclum de aeternitate mundi* at Alexandria.

⁵ *Bibl. cod.* 37; transl. N. G. Wilson, *The Bibliotheca: A Selection* (London 1994) 32, "Menas the patrician" and "Thomas the *referendarius*." Cf. O'Meara, "Dialogue" 50–51 with n.8, *Platonopolis* 173.

⁶ Possibly the PPO of 528/9: *PLRE* II 755 ("Menas 5"), cf. 756 ("Menas 6," proposing the identification).

⁷ Also once possibly identified with a historical person: O'Meara, *Platonopolis* 173.

Thaumasios (Θαυμάσιος), forms which O’Meara terms “no doubt Platonized versions of Menas and Thomas.”⁸ Perhaps we may nonetheless discern some realia⁹ beneath the “Platonization”: realia connected with a Byzantine Egyptian/Alexandrian origin. It helps to read the text with a papyrologist’s eye.

While Menas/Menodoros are common enough, the masculine name Thaumasios is rarely attested¹⁰ (though the feminine name Thaumasia is indeed known from Byzantine Egyptian documentation, e.g. P.Mich.inv. 6898 and its relatives).¹¹ I take it for a literary adaptation of the vocative address to the (rather dim) interlocutor in Platonic dialogues, ὦ θαυμάσιε, “my dear man”—since Menodoros is the character expounding the matter to be imparted, while Thaumasios is the not-so-bright responder who needs to be taught.¹² The author was writing for an audience who would have gotten the allusion. While what we have of the *DPS* does not indicate a specific setting,¹³ we seem to be in a world of elite people of the new aristocracy of service, comfortably moving between provincial origins and the society of the capital, such as that exemplified by the famous Flavius Apion and family.¹⁴

Why was the dialogue form chosen, rather than that of a straightforward narrative treatise? Probably because this was the form popular at the time for reaching a cultivated audience in the leading cities of the empire, people who would pass it

⁸ O’Meara, “Dialogue” 51, *Platonopolis* 174.

⁹ Cf. also O’Meara, “Dialogue” 60–61.

¹⁰ E.g. *SB* I 115. For its part ἡ σὴ θαυμασιότης, “your Admirability,” is attested as a form of address for a provincial governor in *L.Sardis* 18 (I thank Kent Rigsby for this information).

¹¹ R. S. Bagnall and K. A. Worp, “Dating the Coptic Legal Documents from Aphrodite,” *ZPE* 148 (2004) 247–252, and a forthcoming article by the present writer.

¹² *Pace* O’Meara, *Platonopolis* 183, who does not hear the allusion.

¹³ Cf. A. Kazhdan and I. Ševčenko, “Dialogue,” *ODBI* 618–619.

¹⁴ For a good picture see T. Hickey, *A Public “House” but Closed: Fiscal Participation and Economic Decision Making on the Oxyrhynchite Estate of the Flavii Apiones* (diss. Chicago 2001) 12–21; J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2001) 129–138, 149–152.

along to like-minded colleagues.¹⁵ Not just a “mirror of princes for Justinian” like Agapetos’ *Ekthesis*,¹⁶ the dialogue would have furnished discussion material for reading circles of students from whom future imperial officials would be recruited.¹⁷

1. *The good fight*

The first and shorter preserved section of the *DPS*, the fragmentary Book 4, deals with military matters (as a subset of what rulers need to know).¹⁸ Immediate comparison with sixth-century military treatises, such as the Anonymous *On Strategy* (if indeed it is sixth-century) and the *Strategikon* of Maurice,¹⁹ provides both interesting convergences and interesting differences. As might be expected, the *DPS* is less closely tied to real-world military experience, being more about prescription for what ought to be done in an ideal world; and it is written, not in the more everyday language of the military manuals, filled with the loanwords of actual use,²⁰ but in what is usually called the high classicizing style of the sixth century,²¹ appropriate, one would think, for a Neoplatonist context. We are told that the general

¹⁵ See E. J. Watts, “An Alexandrian Christian Response to Fifth-Century Neoplatonic Influence,” in A. Smith (ed.), *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity* (Swansea 2005) 215–229, esp. 218, 224.

¹⁶ See Pazdernik, in Maas, *Companion* 195–196; and C. Rapp, “Literary Culture under Justinian,” in Maas 376–397, here 392.

¹⁷ See E. J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006) 213–222, 224–225, 229–230, 242, 254.

¹⁸ Cf. O’Meara, “Dialogue” 51, 54–55, *Platonopolis* 177.

