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ALAN CAMERON

Earthquake 400¹

For nearly a century no one has challenged the chronology for Synesius' visit to Constantinople established by O. SEECK.² Synesius twice says that he spent three years there,³ and synchronizes his departure with Aurelian's consulate (400) and a serious earthquake: »God shook [the earth] repeatedly during the day, and most people were on their faces in prayer; for the ground was shaking. At the time, considering the sea to be safer than the land, I rushed to the harbour, speaking no word to anyone except Photius of blessed memory – and I only shouted to him from afar, signalling with my hand that I was about to leave. He who left Aurelian, a dear friend and consul, without a farewell has made ample amends for the same offence to Asterius the clerk.«⁴ SEECK referred this earthquake to one recorded by Marcellinus under 402,⁵ and emended Αὐρηλιανὸν... ὕπατον τοῦ ὑπαρχον to harmonize Aurelian's office with the prefecture he had invented for him in 402.⁶ The emendation is unnecessary and even damaging. The phrase »and consul« gives an additional reason why Synesius regrets not having said goodbye to Aurelian. Not just because he was important (which is all ὑπαρχον⁷ would imply) but because, as ordinary consul in office, he was the *most* important man in the entire East and so, being in addition a personal acquaintance of Synesius, eminently entitled to the courtesy of a personal farewell. T. D. BARNES⁸ has recently given reasons for returning to the earlier chronology,⁹ which placed Synesius' arrival in 397/8 and his departure in late 400 – that is to say during Aurelian's consular year. BARNES concludes (a trifle weakly) that »to suppose an earthquake in the city in 400 as well as

¹ I am grateful to JACQUELINE LONG for valuable criticisms of earlier drafts.

² Studien zu Synesios, Philologus 52 (1894), 442–83.

³ De insomniis 14, 148C; Hymn i (iii) 432.

⁴ Epp. 61 (FITZGERALD's translation, but with several changes). The »amends« are a rug Synesius sent Asterius as a present.

⁵ Chron. Min. II (MGH AA xi) 67.

⁶ Aurelian's alleged prefecture of 402 requires detailed discussion elsewhere; meanwhile see BARNES, note 8.

⁷ Οἱ ὑπατικόν (= *consularis*, i.e. former consul), SEECK's other suggestion (p. 459) to get out of the clear chronological implications of the transmitted text.

⁸ Synesius in Constantinople, GRBS 27 (1986), 93–118.

⁹ Well argued (for example) by E. T. CLAUSEN, De Synesio Philosopho (Copenhaguen 1831), 16–21.

in 402 presents no difficulty«. Fortunately we can do much better than that. Though omitted from all four modern lists of earthquakes in Constantinople,¹⁰ one in 400 with exactly the consequences Synesius describes is in fact securely attested by a contemporary source.

I

In his Homily 41 on Acts¹¹ Chrysostom says: »Did not God last year (πέρυσιν) shake our whole city? Did not all run to baptism? Did not fornicators and homosexuals and abandoned men leave their homes and their haunts and change and become religious? But after three days they returned to their own particular sort of wickedness. And why? From sheer laziness!« And again in Hom. 7 of the same series:¹² »If you remember how it was when God shook our city with an earthquake, how subdued all men were? ... No knavery, no villainy then; such is the effect of fear and affliction!«

From the days of Tillemont and Montfaucon, it has been a fixed point in Chrysostomian chronology that the 55 Homilies on Acts were delivered at Constantinople during 400/401.¹³ SEECK was (of course) well aware of these texts, but he dismissed them entirely from the reckoning by alleging that they were delivered 30 years earlier in Antioch (to be precise, in 373).¹⁴ Though his arguments were justly described by his only critic as »light as a feather«,¹⁵ SEECK won a decisive victory: neither Chrysostom passage has ever been discussed again in this connection.¹⁶ Since BONSDORFF's valuable work seems to have had no impact beyond the study of Chrysostom and the point is central to Synesian chronology, the main points must be briefly recapitulated.

First, a number of passages unmistakably describe the preacher as a bishop. For

¹⁰ W. CAPELLE, *Erdbebenforschung*, RE Suppl. 4 (1924), 347; G. DOWNEY, *Earthquakes at Constantinople and vicinity, A. D. 342–1454*, Speculum 30 (1955), 597; V. GRUMEL, *La Chronologie* (Paris 1958), 477; A. HERMANN, *Erdbeben*, RAC 5 (1962), 1104–1112. All but GRUMEL (who does not cite him at all) cite Synesius without comment for 402. It is time for a new, critical list, by someone familiar with the problems of transmission. For some that do not arise in the present case see B. CROKE, *Two early Byzantine earthquakes and their liturgical commemoration*, Byzantion 51 (1981), 122–147.

¹¹ PG 60.201.

¹² PG 60.66.

¹³ See the summary account in J. QUASTEN, *Patrology III* (Utrecht 1960), 440–441 (though not citing here the important work of BONSDORFF discussed below).

¹⁴ Philologus 52 (1894), 460, n.44.

¹⁵ M. VON BONSDORFF, *Zur Predigtätigkeit des Johannes Chrysostomus* (Helsinki 1922), 90.

¹⁶ G. GRÜTZMACHER referred to SEECK's treatment of the homilies in a footnote (Synesios von Kyrene) [Leipzig 1913], 72, n.3); C. LACOMBRADÉ in passing (Synésios de Cyrène: Hellène et Chrétien [Paris 1951], 100–102); after that, silence.

example, the last four columns of Hom.3 (PG 60.39–42) are entirely devoted to an account of the responsibilities of a bishop, and at one point Chrysostom insists that he is »simply speaking as I find it in my own actual experience« (39). Hom. 8 (PG 60.74) refers emphatically to the power of excommunication he enjoyed as bishop, even over the emperor (»as long as I sit on this throne...«, col.60). At the end of Hom.9 an imaginary interlocutor is represented as saying to Chrysostom: »Yes, but you are the leader and bishop« (col.84). Many other passages refer to the power and responsibility he enjoyed to legislate for his flock.¹⁷ None of this would suit Chrysostom's status in Antioch. While already celebrated for the brilliance of his preaching, he was no more than a simple priest in rank, and had always behaved with the utmost tact towards his bishop, the patriarch Flavian.¹⁸

