



CHAPTER

15 Philosophy as a Profession in Late Antiquity

John Dillon

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Abstract

In the spring of 263, in his thirtieth year, the philosopher Porphyry, originally of Tyre, but for some years previously studying with the distinguished Platonist Longinus at Athens, decided on a career move and set out, with one companion, for Rome to join the circle of the rather avant-garde and somewhat mysterious philosopher Plotinus. This chapter considers what sort of a set-up he found when he got there, and what sort of a set-up he had left behind him in Athens.

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In the spring of 263, in his thirtieth year, the philosopher Porphyry, originally of Tyre, but for some years previously studying with the distinguished Platonist Longinus at Athens, decided on a career move, and set out, with one companion, for Rome, to join the circle of the rather avant-garde and somewhat mysterious philosopher Plotinus.¹ What sort of a set-up he found when he got there, and what sort of a set-up he had left behind him in Athens, is part of what I wish to enquire into on the present occasion.

In fact, as Porphyry tells us in his *Life of Plotinus* (ch. 5), he found nothing much going on at all when he arrived, since Plotinus was enjoying his summer vacation (τοῦ Πλωτίνου τὰς θερινὰς ἀγοντοῦς ἀργούς), and not holding regular classes.² But when school resumed in October,³ what did he find himself faced with?

p. 402 One of the first things we have to do, I think, when approaching the study of ancient centres of higher learning, whether philosophical, medical, legal, or rhetorical, is to think small. Even the model of the mediaeval university presents us with something far too elaborate. A nearer analogue to the situation in Late Antiquity, which was put to me many years ago in Berkeley by Peter Brown himself, and which I find most attractive, might be found in what we know of the centres of learning in the medieval Arab world, from Seville and Cordoba to Baghdad or Ispahan, where even a world-famous sheikh would gather with his little flock of students, who might themselves have come to sit at his feet from any quarter of the Arab-dominated world, in nothing more formal than an alcove of a mosque, or a corner of its courtyard, and expound his doctrine, after which teacher and students would adjourn to his house for dinner and further discussion.⁴

Similarly, Porphyry, arriving at Plotinus' school in Rome, joins a very simple and informal institution indeed, by modern standards. But how representative, after all, was the school of Plotinus of late antique philosophical schools in general? Here, I think, on the analogy of Sherlock Holmes's dog that fails to bark, one may take note of certain interesting features of Porphyry's narrative.⁵ Porphyry, certainly, is neither blind to, nor reticent about, Plotinus' various eccentricities, but at no point does he suggest that the general

organization of the school, or Plotinus' position in it, is noticeably peculiar. This I find significant.

p. 403 Porphyry, after all, as I say, had come to Plotinus from Longinus in Athens. He was presumably also familiar with the establishment of the Platonic diadochus Eubulus, even if Longinus was not himself part of that establishment.⁶ Yet he does not note in the *Life* any startling change of structure, such as from a large, organized 'research ↵ institute' to a totally personal, informal group of 'friends'. Certainly, he notes that Plotinus' method of commentary was remarkable (ch. 14), but this in itself emphasizes that the overall set-up was not a shock to him at all. My conclusion from this is that Plotinus' school—apart from the personality of the Master himself—was not in any essential way different in structure from that of any other teacher of philosophy in these centuries.

What, then, was Plotinus' situation? As far as we can gather from Porphyry's narrative, he lived, when Porphyry knew him, and presumably for some considerable time before that, in the house of a wealthy widow called Gemina (ch. 9).⁷ The household included Gemina's daughter, also called Gemina, and a number of young boys and girls who had been entrusted to Plotinus' care on the death of their parents. Whether this was Gemina's only residence, or just a house belonging to her, is not clear, but it was obviously a fairly large and elaborate establishment, in which young ladies and middle-aged philosophers could live decently together.

p. 404 Around Plotinus in this establishment was gathered a circle of 'companions'—Porphyry does not speak of pupils (*mathētai*), only of companions, *hetairoi*. These companions may be divided into three classes: (1) wealthy patrons, (2) close companions, and (3) more casual auditors. The first category is not, of course, exclusive of the other two, but the latter two categories represent, I think, the same distinction that can be found in earlier centuries in the schools of such figures as Plutarch's mentor Ammonius, and that of Aulus Gellius, L. Calvenus Taurus, between young men who attended philosophical lectures to complete their education (as was the case, for instance, with budding lawyers or rhetoricians like Aulus Gellius or Apuleius), and serious students of Platonism, ↵ who would go on to become masters themselves, and one or other of whom would normally be their master's chosen successor.