¹⁹ G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985) 1–135, and *Maurice’s Strategikon* (Philadelphia 1984); idem and E. Gamillscheg, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* (CFHB 17 [Vienna 1981]); A. D. Lee, “The Empire At War,” in Maas, *Companion* 113–133, esp. 122–123.

²⁰ Cf. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon* xiii, xv, xxi; Dennis and Gamillscheg, *Strat.Maur.* pp.556–557 (index of Latin words; other loanwords like βάνδον are in the “Index graecus” [514–556]). The *DPS* uses σημεῖον not βάνδον, ῥάβδος not βέργτον, and so on. But perhaps more than just vocabulary is involved.

²¹ A notion recently questioned by the acute discussion of A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea* (Philadelphia 2004), esp. ch. 1, “Classicism and Its Discontents,” 17–61, esp. 24–38, 40–45.

—perhaps the emperor himself²²—should lead in person and call his men by name: and we are told this by means of an exemplum of “Cyrus the Persian” (4.3)—a double-edged exemplum, since Cyrus was both a barbarian autocrat²³ and a biblical instrument of God’s will.²⁴ The speaker who voices the author’s viewpoint, Menodoros, also gives guidelines for military drill and provides a section on military justice (19–21)²⁵ according to which cowards in practice sessions should be punished with head-shaving and even cashiering, while cowards in actual battle can suffer mutilation²⁶ or the death penalty. The whole matter of a soldier’s τιμή is tied up with either τιμή or ἀτιμία for the state (25).

The second part of book 4 as we have it is a debate over the respective ranking and value of cavalry versus infantry.²⁷ Menodoros tries to frame his answer in a Platonizing way, by referring to first principles and ultimate ends (31–33, 36, 39). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly to a reader familiar with the usual picture of the late Roman military, he, the speaker we are supposed to come away agreeing with, takes the part of the infantry, prop and stay of the world-dominating greatness of Old Rome as well as other warlike states such as Sparta (35–36, 42).

²² See Kaldellis, *Procopius* 65–67.

²³ See Kaldellis, *Procopius* 54–55, for that writer’s use of him vis-à-vis Justinian in *Buildings* 1.1.12. (Cyrus is called “the Persian” in Daniel 6:28.) This positive view might point to a date after the “Eternal Peace” with Persia of 532.

²⁴ 2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4, 7–8, 5:13–17, 6:14; Isaiah 44:28, 45:1.

²⁵ Cf. *Strat.Maur.* 1.6–8, which however mentions neither head-shaving nor mutilation as penalties.

²⁶ A. Kazhdan, “Mutilation,” *ODB* II 1428; cf. *Nov.Just.* 134.13.

²⁷ See Lee, in Maas, *Companion* 122; and cf. Kaldellis, *Procopius* 23, 74. This sixth-century controversy is discussed by Kaldellis, “Classicism, Barbarism, and Warfare: Prokopios and the Conservative Reaction to Later Roman Military Policy,” *AJAH* n.s. 3 (2006) (forthcoming) (I thank him for an advance copy): “the discussion of tactics in antiquity was never purely technical. It was infused with moral overtones, owing to the connection between combat and courage, and hence virtue.” He discusses the *DPS* in part II of his article (with n.37).

Although Thaumasioi protests that “that was then, this is now” (38), Menodoros claims that infantry are superior φύσει καὶ λόγῳ (46) since the foot-soldier directs himself rather than being directed by another (nature) and is motivated by the desire for honor (reason).

This argument is adorned by another exemplum from Old Rome showing how soldiers are the true “impregnable wall” of the city. The author also cites (a lost bit of) Cicero²⁸ on infantry (53), but then brings us back to Byzantine reality with a section (55–56) on the importance of entrenchment, the staked palisade (σκόλοψ), and caltrops (τρίβολοι) that closely recalls *Strat. Maur.* 12.B.22 on how to make camp.

