

# Libanius and the Near East

Fergus Millar

## 1. Introduction

Profound changes marked the history of the Near Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the fourth century; and for these processes there are for us few witnesses of greater potential importance than Libanius, who was born in Antioch in 314, spent all of his life there, apart from a few years in Athens, Constantinople and Nicomedia, and died there in 393. His 64 surviving orations, spread over the decades from the 350's to his death, and his 1544 letters, grouped in two periods, from 355 to 365, and from 388 to 393, would have made him an important source even if his standing as an orator had not brought him into contact with some of the central figures in history of the Empire, beginning with a whole series of Emperors: Constantius, Gallus, Julian, Valens and Theodosius I.<sup>1</sup>

The structure of the Roman Empire had been radically transformed in the decades before and after Libanius' birth, and one very significant effect of that, and of the confrontation with Sasanid Persia, was to make Antioch itself one of the seats of Empire — a role which it had on occasion played before,<sup>2</sup> and was never to play again after the

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<sup>1</sup> In referring to Libanius' works I rely of course on the great 12-volume Teubner edition by R. Foerster (1903-23), and on some invaluable recent English editions and/or translations: firstly the Loeb editions by A.F. Norman, *Libanius, Selected Works I: the Julianic Orations* (1969); II: *Selected Orations* (1977); *Libanius, Autobiography and Selected Letters I-II* (1992) — henceforward, in reference to letters, N; then A.F. Norman, *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius (Translated Texts for Historians 34, 2000)* — henceforward A; and finally Scott Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius from the Age of Constantius and Julian (Translated Texts for Historians 41, 2004)* — B. This latter work has been a priceless aid, and it should be emphasised that this paper, intended to locate Libanius in the perspective of the Roman Near East, has no claims to rival Scott Bradbury's intended volume *The Social World of Libanius*. Translations not otherwise attributed are by the author. It goes without saying that O. Seeck's *Die Briefe des Libanius* (1906, repr. 1966) remains fundamental. While these references are intended only as a guide to the sources of the English translations used, and this essay does not aim for bibliographical completeness, it is embarrassing to find that several works referred to by *SCI's* well-informed referee are not available in Oxford: editions and translations by U. Criscuolo (1994, 1996); G. Fatouros *et al.*, *Libanios, Kaiserreden* (2002); A. González Galvez, *Libanio, Cartas-Libros IV* (2005); P. Wolf, *Libanios, Autobiographische Schriften* (1967). I am enormously indebted to comments by J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz and D.A.F.M. Russell. The remaining errors and misperceptions have to be attributed to the limitations of the author.

<sup>2</sup> For the occasional presence of Emperors of the first three and a half centuries in Antioch see F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*<sup>2</sup> (1992), 48-50; *The Roman Near East* (1993), 111-26; 141-59.

370's.<sup>3</sup> Of the Emperors listed above, only Theodosius never came to Antioch during his reign. But it was not merely that, for much of Libanius' life, Emperors were a recurrent presence in the city. In this century, by contrast with the following one, the *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis*, once detached from travelling with the Emperor, and given a regional function, was normally located there (but in the fifth century was established in Constantinople). So also, as is clear, were a succession of *Magistri Militum*, as was the civilian *Comes Orientis*, who functioned as the equivalent, in the secular diocese of Oriens, of the *Vicarii* who now acted as regional governors of groups ('dioceses') of provinces throughout the Empire. For the modern historian of the Near East as it was under Roman rule, the Tetrarchic institution of the Vicariate is, potentially, a very significant development. For, with the designation of a *Comes Orientis*,<sup>4</sup> and subsequently with the detachment of Egypt from the area covered by 'Oriens', in about 380, we find in contemporary official use a term, 'Oriens', which designates, almost precisely, 'the Roman Near East': that is to say the Roman provinces of Syria, Osrhoene, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Palestine and Arabia.<sup>5</sup>

Geographically, this was the entire zone under Roman control lying between the Taurus mountains and Egypt, and stretching (until Julian's defeat in 363, and the loss of Nisibis) eastwards to the Tigris. Historically, it had shared the experience of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires, and then of Alexander's conquest. But whether that common history represented, in any degree at all, the basis for a shared past is a question which remains to be asked, and of the works of Libanius himself not least. Linguistically, all of it (except, as it seems, Cyprus and Cilicia) was marked by the use, alongside Greek, of one or other Semitic language, whether written or merely spoken. In the social awareness of a highly-educated Greek speaker like Libanius did this common factor have any significance?

<sup>3</sup> Note the telling anecdote in John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 88 (*Patrologia Orientalis* VIII.2, 1912), mentioning an official in the fifth century who had the task of looking after the Imperial palace in Antioch, in case the Emperor came. But none ever did.

<sup>4</sup> We are told by Malalas (318-19) that the first κόμηης Ἀνατολῆς to be designated was a Christian named Felicianus, in 335 (*PLRE* I, Felicianus 5). The first documentary attestation of the title comes from inscriptions in honour of Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus (*PLRE* I, Lollianus 5), also in the 330's, further confirmed by Firmicus Maternus, *Math.* I, *pr.* 7: 'totius Orientis gubernacula'. Valerius Maximus (*PLRE* I, Maximus 49) may have been in office with the title *Comes Orientis* in 325.

<sup>5</sup> The modern term, at least as used in F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (1993), does not cover Cilicia or Cyprus, which did however now form part of 'Oriens'. The list of areas or provinces given above does not take into account the successive subdivisions which marked the fourth century and early fifth: Euphratensis, from Syria, perhaps c. 340; Palaestina Salutaris, later Palaestina Tertia, perhaps about 358 (see Libanius, *Ep.* 334); Palaestina Secunda, under Theodosius I (so Malalas, *Chron.* XIII, 42) or Arcadius; Phoenicia Libanensis, or Secunda, perhaps about 400, followed by Syria Secunda and Cilicia Secunda under Theodosius II (so Malalas, XIV, 24). For the most recent discussion of the creation of a separate diocese of Egypt, along with the introduction of the title *Praefectus Augustalis*, see R.M. Errington, 'A Note on the Augustal Prefecture of Egypt', *Tyche* 17 (2002), 69.

It is clear for a start that no political structure, such as a *koinon* in which representatives of the cities met, united the provinces which now came under the *Comes Orientis*.<sup>6</sup> None the less, it will be worth asking below in what terms issues relating to the provinces of this diocese, and their cities, are presented by Libanius.

Finally, among the major officials based in Antioch, there was the governor (*Consularis*) of Syria. Even if we think merely of the hierarchy of civil government, leaving aside both the military command and the financial administration, Antioch could now find represented within it four different levels of Roman government — the Emperor (at certain times), the Praetorian Prefect, the *Comes Orientis* and the *Consularis Syriae*.

In parallel with the Roman imperial hierarchy, so much more emphatically present in Antioch than ever before (or indeed ever again), there had taken place just before Libanius' birth the last assertion of pagan persecution, with a particularly definite phase in Antioch itself,<sup>7</sup> and then the conversion of Constantine, and the proclamation of toleration; there followed Constantine's conquest of the Greek East, and the calling of the Council of Nicaea in 325. Bishops from all the provinces of Oriens attended, and Canon 6 of Nicaea re-affirmed the special status of the bishops of Alexandria as regards 'Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis', and similarly as regards 'Antioch and the other provinces'. The terms used are curiously vague, and no-one was yet applying the expression 'Patriarch'. But the bases of the two major Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch had been laid, and in Canon 4 the leading role of the 'metropolitan' bishop of each province was also explicitly defined.<sup>8</sup> With Imperial backing, a new Christian structure of authority, which (erratically and imperfectly) mirrored that of the Empire itself, had begun to come into being. How, if at all, would Biblical monotheism, the Christian Church, or Imperial attitudes to the traditional pagan cults, find expression in Libanius' vast corpus of writing?

## 2. Libanius and the Contemporary World

The changes which thus marked the world in which Libanius lived were accompanied by further structural transformations of the wider Greek world: the foundation of Constantinople, and the creation of a Senate there, which would progressively act as a new *locus* of ambition for men from precisely the circles in which Libanius functioned.<sup>9</sup> Given the significance of traditional Greek culture in the formation of what sort of person Libanius was, we should not of course expect that everything which seems to us in retrospect to have been of contemporary significance will be reflected in his letters and his sixty-four 'real-life' orations. Moreover, among his output we do also find, apart from his *Progymnasmata* and his *Hypotheseis* to the orations of Demosthenes, a substantial group of 'imaginary' orations which are literary and moralising exercises with no explicit contemporary references, and which include a significant number which deal

<sup>6</sup> See J. Deininger, *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit* (1965), 183f.; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire II* (1964), 763f.

<sup>7</sup> For the phase of persecution in Antioch in the years 311-12, see W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 514-15.

<sup>8</sup> See N.P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils I: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (1990), 7 (Canon 4), 8-9 (Canon 6).

<sup>9</sup> See P. Petit, 'Les sénateurs de Constantinople dans l'oeuvre de Libanius', *Antiquité Classique* 26 (1957), 347.

with historical, or pseudo-historical, speeches set in the Homeric world or in Classical Greece, Athens above all. These may very well be the best available reflection of his teaching and rhetorical performance, and certainly attest the profoundly (and exclusively) Greek character of Antiochene education.<sup>10</sup> But it is equally significant that both his letters and his other orations deal with circumstances and issues in the contemporary world. If literally hundreds of his letters are brief or allusive, or both, and fail to provide us with concrete allusions to places or individuals, that is a function of their role as communications of a conventional type within a familiar social and cultural setting. These limitations (from the point of view of the modern enquirer) admitted, a large proportion of his letters, and all of these orations, engage actively with issues, often acutely controversial ones, affecting (for instance) the life of the city of Antioch, and its relations with the Imperial state, or the ever-present borderline, or area of tension, between men's obligations as city-councillors and the privileges to be gained by Imperial service,<sup>11</sup> as well as criminal prosecutions, disputes over property, the conduct of his role as a publicly-appointed teacher of rhetoric, or letters of recommendation addressed to Imperial officials.

