

# Synesius in Constantinople

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**S**YNESIUS OF CYRENE, after returning home from his study of philosophy in Alexandria, went to Constantinople to present the emperor with a golden crown and to request a diminution of the taxes levied upon his city or province. He remained in the imperial capital for three years and there wrote two strikingly unconventional works: the speech *On Kingship*, addressed to the emperor Arcadius, and an allegorical account of politics in Constantinople, which bears the double title *An Egyptian Tale* or *On Providence*. The latter work and certain letters reveal that Synesius attached himself to the politician Aurelianus, who ensured that, as a reward for praising his patron, Synesius obtained the desired tax relief for Cyrene, as well as personal privileges for himself. When Synesius departed from Constantinople he travelled first to Alexandria, later returning thence to Cyrene, where he resided for most of the rest of his life, becoming bishop of Ptolemais, the metropolitan see of the province of Libya Superior.

In a classic article published in 1894 Otto Seeck identified the two principal characters in Synesius' work *On Providence* as Aurelianus and Caesarius, the ordinary consuls of 400 and 397 respectively, and he deduced from his reconstruction of the careers of these two men that Synesius came to Constantinople in 399 and departed in 402.<sup>1</sup> This chronology for Synesius' stay in Constantinople immediately became canonical and is assumed in standard histories of the period, in biographical and intellectual studies of Synesius, in exegeses of the works *On Kingship* and *On Providence*, and in manuals of reference.<sup>2</sup> It rests, however, upon an insecure foundation. Seeck's reconstruc-

<sup>1</sup> O. Seeck, "Studien zu Synesios," *Philologus* 52 (1894) 442–83.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, to choose two examples from each of the categories named, E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain* (Paris 1951) 237ff, and E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* I<sup>2</sup> (Paris/Bruges 1959) 225; C. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène, Hellène et Chrétien* (Paris 1951) 84ff, and J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley 1982) 42ff; C. Lacombrade, *Le Discours sur la Royauté de Synésios de Cyrène à l'empereur Arcadius* (Paris 1951) 11ff, and S. Nicolosi, *Il "De Providentia" di Sinesio di Cirene* (Padua 1959) 17ff; J. Quasten, *Patrology* III (Utrecht/Antwerp/Westminister [Md.] 1960) 107, and *PLRE* II 1049. The dating to "397–400" in Lacombrade's edition of the *Hymns* (n.5 *infra*) 55 n.1, appears to be an oversight.

tion of the careers of Aurelianus and Caesarius depended upon his prior assumption that the praetorian prefecture of the East was a collegiate office that two incumbents could occupy simultaneously, which is false.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the rectification of chronological and prosopographical details calls into question some widely held modern assumptions about Synesius' intentions in writing *On Kingship* and *On Providence* and their status as historical evidence. The present paper seeks both to establish reliable dates for Synesius' stay in Constantinople and to assess his social and political standing in relation to the emperor Arcadius and his court.

## I. Osiris and Typhos

The *Egyptian Tale* operates on two levels of meaning, as Synesius states explicitly in the *protheoria* that introduces the work:

It is written about the sons of Taurus (γέγραπται μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς Ταύρου παῖσι),<sup>4</sup> and the first part, as far as the riddle of the wolf, was recited precisely at the moment when the inferior was ruling after coming to power in the political struggle. The following part was woven on after the return of the best men, who asked that the work not remain incomplete and devoted to misfortunes, but, since what was foretold seemed to be occurring in accordance with God's will, to continue the same story and to deal also with their own better fortunes. . . . Lives are described, which are intended to be examples of vice and virtue, the work contains an account of contemporary events, and the story has been fashioned and elaborated throughout in order to be useful (88A–B).<sup>5</sup>

Since the riddle of the wolf concludes the first book (1.18/115B),<sup>6</sup> the genesis of the work in its present form may easily be deduced: Syne-

<sup>3</sup> A. H. M. Jones, "Collegiate Prefectures," *JRS* 54 (1964) 78–89, reprinted in *The Roman Economy*, ed. P. A. Brunt (Oxford 1974) 375–95.

<sup>4</sup> Frequently mistranslated as "It was written in the time of the sons of Taurus" (e.g. Migne, *PG* 66.1210: *sub Tauri filiiis*).

<sup>5</sup> Synesius is quoted from the following editions: N. Terzaghi, *Synesii Cyrenensis Opuscula* (Rome 1944), with references to Terzaghi's chapter divisions and/or the sections in Petavius' edition of 1633, which Terzaghi notes in the margin; C. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène I: Hymnes* (Paris 1978); and A. Garzya, *Synesii Cyrenensis Epistolae* (Rome 1979). The translations are my own; I have consulted A. Fitzgerald, *The Letters of Synesius of Cyrene* (London 1926) and *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene* (London 1930), but Fitzgerald's versions of Synesius' often excruciatingly difficult Greek seem to me not merely to err often in small details but sometimes to misrepresent the tone of whole passages.

<sup>6</sup> Synesius here adapts Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 19 (*Mor.* 358B–C). The change of Plutarch's lion into a wolf may be influenced by Diod. 1.88.6, but Synesius clearly ex-

sius first composed and recited Book One under the title *An Egyptian Tale*, but changed the title to *On Providence* when he added the second book, which concludes with three chapters in praise of providence as the guiding principle in human affairs (2.6–8). The first book shows some signs of retouching, but not of systematic re-writing: Synesius appears to have added a few passages to Book One, but otherwise to have left it unchanged when he composed the second book.<sup>7</sup>

“The story is Egyptian: Egyptians are remarkable for wisdom.” So Synesius begins his tale of the two brothers, Osiris and Typhos, who, though of the same stock, possessed totally dissimilar characters. Osiris, the younger, exhibited every virtue, while his older brother, Typhos, was thoroughly vicious and corrupt (1.1). The contrasting personalities and abilities of the brothers became obvious as they grew up and held minor administrative posts (1.2–4). Their father, who was king, priest, and philosopher, perhaps even a god (1.5), knew his sons well and therefore ensured, before he died, that the virtuous younger brother was appointed king of Egypt in the formal election traditionally held near the city of Thebes (1.5–11). Osiris thus became king and ruled Egypt in accordance with the highest standards (1.12–14). Typhos, however, who had long enjoyed the support of “swineherds and foreigners” (1.6/95A), managed to supplant Osiris by inducing the commander of the Scythians to march on the capital and demand his deposition (1.15f). Typhos then reversed all the wholesome policies of his brother (1.17), provoking a serious man who owed much to Osiris to utter prophecies of his impending downfall (1.18).