The mention of uniforms—so that no one soldier excels his fellow πρὸς ἀξίαν (58)—segues nicely into the deeper meaning of conflict, illustrated with a (positive again) story²⁹ about the Persian king Peroz (459–484) that depicts the Sasanian monarchy in a favorable light as a state governed by δικαιοσύνη (63–70). This is interesting when compared with Procopius’ use of the same king in the introduction to his *Persian Wars*.³⁰ Here the dialogue author presents the Great King of Persia as a Platonic philosopher-king concerned that the φύλακες, indeed the “guardians” of Plato’s *Republic*, participate in and retransmit justice. And in fact the opening section of Book 5 moves from the “guardians” and their πολεμικὴ ἐπιστήμη to the next kind of knowledge,³¹ as shall see. This is Platonism, yes; it

²⁸ There are at least five unidentified quotations from Latin writers (in Greek translation of course) in the work: see Mazzucchi, *Dialogus* 136. The *DPS* clearly shows awareness of the still-alive world of sixth-century Constantinopolitan Latinity, the world of Priscian and Maximian. Cf. R. Browning, “Education in the Roman Empire,” in *CAH²* XIV (2000) 855–883, here 872, 876, 878.

²⁹ Only in this anecdote is the fraught word δεσπότης used (64), and it is applied (ironically?) to the “master” of the fodder harvest, not the Persian monarch: cf. Kaldellis, *Procopius* 128–142.

³⁰ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 69–70, 75–77, 94, 97; on 99 he mentions this exemplum and its Platonic roots.

³¹ The link between arms and the law is made explicit in the opening words of the preface to Justinian’s *Codex: summa rei publicae tuitio de stirpe duarum rerum, armorum atque legum, veniens* (II p.2 Krueger). Cf. also C. Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” in Maas,

is also Christian-influenced Platonism, Platonism aware of and inflected by the dominant Christianity of the time, recalling by means of its Demosthenes allusion (70) also the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3–23, esp. 6).³²

2. *What emperors should know*

The second and principal section of the *DPS*, Book 5, is about βασιλική ἐπιστήμη, “kingly science” (O’Meara) or “rulership knowledge.” This is a kind of *epistémê* which when possessed by the ruler (*basileus*) enables him to imitate God (μιμεῖσθαι θεόν, 5.132),³³ so that thereby all his subjects in their duly-ranked hierarchy can also become assimilated to God. Ruler and subjects together thus seek eventually, after their efforts here on earth, to return home to ἡ ἄνω μητρόπολις (194), the city (not made with hands) which is above (Galatians 4:26), not the passing one here but the abiding one to come (Hebrews 13:14, cf. 11:14–16). Of course this is Neoplatonism, and Christian Neoplatonism at that.³⁴ It is also Justinianic state thought directly comparable to that expounded by the emperor himself in his legal prefaces. The *basileus* must preserve the law (132)³⁵ and imitate divine justice in his own person and actions (138).³⁶ This is exactly what Justinian (or the writer he employs) expresses in the constitution *Tanta* of A.D. 533, especially the preamble and sections 18 and 23 (*Cod. Just.* 1.17.2).³⁷

Companion 161–184, here 165–166 on the *Codex*; also Pazdernik, in Maas 195.

³² Also allusions to Isaiah 28:4 and esp. 40:6–8 (quoted in 1 Peter 1:24) and James 1:10–11 are discernible.

³³ On the concept see O’Meara, *Platonopolis* 178–180.

³⁴ “A bureaucrat’s notion of the Christian *oikoumenê*”: Pazdernik, in Maas, *Companion* 195.

³⁵ Cf. O’Meara, *Platonopolis* 180–182.

³⁶ Cf. again Pazdernik, in Maas, *Companion* 195; and Humfress in Maas 162, 167–168, cf. 173.

³⁷ The medical analogy—like the physician with his Hippocratic oath, the legislating emperor intends to heal the body politic and effect its members’ salvation—in 5.10–16 (esp. 13) recalls the fact that Justinian in 531 required a Gospel oath in all law courts: Humfress, in Maas, *Companion* 179–180 (*Cod. Just.* 2.58.2).

As said above, links to realia of Byzantine society are to be discerned throughout this text. For example, at 5.50–51 it is suggested that in the ideal state the *basileus* should be chosen by lot (κλήρος), from among three nominees, after κοινὰ εὐχαί (litanies in the Great Church?) and ἀγνισμοὶ πάνδημοι (eucharists in local parishes?) for three days. The lot-casting is to be done by priests in church “according to divine law and custom.” Not only is this a deliberate recall of the choosing of Matthias for the apostolate in Acts 1:24–26,³⁸ but it also plays on the phenomenon of ecclesiastical selections by means of lots, such as came to be developed in some eastern churches as a way to avoid government control. Notably, this flies directly in the face of *Cod. Just.* 1.3.46(47).2, forbidding selection by lot.³⁹

The dialogue emphasizes (65–71) the importance the ruler must place on ordaining worthy clergy (μόνους τοὺς ἀξίους), specifically bishops (the closest to the top),⁴⁰ and of professing worthy monastic members of κοινόβια.⁴¹ The former are responsible for seeing to it that their souls are truly fitted to their holy office (ιεροπρεπεῖς) so as to exercise care (θεραπεία) concerning God and divine things, by which humans can look up (πρὸς τὰ ἄνω βλέπειν) in their troubles (65). The latter, if or-

³⁸ While there are Platonic parallels (O’Meara, *Platonopolis* 181 n.80 with cross-reference), the New Testament model is what springs to mind.