Second, another series of passages alludes to the emperor and his palace as conspicuous fixtures in the world of his listeners. For example, Hom.21 (PG 60.168) alludes to the possibility of an invitation to the palace from the emperor himself; Hom.3 (col.39) refers to both the palace and the bishop's throne; Hom.11 (col.99) and Hom.21 (col.170) refer to the emperor's adventus and victories; the last passage also to the need for petitioners to approach the emperor while seated, since when he rises the audience is at an end; Hom.32 (col.237) refers to the emperor and his council (συλλόγους) deliberating on military and domestic issues, in particular (appropriately enough for 400/401) »overcoming those who make war on them«. It is hardly worth discussing SEECK's positive arguments in favour of Antioch. The account of Theodorus' conspiracy there in 372 to which he attributed so much importance (Hom.38, col.274–5) is recounted as a reminiscence of Chrysostom's distant youth in another city. Moreover, a passage in Hom.25 (col.195) implies (as BONSDORFF pointed out) a contrast between Chrysostom and his flock at Constantinople and Antioch. Commenting on Acts 11.19, Chrysostom concludes that: »both the poor in Judaea and those in Antioch who gave their money benefitted, the latter more than the former; but now both we and the poor [i.e. of Constantinople] are famishing, they lacking the necessary sustenance and we the mercy of God.«

It was undoubtedly at Constantinople that Chrysostom preached his homilies on Acts. In which case the following passage in Hom.44¹⁹ becomes vital: »By the grace of God I too have spent three years (τριετία), not indeed exhorting you night and day, but often every three or seven days.«

The formulation is imprecise, since naturally his regular listeners could be counted on to know exactly what he had in mind. But there can be little doubt that what he meant was preaching as bishop of Constantinople. Now since he was con-

¹⁷ Collected by BONSDORFF, pp. 87–88.

¹⁸ C. BAUR, *John Chrysostom and his Time I* (Westminster, Md 1959), 390–95. With the passages quoted above, contrast the beginning of Hom.3 De statuis: »When I look on that throne, deserted and bereft of our teacher ...« (alluding to the absence of Flavian).

¹⁹ PG 60.66.

secrated on 26 February 398, his third year would have ended on 26 February 401. We cannot be sure that he meant three full years,²⁰ but on the simplest interpretation he delivered Hom. 44 (and in all probability Hom. 41 too) early in 401. Πέρυσιν can mean »12 months ago«, but also no more than »last year«, that is to say 400 if spoken in early 401.

When did Chrysostom begin the series? He is known to have thought that Pentecost was an appropriate time to study Acts (cf. his homily »Cur in Pentecoste Acta legantur«),²¹ and early editors inferred from a passage in Hom. 1 (PG 60.22) that he began at or near Easter. But he goes on in the same homily to ask his listeners whether they are waiting for Lent to be baptized, telling them that this is wrong; any time of the year will do. Obviously he cannot have been speaking at Easter. Hom. 4 on the account of Pentecost in Acts 2.1 does not at all suggest that the festival was at hand when he spoke. And a passage in Hom. 29 clearly states that Easter has come and gone (col. 218); indeed it continues (219): »summer is past, winter is here«. There is nothing in the context to suggest a metaphorical winter rather than the real thing. The end of Hom. 26 (204) vividly evokes cold weather.

There is also one fairly clear allusion at the end of Hom. 37 (PG 60.267) to the expulsion and massacre of the Goths on July 12, 400. After denouncing the war between the soul and the body, virtue and vice, anger and gentleness (and so forth), Chrysostom continues: »Let us make an end of this war, let us overthrow these enemies, let us set up these trophies, let us establish peace in our own city. We have within us a city and a civil polity, with citizens and many aliens (ξένοι): but let us drive out the aliens (ξενηλασίαν ποιώμεθα), that our own people may not be ruined. Let no foreign or spurious doctrine enter in, nor carnal desire. Do we not see that, if an enemy is caught in a city, he is judged as a spy? Then let us drive out the aliens. Indeed let us not merely drive out aliens; let us send our enemies packing too. If we catch sight of a wicked thought,²² let us hand it over to the ruler, our mind, the thought that is a barbarian tricked out in the garb of a citizen. For there are within us many thoughts of this kind, by nature enemies though clad in sheep's skins. Just like Persians when they take off the tiara and trousers and barbarian shoes and put on the clothing that is usual with us, and shave themselves close and converse in our own tongue, but still conceal war under their outer garb; just apply the tests and you bring to light what is hidden.«

²⁰ This passage is not to be pressed too hard, since (as in his preceding paragraph) Chrysostom is clearly and deliberately alluding to the passage of Acts that forms his text: »for three years (the same word *trietia*) night and day I did not cease. . .« (Acts 20.31). This is why he says »I too«. But there seems no reason to doubt that he had indeed been bishop for three years; this was why he thought of exploiting the text in this way.

²¹ For a full collection of references to this practice see J. BINGHAM, *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, (1708–22; reprint London 1875), Bk XIV, Ch.3 and Bk XX, Ch.6.

²² Λογισμός; for the sense »evil thoughts or desires« see LAMPE'S *Patristic Lexicon* s.v. 2c.

BONSDORFF seems to have taken the second sentence literally: »Es gibt der Fremdlinge und der Bürger in der Stadt viele, sagt Chrysostom, und er ermahnt seine Zuhörer, den Frieden wieder herzustellen und die Vertreibung der Fremdlinge zu veranstalten, damit die eigenen Landsleute nicht verdorben werden« (p. 94). BAUR justly objected that Chrysostom »spoke of the expulsion of moral enemies (vices), which dwell side by side with the citizens (virtues) in the city of the soul«. ²³ No careful reader could doubt that Chrysostom's language is indeed metaphorical. But why did he choose these metaphors? The idea of a battle between virtues and vices for man's soul is a commonplace, but there seems to be no other example of the virtues and vices being represented as citizens and aliens. On the other hand there is a striking parallel here with a passage from the anti-barbarian tirade in Synesius' *De regno* of 398: »Certain parts of the empire are aflame, as though it were a human body in which alien elements are incapable of mingling in a healthy state of harmony. Then in the case of cities as in that of the body, we must remove the alien elements« (§ 19, 22BC).

Synesius is talking of the body and Chrysostom of the soul, but both compare barbarians in the state to alien elements in man.

The *xenelasia* Chrysostom recommends was hardly the traditional way of dealing with racial conflicts in Greco-Roman society. A number of classical texts explicitly repudiate it as a harsh Spartan practice, altogether out of keeping with Athenian ways. ²⁴ Yet this is just what Synesius urges in his *De regno* (21, 26A; 24CD, »purge the court«, ²⁵ cf. *De prov.* I.15, 108D). Did Chrysostom share these extremist views? Could he, like Synesius, have uttered these words *before* the violent expulsion of the Goths in July 400? Surely not.

