

# Late Antiquity: The Regional Specific Nature of Intellectual Tradition

Elena V. Litovchenko\*, Irina V. Zaytseva, Maria A. Rudneva, Natalia Ye. Zolotukhina, Anastasia A. Grechukhina and Mihail I. Dorokhov

*Belgorod State University, Pobedy str.85, 308015 Belgorod, Russia*

**Abstract:** The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the specifics of the intellectual tradition prevailing in some regions of the Late Antique world. For the purpose of a comprehensive review of the problem, the authors focus on well-known intellectuals of the 5th–6th centuries, representing Gaul (Ausonius, Sidonius, Ennodius *et al.*), Alexandria (John Philoponus, Hypatia, Sinesius of Cyrene *et al.*), Africa (Fulgentius, Priscian, Corippus), Isauria (Candidus Isaurus). Despite the fact that, under the influence of objective factors (Christianization, barbarians), the intellectual tradition changed from its ancient model to the medieval one, it fulfilled its most important task - to preserve the best from the treasury of ancient thought and adapt the ancient heritage to a changing world. In conclusion, the outcomes of the study demonstrate various examples of intellectual tradition and the fortunes of "people of written culture" (*literati*).

**Keywords:** Africa, Gaul, intellectual tradition, Isauria, Late Antiquity.

## INTRODUCTION

Intellectuals during the Late Antiquity (4th – 1st half of the 7th cc.) played a crucial role in cultural continuity during the transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages. At the same time, regional specifics left a significant imprint on the nature and characteristics of the manifestation of intellectual tradition. Here we will consider Gaul, Egypt (Alexandria), Africa and Isauria as various examples of regional specific manifestations of "intellectualism" (Kamugisha, 2019).

This The paper considers the specifics of the intellectual tradition prevailing in some regions of the Late Antique world. Intellectuals are understood as representatives of the Late Antique society who got a classical rhetorical education and used their rhetorical skills in the literary field. This category includes those authors for whom intellectual creativity was not a profession or a source of existence, but a kind of way of life, an existential need for the search for eternal truths.

## METHODOLOGY

The as the main sources, we used the works of the Late Antique intellectuals of the West and the East, while we call the intellectuals those for whom mental work and intellectual creativity were not a profession or a source of subsistence, but a kind of lifestyle, an existential need for the search for eternal truths. Representatives of this social group were distinguished by a high educational level, which predetermined their literary activity as their main hobby throughout their life.

The study was carried out as part of an "intellectual history", which focuses on factors that influence the formation and functioning of the regional intellectual elite.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intellectual life of Late Antique society was largely determined by rhetorical education, which laid the foundations of personality. The works of the "magnificent seven": Cicero, Virgil, Plautus, Terence, Horace, Sallust and Livy consist the base of the "program" of the rhetorical schools in Gaul. The oeuvre of Late Antique writers is full of quotes from the great writers of the past and allusions to their works. The classical culture of Late Antiquity with Virgil at its core (Lim 2004) can be regarded as a "book culture" or even a "book religion", in the sense that its adherents believed with much greater fervor in classical education, than in God.

The maintenance of the intellectual tradition took place in the form of intense literary creation, broadcast primarily through epistolography. Correspondence was considered as a marker of the identity of the Late Antique elite, due to the unsteadiness of the previous identifiers – wealth, high posts in the secular administration, etc. A wide epistolary network in the Late Antiquity consolidated the intellectual community and, like the modern Internet, connected separate regions of the empire, equating the center with the periphery, and after the fall of its western part served as a unifying factor for political entities in the post-imperial space.