³⁹ A. Laniado, *Recherches sur les notables municipaux dans l’empire protobyzantin* (Paris 2002) 237 with nn. 86, 87: “the best” are to be selected by merit (as also recommended by Agapetus’ *Ekthesis* [PG 86.1 1173B]).

⁴⁰ Cf. O’Meara, *Platonopolis* 164–166, 169; and *Nov. Just.* 6.1 and esp. 137.1. See also C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 2005) ch. 6. The raw data in K. A. Worp, “A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt (A.D. 325–c.750),” *ZPE* 100 (1994) 283–318, will repay further analysis.

⁴¹ This especially is an example of what is usually termed the “circumlocution” typical of the “classicizing style”: the phrase in 69 is τοῖς τῶν μοναχῶν λεγομένων κοινοβίοις, “the communities of those called monks”—comparable to Procopius *Persian Wars* 1.7.22 (cf. *Vandal Wars* 2.26.17), “those who are the most ascetic of all Christians, whom they call monks” (οὐσπερ καλεῖν μοναχοὺς νενομίκασι) (cf. Av. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* [London 1985] 96); let alone Agathias’ paraphrases in *Hist.* 5.5.5, 5.13.2, never using the word (cf. Av. Cameron, *Agathias* [Oxford 1970] 85–87). But the notion is now called into question (see n. 21 above). The term *koinobion* is used in, e.g., *Nov. Just.* 123.36.

ganized by ability, could be useful to the *politeia*, states the author interestingly, especially in the areas of warfare and farming (70). This recalls Justinian's *Novels* 7.11, 46.1, 120 (and 123) on monastic and ecclesiastical property, as well as the Pachomian organization of Egyptian monks by agricultural and craft skills.⁴²

The circus factions of the capital, groups given to nothing but "pointless spectacles" (ἀτόποις θεάμασι), are seen by the dialogue's author as a problem (75): indeed a real concern in the sixth century, as recent work has shown.⁴³ Domestic tranquility should rather be enforced by leading citizens acting in the capacity of "what are called ἀγορανόμοι" (89)—a Roman imperial administrative term attested for Greek poleis, including in second- and third-century papyri.⁴⁴ While this might look like an archaism, another feature of the "classicizing style," it may also be an allusion to Justinian's measures to reform the civil service⁴⁵ and perhaps reflect the author's own background.

Yet another Justinianic reference may lurk in 158–168, the succession question. Even a philosopher-emperor in the ideal state is human and can see his dignity (ἀξία) being lessened by illness and old age. Menodoros, classically quoting Seneca and Livy, proposes for such a ruler as he approaches age sixty the alternatives of (1) abdication or (2) keeping a designated-successor aide (βοηθός) at his side (164), so as to live honored like a Homeric god (166) in the confidence of an instantaneous transfer of power at death. Succession to the childless Justinian was a constant worry. Menodoros proposes age fifty-seven (167) as the age at which the *basileus* should make that choice between retirement and naming a partner-successor. If Justinian was

⁴² See J. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg 1999) 47–49, 52, 95–96, 105–108. Pachomius had been a Roman soldier who applied notions of military organization to monastic house structure. (I thank Giles Constable for helpful discussion on this topic.)

⁴³ Still standard is Al. Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford 1976), esp. here 271–280. For a provincial version of faction violence in Egypt see G. Ioannidou, "A Riot in the Hippodrome," *ArchPF* 46 (2000) 51–61.

⁴⁴ Preisigke, *WB* III 92.

⁴⁵ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 225–226.

born in 482, he would have been fifty-seven in 539; and a successor did not begin to look likely until his nephew Justin, *kouropalates* ca. 550–552, began to play a larger state role (in negotiations with the papacy leading up to the Constantinopolitan general council of 553). Hence perhaps the heavy hint: this may be a further clue for dating the dialogue's composition.