For Chrysostom had till then pursued an entirely different policy concerning the Gothic presence in Constantinople, one aiming at assimilation rather than expulsion. ²⁶ It is best described in the words of Theodoret (*HE* v.30): »Appointing presbyters and deacons and readers of the holy scriptures who spoke the Scythian tongue, he assigned a church to them, and with their help won many from their error [i. e. Arianism]. He used frequently to go there and preach himself, using an interpreter who was skilled in both languages, and he got other good speakers to do the same. This was his constant practice in the city.«

It is true that Chrysostom opposed allowing the Goths an Arian church inside the city, but that was a religious, not a racial question. His goal was to draw the

²³ Chrysostom II (1960), 96, n. 31.

²⁴ H. VOLKMANN, *Kleiner Pauly* V (1975), 1406.

²⁵ *Stratopedon*, commonly used (like Latin *castra*) in this sense in late texts: e. g. Ammian. *Marc.* 14.5.9; 16.8.5; Julian, *Epp.* 74.2; 76.1; 129; Sozomen, *HE* 4.16.20; Constantine ap. Athanasius, *contra Arian.* 70.2 and 86; and not least Synesius himself, *Epp.* 5 and 110.

²⁶ It was thus an oversimplification when A. MOMIGLIANO claimed that »St. John Chrysostom supported the anti-German party in Constantinople« (*Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* [Oxford 1963], 14).

Goths away from Arianism into the true faith. Nor did he stand alone in the attempt: there survive eight letters from the ascetic writer Nilus of Ancyra purporting to be addressed to the Gothic general Gainas himself, attacking Arianism and urging him to convert.²⁷ It is hard to believe that Chrysostom would have uttered such words even in metaphor before July 400. After then (of course) it was a different matter. Not only would such liberal views have been unpopular in the immediate aftermath of Gainas' defeat. The mere fact of his coup may have disillusioned many who had till then favoured a policy of assimilation.

Granted that Chrysostom was speaking at some time in the period late 400/early 401, the fate of the Goths of Constantinople is bound to have been on his mind. Despite the fact that the only aliens he names are Persians and (later) Jews, the allusion to »sheep's clothing« was hardly less transparent. There is a close though more explicit parallel in the Homily on the exile of Saturninus and Aurelian, delivered (probably) in late summer 400, shortly before the series on Acts. Chrysostom is here talking about the 'civil' war of 400, a war that is concealed, not open: »On every side there are a thousand disguises. There are many sheep's skins, and countless wolves everywhere concealed in them« (PG 52.415).

He goes on to denounce those who »flattered and kissed your hand yesterday, but now reveal themselves openly as enemies and cast off their disguises«. While these allusions might seem to suggest nothing more than the ill-fated wolf who so disguised himself in the fable,²⁸ the Goths were notorious for dressing in skins, a fashion that caught on in the capital and was widely denounced by conservative elements. Compare too another passage of Synesius (*de regno* 19 = 22A) in which the Goths in Constantinople are compared to wolves among dogs, the guardian dogs of Plato's *Republic* (*Rep.* 375E f.).

The barbarians' leather garments themselves struck the Romans as peculiarly characteristic of their uncouth ways. In his *De regno* 20 (23C) Synesius had waxed indignant at the shame of »a man in skins leading warriors who wear the chlamys, exchanging his sheep-skins for the toga to debate with Roman magistrates and perhaps even sit next to a consul, while law-abiding men sit behind. Then these same men, once they have gone a little way from the senate house, put on their sheep-skins again, and when they have rejoined their fellows they mock the toga, saying that they cannot comfortably draw their swords in it.«

Here we have the same idea of barbarians hypocritically and temporarily exchanging their skins for Roman dress. *Ἐκὸςθιζουσι* in *De prov.* II.2, 118B may also refer to clothing. In the West at least laws were passed forbidding the wearing of trousers and skins.²⁹ To discredit him, Claudian alleged that the prefect Rufinus

²⁷ Epp. I. 70, 79, 114–6, 205–06, 286 in PG 79; but for doubts about the authenticity of this correspondence, see GRBS 17 (1976), 187–8.

²⁸ B. PERRY, *Aesopica* (Urbana 1952), 500, no. 451.

²⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 14.10.2 (?399, cf. O. SEECK, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* [Stuttgart 1919], 77); 3 (399); 4 (416).

wore skins (In Ruf. II.79 f.). *Pellitus* became the standing epithet in Latin poets of the age for Goth (Claudian, IV Cons.Hon. 466; Bell.Get: 481; Rutilius Namatianus, De Reditu II.49).

»Foreign doctrine« in Hom. 37 is no less clear an allusion to the ancestral Arianism of the Goths. Synesius too refers to »scythicizing« in religion (De prov. II.3, 121B) There can surely be no question that this passage was written when the memory of the Gothic massacre was still fresh in the minds of all, no earlier than autumn 400.

How frequently did Chrysostom preach? During Lent and the festival days of Easter, often every day: for example, Homilies 5, 7, 12, 13 and 14 De statuis open with the word »Yesterday.«³⁰ In Hom. 32 on Acts (PG 60.238) there is one »yesterday« (referring to Hom. 31), but there is other evidence suggesting a more relaxed tempo for this series, which (as we have seen) was not preached during Lent or Easter. In the passage already cited from Hom. 44, he says that he has been preaching »not every day and night, but often every third or seventh day«. That is to say, either once or twice a week. A passage in Hom. 29 (PG 60.217) refers to »so many Prophets twice in every week discoursing to you, so many Apostles and Evangelists.« This implies that twice a week was the norm. If so, it must have taken at least six and perhaps as many as eight or nine months to deliver all 55 homilies. If he began later in the year than Easter/Pentecost 400, and had reached winter by Hom. 29, he could not have finished before 401. And we have already seen that there are grounds for placing Hom. 44 at any rate later than 26 February 401.

There is no way of guessing when he began, but he cannot have preached continuously through summer 400. Already in April or May he was persuaded to postpone a trip to Asia Minor because of the »expectation of trouble«, and our informant goes on to explain that »it was the barbarian Gainas who was the expected trouble.«³¹ Before long, he became very involved in the political crisis. In his homily on the exile of Saturninus and Aurelian he begins by apologising for not addressing his flock for so long.³² Theodoret describes how he went to Thrace on an embassy to Gainas (HE v.33), and his lost life of Chrysostom summarized by Photius (cod. 273, p. 507b BEKKER) evidently gave more details about these negotiations. The trip to Thrace fell after the massacre (July 12), when Gainas retreated from Constantinople to Thrace in late July or August.

Was this the end of his distractions? Not according to C. BAUR³³ and (more recently) W. LIEBESCHUETZ,³⁴ who place in the first quarter of 401 Chrysostom's pro-

³⁰ For other example, see J. BINGHAM, *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Bk XIV, Ch. 4.