Typhos’ downfall was in fact occasioned by a massacre of the Scythian troops on whom his power rested, which happened as if by accident (2.1–3). Osiris thereupon returned in triumph, to the delight of all good men, and inaugurated a new golden age (2.4f)—an outcome that demonstrated the rôle of providence in human affairs (2.6–8).

## II. Aurelianus and His Brother

The two levels of Synesius’ narrative are sometimes readily distinguishable. Details of how kings of Egypt were elected on a sacred

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pected the avenging of Osiris by his son Horus to be long delayed (115B: ἐς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς παρόντας ἐνιαυτοὺς). The lion represents Goths, the wolf Huns, according to C. Lacombrade, *REA* 48 (1946) 54ff.

<sup>7</sup> In fact the only completely undeniable addition seems to be in 1.16/112A–B (103.22–104.4).

mountain beside the Nile belong to the level of myth and allegory (1.6), while the unsuccessful war waged by the Egyptians against a rebellious portion of their territory clearly represents the revolt of Tribigild in Phrygia (1.15/108B). Sometimes, however, it is not altogether obvious on which level the narrative is operating, and at least one of the minor characters in the *Egyptian Tale* appears to be polyvalent. When Osiris is described as “the son of the holder of the great office” (1.2/90B), that seems a patent allusion to Flavius Taurus, the real father of Synesius’ hero, who was praetorian prefect under Constantius and ordinary consul in 361.<sup>8</sup> But Synesius places the death of their father immediately before the election in which Osiris became king in Egypt (1.2/102D; cf. 1.3/92A, 1.5/93D), not because Taurus was “still alive in the East in the 390’s,”<sup>9</sup> but because the exigencies of the allegorical narrative set in Egypt demand that the old king die at this point. Moreover, it was not their real father who appointed the prototypes of Osiris and Typhos to official posts before they became kings in Egypt, as Synesius appears to imply (1.3/92A), but the Roman emperor. It is not entirely implausible, therefore, to claim that when the old king delivers a long harangue to Osiris reflecting Synesius’ own political views (1.9–11), he has a purely symbolic significance as representing the political wisdom of the ancient Romans.<sup>10</sup>

Despite such uncertainties, the claim in Synesius’ *protheoria* that his allegory represents real political events in Constantinople during the reign of Arcadius is confirmed by the narrative itself, where certain episodes are described with a clarity and an explicitness that preclude any doubt about the intended reference. The slaughter of the Scythians in Thebes (2.2/117c–121A) is a patent eye-witness account of how the citizens of Constantinople, irritated and fearful, rose and butchered the Gothic troops of Gainas, who were occupying the city (Soc. *HE* 6.6.1ff). That episode is precisely dated to 12 July 400 (*Chron.min.* 2.66), and supplies the anchor with which to moor the whole of Synesius’ allegorical narrative in time and place.

After the massacre of the Scythians, Osiris returned in triumph to “the year named after him” (2.4/124A).<sup>11</sup> The eastern consul of the year 400 was Aurelianus, whom Gainas, probably in April,<sup>12</sup> com-

<sup>8</sup> *PLRE* I 879f. There is no positive reason to doubt that Synesius’ hero and villain really were brothers; cf. 1.2/89D–90A.

<sup>9</sup> *PLRE* I 880.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolosi (*supra* n.2) 79f.

<sup>11</sup> The importance of this detail was rightly stressed by T. Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften* VI (Berlin 1910) 295f. *PLRE* I 129 accuses Synesius of error: “the consulship is here placed wrongly after his return.”

<sup>12</sup> G. Albert, *Historia* 29 (1980) 504ff.

pelled Arcadius to hand over to him for execution, though in the event he was content with exiling him (Zos. 5.17.7ff). The fate of the deposed Osiris corresponds closely to that of the surrendered Aurelianus: he crossed the river in a cargo boat, was guarded everywhere, and tried by a barbarian assembly, which sentenced him to exile, though allowing him to retain his property (1.16/111A–B). The identity of Osiris, therefore, admits of no doubt whatsoever: he is Aurelianus, consul in 400, the year of the massacre described in the second book of *On Providence*.

The identity of Typhos is far less certain than that of Osiris. To be sure, it is clear that in Synesius' allegory the kingship of Egypt must represent the praetorian prefecture of the East, which became the most powerful office of state in the eastern Roman Empire after the eunuch Eutropius (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*, consul, and *patricius*) fell from power in July 399 and was put to death shortly thereafter.<sup>13</sup> Aurelianus came to power on the fall of Eutropius and was appointed *praefectus praetorio Orientis* in place of Eutropius' nominee. But when did Aurelianus leave office? and who replaced him as prefect? The answers to these questions are not immediately obvious. The praetorian prefecture of the East between 395 and 405 is one of the most intricate chronological and prosopographical conundrums that the compilers of the *Theodosian Code* have bequeathed to modern scholarship. Besides Aurelianus, two other prefects are attested in these years, *viz.* Caesarius and Eutychianus, the ordinary consuls of 397 and 398. But the dates of the three prefects overlap, and each is attested at widely different dates.<sup>14</sup>

Seeck solved the problem by supposing that there were two *praefecti praetorio Orientis* for the relevant decade, with Eutychianus in office continuously from 396 to 405, his colleague being alternately Caesarius (prefect in 395–398 and 400/1) and Aurelianus (prefect in 399–400 and 402).<sup>15</sup> Seeck's thesis has recently been restated in a modified form by R. von Haehling, M. Clauss, and G. Albert, who reject Eutychianus' ten-year prefecture, but still have Caesarius and Eutychianus as joint prefects in 396–398 and Eutychianus and Aurelianus as joint prefects in the later months of 399, with Aurelianus and Caesarius as successive holders of the now non-collegiate prefecture

<sup>13</sup> On his career, *PLRE* II 440ff.

<sup>14</sup> The raw evidence is conveniently listed and tabulated by T. Mommsen, *Codex Theodosianus* I.1: *Prolegomena* (Berlin 1904) clxxvf; *cf.* A. H. M. Jones (*supra* n.3) 80f (=377ff).

<sup>15</sup> Seeck (*supra* n.1) 450, *RhM* N.F. 69 (1914) 1ff, and *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (Stuttgart 1919) 287ff, 475; *cf.* W. Ensslin, *RE* 22 (1954) 2439f, 2500.

in the course of the year 400.<sup>16</sup> For Seeck, von Haehling, Clauss, and Albert, therefore, Aurelianus was succeeded by Caesarius in 400: hence Typhos must be Caesarius.