The role of the provincial intellectual elite significantly increased in the Late Antiquity both

\*Address correspondence to this author at the Belgorod State University, Pobedy str.85, 308015 Belgorod, Russia; E-mail: [litoov.ev@yahoo.com](mailto:litoov.ev@yahoo.com), [litovchenko@bsu.edu.ru](mailto:litovchenko@bsu.edu.ru)

administratively and culturally especially that Rome lost its leading position (Kamugisha 2019). In Gaul, the centers of intellectual culture formed around schools in Lyon, Marseille, Arles, Nimes, Toulouse, Narbonne, Vienne, Poitiers and Bordeaux (Haarhoff 1958). Gradually, Gaul becomes a repository of Roman culture and education (Mathisen 1981; 1993; 1994; 2003; McLynn 2009; Van Dam 1985 *et al.*). This is evidenced by the rich literary heritage of such prominent Gallo-Romans as Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus, Salvianus of Marseilles, Sidonius Apollinaris, and then Gregory of Tours. Among these authors, it is necessary to mention Ruricius of Limoges and Avitus of Vienne, whose epistolary heritage is estimated somewhat lower by both philologists and historians, because of their less perfect artistic and stylistic performance and meager historical content compared to the above authors (Mathisen 1999).

Rhetorical canons demanded language mastery from the authors of the Latin West. With the final division of the empire in 395, the Greek language gradually loses its significance in the West, thereby marking the cultural gap between the Eastern and Western empires. Unlike the 2nd century, when Latin writers wrote in Greek, authors of Greek origin (Ammianus Marcellinus, Claudianus) write in Latin. However, knowledge of the Greek language during this period becomes a sign of belonging to the intellectual elite. Graduates of the Gallic rhetorical schools – Ausonius and Sidonius had advanced level of Greek to translate the works and judge the level of education of other representatives of this layer (Aus. Carm. Com. Prof. Burd. 13). Sidonius translated the work of the Greek writer Philostratus “Life of Apollonius of Tyana” (Sid. Ep. VIII.3). Proficiency in a complex language code guaranteed social exclusivity, and letters remained the usual means of expressing social status and identity (Sid. Epist. VIII. 1; VIII. 6, 11-12). This is one of the reasons why in the Visigoth Gaul, Roman aristocrats wanted to provide literary education to their offspring (for example, Rur. Ep. 1.3, 29-40; Ennod. Dict. 10).

By the beginning of the 6th cent. the living “literary cycle” is losing its global character: 112 correspondents of Sidonius Apollinaris lived in central and southern Gaul, around centers such as Clermont, Lyon, Narbonne and Bordeaux. The geographic range of the epistolary network of Ruricius of Limoges, closely connected with the network of Sidonius, is becoming even smaller. However, the intellectual tradition

continues to be maintained in Gaul, although not on a previous scale. The epistles of Desiderius from Cahors in the 7th cent. on the topic, style and functions of writing, retains the tradition of writing senatorial letters of the 4th–5th cc., dating back to the literary samples of Cicero and Pliny. Venantius Fortunatus, for example, wrote not only poetic letters in the traditions of Horace and Ausonius, but even composed pragmatic *epistolae commentaticiae* and official works on behalf of the Merovingian King in poetry. Therefore, it can be concluded that in small and scattered communities, specific aristocratic writing habits should have been preserved: Desiderius or Venantius Fortunatus undoubtedly appealed to an audience capable of appreciating the literary qualities of their letters (Schwitter 2017; Hildayanti, & Alie, 2016).

Alexandria. In Late Antiquity Alexandria continued to be the key development center of the intellectual culture of the East Mediterranean. Alexandrian intellectualism comprises a set of mental and verbal foundations of Alexandrian society, carried out by social actors, in particular, by intellectuals: scientists, theologians, through oral, written and other types of communication. A combination of key principles of Alexandrian intellectualists and the historical process of their existence, creation, absorption, and influence of these ideas may be called the intellectual tradition.

Many brilliant writers, philosophers and theologians lived in early Byzantine Alexandria, among them: Philo, Origen, Arius, Athanasius, Theophilus, Cyril of Alexandria, Hypatia, John Philopon and others, who had a great influence on the development of philosophy and theology (Trequattrini 2018 *et al.*).