In Plotinus' case, patrons included the wealthy senators Castricius Firmus, Marcellus Orontius, Sabinillus, and Rogatianus,⁸ the last of whom went rather overboard, giving away all his possessions and adopting the philosophic way of life. This did wonders for his gout, it seems, but presumably rather lessened his usefulness as a patron. The others, however, seem to have found philosophy compatible with the *bios praktikos*. Castricius Firmus was a particularly good friend. Plotinus was always welcome, one gathers, at his country estate at Minturnae, and when the philosopher was afflicted with his final illness in 269, it was to an estate adjacent to this in Campania that he retired (*VPlot.* ch. 2). This estate belonged to, and was presumably bequeathed to him by, a prosperous doctor of Arabian extraction by the name of Zethus, who had himself been given it by Castricius—interesting patterns of patronage are revealed here.⁹ 'His wants', Porphyry tells us, 'were provided in part out of Zethus' estate, and for the rest were furnished from Minturnae, where Castricius' property lay.' We see in all this Castricius providing very much the same range of services for Plotinus as, back in the second century, we find Herodes Atticus providing for Calvenus Taurus in Athens.¹⁰

p. 405 Plotinus' patrons actually came to include the emperor Gallienus himself, and his wife Salonina (*VPlot.* ch. 12), which imperial favour led Plotinus to propose the rather wild project of establishing a philosophic city on a ruined site in Campania, to be called Platonopolis and to be run in accordance with Plato's ↵ *Laws*—presumably with Plotinus and his friends acting as a kind of Nocturnal Council. This project came to nothing, in fact, Porphyry tells us, by reason of opposition by certain parties at court.¹¹

The presence on the scene of the lady Gemina and of Castricius goes some way to answer, perhaps, a question which must occur to the modern observer. What were the financial arrangements, in an ancient philosophic school, between master and pupil? Such indelicate matters are, after all, never mentioned in our sources—though endowments are, much later, in the case of the Academy in Athens.¹² The answer is, I would suggest, that financial arrangements were left quite vague, in accordance with the philosophic inhibition, dating from Socrates himself, against taking fees for imparting knowledge. The pupil was expected to provide for himself (Porphyry, at least, had a house or apartment of his own, *VPlot.* ch. 11), and perhaps to contribute to such communal meals as were held. The pupil's father, or he himself, if he were mature and rich, might make the philosopher 'presents' of various sorts, but such matters would not be regulated to the extent of constituting anything like an explicit fee. As far as one can observe from the sources available to us, one simply presented oneself at the establishment of the philosopher of one's choice

and hoped to be allowed to enter his circle. It is thus that Porphyry arrives at the school of Plotinus, and it is thus, nearly two centuries later, that Proclus arrives at the school of Syrianus and Plutarchus.¹³

p. 406 About attending lectures there was, it seems, no great difficulty. Plotinus' lectures, at least, were open to all (*VPlot.* ch. 1). Amelius ↵ was once able to bring along a friend of his who was a noted portrait painter, to make sketches surreptitiously for a portrait of Plotinus, and no notice, it seems, was taken of this by the great man (though here his students were in collusion against him). Visitors in town might drop in unexpectedly—as did once, to Plotinus' great confusion, his former fellow-pupil Origenes (ch. 3). In Proclus' case, a century and a half later, it would seem that he just turned up to a lecture by Syrianus,¹⁴ and then commended himself to Syrianus and one of his inner circle of followers, Lachares, by ostentatiously worshipping the rising moon as he left the house at the end of the session—as a result of which, it would seem, Syrianus asked him to stay to dinner, and subsequently received him into his circle.

Moving on from Plotinus, I merely note the school of Porphyry, since we know virtually nothing about it, save that it existed. He presumably set it up, in Rome, on the ashes of that of Plotinus (which seems to have simply dissolved at his death), after his return to Rome from self-imposed exile in Lilybaeum in Sicily some time after the death of Plotinus in 269, perhaps in the mid-270s. The philosopher Iamblichus is declared by Eunapius to have studied with him (and previously with a sort of deputy of his, one Anatolius, Eunap. VP 5.1.467), and we know the names of a number of other pupils, such as Gedalius, to whom he dedicated his vast commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. The school will have continued for upwards of thirty years (his death is generally fixed at shortly after 305). It is possible that his wife Marcella (to whom he addresses a rather pompous epistle at around the turn of the century) filled for him something of the same role as Gemina did for Plotinus. At any rate, reading between the lines of the distinctly defensive proem to his epistle, we may gather that there were many relations of Marcella (who was a widow with five children, her husband having been a 'friend'—perhaps an aristocratic disciple—of Porphyry's) who were highly indignant at the marriage, and who had been making trouble. Despite Porphyry's high-minded denial, there must have been an estate there worth fighting about.

II

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If we turn from the uncertainties surrounding Porphyry to the school established by Iamblichus at Apamea after his departure from Porphyry, we find more or less the same degree of informality manifesting itself as we saw in that of Plotinus.¹⁵ Iamblichus, it would seem, returned from his sojourn in Rome to his native Syria some time in the late third century, and established himself in Apamea, a flourishing town in the Orontes valley, already notable as the birthplace (and perhaps also the place of work) of Numenius, and the town to which Plotinus' senior pupil Amelius had retired in the late 260s. Amelius himself was probably already dead by the time Iamblichus arrived¹⁶ (though his protégé Hostilianus Hesy-chius, to whom he bequeathed his library,¹⁷ may well still have been around). The important factor, though, from Iamblichus' point of view, was the existence of a local patron, in the person of Sopater, scion of a prominent local family, who may or may not have been acquainted with him previously.