What is more, we ought to acknowledge both the variety of genres which are in fact to be found within the category of his works labelled as 'orations', and the weight and significance to be attached to particular examples. We will look a little more closely below at his *Antiochikos*, the fullest representation of the history, topography and urban character of any city known from Antiquity. Then there is his *Autobiography*, — or *Life*, or *On His Fate*.<sup>12</sup> Wolf Liebeschuetz points out that *autobiography*, as opposed to biography, had not been a common genre in the Imperial period, and that it must be significant that this work, originally composed in 374 and successively expanded later, was followed by Gregory of Nazianzus' *On his Own Life* in 381, and Augustine's *Confessions* of about 397. No-one would attribute to Libanius' work, occupying some 125 Teubner pages, either the originality or the spiritual depth of the *Confessions*. But, precisely in its obsession with good and ill fortune, success and failure, or hostile moves by enemies and how they were overcome, it does represent a style of representation of the author's own life, focusing on his professional career, from beginning to towards the end, which both is very revealing and has no precise model in earlier Greek literature (unless perhaps Isocrates' *Antidosis* played that role).<sup>13</sup> It also exhibits with painful

<sup>10</sup> See D.A. Russell, *Libanius, Imaginary Speeches: A Selection of Declamations* (1996), with an excellent introduction. For the presence of the Greek past throughout Libanius' writings see above all the comprehensive treatment by B. Schouler, *La tradition hellénique chez Libanios I-II* (1984).

<sup>11</sup> For the background see F. Millar, 'Empire and City, Augustus to Julian: Obligations, Excuses and Status', *JRS* 73 (1983), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Or. I; see A.F. Norman, *Libanius's Autobiography* (Oration I) (1965); idem, *Autobiography and Selected Letters I* (see n. 1); J. Martin and P. Petit, *Libanius, Discours*, Tome I: *Autobiographie* (Discours I) (1979), the latter with a very useful introduction, which none the less does not seriously address the place of this work within the genre of Ancient biography or autobiography.

<sup>13</sup> Modern studies of Late Antique biography have tended to concentrate on Christian holy men, see e.g. P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (1983). Autobiography is in any case a different matter, and all the more so when written by a pagan. The

clarity how a prominent rhetor had to balance between the political pressures of his city and those of the Imperial government.

Far more profound in its treatment of the fundamental issues of his time is his *Oration XXX For the Temples*, addressed, at least notionally, to Theodosius I in 386, and reviewing the impact to date of the commitment to Christianity of successive Emperors since Constantine — which, so he claims, had not yet gone so far as to involve any outright ban on sacrifice<sup>14</sup> — but Christian violence, led by bands of monks, was running ahead of Imperial policy, he complains, and should be restrained. Given that the worship of the gods could in the past have been taken for granted as a basic element of the structure of society, there are few if any more explicit expressions from Antiquity of the meaning of pagan acts of worship, and of the consequences if Christian violence ended them.<sup>15</sup>

So they sweep across the countryside like rivers in spate, and by ravaging the temples, they ravage the estates, for wherever they tear out a temple from an estate, that estate is blinded and lies murdered. Temples, Sire, are the soul of the countryside: they mark the beginning of its settlement, and have been passed down through many generations to the men of today. In them the farming communities rest their hopes for husbands, wives, children, for their oxen and the soil they sow and plant. An estate that has suffered so has lost the inspiration of the peasantry together with their hopes, for they believe that their labour will be in vain once they are robbed of the gods who direct their labours to their due end. And if the land no longer enjoys the same care, neither can the yield match what it was before, and, if this be the case, the peasant is the poorer, and the revenue jeopardized, for whatever a man's willingness, surely his inability frustrates him.

This oration thus confronts, in considerable detail — and with repeated reference to local circumstances, for instance the destruction of a statue of Asclepius in Beroea (21) — the major ideological conflict of Libanius' time. So also does his so-called *Epitaphios* for the Emperor Julian (*Or.* XVIII): not in reality an actual funeral oration, but an extensive and profoundly engaged account of the Emperor's life, written a few years after his death, and occupying some 135 Teubner pages. Precisely because it is a powerfully partisan work by a contemporary, and is marked by despair at Julian's two great failures, in the restoration of polytheism and in the campaign against Persia, it should be seen as one of the major works of biography from Antiquity. If, viewed as a work of history, or of historical biography, it suffers from the strongly panegyric tone which marks it, it also

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few pages of G. Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*<sup>3</sup> I.2 (1950), 566-75 on Libanius hardly serve to place this work within the evolution of Greek culture. Before drafting this paper I had not found any illuminating modern analysis of the *Autobiography* as a work of literature, so it is all the more fortunate that W. Liebeschuetz, 'Libanius and Late Antique Autobiography', *Topoi*, Supp. 7 (2006), 263ff., has just been published. This paper has been of great value, not least in its exposition (268-9) of the role of traditional Greek paganism in Libanius' self-presentation (19).

<sup>14</sup> For this issue see now the major paper by N. Belayche, 'Realia versus leges? Les sacrifices de la religion d'État au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in S. Georgoudi, R.K. Piettre and F. Schmidt (eds.), *La cuisine et l'autel. Les sacrifices en questions dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (2005), 343, and also G.G. Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice. Les mutations religieuses de l'antiquité tardive* (2005).

<sup>15</sup> *Or.* XXX, 10, Loeb trans. by A.F. Norman.

gains both from the remarkable range of detail which it contains, and from being the work not merely of a well-informed contemporary, but of one who (like the Church historians of the fourth-fifth centuries) is deeply committed to a particular conception of the Imperial role. The *Lives* of Plutarch, each of a similar length to the *Epitaphios*, and major works of literature as they are, may seem by comparison to be no more than elegant and learned moralising essays. At any rate the question of how we should estimate the *Epitaphios* as history deserves more attention than it has received.

A narrative account of the childhood, education, rise to power, policy and military record, and finally death in battle, of an Emperor could surely be seen as history, since in the nature of the case all narrative history of the Imperial period had a strongly biographical element, as seen most clearly in the *History* by Libanius' younger Antiochene contemporary and acquaintance Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>16</sup> — and above all in his books (XX-XXV) on Julian. But this latter was a work of the early 390's, looking back on Julian over a period of three decades. Libanius' account, by contrast, is by far the earliest full-scale narrative of Julian's reign, and would deserve a central place in any modern discussion of Late Antique historiography.<sup>17</sup>

Briefly to draw attention to these three items out of Libanius' vast corpus of writing serves merely to emphasise that — however literary and traditional his training had been — both as an orator and as a correspondent Libanius was actively engaged with the contemporary world. To examine which aspects of the contemporary world he engages with or comments on, and which he does not, is thus not an empty exercise. How Libanius' attention is directed, and how it is expressed in his works, is a question which offers significant evidence on the fourth-century world. But what *was* the world as viewed by Libanius?

### 3. Greek City and Roman Empire

That the public culture of the Antioch of Libanius' time was entirely Greek does not need to be demonstrated here. The major standard works by Petit, Festugière and Liebeschuetz, followed recently by some excellent collective volumes, leave no room for doubt, or need for further proof.<sup>18</sup> None the less, in two respects we should recognise that this state of affairs, clearly attested as it is, might have been otherwise. Firstly, in the early third century Antioch had been one of a large number of cities in the Near East

<sup>16</sup> In spite of the uncertainties from time to time expressed, I take *Ep.* 1065/N.188, addressed to an Antiochene called 'Marcellinus', to be addressed to Ammianus Marcellinus.

<sup>17</sup> It is to be regretted that Libanius' *Epitaphios* receives no systematic attention in the valuable work edited by G. Marasco, *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity, Fourth to Sixth Century AD* (2003), nor in the masterly survey and analysis by W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (2007). If there is a modern work on political biography which analyses it in detail, I have not found it.

<sup>18</sup> P. Petit, *Les étudiants de Libanius* (1957); A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne: Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie* (1959); J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (1972). See now also E. Will, 'Antioche sur l'Oronte, Métropole de l'Asie', *Syria* 74 (1997), 99ff.; C. Kondoleon (ed.), *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (2000); I. Sandwell, J. Huskinson (eds.), *Culture and Society in Later Roman Antioch* (2004).

which had been granted the status of a Roman *colonia*.<sup>19</sup> The first of the new archives of papyri from the Middle Euphrates duly shows it with the titles of *colonia* and *metropolis* in 245.<sup>20</sup> The city's status as a *colonia* ought in principle to have meant that its coins bore legends in Latin. But in fact no coins securely attributable to third-century Antioch have Latin legends, though reference is made (in Greek) to its being a *colonia*, or quite frequently *mētrokolōneia*, up to the point in 253 when minting stops.<sup>21</sup> This Roman status appears to have had a remarkably fleeting impact on Antiochene culture and identity — so much so that Libanius feels obliged in his *Autobiography* (*Or.* I, 3) to assert that his great-grandfather had been a true native of the city, not an immigrant from Italy, even though it was known that he had once made a speech in Latin. The date should have been not long after the middle of the third century. The grant of colonial status, honorific in its time, is never alluded to by Libanius even in his *Antiochikos* (on which more below).

Alternatively, the historical consciousness, or sense of identity, of an educated Antiochene like Libanius might have embraced either the earlier history of Syria before Alexander's conquest; or perhaps an awareness that the Greek culture of Syria had distinctive regional features; or, alternatively, a recognition that this Greek culture flourished in the context of a wider population speaking a Semitic language. We will return at the end of this paper to these latter questions. But as regards the issue of historical consciousness, we can at least apply a test: what view of the history of Antioch is presented in the *Antiochikos*, delivered at the Olympia in 356?<sup>22</sup>

As so often, the account of the city's origins begins in Greek mythology, with Zeus and Hera, and Inachus and his daughter Io (44f.), then bringing in Cretan and Cypriot mythological figures. Then there is a representation of the role of the city (or the future site of it) in the Achaemenid period (59-71). But after that comes Alexander, and an alleged foundation by him (74) — and with that we are into a quite detailed narrative of the earliest years after Alexander's death, and the definitive foundation by Seleucus (88f.), and a sketch of the Seleucids, including a refoundation by Antiochus II (119-121), then the later Seleucids and — in a brief allusion (129) — the dominance of Rome. At this point the temporal narrative stops, and Libanius turns to the working and nature of the city as it was under the Roman Empire. The *boule* comes first (133f.). Later, he claims that, as a centre for education in rhetoric, Antioch now rivals Athens (184-5):

<sup>19</sup> See F. Millar, 'The Roman *Coloniae* of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations', in H. Solin and M. Kajava (eds.), *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History* (1990), 5, on 41-2.