This reconstruction has manifest weaknesses. It rests heavily on Seeck's emendation of dates in the *Theodosian Code*, where acceptance of the transmitted date or another emendation would change the picture significantly. For example, the second prefecture of Aurelianus in 402, which von Haehling hesitantly prolongs into 404, is attested only by a document with the transmitted date of 6 October 396 (*Cod. Theod.* 4.2.1 + 5.1.5), which was probably addressed to him as *praefectus urbi* of Constantinople on 6 October 394, since evidence from the end of his life clearly implies that Aurelianus was appointed praetorian prefect only twice, *i.e.*, in 399 and again in 414.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Seeck's assumption that the praetorian prefecture of the East was a collegiate office that two incumbents could occupy simultaneously was challenged in 1964 by A. H. M. Jones and refuted. Jones noted that the imperial constitutions that attest Eutychianus as praetorian prefect in 396 and 397 (in contrast to those of 398 and 399) contain nothing that serves to define his geographical area of competence; he accordingly argued that in 396/7 Eutychianus was praetorian prefect of Illyricum, not of the East. On that basis, both Jones and the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* have drawn up *fasti* of the praetorian prefecture of the East between 395 and 405 that both avoid postulating collegiate prefectures and require the emendation of only three dates or headings in the *Theodosian Code*.<sup>18</sup> The reconstruction is as follows:

395, Nov. 30–397, July 1	Fl. Caesarius
397, Sept. 4–399, July 25	Fl. Eutychianus
399, Aug. 17–Oct. 2	Aurelianus
399, Dec.–400, July 12	Fl. Eutychianus
400, Dec. 8–403, June 11	Fl. Caesarius
404, Feb. 3–405, June 11	Fl. Eutychianus

Since, on this hypothesis, it is Eutychianus who replaced Aurelianus, it follows that he must be Synesius' Typhos.

<sup>16</sup> R. von Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit der hohen Amtsträger des römischen Reiches* (Bonn 1978) 74ff; M. Clauss, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike* (Munich 1980) 133ff; G. Albert, *Goten in Konstantinopel* (= *Stud.z.Gesch.u.Kultur d. Altertums*, N.F. 1.2 [1984]) 183ff.

<sup>17</sup> The *Paschal Chronicle* (571, 573 Bonn [= *Chron.min.* 2.71]) styles him "prefect of the sacred praetoria for the second time and patrician" both when noting his appointment on 30 December 414 and under 415, while the inscription on the base of the statue erected in his honor by the senate of Constantinople saluted him as "thrice prefect" (*Anth.Pal.* 16.73), *i.e.*, *praefectus urbi* and twice *praefectus praetorio*.

<sup>18</sup> Jones (*supra* n.3) 80ff (=378ff); *PLRE* II 1250.

This reconstruction, attractive as it is, nevertheless contains a fatal flaw, which Alan Cameron has acutely diagnosed.<sup>19</sup> It entails that Aurelianus was removed from the prefecture after a tenure of a little more than four months (late July to early December 399) and then allowed to become ordinary consul after his dismissal. Although Synesius' "many months" during which Typhos was out of office (1.14/107B) could readily be discounted, it is virtually impossible that a man dismissed as prefect in November or December 399 should have been allowed immediately to assume the *fasces* on 1 January 400. The recent precedents of Rufinus in 395, Caesarius in 397, and Eutychianus in 398 strongly imply that Aurelianus was still in office as *praefectus praetorio Orientis* on 1 January 400. Moreover, Synesius neither states nor implies that Typhos was dismissed from office a second time, as Eutychianus was on this reconstruction. Since Eutychianus' prefecture of 399–400 is attested only by three very brief extracts from what could well be the same document (*Cod.Theod.* 12.1.163–65)<sup>20</sup> and by Synesius (whose relevance is in dispute), it should be rejected. The hypothesis that best suits both Synesius and historical probability is that Aurelianus remained praetorian prefect of the East until Arcadius surrendered him to Gainas in April 400, when Caesarius replaced him. It is Caesarius, therefore, who corresponds to Synesius' Typhos.

The identification of Typhos as Caesarius has been argued on the strictly technical grounds that Caesarius succeeded Aurelianus in the praetorian prefecture that corresponds to Osiris' period of rule in Egypt in Synesius' allegory. It may be apposite to note two other ways in which Typhos and Caesarius correspond.<sup>21</sup> First, Typhos is presented as subservient to his wife (1.13/105A–B): the conjugal devotion of Caesarius was notorious and well-advertised (Soz. *HE* 9.2.4ff). Second, Typhos "went Scythian in matters pertaining to divine belief" (2.3/121B): Caesarius obtained the annulment of regulations directed against the Eunomians (*Cod.Theod.* 16.5.27, *cf.* 25).

<sup>19</sup> In "Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius," *Byzantium and the Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (forthcoming), a paper composed after reading a first draft of the present article. Zosimus describes Aurelianus as ὁ τὴν ὑπατον ἔχων ἐν ἐκείνῳ ἔτει τυμήν (5.18.8) when Gainas demanded his surrender; this would seem to exclude the hypothesis that Aurelianus, though designated consul for 400 before his dismissal, was not inaugurated in January, but only after his return from exile in late summer.

<sup>20</sup> The transmitted dates are 11 December (*Cod.Theod.* 12.1.163), 28 December (164), and 30 December (165). Seeck, *Regesten* (*supra* n.15) 301, emends the last to 28 December but retains the first. More appositely, Mommsen *ad loc.* noted "dies dubius" on the grounds that Eutychianus had ceased to be prefect in the summer.

<sup>21</sup> *Cf.* von Haehling (*supra* n.16) 76f.

This identification also has serious implications for the interpretation of Synesius and his value as historical evidence. Caesarius continued to hold the praetorian prefecture of the East after Aurelianus returned from exile: despite the assertions of modern scholars, Synesius nowhere states unambiguously that Typhos ceased to be king in Egypt after his brother's return.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, both the original *Egyptian Tale* and its continuation were written while Aurelianus was out of office. Just as Synesius wrote first to arouse sympathy for his exiled patron, so he added a continuation partly, at least, to urge his reinstatement to high office: the vague and allusive statements about Aurelianus' increased status after returning from exile are either wishful thinking or else intended as self-fulfilling prophecy (2.5/124c).<sup>23</sup>

In the event, Synesius never saw his hopes fulfilled: he was dead before Aurelianus resumed office as praetorian prefect of the East in December 414. Despite his careful insinuations, Synesius reveals the truth by inventing an excuse to explain Aurelianus' failure to regain office: "the gods did not put everything into his hands at the same time" immediately after his return, because the state could not tolerate a sudden complete reversal and "it was necessary for those who were performing purification in preparation to steer a middle course, and for God to move in a deliberate and orderly fashion" (2.6/125c).