We come upon him, in Eunapius' narrative, already well established in Apamea, with a flourishing school, including members from Cappadocia (Aedesius and Eustathius), and even mainland Greece (Theodorus of Asine and Euphrasius). The school appears to have had at its disposal more than one suburban estate (proast-eion, VP 1.12.458), whether provided through the beneficence of Sopater, or from Iamblichus' own resources, on which the disciples could live a communal life. It seems that Iamblichus imposed something of a Pythagorean regime on his followers—as a back-up to which, no doubt, his Pythagorean Sequence, a set of ten works, put together largely from extracts from previous works, and serving as an introduction to all aspects of 'Pythagorean' philosophy, was composed. Eunapius tells us (VP 1.12.458) that he devoted himself unstintingly (aphthonōs) to his pupils, merely ↵ retiring occasionally by himself to pray and meditate—a custom which led to the growth of wild rumours about levitation and suchlike!

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The business of the school would seem to have involved, after the study of the basic principles of Pythagorean philosophy, first, a course in the logic of Aristotle (if we may conclude that from the existence of a massive commentary by Iamblichus on the *Categories*, and some evidence of ones on the *De Interpretatione* and *Prior Analytics* as well), and then the study of a carefully selected sequence of Platonic dialogues, designed to take one through the philosophy of Plato in a coherent order. We are given some account of this in the Anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, a (probably) sixth-century

compilation (ch. 26).¹⁸ First there came a sequence of ten dialogues, beginning with the First Alcibiades, which inculcated the basic self-knowledge which enabled one to embark upon a programme of Platonic philosophy, and followed by the Gorgias (civic virtue), Phaedo (purificatory virtue), after which one passed to the properly theoretic level, the study of true reality (ta onta). Here one first worked through the Cratylus, to acquire a theory of language, then the Theaetetus, for the study of concepts, then the Sophist and the Statesman for the study of cosmic realities,¹⁹ and the Phaedrus and Symposium for the study of theology. As the culmination of this whole course he chose the Philebus. This, however, is only the first cycle; the course concludes with the study of the two 'summits' of Platonic wisdom, the Timaeus, covering 'physics,' the study of every aspect of the physical world, and the Parmenides, for 'theology', the study of intelligible reality.

p. 409 How long all this was designed to take, in terms of years, we have no idea, but the general impression that one receives of the procedure ↵ of ancient philosophical schools is that there was no hurry—a serious student might spend upwards of ten years with his master (as Plotinus did with Ammonius, and Amelius with Plotinus).²⁰ Iamblichus doubtless commented on the text of the dialogues in considerable detail. We have evidence of detailed commentaries by him on virtually all of those in his cycle,²¹ and for each of them he proposed the radical notion that they had one single skopos, or subject-matter, to which all parts of the given dialogue, including the apparently casual details of the introductory portions, related.²² The working out of this Procrustean system involved a large degree of allegorizing, and forcing of the text, but it was actuated by the belief that the divine Plato could have done nothing at random, and that a dialogue must be a single, coherent living whole, on the lines laid down by Socrates in the Phaedrus (264c).

Apart from normal school seminars, there will have been public disputations from time to time, as in the case of the visit to the school (related by Eunapius, 5.3.406) of a rival philosopher, Aly-pius, who tries to put Iamblichus on the spot by asking an awkward question—really a proposal for discussion: 'The rich man is either unjust, or the heir of one unjust, yes or no?' Iamblichus in the event deflects the question, but we can see here in operation a procedure not unlike the mediaeval disputation, or indeed the modern press conference, to which a philosopher might submit from time to time, for purposes of self-advertisement or public relations. The school also went on periodic outings, it would seem, as on one occasion to the hot springs at Gadara—a considerable journey south, into present-day Jordan (VP 2.2.459)—where the great man impressed his followers by conjuring up a pair of spirits, Eros and Anteros, out of adjacent wells.

p. 410 Another kind of external relations in which a philosopher of Late Antiquity might indulge was the composition of 'letters', popular ↵ expositions of aspects of his doctrine in epistolary form, addressed to friends, former pupils, patrons (male or female), or distinguished public figures. Iamblichus is actually the only later Platonist of whom we have any surviving letters (preserved in extracts by John of Stobi in his Anthology), and they illustrate well the range of topics and recipients which might be covered. We find letters to various pupils: to Sopater (also, perhaps, a patron), On Fate, On Dialectic, On Bringing up Children,²³ On Ingratitude, On Virtue, and On Truth; to Dexippus (whose short commentary on the Categories survives) On Dialectic; to Eustathius, On Music. There is one to Anatolius, presumably his old teacher, On Justice; two to a certain Macedonius, On Fate (perhaps the weightiest, from a philosophical point of view), and On Concord; one to the lady Arete, On Self-Control; and a number of others to persons of unidentifiable status. One figure, however, Dyscolius, is identifiable with probability as the governor of Syria around AD 323, towards the end of Iamblichus' life,²⁴ and this reminds us of a significant aspect of the philosopher's Sitz im Leben, his relations with those in authority. Iamblichus' position was secure so long as the anti-Christian Licinius was in power in the East—we have most interesting testimony to his relations with the court in the form of a series of letters addressed to him by an anonymous correspondent who was plainly a prominent member of Licinius' staff, and very probably an ex-pupil²⁵—but when Constantine took over, it became increasingly difficult to maintain such a prominent centre of Hellenic culture and religion, and the school, under Sopater's successor²⁶ Aedesius, had to go underground, re-emerging somewhat later in Sardis.