<sup>20</sup> D. Feissel and J. Gascou, 'Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (III<sup>e</sup> s. après J.-C.)', *Journal des Savants* (1995), 65, no. 1: ἐν Ἀντιο(χείᾳ) κολ(ωνίᾳ) μητροπόλει.

<sup>21</sup> See now the major work of K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria: Northern Syria, 64 BC-AD 253* (2004), 385f.

<sup>22</sup> *Or.* XI; G. Downey, 'Libanius' Oration in Praise of Antioch (*Or.* XI)', *Proc. Am. Philos. Soc.* 103.5 (1959), 652ff.; partial trans. by R. Martin in Festugière (*op. cit.* in n. 18). The translation of 184-5 and 270 used here is that of A.F. Norman, *Antioch*, 5-65, with some improvements suggested by Donald Russell.

In fact, as previously the Greek world was divided between the two states of Sparta and Athens, so in these days the glories of Greece are divided between Athens and us, if Greeks are to be so named by literary culture rather than by race. Indeed, these two torches of rhetoric are held aloft, one illumining Europe, the other Asia, for, first of all, our city has welcomed such fine teachers that if they had not been adjudged worthy of the chairs here, they certainly would have been with regard to those in Athens, since they showed such excellence, some in energy and others in elegance.

Then a very significant section is devoted to a glowing account of the physical topography and architecture of the city (196-229), followed by the suburban region, the sanctuary and resort of Daphne (230-43), and a description of the economic life of the city. Historical events within the Roman imperial period play effectively no part in the picture, apart from popular resistance to the revolt of Eugenius in 303 (159-62), or the capacity of the city to absorb an influx of (Roman) armed forces in the current Persian war (177-80). There is a notable reference to the moment when a *basileus* (in fact Diocletian) had been present in the city, and had participated at the Olympia, garlanded as a *Hellanodikes* (269). By contrast, the evolving place of Antioch in the Imperial system (pp. 155-157 above) is not discussed; and there is no hint that the city might have had a Christian bishop, or have contained a major church. The concluding comparison is with Constantinople and Rome, neither of which is actually named (270):

What city then brooks comparison with ours? She is more prosperous than the oldest states, while to the rest she is superior either in size or mobility of origin or fertility of the land. Moreover, if she be inferior to any in respect of her walls, she yet surpasses the one city in her supply of water, the mild winters, the wit of her inhabitants, the pursuit of wisdom; and in the finest feature of all, in Greek education and literature, she rises superior to a city still greater.

'Hellenic *paideia* and *logoi*' were what really counted. In Libanius' perspective, neither the Ancient Near East of the period before Alexander nor the history and culture of Rome played any significant part, and even a passing reference (174) to expulsions of foreigners from Rome in times of shortage perhaps reflects the present day, not the history of the Republic. But Roman history represents a significant absence from Libanius' writing. In the second and third centuries, however, some educated Greeks had adopted as their own the past of Rome, and had written extensive histories of it.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Ammianus not only wrote his *History*, starting with the reign of Nerva, in Latin, but makes many allusions back to Republican Rome.<sup>24</sup> Notoriously, Libanius himself makes numerous references to the regrettable attraction to young men from his society of learning

<sup>23</sup> See F. Millar, 'Rome in Greek Culture: Cassius Dio and Ulpian', in L. Troiani and G. Zecchini (eds.), *La cultura storica nei primi secoli dell'Impero romano* (2005), 17ff.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Ammianus XIV.6 (moral qualities of early Rome); II, 31-3 (changes of fortune); XV, 10, 9-11 (Scipio and Hannibal); 12, 5-6 (conquest of Gaul); XVII, 11, 3-4 (Scipio Aemilianus, Pompey); XXI, 16, 13 (Cicero, Camillus, Manlius); XXII, 8, 16 (Lucullus); 9, 5-6 (Scipio Nasica and Magna Mater); XXV, 5-16, 23 (historical *exempla* in Julian's speech); XXIV, 2, 16-17 (Scipio Aemilianus); 4,5 (Torquatus and Corvinus); 6, 7 (Sertorius); XXV, 3, 13 (Marcellus, Dentatus, Sergius); 10-11 (campaigns in Thrace); XXIX, 2, 19 (Dolabella in Asia); XXX, 4, 6-7 (Republican oratory); XXXI, 13, 17 (Cornelius Scipio Calvus).



Latin and studying Roman Law at Berytus.<sup>25</sup> As the example of Ammianus shows, it was a possible option within Antiochene culture to go further than that, and to fully absorb Roman history. But everything goes to show that this was an option which Libanius did not take up. In the entire, and very substantial, corpus of his writing there is not a single reference to any Latin writer, nor to any figure from the history of the Republic, apart from one allusion in the *Epitaphios* (233) to the defeat of Crassus, who is not named (μνησθεῖς δὴ τινος παλαιοῦ Ῥωμαίων στρατηγοῦ). We should note, however, that in *Or. XII, To Julian as Consul*, Libanius devotes a page (8-9) to the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the dual consulship.

But, if the history and culture of Rome since the Republic played no part in the frame of reference deployed in Libanius' orations and letters, the contemporary Roman Empire was ever-present, from the new Senate being formed in Constantinople,<sup>26</sup> and its effects on individual careers and on the cities, to the Emperors, to the high officials now stationed in Antioch itself (see above), and to the governors of other provinces — mainly, but not all, within the diocese of Oriens. But it cannot be stressed too strongly how profoundly Greek this 'Roman' Empire was, even though the effective long-term division between East and West was to take place only after Libanius's death.<sup>27</sup> It is no surprise that, as a publicly-appointed orator representing a Greek city, Libanius composed a long series of orations in Greek which were either actually delivered before, or were notionally addressed to, Emperors, high officials and *Consulares* of Syria.<sup>28</sup> As regards the linguistic aspect, relevant both to orations and to letters addressed to office-holders, of discourse in Greek conducted in the public or official context of a Roman Empire whose primary language was Latin, Libanius' correspondence presents two strongly-contrasting features. Firstly, Libanius rigorously avoids — and, so far as I can check, without exception — the transliteration of Latin official vocabulary into Greek. Instead, given the objective of maintaining as pure a Classical language as possible, relatively unspecific circumlocutions are deployed, for instance in speaking of the role of an *advocatus fisci*: ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῶν βασιλικῶν πραγμάτων πόνοις (*Ep.* 861). But where the Latin language does make itself felt throughout is in the single personal names which are in common use for both the upper classes of the Greek cities and for Imperial officials — identified by one name each, with no use either of the Roman *tria nomina* or the traditional Greek combination of name and patronymic. The pages of Libanius' works attest to an extraordinary diffusion of Latin personal names in Greek transliteration, many of them ones whose form would have seemed alien to Cicero: to take only a few

<sup>25</sup> It is not necessary to rehearse again this well-known theme in Libanius. But see now L. Jones Hall, *Roman Berytus: Beirut in Late Antiquity* (2004), ch. IX.

<sup>26</sup> See n. 9 above.

<sup>27</sup> For the twin Roman Empires of the fifth century see F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)* (2006).

<sup>28</sup> (a) Emperors: apart from the *Basilikos Logos* addressed to Constantius and Constans at Nicomedia in the 340's (LIX), four surviving orations addressed to Julian (XII-XV) and eleven to Theodosius (XIX, XX, XXX, XXXIII, XLII, XLV-VI, XLIX-LII). (b) High officials: to Caesarius, *Magister Officiorum* (XXI); Ellebichus, *Magister Militum* (XXII); Icarus, *Comes Orientis* (XXVI); Timocrates, *Comes Orientis* or *Consularis Syriae* (XLI); Eumolpius, *Consularis Syriae* (XL); Eustathius, *Consularis Syriae* (LIV). Other orations are known only by references to them, see Foerster vol. XI, 616-35.

passing examples, 'Italicianus', 'Martinianus'. 'Priscianus', 'Florentius', 'Modestus', 'Albanus', 'Spectatus', 'Fortunatianus'.<sup>29</sup> We may note in particular the letter in which Libanius praises his addressee for the purity of his Greek. His correspondent is called 'Optimus' (*Ep.* 1544).

As for the Latin language itself, it hardly obtrudes on the public discourse reflected in orations or in correspondence with office-holders. Apart from the problematic memory of a speech once given in Latin by Libanius' great-grandfather (see above), the occasions when Latin surfaces are rare; one instance is the point when in his *Autobiography* he refers back with disdain to Festus, *Consularis Syriae* (Σύρων ... ἄρχων) in 365, who was ignorant of Greek, and conducted conversations with Greek-speakers through an interpreter (*Or.* I, 156). Conversely, a protégé from Syria could be recommended to a friend in Constantinople in 361 as being 'pre-eminent in the Greek tongue, but also in the tongue of the rulers, full of legal knowledge, a formidable orator'.<sup>30</sup> Any such person, if they aspired to become a provincial governor, as this man in fact did in the next year, must have acquired at least some proficiency in Latin. But Latin itself plays only a minimal part in Libanius' correspondence, even that with office-holders. The exceptions are significant by their rarity. For instance, when he received a much-treasured letter in 391 from the great Symmachus in Rome, a translator (ἐρμηνεύς) was needed (*Ep.* 1004). The same applied in the following year, when he received a letter from Postumianus, 'the foremost of the Romans'. This time the translation was subject to competition: 'the translators were put to it to render your Latin into Greek, and the best at comprehending each succeeding passage was crowned as victor'. Libanius goes on to suggest firmly to Postumianus that, having made good progress in Greek, he should in future write his letters in Greek.<sup>31</sup> (He makes no suggestion that he himself might attempt to write in Latin). He had however paid a similar compliment to the Roman senator (Aradius) Rufinus, to whom he had written various letters while he was *Comes Orientis* in 362-4. Writing to him subsequently, Libanius describes him as 'having shown a treasure lodged in your spirit derived from ancient and wise men, some writing in your language, some in that of Hellas'.<sup>32</sup>

Such few cases apart, no hint of linguistic ambivalence or comparison marks the scores of letters addressed by Libanius to Imperial office-holders, both higher officials and provincial governors. Libanius' letters are written in Greek, and there is nothing to suggest that he felt the need to seek help to have any of them translated into Latin. It should be stressed of course that our evidence for these exchanges is one-sided: we do not know whether the recipients ever had these letters translated on arrival, or, if they did write to Libanius, whether any of them had first composed in Latin, and then had the

<sup>29</sup> For the background, as regards the reversion to the general use of single names in the Late Roman period, see B. Salway, 'What's in a Name? A Survey of Roman Onomastic Practice from c. 700 BC to AD 700', *JRS* 84 (1994), 124ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 668/B. 79, trans. Bradbury: πρῶτος μὲν ἐν Ἑλλάδι φωνῆ, πρῶτος δὲ ἐν τῇ τῶν κρατούντων, πλήρης νόμων, δεινὸς εἰπεῖν. *Ep.* 1296 confirms that the Iulianus in question (*PLRE* I, Iulianus 15) was a *Suros*, and had learnt Latin.