The fact that Caesarius was in office both before and after the expulsion of Gainas from Constantinople implies that Synesius' depiction of imperial politics in terms of anti-barbarian patriots and pro-barbarian traitors is a deliberate caricature which need bear little resemblance to historical reality. The political history of the period when Synesius was in Constantinople has often been written in his terms, as part of "the great struggle of Romans and Germans."<sup>24</sup> In fact, Caesarius and the other ministers of Arcadius may not have shared Synesius' attitudes. The allegorical narrative of the *Egyptian Tale* is less a political manifesto than a personal satire.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Thus *PLRE* I 321 states that Eutychianus "was dismissed following the departure of Gainas from Constantinople." In the only passage adduced, however, Synesius has the gods postpone the punishment of Typhos until he is dead (2.3/123A-B).

<sup>23</sup> Interpreted by W. Liebeschuetz, "The Date of Synesius' *De Providentia*," *Actes du VII<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la F.I.E.C.* II (Budapest 1983) 39-46, to indicate that the work cannot have been completed in its present form before Aurelianus again became praetorian prefect of the East on 30 December 414.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* V (Berlin 1913) 314ff; cf. G. Dagron, *RHist* 241 (1969) 30: "Ce récit à clés se laisse aisément traduire, il est une source excellente pour l'histoire des événements."

<sup>25</sup> Albert (*supra* n.16) 79ff.



### III. The Careers of Aurelianus and Caesarius

Even apart from the two praetorian prefectures that engross his attention, Synesius' treatment of the careers of his Osiris and Typhos is not altogether straightforward. There are omissions as well as ambiguities in his allegory. The young Aurelianus began by serving under various military commanders, then

ἐπιστάτης δὲ δορυφόρων γενόμενος, καὶ τὰς ἀκοὰς πιστευθείς, καὶ πολιάρχης, καὶ βουλῆς ἄρξας, ἐκάστην ἀρχὴν ἀπεδίδου παρὰ πολὺ σεμνοτέραν ἢ παρελάμβανε (1.3/92A).

To what posts does Synesius allude? Terzaghi seriously misrepresents the passage by deducing: “fuit igitur Osiris praefectus praetorio, a secretis, praefectus urbi, princeps senatus.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, Synesius should allude to two posts only: the *magister officiorum* both commanded the *scholae* and had certain functions relating to imperial audiences and petitions;<sup>27</sup> and the *praefectus urbi Constantinopolitanae* presided over meetings of the Senate of that city.<sup>28</sup> Aurelianus is attested in the latter post in 393 and probably on 6 October 394 (*Cod.Theod.* 4.2.1 + 5.1.5). After holding the praetorian prefecture of the East and the consulate in 400, Aurelianus held no office until he became praetorian prefect of the East for the second time on 30 December 414 (*Chron.Pasch.* 571 Bonn [= *Chron.min.* 2.71]): he became *patricius* (*Cod.Theod.* 7.7.4, *Anth.Pal.* 16.73) and remained prefect until at least 10 May 416 (*Cod.Theod.* 7.9.4).<sup>29</sup>

Caesarius had been *magister officiorum* in 386/7, and in that capacity went with the *magister militum* Ellebichus to Antioch to investigate the riot in which Theodosius' statues had been pulled down (*Cod.Theod.* 8.5.49 Seeck; Liban. *Or.* 21; Thdt. *HE* 5.20.4). Synesius omits any obvious reference to that success. Instead he describes two offices that happen to be otherwise unattested for Caesarius. He had been minister of finance (*ταμίας χρημάτων*), *i.e.*, presumably *quaestor sacrarum largitionum* (1.3/92A);<sup>30</sup> then,

<sup>26</sup> Terzaghi (*supra* n.5) 69 on lines 17ff.

<sup>27</sup> Clauss (*supra* n.16) 15ff, 60ff.

<sup>28</sup> G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale* (Paris 1974) 277ff; *cf.* A. Chastagnol, *La préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-empire* (Paris 1960) 68ff.

<sup>29</sup> For the full evidence for Aurelianus' career, *PLRE* I 128f.

<sup>30</sup> Hardly “praefectus aerario” (Terzaghi [*supra* n.26]). No eastern *comes sacrarum largitionum* is attested between 386 and 391: *PLRE* I 320 deduces that Eutychianus probably held the office in 388 from the passage under discussion combined with Liban. *Ep.* 864.

transferred to another type of office on the chance that he might be fit for it, he behaved more disgracefully, and although the kingdom flourished, that part of the realm which Typhos governed spent a whole year under a curse (92B).

The reference to a whole year suggests a proconsulate of Asia or Achaea, since these posts alone, together with the proconsulate of Africa, had a legally defined term of one year.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Achaea deserves preference, for no proconsul is firmly attested there for more than a decade before 395,<sup>32</sup> while the fasti of Asia are complete—or even overfull—from 392 until 397.<sup>33</sup> Be that as it may, Caesarius became praetorian prefect of the East immediately after Rufinus was killed on 27 November 395 (Soc. *HE* 6.1.4). He held the prefecture until summer 397, then again from 400 to 403, receiving designation as *patricius*.<sup>34</sup> Synesius is almost totally silent about his villain's first praetorian prefecture: his only reference, surely an oversight, is a remark that Typhos' wife grieved that her husband had "been dismissed from the kingship" (1.13/105B).

#### IV. Synesius and Aurelianus

The first book of *On Providence* contains a transparent self-portrait of the author (1.18). There was (Synesius states) a stranger there, a serious man, brought up by philosophy in a rustic fashion, unused to the ways of the city. He had received great benefits from Osiris—namely, freedom from liturgies for himself and a reduction in the services imposed on his *patria*. In return, when many were singing the praises of Osiris, he too composed, wrote, and sang in the Dorian manner, which alone he considered to allow depth of character and expression. While Osiris was in power, the stranger refrained from publishing these compositions. But when Typhos established a tyranny, he then began to praise Osiris openly and to denounce Typhos, even to the latter's face. Typhos accordingly decided to oppress the cities that Osiris had comforted, and he devised a special evil for his denigrator, so that he could not return home in freedom but should remain in misery, watching his enemies prosper.

<sup>31</sup> *Phoenix* 37 (1983) 256ff, 39 (1985) 144ff.

<sup>32</sup> *PLRE* I 1077.