³¹ Palladius, *Dialogus de Vita S. Iohannis Chrysostomi* 49, ed. P. R. COLEMAN-NORTON (Cambridge 1928), p. 87.2; cf. G. ALBERT, *Historia* 29 (1980), 506–8.

³² PG. 52.413 f.

³³ St. John Chrysostom II (1959), 145; 155, n.13.

³⁴ Nottingham Medieval Studies 29 (1985), 5.

tracted visit to Ephesus to settle the suit between Eusebius of Valentinopolis and Antoninus of Ephesus.³⁵ The sermon he delivered on his return home begins with a tantalizingly imprecise allusion to the duration of his absence. Scholars have hitherto relied on the Latin translation in PG 52.421, apparently unaware that in 1961 A. WENGER published the original Greek text from a MS in Moscow.³⁶ Unfortunately, the Greek contains the same ambiguity as the Latin: »After leaving his people for 40 days, Moses found them making idols and stirring up sedition. I, however, having been away, not 40 days but 50 and 100 and more (ἀλλὰ καὶ πενήκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν καὶ πλείους = *sed et quinquaginta et centum et amplius*), have found you rejoicing and philosophizing and persevering in the fear of God.«

Is it 100 or 150 days that he has been away? Or is he just counting upwards from his biblical exemplum: »40, 50, 100, even more«? More than 100 days, at any rate; that is to say, more than three months. And if he means 150, as seems on balance more likely, perhaps as long as five months. He goes on to regret not celebrating Easter at Constantinople. In 401 Easter fell on 14 April. Counting five months back from mid April 401 takes us to mid November 400. But there is simply not enough time to squash all the events Palladius describes³⁷ between April and November 400 – and barely enough (assuming 100 days) to squeeze them between April 400 and January 401, quite apart from the improbability of a departure by sea so late in the year. More important, Palladius twice emphatically states that the suit lasted two years (p. 89.23; 91.3), and the first passage clearly refers to the opening of the synod of Ephesus when Chrysostom was present. Since Palladius dates the beginning of the suit to the thirteenth indiction (Sept. 399–Sept. 400), just before Gainas' coup, that means April 400. If Chrysostom was back in Constantinople by the end of April 401, that would make barely one year. It must be Easter 402 (6 April) that he just missed on his return, which would place his departure, 150+ days earlier, around the beginning of November 401.³⁸ That would be

³⁵ The whole sordid business is described at length by Palladius, *Dialogus de Vita S. Iohannis Chrysostomi* 47–53, pp. 84–93 COLEMAN-NORTON.

³⁶ *L'homélie de saint Jean Chrysostome à son retour d'Asie*, REB 19 (1961), 110–123, in addition republishing the (perhaps fifth century) Latin version from an earlier and better MS.

³⁷ His own wait of nearly two months at Hypaipa (G. ALBERT, *Historia* 29 [1980], 507), followed by 40 days in the summer heat, followed by another 30 days (a good five months if we add in travel to and from Constantinople), the report of Antoninus' death at Constantinople and an unspecified period of delay and debate before Chrysostom finally decided to go himself.

³⁸ This would also explain why Palladius was already waiting at Apamea to meet Chrysostom (p. 89.5). On the BAUR/LIEBESCHUETZ chronology he would not have had time to do anything but leave Constantinople together with Chrysostom. So already COLEMAN-NORTON: »Palladius probably spent the winter at Helenopolis« (p. xvii), though he must be mistaken to date their rendez-vous »early in 401«. That would have taken Chrysostom back to Constantinople in plenty of time for Easter 402 – but caused him to miss Easter 401. On the other hand SEECK (*Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt V* [Stuttgart 1919], 577), with »Ende 401

late enough to suit Palladius' reference to winter (p. 88.24), but just within the outside limits of what was considered the safe sailing season.³⁹

So Chrysostom did not leave Constantinople till November 401.⁴⁰ The Homilies on Acts could have been delivered in unbroken sequence from late summer/early autumn 400 on. That scarcely leaves long enough for all 55 before the end of 400. We can either divide them between 400 and 401 (with BONSdorFF), or put them all in 401. For our present purposes, all that matters is that a substantial number of the homilies must in any case be assigned to 401. If so, then the earthquake referred to in Hom. 41 as having taken place »last year« must have fallen in 400.

II

It is one of the curiosities of scholarship that, having so ably countered SEECK's attempt to transfer the Homilies on Acts to Antioch in the 370s, BONSdorFF then accepted SEECK's transference of Synesius' departure to 402. He therefore knew of no evidence for an earthquake in 400 and weakly concluded that Chrysostom, who was very vague (»ungenau«) about chronology, was referring to an (alleged) earthquake of 398.

Yet would even the vaguest of writers say »last year« when he meant »three years ago«, especially when it was only three years since he had arrived in Constantinople himself? It is only three homilies later in the series (Hom. 44) that Chrysostom stressed those three years he had now spent in Constantinople.

More important, it is doubtful whether there was an earthquake in 398 at all. The date was inferred by SEECK⁴¹ from Claudian's list of prodigies that preceded Eutropius' consulate in January 399 (In Eutr. II.24–45). If Claudian had simply mentioned an earthquake, we might have believed him.⁴² But in addition he lists

oder Anfang 402« puts his departure a little too late. The sermon quoted above implies that he just missed Easter.

³⁹ The regular sailing season ran from 27 May to 14 September, but the outside limits were 10 March to 10 November: L. CASSON, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton 1971), 270. Having spent all his life in two of the greatest commercial cities of the Empire, Chrysostom was well aware of the dangers of winter sailing. In fact, ROUGÉ's article quoted below (n. 61) cites a series of texts from Chrysostom on the subject (pp. 319–20). But he misses Palladius, p. 88.24, cited above.

⁴⁰ BAUR attempts to support his chronology by referring to Palladius' statement that the bishops Chrysostom had deposed at Ephesus »four years before« were reinstated after his exile in 404 (p. 91.9), but we have no reason to believe that they were reinstated immediately after his exile.

⁴¹ *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt V* (Stuttgart 1913), 305, 563.