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.* 1036/N. 181, trans. Norman. See also G. Fatouros and T. Krischen, *Libanius, Briefe: Griechisch-deutsch* (1980), no. 67.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 1493, see *PLRE* I, Rufinus 11; B., 263-4.

letter translated into Greek. But, as we have seen above, Libanius treats the arrival of a *Consularis Syriae*, Festus, who is ignorant of Greek, as something noteworthy. In any case, the first and most obvious explanation for Libanius' consistent use of Greek is that the vast majority of the Imperial office-holders with whom he had contact themselves came from the cities of the Greek-speaking provinces, whether within the diocese of Oriens or outside it, and were native speakers of Greek. This is not the place for a systematic prosopography of Libanius' official addressees (something which in any case was expertly composed by Paul Petit before his death).<sup>33</sup> But it is clear that, apart from Festus and Aradius Rufinus, mentioned above, there are very few instances in Libanius of correspondents holding Imperial offices who can be shown to have originated from Latin-speaking circles in the West.<sup>34</sup> To a striking degree, the functional separation of Latin West and Greek East, which had not yet been formalised in the parallel structures shown by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, has already taken place. Libanius functioned in a Greek world dominated by the Imperial hierarchy and divided into dioceses and provinces — but where Latin culture and Roman history might, but need not, be objects of study, where learning Latin and acquiring a grasp on Roman Law played a significant role, and one which was consciously felt as offering a challenge to traditional Greek education and culture — but where monolingual speakers of Latin hardly obtruded. None the less, it will be relevant to recall, when we ask whether there were any other challenges to Greek culture to be felt in the diocese of Oriens, that 'Rome', in the form of the Imperial system, of an object of ambition for seekers of office, of a body of law and of the Latin language, did both sustain and impinge on the long-established world of Greek culture. But, within the wider world of Greek culture, was the area now formally named 'Oriens' (Ἰωνία) conceived of by Libanius as having distinctive regional characteristics — or as having been simply a part of the Greek world like any other?

#### 4. The Diocese of Oriens

As we have seen above, the new office of *Comes Orientis* is first attested in the 330's, though it is possible that the arrangement whereby the provinces of the Near East were grouped in a 'diocese' went back earlier. But although the new arrangement, combined with repeated wars on the eastern front against Sasanid Persia, conferred an unprecedented status on Antioch within the Imperial system, it cannot be said that we could gain from Libanius any clear impression either of this new wider function of the city or of the region concerned. There is nothing in Libanius' writing to compare with the sweeping and vivid account of the *orientales provinciae* to be found in Ammianus'

<sup>33</sup> See P. Petit, *Les fonctionnaires dans l'oeuvre de Libanius: analyse prosopographique* (1994).

<sup>34</sup> Using the numbering in Petit's excellent repertoire, I can find the following cases (numerals in brackets from *PLRE* I): 66. Cynegius (3) — Maternus Cynegius, almost certainly from Spain. No letters to (or from) him are preserved, but *Or.* I, 23, records that he wrote to Libanius; 152. Italicianus, Italian by birth (Athanasius, *Festal Index*), educated in both Latin and Greek (*Ep.* 238); 204. Nefridius (1). One letter (1315) from Libanius. From Tuscany (Ammianus XXI.5.12); 248. Postumianus (3), see above; 261. (Aradius) Rufinus (5), see above; 262. Rufinus (18). Two letters (1865; 1106/N. 193) from Libanius, from Gaul; 264. (Saturninus Secundus) Salutius (Secundus 3), from Gaul.

*History* (XIV.8). Indeed he never uses the word Ἀνατολή as the name of this area, and deploys his usual somewhat vague and indistinct terminology to refer to the office of *Comes Orientis* itself.<sup>35</sup>

None the less, he does naturally have occasion to address directly, and to speak about, a number of *Comites Orientis* of the 350's onwards. The most prominent of these in the correspondence is (Domitius) Modestus, in office in 358-62.<sup>36</sup> Between them, these letters give some impression of the geographical spread of Modestus' activities: Libanius alludes to resentment over the construction of a stoa dedicated to Dionysus in Antioch (*Ep.* 196/N.68); an appeal relating to a farmer near Beroea (*Ep.* 276); Modestus visiting Cilicia (*Ep.* 34/N.48), as well as Egypt, perhaps also Palestine (a dispute over the post of *eirenophylax* at Elousa, *Ep.* 101/N.54); and to his taking active steps in Euphratensis and Mesopotamia in 359 in the face of a Persian invasion (e.g. *Ep.* 49/N.41). In 359 Libanius appealed to him (*Ep.* 37/N.49) in connection with the treason trials at Scythopolis in Palestine, at which he presided (Ammianus XIV.12.6f.).

More revealing, in a different way, are the four orations of Libanius which are either addressed to Icarius, *Comes Orientis* in 384-5 (*Or.* XXVI), or relate to him (the two orations against him, addressed to Theodosius I, *Or.* XXVII-VIII; and XXIX, on a flogging ordered by Icarius). It is above all *Or.* XXVIII which both illustrates the range of places which came under the *Comes*' rule and, more important, gives a vivid impression of Libanius' view of what the key social units in these provinces were. In a word, as we will see in more detail below, in Libanius' conception (as in Ammianus', see above) the prime feature of one and all of the provinces of Oriens was the set of cities which it contained, both as physical urban centres and as social formations, whose well-being depended on that of their *boulai* and that of the educated landowning gentry who filled them (or might rise into Imperial service, or travel to other cities in search of further rhetorical training, or of expertise in Roman Law). Protection of both the dignity and status, and the financial resources, based on land, of this class is represented as a key duty of Roman government. *Or.* XXVIII, addressing Theodosius I, stresses this point more than once, and first near the beginning (4):

So you know well and fairly, how important its *boule* is to a city and how it is no less than its keel is to a ship, and of what rights it is regarded as worthy by the greatest *boule*, I mean that of Rome, and how these rights have been disturbed by time, and how by that they (the *bouleutai*?) have been ruined — (so) you, o *basileus*, have issued a law that those in this rank and dignity may not be beaten by any government officials.

Later in the speech (23) Libanius returns to the same point: 'For we know that it is on the *bouleuteria* that the cities rest, and if you remove these, nothing remains'. The oration concludes with a final plea to the Emperor to come to the aid of the *boulai*, while in the course of it Libanius records (7) how Icarius had come to Phoenicia and ordered the beating of a man fulfilling a major liturgy there, while Bostra (in the province of Arabia) had witnessed the same, as had Arethousa (in Syria), where he had ruined an

<sup>35</sup> For example, *Ep.* 386: 'the greater *arche*' (compared to that of the *Consularis Syriae*); *Ep.* 1315: ἀρχή ἢ μεγάλη μὲν σοι παρ' ἡμῶν (*PLRE* I, Nefridius I); *Ep.* 364: ἀρχων (*PLRE* I, Modestus 2).

<sup>36</sup> *PLRE* I, Modestus 2; B., 255-7.

impoverished *bouleutes* of philosophical disposition by imposing heavy charges on him. Similarly, in Beroea (in Syria) two *politeuomenoi* had suffered from Icarius (8), as had Lampadius and Philodemus and other *politeuomenoi* in Arados, in Phoenicia (25).

Libanius' orations and speeches may thus serve to illustrate how the actions and attitudes of a *Comes Orientis* could be felt across the diocese, even if he never has occasion to define the region concerned, or to analyse how the different layers of regional authority related to each other. But, as a consistent and — as has been suggested above — very significant set of presuppositions informs Libanius' conceptions of what the provinces of Oriens consisted of (namely, without exception, cities), it will be worth tabulating briefly some examples of the light which he throws on different places across the diocese:

### Syria

Apamea: Julian judges case over *proteia* against Laodicea (*Or.* XVIII, 187); Olympius there in 361 to watch the festival of the Olympia (*Ep.* 668); Alexander, *Consularis Syriae*, 363, visiting Apamea to investigate liability to the *boule* (*Epp.* 1351/N.104; 1357/B.95; 1389-90; 1392/B.97); corruption in grants of exemption by the *bouleontes* (*Or.* XLVIII, 14).

Balanea and Paltos: Problems of *boulai* (*Or.* XLIX, 12).

Beroea: Destruction of bronze statue of Asclepius (*Or.* XXX, 22); keeper of animals for shows (*Or.* XXXIII, 21); appeal to Modestus for poor farmer near there (*Ep.* 276).

Seleucia: Modestus, *Comes Orientis*, imposes liturgy of transporting columns from Seleucia to Antioch on *bouleutai* (of Seleucia?) (*Ep.* 196/N.68); report of profusion of sacrifices in Seleucia in 363 (*Ep.* 1361).

### Euphratesia

Cyrrhus: appeal to Priscianus, *Praeses Euphratesiae*, for impoverished farmer near there (*Ep.* 174); recommending former pupil, *bouleutes* of Cyrrhus, now in decline (*Ep.* 1071); recommending Ariston and Pelagius, citizens of Cyrrhus — quality of men more important than length of stoas, height of theatres or number of houses (*Ep.* 1200); to Domitianus, *Praeses Euphratesiae*, on property-dispute at Cyrrhus (*Ep.* 1291); to Proculianus, *Praeses Euphratesiae*, recommending Cyrillus, *bouleuton* and litigant at Cyrrhus.

Doliche: To (Aradius) Rufinus, *Comes Orientis*, on property at Doliche of wife of former pupil Bassianus (*Ep.* 1380/B.15).