<sup>33</sup> Victorius was proconsul from 392 to 394 (*Cod.Theod.* 11.31.8 + 12.1.12 [24 April 392]; 11.30.50 [4 April 393]; 1.1.4 [22 August 393]; 16.5.22 [15 April 394]), while four names are attested for the next triennium; cf. *Phoenix* 37 (1983) 261.

<sup>34</sup> Le Bas/Waddington, *Asie Mineure* 1652d. For the evidence (other than Synesius) for Caesarius' prefectures, *PLRE* I 171.

Two later works supplement this allusive passage. In the longest of his *Hymns*, Synesius gives thanks to the ruler of the universe for the success of his three years at the court in Constantinople (1[3].428ff): he had endured toil by day and pain by night on behalf of his native land, until divine power released his oppressed *patria* from its troubles. And a letter written from Cyrene to the lawyer Pylaemenes in Constantinople speaks of Synesius' own situation:

“Leisure is the greatest good”: one might say that, like a fertile country, it brings all noble things to the soul of the philosopher. But I shall enjoy leisure only if I succeed in freeing myself from involvement in the political life of the Romans. That will occur when I am released from the cursed liturgy [*sc.* of curial duties]: admittedly, I have become free so far as concerns the emperor, but I should justly blame myself and be ashamed of benefiting from my own exertion (*Ep.* 100).

The conceit is somewhat strained, so that one scholar has taken Synesius to deny that he again obtained the exemption from curial duties that he had earlier won and then lost.<sup>35</sup> That is contrary to the clear meaning of the text. Synesius is writing to his friend to commend one Anastasius, and he hyperbolically compares his letter to the embassy that he had undertaken on behalf of his city: Synesius has indeed received an official exemption from curial duties, but he cannot refrain from political activity.

A consistent picture emerges. Synesius was a supporter of and propagandist for Aurelianus during and after his praetorian prefecture. In return, Aurelianus gave privileges to Synesius and his city or province: in this trait, too, he resembled the laudable Osiris, who granted a shy man exemption from public liturgies even before he requested it (1.12/104A–B). When Aurelianus fell and Caesarius came to power, both Synesius and Cyrene suffered, but when Aurelianus returned from exile, Synesius and Cyrene regained what they had lost. This is relevant to the date of Synesius' departure from Constantinople.

Synesius describes the circumstances of his departure from the capital in a letter asking Pylaemenes to give Asterius a rug Synesius had promised him (*Ep.* 61). The promise, made when Synesius was obliged to sleep in front of “the great record office,” can be kept now that Synesius has left the snow of Thrace for a warmer clime. Synesius did not make the presentation himself because of his hurried departure:

God shook the earth repeatedly during the day, and most people were on their faces in prayer, for the ground was shaking. At that

<sup>35</sup> C. Lacombrade (*supra* n.5) xxx.

time, considering the sea to be safer than the land, I rushed to the harbor, speaking no word to anyone except Photius of blessed memory—and I only shouted to him from afar and signalled with my hand that I was about to leave. He who left Aurelianus, his dear friend and consul, without a farewell has given an adequate apology for the same behavior towards his subordinate Asterius.

Since Seeck, it has been conventional to identify this earthquake with the attested earthquake of 402, which killed many inhabitants of Constantinople (*Chron.min.* 2.67).<sup>36</sup> Seeck himself, however, realized that there is a problem: Synesius implies that Aurelianus was consul at the time. Seeck therefore proposed to emend ὑπατον to ὑπαρχον or ὑπατικόν. Although most recent scholars retain the text and make light of the difficulty,<sup>37</sup> Seeck's instincts were surely correct. The text implies that Synesius left Constantinople during the consulate of Aurelianus, and both the transmitted text and its implication should be accepted. Aurelianus returned from exile sometime after 12 July 400, obtained a restoration of the privileges that Caesarius had cancelled, and Synesius departed with documents attesting his own and his city's privileges before the political situation could change again to his disadvantage. The "snow of Thrace" belongs to the closing months of 400, when Synesius had to wait for the documents he needed.

What hinders the natural inference that Synesius left Constantinople in autumn 400? To suppose an earthquake in the city in 400 as well as in 402 presents no difficulty. Synesius spent three years in Constantinople: can he have come to the imperial capital in 397 or early 398, rather than in 399?

## V. Synesius and Arcadius

Some time after his return to Africa, Synesius looked back on his time in Constantinople with a mixture of pride and regret:

My life has been books and hunting, except when I was an ambassador. Would that I had not seen three years wasted from my life! Yet even then I derived very great and frequent benefit from divination.

<sup>36</sup> Seeck (*supra* n.1) 459; cf. W. Capelle, *RE Suppl.* 4 (1924) 347; G. Downey, *Speculum* 30 (1957) 597; A. Hermann, *RAC* 5 (1962) 1107 (lists of earthquakes). The last-named also registers an earthquake at Constantinople in 400, appealing to J. Sabatier, *Description générale des monnaies byzantines* I (Paris 1862) 99: this is the earthquake under discussion here, dated by the chronology for Synesius that prevailed until 1894.

<sup>37</sup> Following Lacombrade, *Synésios* (*supra* n.2) 101 n.5. In contrast, von Haehling (*supra* n.16) 76 not only accepts Seeck's emendation to ὑπαρχον but also claims Synesius as explicit evidence that Aurelianus was *praefectus praetorio* in 402.

For it rendered ineffective plots against me by sorcerers who could conjure the dead, by revealing them and by preserving me from them all, and it helped me to conduct public business in the best interest of the cities, and made me bolder than any Greek has ever been when I addressed the emperor (*On Dreams* 14/148c–d).

Synesius came to Constantinople as an ambassador, probably representing the provincial assembly of Pentapolis,<sup>38</sup> to present Arcadius with *aurum coronarium* and at the same time to request a diminution of the taxes imposed on his province. Recent scholarship has been almost unanimous in its belief that Synesius came to the imperial court in 399 and delivered the extant speech *On Kingship* to Arcadius' face in or about August 399, while his patron Aurelianus was in power.<sup>39</sup> This hypothesis is hardly plausible, for the speech not only insults the emperor but also attacks his ministers. Moreover, the occasion for which *aurum coronarium* was sent to Arcadius and the date and nature of Synesius' speech require separate investigation.