Alexandria remained an important center of classical education, young people from all over the empire came here to study. Religious differences, however, did not play a decisive role, which contributed to maintaining the status of Alexandrian classical education under Christianization. For example, the most famous student of the pagan philosopher Hypatia was a Christian and Neoplatonist, the future bishop of Ptolemais, Synesius of Cyrene (Haas 1997). Neoplatonic philosopher, bishop, he devoted his life to poetry, rhetoric, and believed that the Hellenic path is a cultural path. The social and political environment of Synesius gave him the opportunity to create a career as an influential public and statesman. The philosopher was an important character in relations with people such as Troilus, Hypatia, Theophilus. The communication of Synesius with his associates was

carried out through correspondence, which once again confirms the idea that epistolography was an established channel for transmitting intellectual tradition. The value of Synesius as a philosopher, as a speaker, politician and bishop is great. He was not only trying to save his province from oppressive taxes and lawlessness, he is also known for his original understanding of pagan philosophy and Christian thought. He became a Christian, adopted the title of bishop, but in fact for him the Church was a new type of Platonic republic in which religion had the same status as in the Plato's "Laws".

With development of institutions of the Christian Church and Christianization of the Empire, the confrontation between the Church and Late Antique intellectuals sharply increases primarily due to the persistence of theurgical practices in Alexandrian schools. The assassination of Hypatia in 415 (Socrat. HE 7.13-15; Ioan. Nic. Chron. 84.95) caused wide resonance and inflicted damage on the position of pagan intellectuals (Watts 2017). Another episode that shook the positions of pagan teachers (Zachar. Vit. Sev. 22–23) took place in 486, when a student named Paralius clashed with pagan teachers into an inner-city confrontation between Christians and pagans, requiring intervention by imperial authorities and ending not in favor of pagans (Watts 2010). Nevertheless, in contrast to other intellectualists' centers of Late Antiquity, in the late 5th century Alexandrian intellectualists had reached compromise with the Church authority through the signing of an agreement between scholar of Neoplatonic Alexandrian school Ammonius Hermiae and Pope Peter III of Alexandria also known as Mongus. All this allowed providing a process of peaceful co-existence of the two branches of Alexandrian intellectual tradition, which survived until the Islamic conquest in 641. Despite the fact that the theological school was actively developing in the early Byzantine time, and its representatives, including hierarchs of the Alexandrian Church Alexander, Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyril played an important role in main Christian discussions, even in 6th c., we find information about the preservation of a certain status of pagan teachers, for example, the pagan Ammonius played a significant role in the training of the Christian philosopher and theologian John Philoponus (Haas 1997). Finally, the school of Ammonius and Olympiodorus the Younger lasted until the beginning of 7th c. (Watts 2006; Matandare, 2018). The agreement averted the threat of closure of the school, how it happened in Athens before, and strengthened the

position of both the school and its pagan teachers in a shifting political world.

Thus, we can talk about maintaining the role of Alexandria as one of the leading intellectual centers of the Empire during the early Byzantine time.

Africa. In Late Antiquity Africa was a province of the Roman Empire, then it was part of the Kingdom of Vandals and Alans (429-533), and in 533 became part of the Byzantine Empire. We are considering the period which characterized by the coexistence of various representations of the world - ancient (pagan) and early Christian, the peculiarity of which lies not in a categorical opposition to each other, but in a close interweaving. This time is also characterized by the "last outbreaks" of Latin culture in the East.

We know several intellectuals who were of African origin - Fulgentius, Priscian and Corippus. Their works was written in Latin, which, first of all, is identified with the classical tradition. Mythology, the idea of the eternity of Rome as elements of the classical tradition, are firmly entrenched in their literary heritage.

Fulgentius is known to us for a number of works, among which are "Mythologies" and "The Exposition of the Content of Virgil According to Moral Philosophy". Despite the content of the works reflecting the ancient classical heritage, the author does not abandon the ancient classical culture, but adapts it for the Christian readers (Hays 2003; Hays 2004; Litovchenko 2014). These works are written in Latin, however, they contain violations in the use of the grammar of Latin, barbarisms are used that indicate the degradation of the classical culture of modern society (Kamugisha 2019).

Priscian, was a native of Mauretania Caesariensis, but worked in Constantinople. Priscian's main work "Institutes of Grammar" is a comprehensive study of Latin grammar, based on the grammatical tradition of Greek and Latin writers (Schwitter 2017). "Institutes of Grammar" indicates the need for students and leading officials of the administration, whose language was Greek, to master Latin and use it at the level of fulfilling their official duties. Thus, Latin and Greek in Constantinople at the beginning of 6th c. still continue to be state languages that coexist on an equal footing.

