

Silviu Anghel

Living with the past: the City and its Philosophers in Late Antique Athens

Abstract: It has long been recognized that the members of the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens remained active practitioners of pagan cults well into Late Antiquity. Sometimes, however, it is argued that the rest of the city of Athens shared, at least in part, the practices of the Neoplatonic professors and their students. Yet the Academy consisted of a few members only. How representative were the practices of the members of the Academy for the sacred landscape of the city of Athens in Late Antiquity? The present article argues that the sources, namely the literary passages emanating from the members of the Academy themselves, as well as archaeological data point to a general lack of interest of the city in the practice of cultic paganism and even in the preservation of statues in Athens. The first case study is the episode of Nestorius (*Zosimus New History* 4.18). A new interpretation of the passage is proposed: Nestorius aims to restore public pagan cults by introducing on the Acropolis the worship of Achilles. The city however does not react positively and shows a profound lack of interest. The second case study is that of Proclus introducing a cult of Athena in his own house (*Marinus Life of Proclus* 30). It is argued that this passage is a reflection of the collections of statuary found in two large houses in Athens (House Omega on the northern slope of the Areopagus and the so-called “House of Proclus” on the south side of the Acropolis). The statue collections were gathered from abandoned sites around Athens, again testifying that the city was not interested either in pagan worship or the upkeep of the statues. The final case study is that of Hegias restoring private shrines in the hinterland of Athens and using them for pagan worship (*Damascius Philosophical Life* 145). The philosopher’s initiative was criticized by his relatives. In all cases pagan cultic practices were met with lack of interest by the city, although in no case with violence. In all cases the efforts of the active pagan practitioners were to preserve sacred images, signifying that they had not lost their importance even in circles well familiar with Neoplatonic philosophy.

Zusammenfassung: Die Mitglieder der neuplatonischen Akademie von Athen übten bis in die Spätantike hinein die paganen Kulte aktiv aus. Mitunter gehen Gelehrte davon aus, dass auch die übrige Stadt Athen, zumindest partiell, die Praktiken der neuplatonischen Lehrer und ihrer Schüler teilte. Doch die Akademie bestand nur aus wenigen Mitgliedern. In welchem Maße waren die Praktiken der Akademiemitglieder für das religiöse Leben Athens in der Spätantike repräsentativ? Der vorliegende Aufsatz behauptet, dass die Quellen, nämlich die literari-

schen Texte, die von den Akademiemitgliedern selbst stammen, zusammen mit den archäologischen Daten auf ein vollkommenes Desinteresse der Bürger Athens an der Praktizierung des kultischen Heidentums hindeuten, ja nicht einmal an dem Erhalt der Götterstatuen in ihrer Stadt. Der Aufsatz untersucht diese Frage. Das erste Beispiel stellt die Episode von Nestorios (Zosimos, *Neue Geschichte* 4.18) dar. Eine neue Auslegung der Passage wird vorgeschlagen: Nestorius zielt darauf ab, den heidnischen Kult wiederherzustellen, indem er auf der Akropolis den Kult des Achilles einführte. Die Mitbürger zeigten sich desinteressiert und ablehnend. Das zweite Beispiel untersucht die Einführung des Kultes der Athene, den Proklos in seinem eigenen Haus der Göttin widmete (Marinos, *Leben des Proklos* 30). Dazu wurde die These aufgestellt, dieser Bericht spiegele sich in einer Statuensammlung wider, die in zwei Häusern Athens aufgefunden wurden (Haus Omega auf den nördlichen Abhang des Aeropag und das so genannte ‚Haus des Proklos‘ auf der südlichen Seite der Akropolis). Die Sammlung von Statuen aus unterschiedlichen verlassenen Orten um Athen herum bezeugen auch hier, dass die Stadt kein Interesse hatte: weder an einem paganen Kult noch an der Erhaltung der Statuen. Das letzte Beispiel beschäftigt sich mit Hegias, der private Heiligtümer im Hinterland von Athen wieder errichtete und sie für den paganen Kult nutzte (Damaskios, *Das Leben des Philosophen* 145). Die Initiative des Philosophen stieß auf Kritik bei seinen Verwandten. Alles deutet darauf hin, dass die Ausübung paganer Rituale und des Kultes kaum auf Interesse seitens der Mitbürger stieß, aber in keinem Fall auf Gewalt. Die Bemühungen der letzten Heiden zielten darauf ab, die heiligen Bilder zu erhalten; sie blieben auch unter den Philosophen bedeutsam, weil ihre Philosophie den praktischen Kult nicht aufgeben wollte.