The *aurum coronarium* of the later Roman Empire was a customary offering of gold crowns to an emperor, in theory voluntary but in practice obligatory.<sup>40</sup> Emperors normally received such presentations at their accession and at the successive quinquennial celebrations of their reign, though they occasionally received them for extraordinary achievements such as military victories. The question, therefore, must be asked: if Synesius came to Constantinople in 399, what event or anniversary did he come to mark? Conceivably, the birth of Arcadius' daughter Pulcheria on 19 January 399 (*Chron.min.* 2.66). But while the evidence for sending *aurum coronarium* or *aurum oblativium* to mark an accession or an emperor's fifth, tenth, or fifteenth year of rule seems to be abundant,<sup>41</sup> there is no secure evidence that it was dispatched to mark a birth—not surprisingly, given the incidence of infant mortality in the ancient world, even within the imperial family. Perhaps, therefore (so it has been argued), Cyrene was marking Arcadius' accession in 395 four years late.<sup>42</sup> The notion is anachronistic: a Roman emperor began to rule from his *dies imperii*,

<sup>38</sup> W. Liebeschuetz, *Byzantion* 55 (1985) 146ff, esp. 154.

<sup>39</sup> Seeck (*supra* n.24) 315ff; Lacombrade, *Synésios* (*supra* n.2) 85ff, *Discours* (*supra* n.2) 21ff; *PLRE* II 1049; Bregman (*supra* n.2) 49ff.

<sup>40</sup> See especially T. Klauser, "Aurum coronarium," *RömMitt* 59 (1944) 129–53, reprinted in his *Gesammelte Arbeiten zur Liturgiegeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und christlichen Archäologie* (= *JAC* Ergänzungsbd. 3 [1974]) 292–309.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Them. *Orr.* 14 (accession of Theodosius), 8 (*quinquennalia* of Valens, in 368); Symmachus *Relat.* 13 (*decennalia* of Valentinian II, in 384). For an imperial victory as an occasion for *aurum coronarium*, cf. Liban. *Epp.* 846, 878 (388).

<sup>42</sup> C. Lacombrade, *REA* 51 (1949) 54ff.

not from the death of one of his imperial colleagues, even if that colleague was his father.<sup>43</sup> The truth seems to be that a suitable occasion for the offering of *aurum coronarium* in 399 cannot be discovered. But if Synesius came to Constantinople in 397/8 (as must be the case, if he departed in 400), the problem vanishes. Arcadius was proclaimed Augustus on 19 January 383 (*Chron.min.* 1.244); he thus celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of his accession on 19 January 398, and there is no difficulty in supposing that it was to commemorate this happy event that Synesius brought *aurum coronarium* from North Africa to the imperial capital.<sup>44</sup>

The speech *On Kingship* proclaims itself a *logos stephanotikos*, a speech intended to accompany the presentation of the *aurum coronarium* from Cyrene (2c–d). But neither its form nor its content reflects the norms of the genre. One of the two rhetorical treatises that pass under the name of Menander the Rhetor specifies that the crown speech should not exceed 150 to 200 lines in length, and should be followed immediately by a reading of the honorific decree from the city that has voted the crown. This miniature speech should base its prooemium on the crown and the emperor's glory, proceed through the standard topics of an imperial panegyric (family, if noble, otherwise his good fortune, then education and virtues, deeds in war and deeds of peace), and conclude with the presentation of the crown and the city's requests (2.12).<sup>45</sup> Synesius' speech runs to some 1,200 lines and avoids the traditional schema of a panegyric. The prooemium willfully and ostentatiously flouts all expectations. Synesius proclaims that he does not come from a large and prosperous city, has not brought a fine speech spun from rhetoric and poetry, and will not be abashed by the emperor's majesty: he will exercise the philosopher's right to speak freely (1A–B).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1982) 1ff.

<sup>44</sup> A. Chastagnol, *RevNum* VI.22 (1980) 106ff, argues that *quinquennalia*, *decennalia*, *quindecennalia*, *vicennalia*, and *tricennalia* were celebrated only on the fourth, ninth, fourteenth, nineteenth, and twenty-ninth anniversaries of the emperor's *dies imperii*, not at both the beginning and end of the anniversary year. If true, that claim would exclude the hypothesis advanced here. In fact there is sufficient evidence to prove that at least the fifth, twentieth, and thirtieth anniversaries of *dies imperii* were normally celebrated during the fourth century: Jerome *Chron.* 231<sup>e</sup> Helm (Constantine in 326); Eus. *Laud.Con.* praef., cf. H. A. Drake, *Historia* 24 (1975) 345ff (Constantine in 336); Amm. Marc. 21.1.4 (Julian in November 360); Symmachus, *Or.* 1.16 (Valentinian in 369).

<sup>45</sup> D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981) 178ff.

<sup>46</sup> On *παρρησία*, a virtue stressed especially by Cynics, see E. Peterson, *Reinhold-Seeberg-Festschrift* I (Leipzig 1929) 287f; M. Billerbeck, *Epiktet: vom Kynismus (= Philo-*sophia Antiqua* 34 [1978]) 156.*

The content is as unconventional and unexpected as the form. Much of the matter, to be sure, finds abundant parallels in other ancient writings about monarchs and monarchy, from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Agesilaus* to the poem delivered by Claudian in Milan on 1 January 398 to celebrate the fourth consulate of Honorius.<sup>47</sup> But Synesius has used the traditional material in a surprising fashion: whereas generations of panegyrists had described the ideal ruler in ways that emphasized the degree to which the ruler being addressed exemplified perfection, Synesius continually invokes the ideal in order to proclaim how far short Arcadius falls. And not only Arcadius himself, but his chosen ministers:

This majesty and the fear of being brought down to human level if you become a common sight cause you emperors to be incarcerated and besieged by yourselves, seeing very little and hearing very little from which practical wisdom is acquired, enjoying only the pleasures of the body, and among these the most material, the ones offered by touch and taste, living the life of a jellyfish. As long as you deem mankind unworthy of you, you will not attain even human perfection. Those with whom you associate in your daily life and otherwise, and those who have access to the palace more freely than generals and captains, those whom you collect as favorites, those men with small heads and petty minds whom nature in error stamps amiss, just as dishonest bankers counterfeit coins (and a dullard becomes a gift for an emperor, and the duller he is the greater the gift)—these, at once ready to laugh and to weep incessantly, playing the buffoon with gestures, noises, and all means possible, help you to waste the time, and try to relieve with a greater evil the fogginess of mind you have from living not in accordance with nature. The half-baked thoughts and words of these men suit your ears more than a philosophical proposition clearly and tersely expressed. But, however much you have enjoyed this amazing seclusion, distrusting the sensible part of the people and acting haughtily towards them, while bringing the empty-headed part close to you and stripping yourself for them, you ought to know full well that every institution needs the same qualities to grow to maturity and to function efficiently (14/14D–15c).