One more topic remains to be explored: biblical allusions in the *DPS*. Though over a century ago only that to Genesis 1:26⁴⁶ was noticed,⁴⁷ we have already seen that there are many. Here I should like to signal just two more: 5.191, “walking in the light”, and 5.107, an at first seemingly enigmatic quotation that turns out to be a line of iambic verse. “Walk in the light” is a New Testament, indeed a Johannine, locution.⁴⁸ When the dialogue's authorial spokesman has gotten his interlocutor to grasp the notion that the “perfect and blessed life” is that having θεοῦ μίμησιν (186), Thaumasioi goes on to equate that μίμησις with benefiting humanity (the way God does, and by creating a just polity). But Menodoros reminds him of the many ways this has to be done, according to the subjects' capacities, and that those who live by this rulership *epistémé* must “walk in the light” so as to lead the less well sighted.⁴⁹

Likewise in 107: again deploring disunity in the un-ideal state, after Menodoros has laid out his plan for magistracies to superintend the desired unity, Thaumasioi renews his lament over a state that seems to have had the Homeric apple of discord thrown into its midst (104).⁵⁰ He calls the *démos* “di-

⁴⁶ To the exegesis of which Philoponus devoted an entire book (Book 6) of his *De Opificio Mundi*; cf. L. S. B. MacCull, *ZAC* 9 (2006) 397–423.

⁴⁷ By K. Praechter in *BZ* 9 (1900) 629, 631: O'Meara, “Dialogue” 59; *Platonopolis* 183, calling it an “isolated and rather weak indication” of the author's Christianity. Hardly isolated, as we have seen.

⁴⁸ 1 John 1:7; John 11:9–20, 12:35; Revelation 21:24. Cf. also Ephesians 5:8. The *DPS* uses βαδίζειν, not the NT περιπατεῖν.

⁴⁹ Cf. Matthew 15:14/Luke 6:39 and John 9:39–41.

⁵⁰ Citing the same σκαίος δάμων (104) that is named as the cause of marital strife in papyrus divorce contracts from the sixth-century archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodito: e.g. *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67311.15 (Preisigke, *WB* II 465).

vided against itself” (106);⁵¹ and then renews a call for higher authority, saying, “As the saying goes, ‘As from the depths of the soul you have cried out’”—a version of Psalm 129:1, ἐκ βαθέων ἐκέκραξαί, *De profundis clamavi*. βαθείας ὡσπερ ἐκ ψυχῆς ἀνώμωζας is metrical, an iambic-line paraphrase (with change to second person) of that psalm verse, a verse, moreover, that serves as the second introductory antiphon of the service of vespers.⁵² Though I know of no early Byzantine iambic verse psalter paraphrase to stand beside the hexameter one,⁵³ such composition is typical of late antique learned culture, and such a quotation would fit both the author’s *paideia* and the character’s persona.

3. *Alexandria ad Aegyptum?*

After this survey of the text, what do we have? I think we have a number of clues telling us to look in the world of sixth-century Egypt and specifically that of Alexandrian Christian Neoplatonism for our anonymous author. In addition to the papyrus-attested terminology mentioned above, we find other expressions characteristic of Egyptian documentary usage. In calling for a cabinet post for land survey and apportionment (γεωμορικόν) and tax registration and collection (φορολογικόν, 5.80), the author uses terminology long in use and also still found in such sixth-century documentary texts as *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67097.37, II 67169.7, and *P.Mich.* XIII 659.72. For resettling inhabitants from other localities we find ἀποικία and ἀποικί-ζειν (194), already used of the creation of the city of Antin-ooöpolis (Preisigke, *WB* I 179). Most of all, we should look at the striking image of the Mother and Queen of Cities comforting her complaining children (5.108–112), not discussed at all in recent studies.

Menodoros replies to Thaumasio’s “Why ‘De profundis?’” (109–112):

because you have rubbed my nose in the problem, a problem I loathe, yourself placing it before my eyes ὡς ἐν γραφῆς ιστορία,

⁵¹ Cf. Matthew 12:25/Mark 3:25/Luke 11:17.

⁵² I thank Aristeides Papadakis for his expertise.