Let us turn now, moving forward a century, to the so-called Athenian School, and to its most prominent figure, Proclus. We have already caught a glimpse of the circumstances of his arrival in Athens in 431.²⁷ He was met at the port of Piraeus by his friend Nicolaus, who was a fellow-Lycian, and was prepared to offer him a place to stay until he found his feet. Nicolaus was himself studying rhetoric, and may indeed have made some attempt to enroll Proclus in the school of his master,²⁸ but Proclus' inclinations were firmly directed towards philosophy, and specifically towards Platonism, and this led him, more or less inevitably, to the feet of its chief, if not only, exponent, Syrianus, son of Philoxenus, himself the designated successor of the grand old man of Athenian Platonism, Plutarchus, son of Nestorius. Marinus (loc. cit., n. 13 above) gives us a pleasant description of what may have been an introductory interview, at which there was also present one Lachares, who seems to have been a kind of assistant, or senior student, of Syrianus' (holding a status analogous, presumably, to that of Amelius vis-à-vis Plotinus, or Sopater with Iamblichus). I will let Marinus take up the story:²⁹

As they were still conversing, the sun came to set, and the moon, emerging from her conjunction with the sun (ὑπὸ συνόδου) made her first appearance.³⁰ So they moved to dismiss the young man, seeing as he was a stranger,³¹ so that they could have leisure on their own to pay reverence to the Goddess. But he, after proceeding just a short distance, and himself observing the moon appearing from her (zodiacal) house, stopped in his tracks, took off his shoes, and, as they looked on, made his prayer to the goddess. At that, Lachares, struck by the frank and fearless behaviour (παρρησία) of the young man, remarked to Syrianus, employing that admirable expression of Plato's about great natures (cf. *Rep.* 491e–492a): 'This fellow will either come to be a great good, or its opposite!'

p. 412 And at that, the young Proclus was accepted into the inner circle. Syrianus took him into his house,³² and then introduced him to the aged Plutarchus, who had officially retired, but who was prepared to take on this promising young man for private lessons. With Plutarchus, Marinus tells us (ch. 12), Proclus read Aristotle's *De Anima* and Plato's *Phaedo*,³³ and Plutarchus was so pleased with him that he suggested that Proclus should take notes of his expositions and write them up; and, to encourage him in this, he put it to him (rather significantly, in view of what we know of the provenance of other surviving commentaries, such as that, ostensibly, of Hermeias on the *Phaedrus*)³⁴ that in future times they would be regarded as *Proclus'* commentaries on the works in question.

There is no evidence, in fact, that Proclus took him up on this generous offer, but he plainly owed a good deal to his association with the old man, which went on for his first two years in Athens, after which Plutarchus died. It is not clear, in this time, whether Proclus also took lectures from Syrianus, but it rather sounds from Marinus' narrative (chs. 12–13) as if Syrianus had farmed the young man out to his own former teacher, until he should have covered all the preliminaries to the 'advanced' course in Platonism, which in fact amounted to a thorough survey of Aristotle's works—as Marinus specifies, 'in logic, ethics, politics, physics, and theology'. Apart from the *De Anima*, then, we may conjecture that in these first two years with Plutarchus, Proclus was taken through the *Organon*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics* (at least *Met.* Λ—but possibly A, M, and N as well, on which Syrianus himself composed a commentary, which survives). That would be quite a demanding schedule, but these works may well not have been read *in toto*.

At any rate, when Proclus finally transferred full-time to Syrianus, he was ready—after what Marinus describes (ch. 13) as 'the preliminary initiations and lesser mysteries' (προτέλεια καὶ μὴ μυστήρια)—for initiation into the central mysteries of Platonism. ♪ This presumably means the Iamblichean canon of dialogues, culminating in the two 'summits' of philosophy, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*.

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Syrianus himself did not survive for many years after Plutarchus. He was certainly dead by the time Proclus composed his own dialogue on the *Timaeus* (in 440, when Proclus was 28, as Marinus tells us), and he is generally agreed to have died around 437. In his last year, according to Marinus (ch. 26), having got through the Plato course, he gave Proclus and one of his fellow senior pupils, Domninus, the choice of a seminar on the Orphic poems or on the Chaldaean Oracles, but Domninus and Proclus could not agree (Domninus favouring the Orphics, Proclus the Chaldaeans), and while they were still dickering, Syrianus died; but we can observe from this the general direction that instruction might take—culminating, after a full course of Platonism, in more properly theological and even theurgic revelations.

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We get no very clear idea, unfortunately, from Marinus about the communal life of Syrianus' school. Plainly, there were other students than Proclus, though not many may have lived 'in', as Proclus did. We know of Lachares, for a start, but there was also Plutarchus' grandson³⁵ Archiadas (who may also have shared his sessions with Plutarchus—at any rate, the old man bequeaths him to Syrianus along with Proclus (Marinus, ch. 12)—and of course Hermeias. But how many more? I think it improbable that there were many. We are dealing with tiny groups here—little more than half a dozen serious students, probably, at any one time, though the number of hangers-on and occasional attenders at lectures may have been larger. I suppose, between one source and another (Marinus, Damascius, Proclus' own dedications), we have names of about a dozen students of Proclus covering the whole period of over forty years during which he was head of the Athenian Academy. ↪ A number of these, such as Archiadas, Hierius, son of Plutarchus, Hegias, son of Theagenes, Damascius' master Isidorus, Marinus, Athenodorus,³⁶ Asclepiodotus,³⁷ or Pericles of Lydia,³⁸ will have stayed with him for a considerable time, but still the evidence does not point to a group of more than half a dozen serious students at any one time.