<sup>47</sup> Many of the *loci similes* are listed in Terzaghi's notes; for a more systematic investigation see Lacombrade, *Discours* (*supra* n.2) 88ff. There is no need to suppose that Synesius imitated Claudian, as argued by Lacombrade, "Notes sur deux panégyriques," *Pallas* 5 (1956) 15–26. The opposite thesis, that Claudian copies Synesius, and had therefore read *On Kingship* before 1 January 398, was argued by T. Birt, *De moribus christianis quantum Stilichonis aetate in aula imperatoria occidentali valuerint disputatio* (Marburg 1885) xviff.

Can Synesius be imagined thus to have insulted both emperor and court to their faces? Surely not. Synesius must be writing before Aurelianus came to power, and the crude allusion to Arcadius “stripping himself” before the “empty-headed” should be an allusion to Eutropius: since he was *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, the emperor did indeed undress in his presence.

Synesius’ *On Kingship* is not a real speech, nor did Synesius arrive in Constantinople in 399 and deliver the extant oration shortly thereafter.<sup>48</sup> Synesius came with the *aurum coronarium* of Cyrene in 397/8, and failed to obtain the relief his city sought from the ministers then in power. Subsequently, perhaps after many months of fruitless petitioning (*cf. Hymn* 1[3].436ff), he allied himself to Aurelianus and wrote *On Kingship*—presumably in late 398 or early 399—as a manifesto on behalf of Aurelianus and his political allies against Eutropius, Eutygianus, and their supporters, who at that time had the emperor’s ear. Synesius was promoting the interests of Aurelianus; in return, he hoped for, and perhaps had even been promised, recompense in the form of tax relief for Cyrene and personal advancement or privileges for himself.

Against this background, the combination of philosophy and xenophobia in *On Kingship* becomes more comprehensible. Synesius presents himself as the ambassador of Cyrene, an old and famous city fallen on hard times and needing imperial assistance. He will crown the emperor’s head with gold and his soul with philosophy (2C–D): as a philosopher, he has the duty of proclaiming the truth, however unpalatable it may seem to his assumed audience (2A–B, 3A–D).

The central thesis of *On Kingship* is that Arcadius needs philosophy in order to become a good emperor and to rescue the Roman Empire, especially its cities, from the dangers that surround it. Synesius holds up before the youth whom he purports to address not only the traditional ideals of imperial conduct, but also the specific examples of his father Theodosius (4D–5B, 25C) and three pagan emperors of the late third century (17D–20A).<sup>49</sup> Insistently he warns Arcadius not to rely on his present ministers and courtiers, who flatter him excessively (3D–4C, 12A–B, 14B–15D). And he urges him to change his behavior from that of a tyrant to that befitting a good king (5D–6D).

<sup>48</sup> Lacombrade, *Discours* (*supra* n.2) 22, detected an allusion to the rebellion of Tribigild in Phrygia (22B), which would entail a date of composition no earlier than the spring of 399. Peter Heather has persuaded me that Synesius probably alludes here to Alaric and the Goths in the Balkans: it follows that *On Kingship* may have been written in 398 rather than 399.

<sup>49</sup> Synesius names the first emperor as Carinus (18C), apparently in error for Carus; the second and third, whom he does not name, appear to be Galerius and Diocletian.



Arcadius should snap out of his present torpor (5c), command his army in person (12b–14b), and emulate the generals and emperors who brought success to the Roman state (15d–21c). Above all, he should consider carefully what race of soldiers he needs (21d). Barbarians are by nature disloyal; Arcadius should therefore cease to rely on Scythians and enroll an army of trusty yeomen (22b–c). The barbarian element must be expelled from all positions of power, and the purge must embrace not only the high command but also the Senate, since barbarians have infiltrated even that august assembly (23b–c); the alternative will be enslavement by them (26b).

“The emperor must purify his court” (24d). Once that is done, the Roman Empire can recover greatness and prosperity, and the emperor’s subjects can be well governed again, free from oppression and excessive taxation—provided that men are chosen to govern “for their virtues, not because of their wealth, as now” (26d–31c, esp. 30b). Such are the potential benefits of philosophy and true education (31c). This “anti-German manifesto of the party of Aurelianus” looks forward with longing to a time when Synesius’ friends will displace his enemies as the emperor’s ministers and will pay due regard to the interests of the cities of the empire.<sup>50</sup> The author of *On Kingship* did not in fact need to wait long for his patron to come to power.

## VI. Paeonius

A third, brief work survives from Synesius’ stay in Constantinople. It is a plea for assistance accompanying the gift of an astrolabe to one Paeonius, which most manuscripts entitle *To Paeonius*, but to which Synesius himself refers as *On the Gift* (*Ep.* 154). Paeonius had influence with the emperor, and the Pentapolis derived some benefit from both work and gift (*Ep.* 154): *To Paeonius* was written, therefore, at the period when Synesius was seeking support at court for his petition on behalf of Cyrene. More precisely, if Synesius brought the astrolabe with him as a present for Paeonius, he should have presented it very shortly after his arrival.

The content corresponds. Synesius addresses Paeonius as a fellow-lover of philosophy who not only shares his indignation at its present political impotence but has lamented it openly (307b). He claims that Paeonius expressed sympathy for the disrespect in which Synesius himself was held (307d–308a). Consequently, since Paeonius combines

<sup>50</sup> The phrase is from J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* I<sup>2</sup> (London 1923) 129, who rightly dated Synesius’ speech before the fall of Eutropius.

the long-dissociated skills of philosophy and military service (308c), he feels able to proclaim that Paeonius will set the world to rights:

No greater misfortune might happen to cities than for their strong element to be mindless and their wise one powerless. Yet it seems likely that you, when you take office, will restore this combination [*sc.* of strength and wisdom] to us, since you are entrusted with the conduct of public affairs and you consider it an obligation to practise philosophy (309B–c).

It would be a fair inference from these words alone that Synesius was writing before he adopted Aurelianus as his patron. But the way in which he introduces his description of the silver astrolabe, crafted in Africa and designed by Synesius himself in accordance with the teachings of his “most revered teacher” (311A), confirms that he had only recently arrived in Constantinople. Presumably, therefore, *On the Gift* belongs to the early months of 398.