⁴² Most modern critics credulously repeat Claudian's predictable, convenient and improbable list of prodigies without qualm or reservation: e. g. E. DEMOUGEOT, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain* (Paris 1951), 194; M. V. O'REILLY, *Augustini de excidio urbis Romae sermo* (Washington 1955), 89; K. G. HOLM, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 1982), 62. J. HUBAUX used them as a springboard for fur-

not only flood and fire, but weeping statues, wild beasts roaming the streets and even the shores of the Bosphorus clashing together, so that sailors had to avoid new Symplegades! SEECK identified Claudian's quake with one mentioned by Philostorgius (HE xi.7), accompanied by pestilence, famine, torrential rain, drought, whirlwinds, barbarian invasions, hail, frost and even snow, over most of Europe, Asia and Africa. But Philostorgius' quake is given no more precise a date than »in my day«, in a chapter sandwiched between Eutropius' fall and Gainas' rebellion. On the other hand it is said to have occurred »in accordance with the portent of a star in the form of a sword«, which looks like the well-documented comet⁴³ of March–May 400. Comets are much rarer than earthquakes, and if Philostorgius' earthquake happened at all, it is surely more likely to have been Synesius' quake of autumn 400.⁴⁴

BONSDORFF adds a very vague reference in one of Chrysostom's Homilies on Colossians (p. 84), »Who could have expected things that have now happened in various places, earthquakes and destruction of cities?« Even if (as BONSDORFF argues) these homilies date from autumn 399, there is no possibility of pinning this very general evocation of disaster to any time or place. And can we even be sure that it is not just a metaphor? In another homily of this period, an earthquake (together with shipwreck, bolt, storm and upheaval) is undoubtedly (as BONSDORFF concedes) a metaphor for Eutropius' fall (p. 75). We may compare Gregory of Nyssa's claim that Constantinople had suffered an earthquake in 385, referring to the death of Theodosius I's daughter Pulcheria.⁴⁵ A year later he repeated the same image for the death of her mother Flaccilla.⁴⁶

SEECK added yet another batch of texts to his dossier for 398. In a sermon delivered in 410, Augustine described a quake at Constantinople »a few years ago in the reign of Arcadius« that was accompanied by a »fiery cloud« (*igneae nubes*) and a »fearful flame« (*horrenda flamma*) that seemed to hang down from heaven« (De excidio urbis Romae sermo 7). Orosius (almost certainly dependent on Augustine) likewise refers to a flame hanging down from the sky during a quake at Constantinople »in our days« (Hist. adv. pag. 3.1.2). Now according to Marcellinus (Chron. Min. II.64) the quake of 396 was accompanied by a »blazing sky« (*caelumque ardere visum est*). And the anonymous Gallic Chronicle of 452 (Chron. Min. I. [MGH AA IX] 650), while saying nothing about a quake, describes how in

ther flights of fancy: La crise de la trois cent soixante cinquième année, L'Antiquité classique 17 (1948), 343–354.

⁴³ HO PENG YOKE, Ancient and Medieval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources, in *Vistas in Astronomy* 5, 1962 (ed. A. Beer), 161, no. 183; id., *The Astronomical Chapters of the Chin Shu* (Paris and the Hague 1966), 243; W. GUNDEL, RE 11.1190.

⁴⁴ So in fact already GUNDEL, l.c.

⁴⁵ Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam, pp. 461.8, 11, 18; 462.24; 463.1 ed A. SPIRA, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera IX*, ed. W. JAEGER and H. LANGERBECK (Leiden 1967).

⁴⁶ Oratio in Flaccillam, ed. SPIRA, ib. p. 481.

395⁴⁷ »Constantinople was converted in fear of God's wrath beneath a fiery cloud« (*igne super nube*). It looks as if all four are trying to describe a similar meteorological phenomenon – though at 41° latitude hardly (with SEECK) the Aurora Borealis. More probably the tremors at Constantinople were linked to a volcanic eruption somewhere perhaps quite distant whence wind-borne ash created (as it often does) weird celestial phenomena.⁴⁸ For SEECK it was the same phenomenon and so the same year. He then claimed that Claudian also referred to this terrifying red cloud (citing In Eutr. I.4–5, *nimboque minacem/sanguineo rubuisse Iovem*), and since (in his opinion) Claudian's quake could be dated with certainty to December 398, he also dated all the other texts to 398 – including the two chronicles with dates of 395 and 396.⁴⁹ But the quoted lines do *not* come from Claudian's list of portents in Bk II, those that are alleged to have preceded Eutropius' consulate. They come from a quite separate list of *typical* portents in Bk I (monstrous births, twin moons and the like) that are held to have been put in the shade by the portent of a eunuch consul: *omnia cesserunt eunucho consule monstra*.

There is not the slightest suggestion that any of these portents actually happened in 398. It is conceivable that Claudian got his blood-red cloud from an account of the phenomenon described by Augustine and the two chroniclers, but if so, it did not happen in 398. For almost certainly Bk I of the In Eutr. was written early in 399,⁵⁰ before Claudian had yet received any authentic information from Constantinople that year. Rather than transfer Marcellinus and the Gallic Chronicle to 398, we might suspect instead that it was Claudian who adapted the real earthquake and spectacular red cloud of 396 to serve as one of his imaginary portents so conveniently presaging Eutropius' consulate in 399. More probably, however, Claudian's *sanguineo nimbo* means no more than »rain of blood«, one of the stock ancient (and modern) portents – a suggestion strongly supported by *decolor*

⁴⁷ The entry is placed between the deaths of Theodosius I and Rufinus, January and November 395.

⁴⁸ For example, see the Royal Society report on »The Eruption of Krakatoa and Subsequent Phenomena«, ed. G.J. SYMONS (London 1888), especially Part IV (pp. 151–463) on »unusual optical phenomena of the atmosphere ... coronal appearances ... coloured suns« and the like; pp. 263 f. give a list of »exceptional optical phenomena« from more than 800 localities in the immediate aftermath of Krakatoa; pp. 384 f. a list of volcanic eruptions from 1500–1880 together with their accompanying »analogous glow phenomena«. Some more material is to be found in R. FURNEAUX, *Krakatoa* (Englewood Cliffs 1964), 156 f. On 27 Nov. 1883 fire engines were called out at Poughkeepsie N. Y. and New Haven Conn. to deal with a glow in the sky that turned out to be Krakatoa!

⁴⁹ That is to say, he did not hesitate to transfer Marcellinus' 396 quake to 398 – while basing his entire Synesian chronology on the accuracy of Marcellinus' 402 quake!

⁵⁰ See my *Claudian* (Oxford 1970), 127 f.; on altogether untenable grounds S. DÖPP (*Zeitgeschichte in Dichtungen Claudians* [Wiesbaden 1980], 167 f.) suggests that both books were published together later in the year. See now G. ALBERT, *Chiron* 9 (1979), 623 (»zum Amtsantritt des Eunuchen«).

imber at Bk II.41.⁵¹ The usual wealth of illustrations (from all periods) and bibliography are supplied in A. S. PEASE's commentary on Cicero, *De divinatione* I.98 (*sanguinis ... imber*; cf. II.60, *sanguineus imber*), concluding that the reference is to rain »mixed with and colored by some atmospheric dust of a reddish hue«. If this is the correct interpretation, there would be no contemporary reference in Claudian's words at all.