[Callinicus (sic): Accusations over delivery of supplies to military unit at *stathmos* there (*Ep.* 21/N.34).]

Samosata: Recommending Diognetus, his education in Samosata and love of literature (*Ep.* 858).

### Cilicia

Alexandria ad Issum: To Celsus, *Praeses Ciliciae*, on need to enrol new members for *boule* (*Ep.* 696).

Rhosus: To Celsus, on pressure on doctor Philo to be enrolled in *boule* (*Ep.* 723).

### *Mesopotamia/Osrhoene*

Carrhae: temple of Zeus (*Or.* XVIII, 214).

Edessa: Under Constantius, on destruction of bronze statue of Emperor (*Or.* XIX, 48, and XX, 27, also referring to festivals there).

### *Phoenicia*

Berytus: Crowd of orators, along with Strategius, *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis*, visiting Berytus for festival (*Ep.* 468).

Panaeus: Recommending Maron, impoverished pupil from there (*Ep.* 153).

Emesa: Formerly prosperous, now impoverished, still sends embassies and crowns to Emperors to avoid falling out of category of city (*Ep.* 846/N.148).

Sidon: Performance of liturgies by Sidonius, member of *boule* in Sidon, and his discourse on regime of Leontius, *Consularis Phoeniciae* (*Ep.* 1046).

Tyre: Appeal to Gaianus, *Consularis Phoeniciae*, to help Domnus avoid enrolment as *bouleutes* (*Ep.* 336); appeal to Gaianus, *Consularis Phoeniciae*, to help Herculianus to resist claims to ownership of his house by city (*Ep.* 828); Cyrillus as *archon* of Tyre (*Ep.* 166); to Prosdocius, doctor in Tyre — any sophist established there would praise him (*Ep.* 1018).

### *Arabia*

Bostra: Reported to Libanius by inhabitants that (Christian) Orion (of Bostra), while in office (*arche*), had not attacked temples or driven out priests (*Ep.* 763/B.130).

### *Palaestina Prima*

Caesarea: Caesareans offered Acacius, teacher in Antioch, higher salary to teach there (*Or.* XXXI.42; A., pp. 66f.)

### *Palaestina Salutaris*

Gaza: Plea to pupil Anaxertus not to return to native Gaza too soon (*Or.* LV).

Elousa: Appeal to *Comes Orientis*, Modestus, over disputed office of *Eirenophylax* held by relative of Zenobius, also from Elousa, formerly teacher of Libanius in Antioch (*Ep.* 101/N.54); recommending to governor Clematius two brothers from Elousa, both rhetors and making a living from advocacy; to governor Firminus, on his having deposed Boethus as *Eirenophylax* in Elousa and appointed someone else (*Ep.* 532).

Petra: Recommendation to Clematius, governor of Palestine, for Dynamius, previous acquaintance in Athens, evidently returning home, as 'adorning Petra' (κοσμοῦντι τὴν Πέτραν) (*Ep.* 321).

Libanius' scattered and disparate allusions to events and circumstances in the cities of the various provinces of Oriens are of course wholly insufficient to provide a social or cultural history. But, taken together, they do consistently reflect a conception on the part of Libanius that this was a world whose culture was Greek, where the characteristic social formation was the (in principle) self-governing Greek city, and from any part of which men might travel abroad to complete their Greek education. In this perspective, there is nothing obvious to distinguish Palestine or Arabia from Syria or Phoenicia. But does Libanius perceive anything other than a uniform world of Greek cities? If so, in what precise ways is he aware of disparate elements in the society of Oriens? Alternatively, if he is not so aware, or only in very marginal ways, to what degree should this pattern of conception, on the part of a centrally-placed contemporary observer (who, as we saw, can certainly not be accused of failure to respond to the major events of his time), influence the way that we see Oriens as it was in the fourth century?

### 5. Libanius and Near Eastern Society and Culture

It is tempting for us to think of the provinces of the Roman diocese of Oriens as belonging in a profound sense to the 'Orient', namely as a region whose culture went back to before Alexander's conquests; where the various dialects of Aramaic represented the normal speech of the street and the field; where in the Christian period Syriac, as an Aramaic dialect, came to claim a place as a language of culture; and where the Islamic conquests of the seventh century would soon reclaim the area decisively for the 'Orient', and impose the dominance of a new Semitic language of culture. There is of course some validity in this perspective, and it can even now be explicitly argued that, in the millennium of its apparent dominance, Greek never fully took root as the standard language in use among the population.<sup>37</sup>

Such assumptions do however have to be checked against empirical data. So, first, if we take the example of Libanius' native city, Antioch, and of the extensive territory of prosperous villages which now surrounded it (villages of which Libanius himself was well aware),<sup>38</sup> the entire period up to and including Libanius' lifetime produces hardly a single securely-dated inscription in any Semitic language, from city or *chora*. The sole exception, which is of course significant for the future, is one solitary Greek name transliterated into Syriac ('SB — Eusebius) as part of a longer Greek inscription. It dates from 389, four years before Libanius' death.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, even though, as indicated above, there are serious logical problems in deciding how we should take into account

<sup>37</sup> See the brilliantly suggestive articles by D. Wasserstein, 'Why did Arabic Succeed where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad', *SCI* 22 (2003), 257ff., and R. Hoyland, 'Language and Identity: The Twin Histories of Arabic and Aramaic (and: Why did Aramaic Succeed where Greek Failed?)', *SCI* 23 (2004), 183ff. Illuminating as the two papers are, in my view both of them profoundly underestimate the penetration of Greek, not only within cities but also in rural contexts, in the millennium of Greek, and then of Graeco-Roman, domination of the Near East.

<sup>38</sup> See esp. *Or.* XLVII *On Protection Systems*, of 389/92; see Norman, *Loeb* II, 491f.; L. Harmand, *Libanius, Discours sur les patronages* (1955).

<sup>39</sup> See *IGLS* II, no. 555, from Babisqa.

the perspective on the society of Oriens offered by Libanius, we cannot simply ignore it. So what perspective does Libanius offer, and which of the significant features of the contemporary world does he illuminate, and which does he ignore?

Firstly, as we have already seen in the case of his great *Oration XXX For the Temples*, he is fully aware of the threat to his traditional culture posed by Christianity. But, though he refers obliquely to Christians, he never once uses the words Χριστός or Χριστιανός. Circumlocutions referring to threatening and destructive developments are deployed instead, most notably where he speaks in his *Autobiography* of the construction of what is normally taken to be the Great Church in Antioch, and the oration which Bemarchius delivered on the occasion: 'He (Bemarchius) had travelled as far as Egypt, delivering just one oration, in which, although he personally sacrificed to the gods, he spoke in favour of him who had set himself up against them, and discoursed at length on the church (? — τὸν νεών) which Constantius had built for him'. Milena Raimondi, however, has recently argued, following terminology deployed by Themistius, that the reference to a νεώς is actually to Constantinople itself and its new Senate. It remains uncertain, however, what it is that is referred to as νεώς, or what the relevance of Bemarchius' tour as far as Egypt was. The indefiniteness of the way in which the implied challenge to the gods is described is at least unmistakable in itself.<sup>40</sup>

Julian's attempted restoration of temples, sacrifices and polytheistic worship naturally plays a significant part in the *Epitaphios*: 'It was this that shook him to the core, their altars overturned, their sacrifices suppressed, their priests sent packing and their property divided up between a crew of rascals'.<sup>41</sup> Later in the *Epitaphios* he refers to the Emperor's *Against the Galileans* — but again in oblique and circumlocutory terms: 'As winter lengthened the nights, besides many other fine compositions, he attacked the books in which that fellow from Palestine (τὸν ἐκ Παλαιστίνης ἄνθρωπον) is claimed to be a god and son of a god'.<sup>42</sup> Allusions to the brief restoration of paganism and the subsequent reaction also occur many times in his letters.<sup>43</sup> But, even though his correspondents actually include a couple of bishops,<sup>44</sup> and although he is aware of the local origins of Christianity (see above), he never has occasion to refer either to the Bible or to any subsequent Christian writings. In that sense, the opposition between Christianity and paganism was asymmetrical. Christians had no choice but to confront the legacy of pagan culture, and its literary expression. But it was, as it seems, rare for any pagan to explore Biblical traditions or Christian writing. Julian, as a lapsed Christian, was of course the great exception. Christianity, for Libanius, was the source of acute anxiety

<sup>40</sup> *Or.* I, 39, trans. Norman, for Libanius' very hostile account of Bemarchius see *Or.* I, 31 and 39-47. See now the illuminating paper of Milena Raimondi, 'Bemarchio di Cesarea, Panegirista di Costantino e Constantinopoli. Per una reinterpretazione di Libanio, *Or.* I 39; 43', *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità* 33 (2003), 171ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Or.* XVIII, 23, trans. Norman.

<sup>42</sup> *Or.* XVIII, 178, trans. Norman.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. *Ep.* 543; 694/N.80; 710/N.83; 718; 724/B.182; 739/B.43; 757/N.91; 763/B.130; 770/N.92; 811/N.100; 819/N.103; 964/N.171; 1217/B.141; 1338/B.183; 1351/N.104; 1361; 1364/N.105; 1411/B.98.

<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 611, to Dorotheos, bishop of Tyre; 1543/N.144, to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium.



and concern; but it was not the object of any intellectual interest, and still less of any interest in it as one product among others of the non-Classical culture of the Near East.