Paeonius is not named by Synesius elsewhere, but in a letter to his former fellow-pupil Herculianus, Synesius alludes to an unnamed *comes* at Alexandria with whom he was acquainted and who is clearly Paeonius (*Ep.* 142): alone of living men, this *comes* unites literary culture and military skill—precisely the combination of accomplishments that characterises Paeonius. The date of the letter can neither be determined from external criteria nor legitimately deduced from its place in Synesius’ correspondence, which a posthumous editor has arranged in a very unsystematic order.<sup>51</sup> But Synesius’ anonymous allusion to Hypatia in *On the Gift* suggests that Paeonius had been in Alexandria before 398, and hence that he had been *comes Aegypti* before that date.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, all the other letters to Herculianus (*Epp.* 137–41, 143–46) seem to belong to the period between Synesius’ return from Alexandria to Cyrene *ca* 393 and his departure for Constantinople. It would be worth knowing what position of command Paeonius held in Constantinople during the ascendancy of Eutropius.

## VII. Synesius in Constantinople

Christian Lacombrade has recently declared that the often delicate problems posed by the life and works of Synesius have been solved.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Seeck (*supra* n.1) 458ff.

<sup>52</sup> *PLRE* II 816f enters Paeonius as *comes*, probably of Egypt, between 402 and 411 and suggests that he was a *comes rei militaris* when Synesius sent him the astrolabe. The unnamed *comes* of *Epp.* 98f (to Olympus, for whom see *Epp.* 133, 148) need not be Paeonius, but may be an otherwise unknown *comes* in office in or shortly after 401.

<sup>53</sup> *Hymnes* (*supra* n.5) v n.1.

That optimism unfortunately represents a premature certitude. The three years Synesius spent in the imperial capital did not run from 399 to 402, as Lacombrade believes, but from the winter of 397/8 to the late autumn of 400. Synesius' first modern editor proposed this chronology in the early seventeenth century, and it remained dominant (if not entirely unchallenged) until 1894, when the current orthodoxy arose.<sup>54</sup> The *crux interpretationis* appears to be Synesius' remark that his Osiris in *On Providence* returned to "the year named after him": Seeck's chronology for Synesius' sojourn in Constantinople entails that Aurelianus did not return during his consular year;<sup>55</sup> therefore Seeck's chronology cannot be correct. But everything falls into place if Synesius came to Constantinople in the winter of 397/8 and left between September and December 400.<sup>56</sup> On this basis an overall assessment may be offered of Synesius' stay in the imperial capital, and of the significance of the literary works he wrote there.

Synesius came to Constantinople from Cyrene, with *aurum coronarium* to present to Arcadius on the fifteenth anniversary of his proclamation as Augustus, in January 398. He came as a civic duty but he hoped to benefit from imperial generosity in return for the homage offered. In the event he was disappointed. Paeonius, whom he had known in Alexandria and for whom he brought an astrolabe as a present, proved an ineffectual ally, whatever sympathy and assistance he may have offered. Synesius turned, therefore, to Aurelianus, a former *magister officiorum* and prefect of the city of Constantinople, whose dislike for the ministers who had the emperor's ear was obvious. Late in 398 or early 399, perhaps when the dominant position of Eutropius was already beginning to appear vulnerable, Synesius published his work *On Kingship*—which may indeed have helped to undermine the eunuch's power. When Eutropius fell, Aurelianus became praetorian prefect of the East and Synesius received the privileges for himself and his province for which he had been waiting. But he was unable to return to Cyrene before Aurelianus was dismissed at the behest of Gainas. Aurelianus' successor Caesarius cancelled the privileges, and

<sup>54</sup> See the prefatory material conveniently reprinted from Petavius and Fabricius, and the "monitum in orationem *de Regno*" in Migne, *PG* 66 (1864) 1020ff; also R. Volkmann, *Synesius von Cyrene* (Berlin 1869) 13.

<sup>55</sup> The return of Aurelianus is placed in the winter of 401/2 by Seeck (*supra* n.1) 452, *cf.* 459; Lacombrade, *Discours* (*supra* n.2) 104ff; Albert (*supra* n.16) 192f.

<sup>56</sup> J. Vogt, "Synesius auf Seefahrt," *Kyriakon.Festschrift J. Quasten I* (Münster 1970) 400–08, argued from *Ep.* 4 that Synesius was already back in North Africa by May 401. Against this deduction see D. Roques, "La lettre 4 de Synésios de Cyrène," *REG* 90 (1977) 263–95; C. Lacombrade, "Encore la lettre 4 de Synésios et sa nouvelle lune," *REG* 91 (1978) 564–67.

the bitter Synesius again took up his pen with *An Egyptian Tale*, which corresponds to the first book of the extant work *On Providence*. This was about June 400; before the end of that year Aurelianus had returned from exile (though not to office as praetorian prefect), and Synesius had left the imperial capital after adding a second book to his *Egyptian Tale* to form the complete work *On Providence*.

If this reconstruction is valid, then the standard comparison of Synesius to his western contemporary Claudian is gravely misleading.<sup>57</sup> For Synesius wrote none of his surviving works as the propagandist of a man who, like Stilicho, was in power: Synesius wrote on behalf of Aurelianus before he became praetorian prefect of the East and after he was dismissed. Significantly, while Aurelianus was in power, Synesius tells us that he spoke in praise of him but refrained from publishing his encomia (*On Providence* 1.18/113B). This reveals something very important about Synesius' character and personality. It also has a much wider implication for any modern student who wishes to understand what was happening in the eastern Roman Empire in the early fifth century. Besides having certain personal and intellectual eccentricities,<sup>58</sup> Synesius wrote as a spokesman of the 'outs', and it is illegitimate to infer imperial policy from his diatribes. On the contrary, his speech *On Kingship* and his allegory *On Providence* perhaps find their closest congener in Procopius' *Secret History*:<sup>59</sup> like that famous lampoon, they are opposition-literature in an age dominated by panegyric.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Alan Cameron, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford 1979) 245f and 321f, accepting A. H. M. Jones' identification of Typhos as Eutygianus (245 n.1).

<sup>58</sup> On his philosophical attitudes, see esp. H. Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano (Oxford 1963) 126–50; F. Tinnefeld, "Synesios von Kyrene: Philosophie der Freude und Leidensbewältigung," *Studien zur Literatur der Spätantike*, ed. C. Gnllka and W. Schetter (Bonn 1975) 139–79.

<sup>59</sup> On which see now Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1985) 49ff, esp. 65 (attitudes shared with Synesius).

<sup>60</sup> This paper is an expanded and revised version of a lecture delivered to the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies on 8 November 1983; I am grateful to Charlotte Roueché and Stefanie Kennell for their comments, and to Alan Cameron for letting me read a typescript of the paper cited in note 19, with which the present article has a symbiotic relationship. I have also profited from discussion and correspondence with Wolf Liebeschuetz—amicable despite our deep disagreement about many of the problems considered here.