If it had stood alone, Marcellinus' date might not have deserved such confidence. But the Gallic Chronicle is a well informed work compiled only half a century later (in 452) that preserves several useful scraps of information about the East (for example, the very next entry on Rufinus). And while it does not agree completely with Marcellinus, 395 is closer to 396 than 398. It is also entirely independent of Marcellinus. Furthermore, there is one last source⁵² not cited by SEECK, the twelfth century Chronicle of Michael Glycas (p. 478.20 BONN ed. = PG 158.484C), recording a serious and widespread earthquake lasting for seven days at a date not further specified between Arcadius' accession (395) and Chrysostom's arrival in Constantinople (398). Late though this work is, it is independent of both Marcellinus and the Gallic Chronicle, and its support for their date is not negligible. It is particularly noteworthy that Glycas' »seven days« nicely supports (though not so closely as to arouse suspicion of derivation) Marcellinus' statement that his 396 quake lasted *per dies plurimos*. Given the usual poverty and imprecision of our documentation for earthquakes, the evidence for 395/6 is unusually clear, abundant and unanimous. By contrast, there is nothing but Claudian's vivid imagination in favour of 398. CAPELLE, DOWNEY, GRUMEL and HERMANN quite properly (if unintentionally)⁵³ record no quake under 398.

If SEECK's quake in 398 is eliminated, that leaves no earlier quake during Chrysostom's episcopate at Constantinople with which to identify the quake of the Homilies on Acts.

In the light of the chronology of Chrysostom's homilies here established and the fact that the very same letter of Synesius refers to Aurelian as consul, we can no longer doubt that both writers are describing one and the same earthquake, in 400.⁵⁴ It should be noted that Synesius' »repeatedly during the day« clearly implies (unlike 396) a one day quake. And though there is no such precise indication in

⁵¹ So A. C. ANDREWS in his commentary on the *In Eutropium* (Philadelphia 1931), pp. 26–7, 88.

⁵² And perhaps more still, if DOWNEY was right to date two sermons of Chrysostom mentioning quakes at Antioch to 396 (*History of Antioch* [Princeton 1961], 438). This would bear out the evidence cited below that the 396 quake was more widespread than the others discussed in this paper. But one at least of these sermons may be much earlier (BONSDORFF, pp. 5–7).

⁵³ That is to say, they do not mention Augustine, Claudian, the Gallic Chronicle or any of the relevant sermons of Chrysostom or SEECK's hypothesis in *Gesch.* V.305, 563.

⁵⁴ As taken for granted by scholars before SEECK: e.g. E. T. CLAUSEN, *De Synesio Philosopho* (1831), 16, n.2; see too MIGNE's preface to PG 60, 9–10.

Chrysostom, his remark that three days later it was forgotten hardly suggests a series of quakes lasting seven days.

There may well have been another in 402. But in the absence of any other documentation, can we have any real confidence that Marcellinus did not simply misdate the quake of 400? There is also another possibility. Theodoret records another providential quake that is said to have changed the Empress Eudoxia's mind about the first banishment of Chrysostom in September 403 (HE v.34).⁵⁵ If this quake happened at all,⁵⁶ it happened in 403. No one can exclude the possibility that there were quakes at Constantinople in 400, 402 and 403,⁵⁷ but we should at least consider the possibility that Marcellinus' 402 quake is in fact the same as Theodoret's 403 quake, in which case it would have to be transferred to 403.⁵⁸ If so, that would remove any possibility of linking it to Synesius' departure, since he cannot possibly still have been in Constantinople as late as September 403. In all probability only one earthquake took place during Synesius' three years at Constantinople, in autumn 400.

III

Synesius makes it clear that he returned home by sea, in which case he is not likely to have found a boat ready to leave after the end of the sailing season, 14 September.⁵⁹ According to Mark the Deacon, Porphyrius of Gaza was urged not to sail to Constantinople because of the proximity of »the winter equinox« (which the following chapter reveals to have been the *autumnal* equinox⁶⁰); having disregarded

⁵⁵ Theodoret's quake is repeated with further embellishments in two worthless later Lives of Chrysostom: see BAUR, Chrysostom II 271, n.11.

⁵⁶ The better informed Palladius (p. 51.17 COLEMAN-NORTON) says that there was a »calamity in the bedchamber«, which has usually been taken to imply a miscarriage. Of course an earthquake might bring on a miscarriage... The Emperor Leo VI describes an earthquake *in* the imperial bedchamber (BAUR, l.c.)!

⁵⁷ Epp. II.265 of Nilus of Ancyra (PG 79.265) purports to reply to a letter of Arcadius asking why the city is being so troubled with earthquakes. Nilus replies that it is a judgement for exiling Chrysostom, which implies that he is writing after the quake of 407 (cf. GRBS 17 [1976], 187). However they are counted, there were a lot of earthquakes during the reign of Arcadius.

⁵⁸ Marcellinus is in general among the more reliable of the chroniclers, but (for example), he misdates the earthquake of 478 to 480: E. STEIN, *Histoire du Bas-Empire II* (Paris/Bruges 1949), 787, with B. CROKE, *Byzantion* 51 (1981), 131.

⁵⁹ L. CASSON, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton 1971), 270–272.

⁶⁰ H. GRÉGOIRE and M.-A. KUGENER translate »solstice d'hiver« (Marc le diacre: *Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza* [Paris 1930], p. 28), which is certainly what the phrase should mean (cf. LSJ s.v. τροπή Ib), but in the context it must refer to the autumnal equinox, which fell three days before Porphyrius in fact sailed. It should be added that, as P. PETERS showed in a little known article, the *Life of Porphyrius* is a work of almost pure fiction dating from (at earliest) the mid sixth century (*Analecta Bollandiana* 59 [1941], 65–100; cf. R. MACMULLEN, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* [New Haven 1984], 86–9). Porphyrius' voyages are dated

the advice and sailed (on 25 September), once there he was unable to leave till the following Easter.⁶¹ Libanius describes how as a student he could not find a ship to take him from Constantinople to Athens because the sea was »already closed to seafarers because of the season« (Or. i. 15). In the end he was able to make a private arrangement, at a price, but it is clear from what he says that there was no regular passenger transport by sea during the close season. Given Synesius' ignorance and fear of the sea,⁶² it is hardly likely that he would have been willing to risk the Propontis in winter. And at no time of the year was there a land route from Constantinople to Cyrene.⁶³

Did he sail direct to Cyrene? Or did he, as LACOMBRADÉ (without any evidence) assumed, go via Alexandria?⁶⁴ As it happens there is some evidence after all. It comes in the much debated fourth letter of Synesius,⁶⁵ addressed to his brother Evoptius in Alexandria.