Similarly, Jews appear in Libanius' orations and letters, but in a strikingly matter-of-fact and allusive way (and not, at least not explicitly, as representing a distinctive ethnic, religious or linguistic group to be found in Palestine). Instead, we have, first, a reference in *On Protection Systems* to Jews who for generations had been tenants, evidently near Antioch, on his land.<sup>45</sup> Then, more significantly, there is his reference in a letter of 364 to disturbances among the Jews 'among us' (παρ' ἡμῶν), which must mean in Antioch, over the possibility that the position of *archon* might be regained by a tyrannical character who had previously been expelled from it. The Jewish community of fourth-century Antioch, apparently Greek-speaking, is of course known both from two of the Greek mosaic inscriptions of their sister-community at Apamea and from the *Homilies* in which John Chrysostom warned Christians against the attractions of their services and festivals.<sup>46</sup> But the interest of this letter arises from the fact that the Jews in question had approached Libanius with a request to write the letter, addressed to Priscianus, *Consularis Palaestinae*, since the prospect of this unwelcome return to office arose, so they believed, from an order emanating from 'the *archon* of the *archontes* among them', over whom Priscianus was thought to have influence. In the context this can only be a reference to the Jewish Patriarch in Palestine.<sup>47</sup> The implications of this (potentially) four-way exchange are considerable: the evident command of Greek on the part of at least the leaders of the Antiochene Jewish community (confirmed by the inscriptions from the mosaic floor of the synagogue at Apamea); the established public role of the 'archon of *archontes*', although a formal status is not reflected in any known Roman legislation until nearly three decades later;<sup>48</sup> and the implication that the Patriarch and the *Consularis Palaestinae* will have been in a political relationship, which can only have been conducted in Greek. Such relations might in theory have required the use of interpreters or translators to mediate between Aramaic and Greek. But in fact, and surprisingly, there is also a whole series of letters from Libanius to the current Patriarch, all of course in Greek, and with no implication that translation would be involved. This is significant, because in *Ep.* 914, of 388, he refers to a series of *grammata*, apparently meaning letters from the Patriarch, concerning the wrongs done to his race (*genos*) — but the references to the need for translation which are found when he receives letters in

<sup>45</sup> *Or.* XLVII, 13, see M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* II (1980), 584, no. 495a.

<sup>46</sup> For the mosaic inscriptions of the synagogue at Apamea see now D. Noy and H. Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis III. Syria and Cyprus* (2004), 84-113; the two inscriptions referring to Ilios, 'archisynagogos of the Antiocheis', are *Syr.* 53-4. For the *Homilies* of John Chrysostom see esp. R.L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: rhetoric and reality in the late fourth century* (1983).

<sup>47</sup> *Ep.* 1251, see *op.cit.*, 598, no. 504, and earlier W.A. Meeks and R.L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (1978), esp. ch. III: 'Letters of Libanius Concerning the Jews'.

<sup>48</sup> First in *CTheod.* XVI.8.8, of 17.4.392, see A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (1987), no. 20. For the extremely complex and controversial issue of the status of the Patriarch see M. Jacobs, *Die Institution des jüdischen Patriarchen* (1995).

Latin (10) do not appear.<sup>49</sup> Other letters headed 'to the Patriarch' must be to the holder of the same office, but are colourless recommendations of individuals (*Epp.* 917; 973-4; 1084; 1097). A further letter beseeches the Patriarch not to pursue further his hostility to Hilarius, evidently the Hilarius who was *Consularis* of Palaestina in 392/3.<sup>50</sup>

There is thus a clear implication that the current Patriarch could play a quite significant part in the politics of Oriens, and did so through the medium of communications in Greek. Libanius' personal connections thereby stepped outside the bounds of pagan society (as of course they did with his many Christian correspondents). But there is nothing to show as regards Judaism, any more than Christianity, that Libanius ever expressed any active interest in it as a system of belief or as a literary tradition. Julian, on the other hand, had seen the Temple and sacrifice both as traditional features of Judaism and as aspects of it which, once restored, would provide an element in common with paganism; and in writing a letter (of long-disputed authenticity) to the *koinon* of the Jews (whatever that meant) to express this intention, had referred both to 'my brother Iulus (Hillel) the Patriarch' and to the 'sacred city Jerusalem'.<sup>51</sup> But Libanius never refers to Jerusalem, either under that name or its current official one, Aelia; and in his detailed exposition in the *Epitaphios* of Julian's attempted pagan restoration he omits any reference to the plan for the rebuilding of the Temple. The fact that he corresponded with the Patriarch, or Patriarchs, of his time should be seen as indicating more clearly that these Jewish leaders claimed a place among the influential Greek-speaking élite of Oriens, than that Libanius stepped outside the normal bounds of his awareness.

These bounds were not wholly rigid, however, and he can also be found recommending to the same Priscianus, *Consularis* of Palaestina, mentioned above, tolerance for a group who are evidently the Manichees: 'these are worshippers of the Sun with blood (sacrifice) and honour him as a god as members of the second rank...' The letter belongs in 364, at the moment of Christian reassertion after the reign of Julian.<sup>52</sup> But, more generally, neither religious variety nor contrasting ethnic identities disturb the general reflection of Hellenism, or of a shared Greek culture, which marks all of his output. Insofar as the cults of the Greek cities which were scattered across the provinces of Oriens were marked by syncretism, or by a compromise in divine nomenclature, or in ritual or in iconography, between Greek conceptions of the gods and local ones, it is impossible to discern this in the pages of Libanius: without exception, the divine names which appear in his works are those of the established Greek pantheon; nor does he ever refer to Greek divine names with any local epithet attached.<sup>53</sup> Libanius' paganism is, without qualification, Greek paganism.

<sup>49</sup> *Ep.* 914; Stern, *op. cit.*, 589-90, no. 496; N., no. 160.

<sup>50</sup> *Ep.* 1105, Stern, *op. cit.*, 597, no. 503; *PLRE* I, Hilarius 8. Note the parallel provided by the reference in Jerome, *Ep.* 57.2 to the *inimicitiae* of the Patriarch Gamaliel towards the *vir consularis* Hesychnius, leading to the latter's execution on the orders of Theodosius I; *PLRE* I, Hesychnius 4.

<sup>51</sup> See Stern, *op. cit.*, 559-68, no. 486a. Stern defends the authenticity of the letter on 508-9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ep.* 1254, N., no. 132, trans. Norman; *PLRE* I, Priscianus 1.

<sup>53</sup> The invaluable index in vol. XII of Foerster's edition shows the appearance of Adonis, Athena, Alcippe, Amalthea, Aphrodite, Ares, Artemis, Calypso, Demeter, Dionysus, the Dioscuri, Eros, Diotima, Ganymede, Hera, Hermes, Hyllus, Kronos, Radamanthus, Thetis, Zeus.

Two in particular among his works can be used to reinforce this conclusion. The first is his *Autobiography*, in which, as Liebeschuetz observes, the theme of pagan observance is prominent, and recurrent allusion is made to the gods, for instance in reports of a dream sent by Heracles (67) and of his prayer to Asclepius (143).<sup>54</sup> The second is a work which survives only in the fragments quoted by John Chrysostom in his *Homily* on Babylas. This is the *Monodia* of Libanius, identified by Chrysostom only as 'the sophist of the city' (98), on the temple of Apollo, burned down under Julian. Quotations from the *Monodia* appear in that chapter, and others follow in chs. 104, 105, 106 and 112. Perhaps a partial quotation of the extract in 105 will best catch the tone of pagan piety — and, more important, the severely Classical frame of allusion:<sup>55</sup>

The Olympics are not too far off, and the festival will convene the cities, and they will come bringing oxen as a sacrifice to Apollo. What shall we do? Whither shall we go? Which god will open the earth for us? What herald, what trumpet will not induce tears? Who will call the Olympics a holiday, when the nearby ruins impel lamentation. 'Give me my bow drawn by the horns' (says the tragedy) and a little divination (I say), so that with one I may catch and with the other I may shoot the person who did this. O impious boldness, O defiled soul, O rash hand! He is another Tityus or Idas, the brother of Lynceus; not a giant like the one, or an archer like the other, but knowing this one thing: to rage against the gods. When the sons of Aloeus were yet hatching plots against the gods, you stopped them by death, Apollo; but the one who brought fire from afar encountered no arrow flying into his heart.

These words could have been spoken by a rhetor, or 'sophist', anywhere in the Greek world. We should not accept too easily the fact that for an audience in a major city in Oriens there was no other frame of reference — until one was supplied by Christian tradition.

## 6. 'Syrians' and Others

A different impression might be gained from what appear at first sight to be contrasting ethnic names as used by Libanius in speaking of his contemporaries: 'Syrian' (Σύρος), 'Phoenician' (Φοίνιξ), 'Cilician' (Κίλιξ), and 'Arab' or 'Arabian' (Ἀραβ, once only, and, more commonly, Ἀράβιος). Though there are many references to individuals from Palaestina (Παλαιστίνη), no ethnic noun or adjective is used for them. But in fact, in any case, 'ethnic', in the sense of a biological descent-group, or of persons sharing a distinctive common culture, is precisely what these terms are not. On the contrary, they refer, with almost complete consistency, to specifically geographical origins, expressed in terms of the current names of the Roman provinces of Oriens. It is significant that, unlike Theodoret, born in Antioch at just about the time of Libanius' death, he does not refer either to 'Osrohenians' (Ὀσροηνοί) or to 'Euphratesians' (Εὐφρατήσιοι).<sup>56</sup> It is in

<sup>54</sup> Liebeschuetz, *op.cit.* in n. 13 above, on 268-9.

<sup>55</sup> *Liber in Sanctum Babylam, contra Julianum et contra Gentiles* 105, Migne, *PG L*, col. 533f. See M.A. Schatkin, *Jean Chrysostome, Discours sur Babylas (Sources Chrétiennes 362, 1990)*; M.A. Schatkin and P.W. Harkins, *Saint John Chrysostom Apologist (Fathers of the Church 73, 1985)*, on 1-152, translation quoted from 137. The tragedy referred to is Euripides, *Orestes*, line 268.

<sup>56</sup> See text to n. 68 below.

any case unclear whether there was a separate province of Osrhoene in Libanius' lifetime. There was however, since some time between 325 and the 350's, a newly-formed province of 'Euphratensis' or 'Euphratesia', covering the area of Commagene and a considerable stretch of territory to the south of it on the west side of the Euphrates, as far as Resafa.<sup>57</sup> Libanius refers even to people from this newly-formed province only by circumlocutions,<sup>58</sup> and it was evidently too soon for a pseudo-ethnic to have come into use.