As for the day-to-day work of the School, Marinus tells us (VP 22) that Proclus would deliver five lectures (*praxeis*) a day,³⁹ and sometimes more, while also composing up to seven hundred lines. And this did not prevent him from paying visits to other philosophers, and from giving informal evening seminars (*ἀγγραφοὶ ἀσπεριναὶ συνουσίαι*). The point of describing the evening *synousiai* as *agraphoi*, 'unwritten' is presumably to contrast them with the daytime lectures, which would be delivered from a written text. If we may speculate about the daily timetable, I would suggest an early start (8.00 a.m., or even 7.30?), culminating in lunch around 2.00 p.m., followed by a siesta, and then perhaps an *agraphos synousia* around 5.00 p.m., followed by dinner, attended by the whole School. After that, or perhaps during the siesta period, the great man might find time to compose his seven hundred lines (possibly dictated to a slave *amanuensis*). Later in the night, at any rate, Marinus tells us, Proclus devoted himself to prayer and occasionally the composition of hymns (some of which we still have),⁴⁰ since he was very sparing of sleep. No doubt this is an idealized picture, but still anything resembling this routine would be pretty gruelling, especially as one got older.

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Proclus' school was not, so far as we can see, entirely a one-man show, though the status of assistants is something on which we have little guidance. Plainly, in all the schools we have looked at, senior students came to be entrusted with pedagogical tasks of one sort or another, whether or not this conferred on them any official position. In Plotinus' circle, Amelius and then Porphyry were set various such tasks, such as refuting the Gnostics (Porph. *VPlot.* 16), but they are not explicitly said to be involved in teaching. In the case of Iamblichus' school, we have no evidence, but we have observed him studying with, prior to Porphyry himself, Anatolius, whom Eunapius describes as τῶν κατὰ Πορφύριον τὰ δεύτερα φερόμενος, which seems to point to some kind of deputyship (the phrase is used later by Photius—probably reproducing the terminology of Damascius—at *Bibl. cod.* 181, introducing the *Philosophos Historia*, to describe the position of Proclus' pupil Zenodotus: διάδοχος καὶ οὗτος Πρόκλου, τὰ δεύτερα Μαρίνου φέρων—which I take to mean 'successor to Proclus, acting as assistant to Marinus'). This is presumably also the solution to the mystery of the status of Domninus as *diadochos* to Syrianus (Marinus, VP 26): he was an 'associate *diadochos*'! Apart from this, we also hear of such figures as Athenodorus giving seminars (cf. above n. 36).

Certainly not every day can have taken the course outlined by Marinus, because, despite his unworldly attitudes, Proclus' life had a practical, political dimension. Engaging in civic politics in an increasingly Christianized Empire had its dangers, but Marinus tells us (ch. 15) that Proclus

sometimes took part in political deliberations, attending public meetings on city affairs (τοῖς κοινοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως συλλόγοις παρ-γινόμενος), and proposing resolutions with sound judgement. He also consulted with magistrates on matters of justice, not only exhorting these men, but in a manner compelling them, with plain speaking befitting a philosopher (τῇ φιλοσόφῳ παρρησίᾳ), to do their proper duty.

He also seems to have had some supervisory role in public education.

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All this reminds us that the late antique philosopher was, after all, whether he liked it or not, a public figure, and if one was not of the now prevailing faith, that role could be troublesome. There does appear to have been at least one period where, Marinus tells us (*loc. cit.*), Proclus found it prudent to withdraw for a year from ↪ the city, and undertake a cultural and religious tour of Asia Minor. Marinus speaks darkly of a 'hail-storm and mighty wave of troubles' (ζάλη καὶ τρικυμία πραγμάτων) which could possibly refer to the fall-out from the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but could have been something much more local; at any rate it was a

period where a Hellenes had to keep his head down. The Academy in this period, as we know from both Damascius (*Phil. Hist.* §102 Athanassiadi) and Olympiodorus (*In Alc.* 141, p. 92 Westerink), was very well endowed—Damascius talks of an income of 1000 gold *nomismata* (= *solidi*) and more in Proclus' day,⁴¹ the product of generations of endowments and legacies—and this, while giving the *diadochos* a certain clout in civic politics, and providing a comfortable living (especially for a man of such sober habits as Proclus), also gave hostages to fortune: there was the ultimate danger of expropriation, if Christian enthusiasm got out of hand.

IV

These reflections bring me, finally, to touch on the topic of the philosopher in politics in this era. As we have had occasion to observe, none of the holy and divine men with whom we have been dealing was quite as untouched by the 'real world' of society and politics as they would, no doubt, have wished to be. Plotinus was a society figure in Rome (leaving aside speculation on what political connections had been necessary to set him up there in the first place), and was well connected at court; it is even possible, as I have suggested, that the assassination of Gallienus, and the accession of the rough Illyrian soldier Claudius Gothicus, proved a serious blow to the school. The flourishing of Iamblichus' school at Apamea was plainly intimately bound up with the survival of the anti-Christian regime of Licinius; when Constantine was victorious, the school simply dissolved. The Academy at Athens survived, despite the vicissitudes hinted at by Marinus, until whatever Justinian did to it in 529⁴²—but whatever that really was, it seems effectively to have closed it down, and caused a scattering of the faculty.