This famous and lively piece describes in harrowing detail a nearly disastrous sea voyage from Alexandria to Cyrene. The ship sailed on a Friday, but because of the weather put into land on Saturday morning, where they waited »until the sea should abate its fury« for two days. Late in the second day after this, the »thirteenth of the waning [month]«, fell the New Moon. There should be enough here to enable us to fix the year.

Unfortunately there is sufficient uncertainty to produce a number of different solutions, from 397 to 410, the most popular being SEECK's 404, supported by GRÜTZMACHER. The problems are: what calendar was Synesius using, and did he reckon the two days spent ashore inclusively or not? The problems are analysed and all possible solutions set out with great thoroughness in a useful though ultimately unsatisfactory recent paper by D. ROQUES (RÉG 90 [1977], 261–295). He has made it virtually certain that the days spent ashore were Saturday and Sunday, in which case the New Moon fell on Tuesday night/Wednesday morning. As for

thus not because they really happened then (Porphyrius himself may never have existed), but to demonstrate the power of true faith. When bad weather was expected, there was none. But on the way home, when calm weather was expected, there was a storm, which did not abate till Porphyrius catechized the ship's captain, an Arian! It follows that the writer carefully chose his dates to suit his thesis; they are therefore typical. For a useful analysis of Porphyrius' voyages, see J. ROUGÉ, in *Oikoumene: Studi paleocristiani pubblicati in onore del concilio ecumenico Vaticano II* (Catania 1964), 64–6.

⁶¹ Marcus Diaconus, *Vita Porphyrii* 33; 52. For other examples see J. ROUGÉ, *La navigation hivernale sous l'Empire romain*, RÉA 54 (1952), 316–325.

⁶² See Epp. 4, with CASSON, p. 268 n.1.

⁶³ Epp. 157 describes Cyrene as cut off from the world during winter.

⁶⁴ »A peine a-t-il touché bord à Alexandrie (printemps-été 402) qu'il réembarque presque aussitôt pour Cyrène...« (Synésios de Cyrène: I Hymnes [Paris 1978], xxx. No source is cited for this remarkably precise narrative.

⁶⁵ Unhelpfully renumbered 5 in A. GARZYA's new edition, *Synesii Cyrenensis Epistolae* (Rome 1979).

the calendar Synesius was using, here the evidence is less clear. In general, to be sure, Synesius used Egyptian months (cf. Epp. 13 and 36, with ROQUES, p. 277, n. 1). But the phrase »thirteenth of the waning month« (p. 20.7 GARZYA) refers to no calendar in current use.⁶⁶ It is an archaizing and artificial way of designating the end of the lunar month, with the aim (as the context makes clear) of exploiting the associations of unlucky thirteen.⁶⁷ And although this might suggest the 28/29th of a lunar month, we shall see that the correct date is in fact the 28th of a julian month as well as a lunar month, in May 401.

ROQUES eliminated all but one of the 15 years he considered possible on a variety of grounds (some better than others), and was left with October 407. Yet two of his rejected years he eliminated on grounds that are no longer valid: 401 because (following SEECK) he believed that Synesius was at Constantinople that year; and 404 because Synesius says nothing throughout the 15 pages of the letter about his wife, at that very moment (according to ROQUES) expecting his first child in Alexandria. But now that we know Synesius left Constantinople in 400, he could easily have sailed from Alexandria to Cyrene in 401. And his marriage and the birth of his first son have likewise only been dated to 403–4 on the assumption that he did not leave Constantinople till 402.

All we know of the date of the marriage is that the ceremony was performed by the Patriarch Theophilus (Epp. 105), and so evidently while Synesius was in Alexandria. Epp. 123 shows him returning to Cyrene after two years in Egypt, and since he was certainly back in Cyrene in time for the barbarian invasions that began in 404/5, by when he had both a wife and one child (Epp. 132), on the SEECK chronology that left only 403–4 for this two year stay. It followed that both marriage (»rapidement conclu«⁶⁸) and first child had to be fitted into this period.

But now that we have two more years to play with, we are free to place the marriage in 401 or (to allow a more leisurely courtship) 402. The first child could have been born in 402–3 as easily as 404.⁶⁹ Nor is it any longer necessary to date the two year stay to 403–4, rather than (say) 401–2 or 402–3. Synesius may also have made other trips to Alexandria during the period 400–404. For example, Epp. 129

⁶⁶ Though it is of no help with our problem, reference may now be made to the long antiquarian scholion on this passage published by A. GARZYA, *Boll.com. n.s.* 8 (1960), 49, reprinted in his *Storia e interpretazione dei testi bizantini* (London 1974), no. 28.

⁶⁷ Oddly enough ROQUES does not notice in this connection that Synesius had already made the point that the ship's crew consisted of *thirteen* anything-but-able-bodied men (»there were twelve sailors on board, with the skipper making the thirteenth«, p. 12.7 GARZYA). The associations of foreboding created in listing the crew have already been pointed out by R. PACK, *Folklore and Superstition in the Writings of Synesius*, *Classical Weekly* 43 (1949), 52 – though oddly enough without reference to the »thirteenth day« of p. 20.7.

⁶⁸ C. LACOMBRADÉ, *Synésios de Cyrène: I Hymnes* (Paris 1978), xxx.

⁶⁹ ROQUES promises to explain elsewhere his private information that this child was born in November or December 404, but since 404 is too late anyway, the point need not be pursued here.

describes arriving there accidentally after setting out for Constantinople. Since his wife was presumably an Alexandrian, he may well have brought her with him on such trips to see her family. So even if we accept the implication of a remark in Epp. 18 that the twins born in 405 (Epp. 53), like his firstborn, were conceived in Alexandria, this need have no bearing on the date of the two year stay, the marriage, or the birth of the firstborn.

It would be difficult to assign the flippant tone of Epp. 4 to Synesius' latter years, burdened as they were with episcopal responsibilities and clouded by the successive deaths of all three sons. In fact, as SEECK saw,⁷⁰ one passage (p. 18.16 GARZYA) clearly implies a date within a year of his return from Constantinople. At a moment when all seemed lost, claims Synesius: »I was lamenting, not so much my approaching death (the god of hospitality be my witness!) as the sum of money which would be lost to that Thracian before whom, even when dying, I should feel shame.«

Obviously Synesius' brother (to whom the letter is addressed) was expected to know the identity of this Thracian to whom Synesius owed money. Fortunately we know too: it must be the Constantinopolitan Proclus who loaned him 60 *solidi* for the expenses of his voyage from Constantinople. Epp. 129 describes how Synesius sent him payment (plus interest) from Cyrene, together with a batch of letters and various presents to his friend Pylaemenes. Unfortunately the ship to which he entrusted this cargo was turned back to Alexandria by unfavourable winds, and to his surprise and distress Synesius found it waiting for him when he arrived there himself following a similar diversion. Epp. 129 replies to a letter he had apparently received from Pylaemenes before leaving Cyrene. He claims to have been writing to his friend in vain for »a whole year«. It was a batch of letters that came back, but only one ship. Presumably Synesius wrote to Pylaemenes as the spirit moved him, but did not despatch his letters till a suitable opportunity arose, the usual pattern with correspondence in antiquity.⁷¹ Indeed he mentions a special trip to the harbour of Phycus for the purpose.