At any rate, in so far as such pseudo-ethnics are used by Libanius, they function (almost) strictly to denote the geographical origins of individuals on the one hand, or to identify the groups over whom provincial governors ruled on the other.<sup>59</sup> What these terms do *not* do is to mark out people as belonging to social groups, or cultural-linguistic traditions, of a nature which would distinguish them from Greeks. On the contrary, they are frequently used precisely in association with an emphasis on a man's role in Greek literary culture. Thus, for instance, in recommending Gaudentius to the *Praeses Arabiae*, Andronicus, Libanius writes: 'Gaudentius shares with us in our labours over the young men. He is an *Arabios* and is of good family there, but more impoverished than befits their reputation' (*Ep.* 543). Elsewhere, this man is 'Gaudentius the rhetor' (*Ep.* 747). 'Arabios' in Libanius does not mean what we normally mean by 'Arab'. If Libanius had happened to refer to the armed nomads of the steppe or desert zones, the likelihood is that he would have spoken of them as 'Saracens' (Σαρακηνοί), which in this period was the normal term.<sup>60</sup> But in fact he never takes the occasion to.<sup>61</sup> *Arabioi*, on the contrary, were the inhabitants of the province of Arabia (e.g. in *Ep.* 1159), and can be listed, for instance, in the oration *For the Teachers* (XXXI, 40) among the groups from different provinces who were present among the students of rhetoric at Antioch. Equally, *Suroi* were the inhabitants of Syria, and they can equally be praised for their distinction in Greek culture and rhetoric. So Libanius writes to a fellow-Antiochene, Olympius: 'You are a haven for the *Suroi*, even if they have no share in *paideia*, and again a haven for those who have acquired *paideia*, even if it happens that they are not *Suroi*'.<sup>62</sup> Or again,

<sup>57</sup> See most recently A. Breitenbach and S. Ristow, s.v. 'Kommagene (Euphratesia)', in *RAC* 163 (2004), cols. 233-273, in col. 242.

<sup>58</sup> Note for example *Ep.* 95/B.120, trans. Bradbury: 'Pelagius is ranked among the foremost men of those around the Euphrates (εἰς τὰ πρῶτα τελεῖ τῶν περὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην)'.

<sup>59</sup> See e.g. *Ep.* 1073, on the same Pelagius (*PLRE* I, Pelagius 1), formerly *Consularis Syriae*: ἄρξαντι Σύρων, Σύρος ὢν. In fact Pelagius came from Cyrrhus in Euphratesia, and Libanius goes on to say of his addressee, Anatolius (*PLRE* I, Anatolius), who came from Cilicia, as εἰ δὲ Σύρος γε σύ. It is precisely of this letter that Seeck, *op.cit.* in n. 1 above, on 69, speaks of the occasional use by Libanius of 'Syrian' in a looser sense. See also *Ep.* 1159, on Harmonius (*PLRE* I, Harmonius), formerly *Consularis Syriae*, and now governor of Arabia: ἐπίσταται δὴ καὶ Ἀραβίας ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ σχήματος.

<sup>60</sup> See F. Millar, 'The Theodosian Dynasty (CE 379-450) and the Arabs: Saracens or Ishmaelites?', in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* (2005), 297.

<sup>61</sup> He might well have done so in narrating Julian's last campaign in the *Epitaphios* (*Or.* XVIII, 204f.); see Julian, *Ep.* 27 Hertlein/98 Bidez-Cumont/58 Loeb, addressed to Libanius himself (401D): πρὸς τοὺς Σαρακηνοὺς ἐπεμψα πρέσβεις (written from Hierapolis). But he happens not to refer to them.

<sup>62</sup> *Ep.* 523; *PLRE* I, Olympius 4.

in recommending Iulianus to Themistius, Libanius speaks of him as ‘a most prominent *Suros*, a leader among the *philologoi*, and having acquired the culture of the *Italoi* as well as our own’.<sup>63</sup>

*Suroi*, when referred to by Libanius, are clearly distinct from *Assurioi* or *Asurioi*, who are the inhabitants of that region of the Sasanid empire through which the Emperor Julian marched on his way down the Euphrates; apart from a passing reference to their territory being marked by villages rather than cities, nothing is said about them, or still less about the language they spoke.<sup>64</sup> As noted above, when he speaks of *Suroi* Libanius means the inhabitants of the province of Syria, with the passing implication on occasion that the term might cover also those of Euphratesia or Cilicia.<sup>65</sup> What does *not* appear, as a general rule, in Libanius is any distinction between those inhabitants of Syria who were Hellenes and those who were *Suroi*. In his own eyes, Libanius, as the supreme exponent of rhetoric in Greek, was himself a *Suros* (*Or.* I, 16; *Or.* XVIII, 242). So also, in this sense, were the whole circle who surrounded him. Writing to a friend, Euelpistius, who had departed on a journey, he expresses the hope of receiving letters from him: ‘It is a great thing for me, a great thing that Hellas should hear from your mouth that you love me, and that the *Suroi* should see in these letters that I am honoured by you’ (*Ep.* 1519).

On a wider view, *Suroi* were merely the inhabitants of one province among others from which Libanius’ pupils were drawn:<sup>66</sup>

In the cities of Galatia, however, you would see many, and no less a number in Armenia. Again, the Cilicians outnumber them, and these too are far outnumbered by the Syrians. And if you go to the Euphrates, and cross the river and go to the cities beyond, you will come across some of my pupils, and perhaps not bad ones, either. Both Phoenicia and Palestine are under some obligation to me, together with Arabia, Isauria, Pisidia and Phrygia. In saying this, I do not imply that everyone from every region has taken home from me a pre-eminence in eloquence, but that each area has gained some orators. And I will not mention the dead, for if I were to assert that these have been my greatest glory, I don’t think that I shall hurt the feelings of the living. Some of them are my fellow-citizens; two, from Galatia, were the namesakes of mine. Just recently there was a Cappadocian, and a Cilician not long ago, and a Phoenician besides.

Yet, as regards the question of identity, or of what defined a person as a *Suros* in Libanius’ eyes, that is not quite all. For one single passing reference in his oration *For Thalassios* of 390 reflects his awareness that in the market place ‘the language of the *Suroi*’ could be heard. Speaking abusively of Sabinianus, a member of the Senate at Constantinople, Libanius says:<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Ep.* 1296; *PLRE* I, Iulianus 15. Compare the recommendation for Iulianus in *Ep.* 668/B.79, quoted above, p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> See, for *Assurioi*, *Ep.* 1120; 1402/N.109 (both on Julian’s campaign): εἶχοντο εὐθὺς Ἀσσύριοι, κῶμαι πολλὰ καὶ ὀλίγαι πόλεις. For *Asurios*, *Or.* XVII, 6; 20; XVIII, 219-21; 227; 231 (all in the same context). But note also *Or.* XI, *Antiochikos* 59, referring back to the gods of the ancient Assyrians and to the rule over them of Semiramis.

<sup>65</sup> See n. 59 above.

<sup>66</sup> *Or.* LXII, *Against the Critics of his Educational System* (A.87f), 27-8, trans. Norman.

<sup>67</sup> *Or.* XLII (A.145f), 31, trans. Norman, who notes that this is Libanius’ only reference to Syriac. The significance of this lack of explicit awareness is duly noted by Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (1980), 22-3, and from there picked up by Nicholas

One such as he is more of a disgrace to the Senate than all those who cry out in Syriac (τῆ φωνῆ τῆ Σύρων) for the customers who need them for mending their wooden bowls.

There is a clear implication here of an association of Syriac with lower-class life and economic activity. In the phrase ‘the language of the *Suroi*’ the word functions in a different context from cases where *Suroi* are all the subjects of a governor of the province, or represent one provincial group among others from which Greek orators might spring. There is no hint here, or anywhere else in Libanius, of an implication that Syriac might also function as a language of culture. Nor does he show any awareness that Syriac (or Aramaic) was spoken throughout Oriens, in a series of different provinces. No such observation appears in Greek literature, pagan or Christian, until we come to the much-quoted observation of Theodoret (above), who was (very significantly) two-three generations younger. It is also here, in Theodoret’s *Questions on Judges*, that we see the newly-formed ethnic, derived from the name of the province of Euphratesia, which is not to be found in Libanius, as well as the ethnic ‘Osrhoenians’.<sup>68</sup>

Just as the *Osrhoenoi* and *Suroi* and *Euphratesioi* and *Phoenikes* use the language of the *Suroi*, but nonetheless the *dialexis* shows great variation...

Even though he came from an educated background in Antioch, just like Libanius, Theodoret, as a Christian born some eight decades later, will serve to illuminate how rapidly contemporary perceptions of culture and society in Oriens were to change in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>69</sup> Firstly, as a Christian, the Bible was central to his view of the world, and provided an element which was wholly absent from Libanius’ outlook. Secondly, though (as I firmly believe) Greek was his first language, and the only one in which he composed, or could have, he seems to have understood spoken Syriac, and knew of, and could use, a Syriac version of the Bible, and was aware of linguistic similarities or differences between Syriac and Biblical Hebrew. Thirdly, he was aware of earlier writers in Syriac, belonging to the second to fourth centuries, for instance Bardesanes and Ephraem.<sup>70</sup> Finally, and partly as a function of the much broader social spectrum covered by Christian writing, Theodoret, in speaking of the monks of Syria and neighbouring provinces in his *Philotheos Historia*, can pick out some — but, it should be stressed a minority — who were speakers of Syriac.<sup>71</sup>

Theodoret could properly be seen as representing a considerable step beyond Libanius in his awareness of a wider historical and cultural background, of a greater range of social classes and of diversity in the contemporary culture of Oriens, and in his recognition of Syriac as both a popular language and a language of Christian culture. In effect, he can be taken to represent the period when Syriac began its (quite slow) spread as a

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Ostler in his remarkable analytical survey, *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World* (2005), 250.

<sup>68</sup> Theodoret, *Questions on Judges* 19 (PG LXXX, cols. 506-8).

<sup>69</sup> What follows summarises, without repeating in detail, some of the content of F. Millar, ‘Theodoret of Cyrrhus: a Syrian in Greek Dress?’, in B. ter Haar Romeny and H. Amirav (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople; Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (in press).

<sup>70</sup> See Theodoret, *HE* IV, 26; *Haer. Fab. Comp.* 22; *Ep.* 151.

<sup>71</sup> Theodoret, *Historia Philotheos* V, 5-6 (Greek- and Syriac-speaking monks near Zeugma); IV, 13, VII, 13 (monk Macedonius speaking Syriac); XXI, 15 (demon speaking Syriac).

Christian language from its homeland beyond and along the Euphrates, first westwards to Syria and neighbouring provinces, and then (even more slowly) southwards.