In all three cases, it is interesting to note that, while the great man himself is not involved in politics, someone in his immediate circle always is: in the case of Plotinus, the Arabian doctor Zethus; in that of Iamblichus, his senior pupil and probable patron, Sopater (for whom his foray into imperial politics in Constantinople in the late 320s, after Iamblichus' death, proved fatal, as Eunapius tells us⁴³)—but there is also his anonymous friend at the court of Licinius, plainly a former pupil, and possibly, as I have suggested above, none other than Julius Julianus. In the entourage of Proclus, we have above all the figure of his close friend Archiadas, grandson⁴⁴ of Plutarchus, but also Archiadas' son-in-law, Theagenes, who was plainly a prominent member of society, and a useful patron of the school. At VP 14, Marinus tells us that, while Proclus himself was too high-minded to enter actively into political life, he 'encouraged Archiadas to devote himself to it, instructing him, explaining to him the political virtues and methods, acting like coaches who pace runners, exhorting him to direct the affairs of his whole city, and at the same time to render services to individuals, in every kind of virtue, but especially in the area of justice.' So Archiadas was in effect appointed the legal and political adviser of the Academy, and he seems to have performed this role effectively enough. He appears to have bequeathed this role to Theagenes, to whom he gave in marriage his daughter Asclepigeneia (the Younger). Theagenes must indeed have been one of the most prominent men in Athens in the latter part of the century. He was an eponymous archon at some unknown date, which in this era is a sign of great distinction, a patricius, and a member of the Senate in Constantinople, and Damascius tells us (*Phil. Hist.* §100) that he used his great wealth for various civic purposes: besides supporting the Academy, 'he spent money on teachers, doctors, and other matters relating to the welfare of his fatherland'—that is to say, he paid the salaries of public teachers and doctors. Marinus speaks of him, in VP 29, as 'our benefactor (*euergetēs*)'—that is, benefactor of the Academy—though Damascius, with his usual waspishness, speaks of Theagenes being hostile to Marinus, when Marinus succeeded Proclus as *diadochos*, despite Marinus' efforts to conciliate him (*loc. cit.*). So it would seem, on the whole, that, while our philosophers were not by any means as unworldly as they make out, they did prefer to appoint surrogates when it came to really getting one's hands dirty.

All in all, then, the philosopher in late antique society was a respected and active member of the community, sometimes, it would seem, in the direct pay of the community in which he taught—though this is not the case with the figures I have been dealing with—but always supported financially by a patron or patrons of some sort. Only in the case of the late antique Athenian Academy do we find a more or less self-supporting philosophical institution. With the onset of Christianity, things became inevitably somewhat fraught—though not by any means as promptly as one would expect⁴⁵—and, unless one came to some arrangement with the Christian establishment such as was entered into by Ammonius in Alexandria in the 390s (and such as the Athenian philosophers disdained), the game was bound to be up sooner or later. In Athens, the shutters came down, effectively, in 529 (though philosophical activity, such as the writing of commentaries,

did continue in private after that, as we know), while in the capital of Constantinople the end did not come until 726, with the closing of the university—and by that time the professors, men such as Elias, David, and Stephanus, had long been Christian.