⁵³ J. Golega, *Das homerische Psalter* (Ettal 1960).

as though in the description of a painting.⁵⁴ Turning suddenly, I as it were saw the cities as in a painting [*pinax*] standing in a circle around their mother and queen, insulted by those they had nourished and telling one another of both the acts of violence and the attacks occurring within them and the misfortunes and sackings brought on them from outside; and, feeling pity, I could not help bemoaning their suffering. I seemed to hear, as if from people celebrating a pagan ritual (ἐπὶ τῶν κορυβαντιώντων), the ruler's words to them for comforting their souls (ψυχαγωγία),⁵⁵ words spoken in a double sense to them by one who was suffering with them in the same fashion. (For it is an encouraging speech, and one that follows the order of nature, to say that the great suffers the same as the lesser.) She said: "Hold on, children; hold on, my daughters;⁵⁶ willingly bear up under nature's works. For the Demiurge of the universe himself, in his great goodness and wisdom, has assigned to human beings cycles of times (καιρῶν) of plenty and of want, for the sake of good order (εὐταξία). We profit from both, becoming collaborators with the will of God according to the law of nature, and more easily bearing the vicissitudes of changing times, which are not truly vicissitudes—for nothing at all exists, in whole or in part, against nature—but only seem to be, because of the incompleteness of our knowledge (γνώσις) and the shortness of human life."

Menodoros then gives this philosophical vision as a reason for opposing the suggestion to favor the young for office since they are as yet incapable of such responsibility (because they do not yet grasp God's plan).

This striking image of the Queen Mother City might instantly recall either a personified Constantinopolis, the Queen City, or else a personified Alexandria, queen city of the Mediterranean and mother of Egypt's nome cities, both personified

⁵⁴ So Mazzucchi p.80, i.e. an ekphrasis; or possibly "as though in a narrative painting."

⁵⁵ Contrast the use of this word by the Christian David in his *Prolegomenon* (*Comm. in Arist. Graeca* XVIII.2 1.7) with that by the pagan Simplicius in his *In Cat.* (VIII 7.10; transl. M. Chase, *Simplicius on Aristotle's "Categories" 1–4* [Ithaca 2003] 22).

⁵⁶ Cf. *Iliad* 2.299, in Odysseus' speech advising perseverance.

and depicted in late antique visual art.⁵⁷ The cycles of plenty and want might well be connected with the failed harvests and subsequent great plague of 541/2, which struck both the capital and the provinces.⁵⁸ On the whole, though, the phraseology is that of the Alexandrian late antique philosophy commentators, who were profoundly embedded in their social context.⁵⁹ The dialogue's author clearly was concerned to make the philosophical analysis of politics intellectually respectable to his audience. I think it constructive to see this text that puts New Rome into a meaningful relation with Old Rome as a product of the same Alexandrian philosophical school⁶⁰ as the Aristotle and Plato commentaries of late antique scholars so different as Olympiodorus and John Philoponus—the latter, of course, the first to provide the newly separated church of Egypt with its intellectual foundations and the only philosopher-theologian to engage directly (if by letter) with Justinian himself. In Philoponus' world, the world of Byzantine Egypt tensely negotiating its

⁵⁷ A. Cutler, "Tyche: Representation in Art," *ODB* III 2131; L. James, "Good Luck and Good Fortune to the Queen of Cities: Empresses and Tyches in Byzantium," in E. Stafford and J. Herrin (eds.), *Personification in the Greek World* (Aldershot 2005) 293–307 (not, however, discussing the *DPS*). (If the reader is meant to envision a mural-crowned city Tyche, might this be an allusion to the ironic [lower-case] *tyche* invoked by Procopius? For more on this controversial topic see Kaldellis, *Procopius* 165–221, esp. here 218–219.) Might the provision for a public library in the author's ideal state (83) recall what was left of Alexandria's, rather than Constantinople? (See R. Bagnall and D. Rathbone, *Egypt from Alexander to the Copts* [London 2004] 54, 60.)

⁵⁸ See most recently (summing up a decade of research) A. Arjava, "The Mystery Cloud of A.D. 536 in the Mediterranean Sources," *DOP* forthcoming (I thank him for a copy), including on the relation between the "dark skies" event and the much-discussed plague.

⁵⁹ See L. S. B. MacCoull, "Philosophy in its Social Context," in R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 450–700* (forthcoming); C. Wildberg, "Philosophy in the Age of Justinian," in Maas, *Companion* 316–340 (though 329–333, "Philosophy and Politics," does not discuss the *DPS*).

⁶⁰ Cf. Watts, *City and School* ch. 9.

own contested relation with the imperial capital, a dream of the ideal state might be more than just a dream.⁶¹

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⁶¹ In loving memory, as always, of Mirrit Boutros Ghali (*enesôf hmpefsa para ñshêre ññrôme* [Ps 44:2a]).