A distinctive feature of Corippus is the choice of the genre in which his works was written. Corippus is an epic poet. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that in his main work "Iohannis" he describes the events taking place in

the province of Africa after its “return” to the Byzantine Empire. Important is the fact that for his poem, Corippus does not choose a significant event - for example, the recapture Africa, but less significant, local fact, which traces the classical epic tradition of attention to a small episode and its hyperbolization up to a universal level. In addition to the ode to the principal character - John Troglita, the poem provides geographical and ethnographic information about Africa, in which Christian motives are also traced (El Shamsy 2020).

Despite the firm position of Latin in the eastern part of the Roman Empire in the 5th – the beginning of 6th c., its status will change by the middle of the 6th c. and gradually to the 7th c. it will lose its significance: its existing continued only in the West (including Africa) as the basis of Western Early Middle Ages culture. The Latin layer of Early Byzantine literature will be forgotten. Africa shows a clear trend towards the migration of intellectuals to Constantinople. This is apparently due to their sense of fragility of the Byzantine power in the region.

Isauria. Let's have a look at Isauria in its «political prosperity» during the second half of the 5th cent., when the natives of Taurus foothills had an enormous effect on Byzantium internal policy. The natural isolation of the region, the way of riches accumulation by war leaders and the elite separation – all of these facts caused a war career in Constantinople as a social priority for Isaurians (Shaw 1990).

It is no coincidence that consolidating into the metropolitan elite the mountaineers actively used well-educated secretaries for precise genealogy setting-up for noble Isaurians to confirm their rights, for studying land buying and selling documents (Lim 2004).

Later family feats were glorified and that caused literature patronage. One of the brightest example of so-called «penny-a-liners» was Candidus Isaurus, from Isaurus highlands by origin. Photios, the 5th century historian, in his *Miriobiblion*, denoted on Candidus Isaurus's poetry and historical writing. In the introduction he defined his position as *Υπογραφεύς* — a scribe, or *νοτάριος* – a notary (Destunis 2008). His work describing a great rope of his compatriots on Byzantium in the 5th cent., was very tendentious (Filatov 2011).

Some Isaurians, like Zenon's wife wrote poems by themselves (Lenski 1999) (collection «Seleucia

Paulina»). Zenon the Emperor kept the lodge of poets to glorify his success.

Isidore's mention of Master Illus – an Isaurian leader of rebellion against Zenon, was described his as one «feeling an extraordinary affection to knowledge» (Matandare 2018). This might be interpreted in two ways – Illus could impress contemporaries by his intellect or it could be an approval of his communications with Pamprepius, the pagan Egyptian philosopher and poet. Namely because of Illus, Pamprepius became a quaestor in 479, then «a patrician» and later «an honorable consul» (Brooks 1893). In any case it is an obvious fact of close collaboration of the Isaurian and the intellectual, besides the last one also took part in the rebellion against Zenon (Schwitter 2017).

Political survival and success in the Early Byzantium then (in civil, military, church or court politics) depended on allies and confederates (Burgess 1992). That's why Isaurian war elite actively integrated in Byzantine culture by means of patronage in the 5th cent. However, there are no many mentioning of Isaurian intellectuals in different sources. It is possibly related to further unpopularity of Isaurians and denunciation of the time of their governance after the Isaurian war in 492-496 (Elton 2000).

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the regions of the Late Antiquity analyzed above, show us various examples of intellectual tradition and the fortunes of “people of written culture” (*literati*). Along with such centers of scholarship as Alexandria in the East, the center of Latin literary culture in Gaul in the West, we observe such small regions as Cyrenaica and Isauria. Despite the difference in the significance of these regions for the Mediterranean world, the intellectuals who represent them together create a dense cultural fabric that allowed the Late Antique world to rub through the transition to the Middle Ages. It is suggested that this study, which has been conducted as part of the “Intellectual History”, be compared with other studies in this field in order to reach a more comprehensive conclusion on this subject.

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Received on 24-10-2020

Accepted on 03-12-2020

Published on 29-12-2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.280>© 2020 Litovchenko *et al.*; Licensee Lifescience Global.

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