Notes

- 1 Porphyry does not tell us what prompted his move from Athens to Rome. He leaves us to assume that he came to sit at the feet of Plotinus, presumably having heard some report of him at Athens. Eunapius, however, in his brief life of Porphyry (*VP* 4.6.456), seems to imply that he came to Rome initially to seek his fortune as an independent philosopher (ἵνα κατάσχη διὰ σοφίας τὴν πόλιν), but then came upon Plotinus, and was captivated by him. Eunapius, however, is a generally unreliable man, at least when out of range of his own personal experience.
- 2 This is rather curiously phrased—συνόντος δὲ ἄλλως ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις—but it seems to imply getting together for discussions *in a different way*, i.e. not in the regular way. Armstrong renders this as ‘only engaging in general conversation with his friends’, which is a paraphrase rather than a translation, but may indeed convey the true sense. The French *Vie de Plotin* translation gives ‘néanmoins il enseignait d’une autre façon, dans ses entretiens’, which is certainly nearer to the Greek, but leaves the situation obscure. It is not made clear whether or not Plotinus is still in Rome, but it is a reasonable assumption that he was holidaying in Campania, on the estate of one of his friends, Zethus or Castricius, and talking informally with his associates there. It is hardly conceivable that Plotinus would ever have stopped philosophizing for very long.
- 3 The summer vacation in the schools lasted normally from the end of July to the middle of October. Cf. Marrou (1965) 393.
- 4 Dining together was, of course, a central, and most attractive, feature of the communal life of a philosophical school. We learn most about this from Plutarch 150 years earlier, but we find both Longinus in Athens (*Porph. ap. Euseb. PE* 10.3.1–85 = *Fr.* 408 Smith) and Plotinus in Rome (*Porph. VPlot.* 15) celebrating Plato’s Birthday, the Platoneia, with a formal dinner party, to which outsiders were invited, and at which formal discourses were presented. This would only be the tip of the iceberg, though; there was probably an informal dinner of the school on most evenings, at which philosophical questions might be raised.
- 5 For the account of Plotinus’ school, I borrow from my earlier essay, ‘The Academy in the Middle Platonic Period’ (Dillon 1979).
- 6 On Longinus and his school, see Brisson (1994) 5223–8; but Brisson can cast no light on the relations between Longinus and Eubulus. From the evidence of Porphyry, *Fr.* 408 Smith (cf. above, n. 4), Longinus would certainly seem to have run a school of his own.
- 7 It is quite possible, as is suggested acutely by Saffrey (1992) p. 32, that this Gemina was none other than Afinia Gemina Baebiana, the widow of the emperor Trebonian, killed by his own troops in battle in the spring of 253. It would then have been perhaps in 254 or so that Plotinus might have commenced this happy arrangement, about ten years after his arrival in Rome, as Gemina in her widowhood turned to the patronage of philosophy. She could also have introduced him into Roman senatorial society—if he did not already enjoy that privilege from other sources.
- 8 *Porph. VPlot.* 7. Castricius and Marcellus we do not know of outside the pages of Porphyry, but Sabinillus was consul ordinarius, with the Emperor Gallienus, for 266, and may have been the intermediary through whom Plotinus was introduced to the emperor and to his wife Salonina, while Rogatianus is perhaps the C. Iulius Volusenna Rogatianus who was proconsul of Asia in 254 (*CIL* 3.6094).
- 9 This Zethus (presumably Zayd in Arabic) is an interesting figure, and may even be a link in the obscure chain of influence which brought Plotinus to Rome in the first place, and set him up there so comfortably. Zethus, Porphyry tells us (ch. 7), had married the daughter of one Theodosius, a pupil of Ammonius—so we have an Alexandrian connection. Then Zethus ‘had an interest in politics’ (πολιτικὸς ὦν καὶ ῥοπαῖς ἔχων πολιτικός); whatever that precisely implies, it no doubt involved the ability to make introductions with prominent figures. Do we see here some trace of an ‘Alexandrian Mafia’ at Rome?
- 10 Cf. e.g. Aulus Gellius, *NA* 18.10. Herodes’ villa at Cephisia was plainly something of a port of refuge for Taurus and members of his school.
- 11 This may have been all for the best, after all, but it would have been intriguing to see how it worked out. Can we, in this opposition of a party at court, perhaps see the influence of a sort of ‘Athens lobby’, worried about Platonopolis becoming an intellectual counterweight to the schools of Athens, and thus bad for business—as was also once suggested to me by Peter Brown? But Gallienus was in any case not popular with the senatorial class; indeed, a too close dependence upon him and his wife may have jeopardized the continuance of the school after Gallienus’ assassination in 268 (and possibly contributed to Porphyry’s bout of depression).
- 12 Notably by Olympiodorus, *In Alc.* 141.1–3—though Olympiodorus mistakenly assumes that the Academy had been accumulating endowments continuously from the days of Plato himself. More probably, these endowments (διαδοχικά) go back no further than the days of Marcus Aurelius, if that far, but that does not make Olympiodorus’ evidence any the less valuable for the insight it gives into the funding of the Academy in late Antiquity.
- 13 Cf. Marinus, *VProcl.* 11–12. Of course, we do hear stories of touts for the various schools waiting to nobble prospective students just off the boat in the Piraeus, but that practice is more proper to the schools of rhetoric. Proclus is in fact met off the boat by a friend and fellow-countryman Nicolaus, who seems to have been studying as a sophist at the time, but there seems to be no question of Nicolaus acting as a tout for anyone. Proclus finds his own way to Syrianus.
- 14 Marinus, loc. cit.
- 15 We are dependent for our information on Iamblichus virtually entirely on the rather superficial and sensational account of

Eunapius in his *Lives of the Philosophers* (5.457–61)—though Eunapius does claim (5.1.11.458) to derive his information in part from his teacher Chrysanthius of Sardis, who in turn was a pupil of Iamblichus’ pupil Aedesius.

16 He was certainly dead by the time Porphyry composed his *Life of Plotinus*, but we do not know when that was; and he was also dead by the time Porphyry composed his *Timaeus Commentary*, since he tells a rather sad little anecdote about him (Fr. 74 Sodano).

17 Porph. *VPlot.* 3.47.

18 Edited most recently, in the Bude ´ series, by Westerink et al. (1990). I follow here the corrected scheme set out by Westerink in the Introduction, pp. lxxi–iv (the received text is both corrupt and confused at various points).

19 This may come as something of a shock to many modern Platonists, but in fact Iamblichus appears to have discerned the proper subject (*skopos*) of the Sophist as the sublunary demiurge (performing as a sort of cosmic sophist), and the *Statesman* as concerning the heavenly demiurge (on the basis of the myth). It must be confessed also that these two dialogues have been left out of the list by the dimwitted compiler, but Westerink (loc. cit.) has shown convincingly that they must have been included, in this place.