Before and during Libanius' lifetime, however, there is no evidence whatsoever that anyone brought up west of the Euphrates used Syriac as a language of culture, or for writing religious — that is to say Christian — texts. Eusebius, from Caesarea in Palestine, had been aware of the writings of the *Suros*, Bardesanes, and in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* had quoted in Greek a section of *The Book of the Laws of Countries*.<sup>72</sup> Another Eusebius, a slightly older contemporary of Libanius, who became bishop of Emesa in around 340, was the first Christian scholar of whom we know to use the Syriac version of the Bible in his work. This capacity is presumably explained by his birth, in about 300, in Edessa, and his education there. But all of his own writing was, so far as we know, in Greek.<sup>73</sup> Another contemporary of Libanius, Epiphanius, born near Eleutheropolis in Palestine, devotes a chapter of his *Panarion* to the heresy of the *Bardesianistai*, and notes that Bardesanes, from Edessa, had been learned in both languages, Greek and Syriac.<sup>74</sup> There is nothing to suggest that Epiphanius himself could read or write Syriac. That there were monolingual *speakers* of Syriac in Palestine in Epiphanius' time is of course attested by the well-known report by Egeria of the sermons of the bishop of Jerusalem, which he always delivered in Greek, even if he in fact knew Syriac himself (*licet siriste noverit*); a presbyter stood by to provide an oral translation in Syriac.<sup>75</sup>

Though the *speaking* of one dialect or another of what Greek — and Latin — speakers called 'the language of the *Suroi/Suri*' is thus sufficiently well attested in the fourth century in both Syria and Palestine, the *writing* of literary works in Syriac in that period was still a characteristic only of the zone beyond the Euphrates, namely Roman Osroene and Mesopotamia (above all in the person of the great Ephraem, from Nisibis), or of that still further east, in the Sasanid empire, in the person of Aphrahat. But it remains highly significant that Christian Greek contemporaries of Ephraem and Libanius could be aware of Christian writing in Syriac, even if they themselves came from outside the Near East.

The most striking evidence of this is provided by the encomium on Ephraem attributed to Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>76</sup> But, apart from identifying him as a *Suros* (which must refer here to language or culture), the author give no details of Ephraem's life or works, and *a fortiori* does not comment on the language in which they were written. But if, as he claims, Ephraem enjoyed world-wide fame, this must have been though the medium of works written in, or translated into, Greek.

Even these scattered allusions to the speech or writings of *Suroi*, however, are enough to indicate that a new Christian language of culture had arisen on the eastern frontier zone, and (more important still) that Greek-speaking Christian contemporaries

<sup>72</sup> Eusebius, *HE* IV, 30; *PE* VI, 9, 32-10, 40.

<sup>73</sup> See B. ter Haar Romeny, *Eusebius of Emesa. A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew and Syriac. Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (1997).

<sup>74</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 56, 1: λόγιός τις ὢν ἐν ταῖς δυσὶ γλώσσαις, Ἑλληνικῇ τε διαλέκτῳ καὶ τῇ τῶν Σύρων φωνῇ.

<sup>75</sup> *Peregrinatio Egeriae* 47, 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> For the text, see *PG* XLVI, cols. 819-50.

elsewhere were aware of it. To Libanius, however, 'the language of the *Suroi*' was what could be heard among petty craftsmen in the market.

### 7. Conclusion: Libanius' Near East

That the framework of Libanius' conception of the world was provided by the traditional Greek culture in which he was brought up is no more than a truism. But even here some qualification is needed. So far as his surviving 'real-life' orations and letters can show, Libanius, however profound his philological training (3-4), directs his attention to issues arising in the contemporary world. Of course he can and does make the conventional references to the major established writers of the Archaic or Classical periods: for instance Aeschines, Aeschylus, Aesop, Alcman, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Hyperides, Phrynichus, Plato, Pythagoras, Thucydides.<sup>77</sup> But, in his explicit use of quotations from earlier Greek pagan writing, he is, paradoxically, far outdone by his Christian fellow-Antiochene, Theodoret, who in his *Cure of Hellenic Maladies*, written in the 420's, dissects traditional pagan thought more systematically than anyone else, and names over a hundred different authors.<sup>78</sup>

Nor is Libanius by inclination a historian (except in the first part of his *Antiochikos*, see above), and only a few key figures from the history of the Greek world appear repeatedly in the 'real-life' writing represented by his letters and his orations on current issues. In fact, the world which greets the reader of these texts is the contemporary, Greek-speaking, world of the eastern Roman Empire. Or, to be more precise, it is the governing structure of that world in its interactions with the Greek cities and their ruling elites. To a remarkable degree, the institutions and posts which represented the framework within which Libanius functioned not only were Roman creations, but were quite recent innovations: the city of Constantinople itself, and its steadily evolving Senate; the role of Berytus as a centre for the study of Roman Law, not attested before the first half of the third century; the Praetorian Prefecture, as a civil office; the *Magistri Militum* of Oriens, stationed regularly (as it seems) at Antioch; the *Comites Orientis*, also located in Antioch. As we saw above, it does not seem that Libanius perceived the provinces which were now grouped as the diocese of Oriens as enjoying any particular common identity, either administrative or cultural. By contrast, it is striking how John Chrysostom, in speaking of the role of his bishop, Flavianus, in appealing to Theodosius I for clemency after the riot of the statues in 387, represents him as being fully aware of the status of Antioch as the 'capital', or mother-city, of Oriens ('Ανατολή) in the secular sphere (and by implication in the ecclesiastical one also?):<sup>79</sup>

His word would not now be on behalf just of one city, but on behalf of *Anatole* as a whole, for, of the cities which lie in the East, the head and mother is our city.

Even Chrysostom, it should be noted, thinks of a world of cities headed by Antioch, rather than of a number of provinces grouped in an administrative diocese.

<sup>77</sup> See the invaluable index in Foerster, vol. XII.

<sup>78</sup> P. Canivet, *Théodoret de Cyr, Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques* 1-2 (SC 57, 1958); see P. Canivet, *Histoire d'une entreprise apologétique au V<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1957).

<sup>79</sup> Chrysostom, *Hom.* III, 1 (Migne, PG XLIX, col. 47).



Libanius, in a rather similar way, saw each province, whether part of Oriens or not, as having very similar characteristics, namely as being made up of *poleis* for whose well-being the governor was responsible. Thus, in writing to Calliopius, the *Consularis* of Bithynia in 356/7, Libanius says:<sup>80</sup>

The pleasure which I would feel if you were governing *Suroi*, this I now do feel, since you are governing cities which I value equally with my native city.

Alternatively, writing to Ulpian, *praeses* (and perhaps simultaneously *dux*) of Arabia in around 363/4, Libanius records that his addressee has the reputation of being the founder (ὀκιστής) of Arabia, 'having rescued the cities (*poleis*) from destruction'.<sup>81</sup>

Palaestina also could be seen in the same light, as emerges most clearly in a letter recommending one Severus to the *Consularis Palaestinae*, Aphobius, in 365.<sup>82</sup> It deserves quotation in full:

The excellent Severus has arrived, and with the intention of looking after his affairs (properties?); however, he also puts much weight on this, namely seeing how Palaestina is governed by your judgement; for prospering cities are an agreeable sight. You are benevolent always and to all, and no occasion has altered your conduct, but towards those imbued with *paideia*, you show so much zeal that many things which seemed impossible have come to pass by your doing. Of this I hope that Severus too will have experience, and will surpass in his description those who report on your deeds. For, if any Greek does, he has the power of speech.

The cities and the Imperial administration were more closely linked still, in that some of the options open to the leading circles were mutually incompatible, and hence were the *locus* of constant contention: whether to stay in one's home city and serve on the *boule*; to go to Berytus or Rome to study Roman Law; to practice as a rhetor or a doctor; to become a provincial governor or higher official, or a member of the Senate of Constantinople.<sup>83</sup> As we have seen, the vast majority of the holders of Imperial offices, of all ranks, whom Libanius encountered, were men from the cities of the Greek provinces, whose culture and background were essentially the same as his own. In structure and in its governing principles, this world was Roman, even down to the wild-beast shows which needed to be put on for the people, or the rules which stated that the only *leitourgia* to which a doctor should be liable was that of practising his profession (*Ep.* 723, see above). But in the language of orations and letters it was Greek.

In this Hellenised Roman world, learning Latin, or going further and studying Roman Law, were significant options, but neither was a necessity. Libanius' very central role in the life of his region could be, and was, conducted without any knowledge of Latin. Nonetheless, Roman Law and, less clearly, Latin literature represented a meaningful and ever-present alternative to Greek culture and rhetoric. No other, more regional,

<sup>80</sup> *Ep.* 536; *PLRE* I, Calliopius 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ep.* 1155; *PLRE* I, Ulpianus 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ep.* 1478; *PLRE* I, Aphobius. My translation owes much to comments from Donald Russell.

<sup>83</sup> On the way in which, from the 370's in particular, the Senates of Rome and Constantinople were developing as quite separate organisations, with different rules of entry, see C. Zuckerman, 'Two Reforms of the 370s: Recruiting Soldiers and Senators in the Divided Empire', *Rev. Ét. Byz.* 56 (1998), 79ff.

alternative culture did so. Christianity and the Church represented a real threat, of which Libanius could not but be conscious. But, though his pupils and correspondents included many Christians, for instance (according to Christian tradition) the great figures of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom,<sup>84</sup> nothing in the historical, doctrinal or literary content of Christianity found expression in his writing. Equally, though one passing reference shows that he knew that people might speak *Suristi* (22), nothing suggests that he was aware that a Christian literature in that language already existed. On all of the other occasions when he uses the word *Suros*, including of himself, he means an educated Greek speaker from Syria. In short, the world to which Libanius belonged was that of the Greek cities of the provinces, and there was no basis within his awareness — whether of history, of language, of culture or of religion — why either the province of Syria or the wider diocese of Oriens should have been seen by him as having been marked by any distinct regional identity. We may choose to study the ‘Near East’ as it was under Rome. But we have to do so in the knowledge that one of our prime contemporary witnesses seems to have had no conception of any such thing.

The Oriental Institute, Oxford University

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<sup>84</sup> Socrates, *HE* IV, 26, 6 (Basil and Gregory); VI, 3, 1 (John). When John speaks in *Ad Viduam* I.2 (*PG* XLVIII, 601) of ‘my sophist’, characterised by superstition, he may be referring to Libanius. See J.L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication: John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (2006), 60.