So it was not the ship's departure but his own earliest letter to Pylaemenes that Synesius dated a year earlier. He may well have begun writing soon after his return from Constantinople. Epp. 129 strongly implies that the letter of Pylaemenes to which Synesius refers is the first news he has had from Constantinople since he left. He regrets that it is only »the excellent Proclus and Trypho« whose greetings to him Pylaemenes had reported, and is obviously embarrassed to learn that his own previous letters and above all Proclus' 80 *solidi* have not long since reached their

⁷⁰ pp. 469–70, restated by LACOMBRADÉ, RÉG 91 (1978), 566–7. Since both were operating on the assumption that Synesius left Constantinople in 402, naturally neither reached the true date.

⁷¹ See (for example) O. SEECK, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet* (Leipzig 1906), 2f. For other information in Synesius on the despatch and delivery of letters, see J. C. PANDO, *The Life and Times of Synesius of Cyrene as revealed in his Works*, Diss. Washington 1940, 62–65.

destination. Repaying the 80 *solidi* cannot have been a problem to a wealthy man like Synesius, and we may guess that one who valued his Constantinopolitan connections so highly would have made prompt arrangements to settle his debt the moment he reached home.

And yet he had clearly *not* made any such arrangements at the time of the voyage described in Epp. 4. The reason is surely that he had not yet reached home. Leaving Constantinople as late in the year as he did, he may not have been able to get a passage all the way to Cyrene. He may have had to wait in Alexandria till the seas were open again, staying no doubt with his beloved brother Evoptius.⁷² This would explain why Evoptius was expected to pick up so allusive a reference to his brother's debt. It was a recent debt, very much on Synesius' mind after his hasty departure from Constantinople on borrowed funds.

It is thus suggestive that in 401 the New Moon that falls on a Tuesday comes as early in the year as 28 May. We have already seen that the regular sailing season began on 27 May. Synesius' ship, which he states to have been carrying more than 50 passengers (including women), was obviously a regular passenger ship, perhaps the first of the year to make the run to Cyrene, leaving Alexandria on 24 May.⁷³

Synesius' account details at least one violent rain storm. Now one of ROQUES' axioms is that: »Le mois cherché ne saurait être un mois d'été . . . L'été durant, sur le littoral libyen et égyptien, de début mai à début novembre, il faut, dans l'hypothèse la plus pessimiste, éliminer au moins les mois de juin-juillet-août et septembre durant lesquels il ne pleut pratiquement jamais.«

As LACOMBRADÉ has already objected, this goes much too far. We just cannot exclude the possibility of a freak rain storm at any time of year. Moreover, if Synesius had been travelling in (say) March or November, he should have expected bad weather. Yet there is no suggestion of this. The boat was packed with passengers, as though expecting a calm and speedy voyage.

There is also one other passage towards the end of the letter which (in a different way) seems to me to lend some general support to this early date. The day after the New Moon the captain beached his ship again, at a little harbour called Azarium. Since the voyage had now lasted much longer than expected, provisions were running short. Fortunately the locals generously made good the deficiency. At this point Synesius treats his brother, tongue firmly in cheek, to a fine traveller's tale. The women of the area, he observes *more Herodoteo*, have been cursed by Aphrodite: they all have unusually large breasts (p. 24 GARZYA). So large, in fact, that they do not hold their babies in their arms to nurse them, but suspend them from their shoul-

⁷² Evoptius could no doubt have settled the debt for him, but then he would have had to reimburse Evoptius. There was no urgency, and it was simpler to wait till he could use his own money in Cyrene.

⁷³ As suggested by J. VOGT, Synesios auf Seefahrt, Kyriakon: Festschrift J. Quasten I (Münster 1970), 400–408.

ders, since their nipples point upwards! They were amazed to discover how poorly endowed Synesius' female fellow-passengers were in this respect, and a skinny slave girl from Pontus »whom art and nature had combined to make more skeletal than an ant« earned a small fortune stripping for the rich ladies of the tribe (p. 25).

Synesius claims to have steered clear of these remarkable females (p. 24.1 f.): »To please you [his brother] I took nothing from the women, so that there should be no truce between them and me, and also so that I should be able to deny it with an easy conscience if required to take an oath.« Of course, this is just banter between brothers, a private joke. Synesius pretends not even to have accepted food from these women so as not to compromise himself. Perhaps Evoptius knew only too well that Synesius was prone to get into compromising situations.⁷⁴ At the beginning of the letter Synesius describes the living arrangements of the passengers, »about a third of us being women, most of them young and fair of face. But don't be jealous, for a screen separated us from them, and a truly stout one at that, a tattered bit of freshly torn sail, to virtuous men the very wall of Semiramis. Even Priapus would have been virtuous if he had taken passage with Amarantus, for there was never a moment when he allowed us to be free of fear of the uttermost danger« (p. 12.20 f.).

Obviously the screen was not stout and not all the men were virtuous. The interesting thing about this banter, I would suggest, is that it is directed at Evoptius, as if it was he who had warned Synesius to steer clear of temptation. Does not this perhaps suggest that Synesius was not yet married? If he had been married, might we not have expected him to handle the motif of temptation rather differently, even in the humorous style of this letter? But it is as a personal favour to Evoptius, not to his wife, that he avoids even a »truce« with the large-bosomed ladies of Azarium.

This is, of course, no more than we should have expected if the letter was written in May 401, before Synesius had yet returned to Cyrene to report on the success of his mission. Next year (or perhaps later the same year) he found himself in Alexandria again by accident. It was presumably on another occasion that he went there to stay for those two years, though he might well have already met his future wife on one of these briefer visits.

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⁷⁴ Remember the revealing passage in § 1 of »on praise of baldness«, describing how he was »cut to the quick when the disaster happened and my hair started to fall out«. »What was my crime«, he continues, »that I should appear less attractive to women?« The significance of this remark is hardly reduced by his subsequent protestations of modesty.