20 And indeed as Porphyry doubtless would have, had their relationship not been interrupted by Plotinus’ death (Porphyry’s withdrawal to Lilybaeum was for health reasons only).

21 Only for the *Theaetetus*, *Statesman*, and *Symposium* is evidence entirely lacking—no doubt simply because there are no surviving later commentaries on those dialogues.

22 Cf. on this Proclus, *In Alc.* p. 13, 17 Creuzer (= Iambl. *In Alc.* Fr. 2 Dillon).

23 Sopater was a family man, producing, among others, two sons, Sopater and Himerius, the latter of whom had a son, Iamblichus (called after the philosopher), on whom see Cameron (1967).

24 See *PLRE* 1.275.

25 On this personage, whose letters to Iamblichus found their way, mysteriously, into the correspondence of the Emperor Julian, see Barnes (1978). I am much tempted by the possibility, not suggested by Barnes, that the personage concerned is none other than Julian’s maternal grandfather, Julius Julianus, who had been Praetorian Prefect and virtual head of government under Licinius, which would provide a plausible reason for his being confused with Julian himself. This would put Iamblichus in touch with the top echelons of Licinius’ administration.

26 Sopater himself, shortly after succeeding Iamblichus, had gone off, in 326, rather rashly, to Constantinople to seek his fortune in the imperial administration, and got himself executed through getting mixed up in the politics of the court.

27 Above, pp. 40–56.

28 At any rate, Marinus remarks (*VProcl.* ch. 11) that Proclus was ‘much sought after by the teachers of rhetoric’ (περιμάχητος τοῖς ῥητορικοῖς γενόμενος), a situation which Nicolaus may have had something to do with.

29 Either Marinus heard this story from Lachares himself in his old age, or it had passed down in the folklore of the school.

30 This refers to that period of the month when the moon first comes out from contiguity with the sun, and so becomes visible at nightfall.

31 This shows something of the caution with which practising followers of the Old Faith tended to proceed under an aggressively Christian regime. They could not be sure of Proclus’ allegiances.

32 Presumably the large house excavated in 1955 near the south base of the Acropolis, in which many traces of philosophical activity were found. See on this Franz et al. (1988) 42–4.

33 Psychology would seem to have been Plutarchus’s particular field of interest. Cf. Blumenthal (1975).

34 In fact, simply Hermeias’ written-up notes of Syrianus’ seminars on the dialogues.

35 Marinus’ describes him as Plutarchus’ *engonos*, which would normally mean ‘grandson’, but we learn later (ch. 29) that Archiadus was married to one Plutarcha, and had a daughter of the same name as Plutarchus’ daughter, Asclepigeneia. It seems to me possible that Plutarcha was another daughter of Plutarchus (though she *may* have been just a more remote relation), and that Archiadus was really his son-in-law, and his offspring in a merely spiritual sense. Proclus, after all, liked to refer to Syrianus as his ‘father’ (*patēr*) and Plutarchus as his ‘grandfather’ (*propatōr*)—and Syrianus, as we learn from Damascius (*Phil. Hist.* § 56 Athanassiadi), had wanted to marry Proclus to his relative (niece?), Aedesia. When Proclus tactfully declined, Syrianus married her to his other pupil Hermeias.

36 Mentioned by Damascius at *Phil. Hist.* §66G. He is described there, though, rather as an assistant of Proclus, giving exegeses of texts to students himself. The role of such assistants we will discuss in a moment.

37 Dedicatee of the *Parmenides Commentary*, who figures quite extensively in Damascius’ *Philosophical History* (§§ 83, 86, 103 Athanassiadi); he will have been a pupil only in Proclus’ last years, however.

38 Dedicatee of the *Platonic Theology*, who is also accorded a mention in the *Parmenides Commentary* (872, 18–32 Cousin), as having contributed an interpretation of *Parm.* 131de, thus giving evidence of discussion in seminar within the School. Pericles, indeed, sounds more like a senior assistant, to judge from the mention of him in Marinus, *VPlot.* 29.

39 A *praxis* will have been about an hour long, to judge from the surviving commentaries of Olympiodorus, which are divided into *praxeis* of 6–8 Teubner pages (these may, of course, have been amplified in being edited); but this is a pretty formidable load, one would think.

40 Recently published in an excellent edition by van den Berg (2001).

41 To put this figure in perspective, the salary of a rhetor or grammarian in Carthage at about this time was 70 *solidi* a year (*Cod. Iust.* 1.27.1.42). Admittedly, Proclus had an establishment to run, but with no more than one or two assistants to support, he should have been pretty comfortable.

42 This is still controversial, even after Alan Cameron’s enlightening discussion (Cameron 1968), but it does seem to have involved confiscation of Academy assets, as well as a ban on teaching in public—not a total confiscation, however, as Olympiodorus in the 560s attests to there still being some assets, ‘despite the many confiscations that have taken place’.

43 VS 462. It is remarkable, indeed, that Sopater should have had such confidence of advancement at an aggressively

Christian court, considering his background; but he did in fact have considerable success, until he fell foul of the Grand Chamberlain Agapius.

44 Or possibly son-in-law. See n. 35 above.

45 One of the redeeming features of the absolutism of the later Roman Empire was its inefficiency in the enforcement of its own decrees.