Dr. Silviu Anghel: EDRIS Courant Center, Georg August Universität Göttingen, Nikolausberger Weg 23, 37073 Göttingen, Email: sanghel@uni-goettingen.de

The end of paganism and the city of Athens

The history of the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens in the 4th to 6th centuries CE stands out in the religious landscape of Late Antiquity.¹ If elsewhere Christianity

¹ A lot has been written on the religion of the Academy of Athens. A selective list includes Cameron 1969 b, Blumenthal 1978, Athanassiadi 1993, Watts 2006, Dillon 2007 and Athanassiadi 2009. Two of the most important sources have recently received new editions: Damascius' *Philosophical History* ed. Athanassiadi 1999 (from now on *PH*) and Marinus' *Life of*

gradually became more and more important, in Athens the members of the Academy, active practitioners of Hellenic cults,² enjoyed a long and unique period of activity. But how did the Platonic Academy interact with the world around it? Scholarship has been divided on this issue. Some scholars emphasize intolerance,³ and evidence for tensions does exist in the sources.⁴ However, to emphasize moments of tension creates a false impression. Other scholars have rightly pointed out that apathy and lack of interest were more prevalent than intolerance.⁵

Most of the studies so far have focused on the relationship between the Neoplatonic Academy and the imperial administration or the Christian clergy. The present article in return focuses on the relationship of the Academy with the community of Athens. The so-called Neoplatonic Academy consisted of a few leading members, some *hetairoi*, close friends and associates and of a few students.⁶ These met in private houses. It is obvious that the members of the Neoplatonic Academy formed a very small minority of the population of Late Antique Athens. The overwhelming disparity in numbers in favor of the former is only paled by an almost complete lack of knowledge about the social or religious life of the latter, for while the writings of the members of the Academy provide us with a wealth of information on the life of a small minority, very little is said about the city around them.

An important methodological issue is how to integrate what is essentially information about a few individuals within the larger civic context, to move from private to the public in the sacred landscape of 5th century Athens. This situation is not particular to Athens or the Neoplatonic Academy. In Late Antiquity, an era

Proclus ed. Saffrey and Segonds 2002 (from now on *LP*), both featuring extensive commentaries.

² As John Dillon rightly says in a recent article, “the last few generations of Hellenic philosophers can be seen as remaining true, in matters of religion, to their master Plato” (Dillon 2007: 120).

³ For example Athanassiadi 1993. Her article called ‘Persecution and Response’ sees the members of the Academy as having to react to a constantly increasing level of intolerance and persecution.

⁴ Most famously Proclus was forced to leave Athens for a while (*LP* 15).

⁵ Alan Cameron, in an insightful article written in 1969, rightly points to other factors that explain this situation: lethargy, preoccupation with heresy or the lack of suitable Christian authors to replace the members of the Academy (Cameron 1969 b: 10–11). This thesis was developed by Watts 2006, the most extensive and newest treatment of the school’s relationship with the city.

⁶ For a description of the school, of its most important members and their friends, see Watts 2006: 90–98.

of change, most information about religion concerns individuals and not communities, as Garth Fowden observed in the XIIIth volume of the *Cambridge Ancient History*.⁷ So what do the writings of Neoplatonists tell us about the sacred landscape of Athens? Some historians have not resisted the temptation to simply generalize the religious practices of the Neoplatonists to the world around them. For example Frank R. Trombley in his recent survey of Hellenic religion considers the deeds of the Neoplatonists to be typical of Hellenic religion in the 4th and 5th century CE in Athens. In his view, Imperial legislation against paganism had left no trace in Athens and texts such as Marinus' *Life of Proclus* indicate that "the old Hellenic religion lost little of its strength among true believers".⁸

In my view it would be a mistake to treat the entire city of Athens as a monolithic block. Whoever these 'true believers' may have been, there is evidence that by the time of Proclus, the majority of the population of the city of Athens could not be described as 'true Hellenic believers'. I will look at two sets of evidence. The first set of evidence concerns the role and importance of sacred images. These functioned as a mediator, a link between the philosopher and the city. A good example of their role of mediation in Hellenic religion is the curious episode which led to the burning of the temple of Apollo in Daphne (a suburb of Syrian Antiochia), as recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus. In 362 CE, the Cynic philosopher Asclepiades visited Daphne and its great temple of Apollo.⁹ Part of his worship involved placing a statuette of *Dea Caelestis* before the feet of the main cult statue of the temple. This statuette he carried with him wherever he went. After worshipping the images and lighting candles, he left the statue in the temple over the night. The flames of the candles then ignited the inflammable materials in the temple and burnt the entire structure.

This incident reveals important (and habitual) religious practices. The text states that Asclepiades carried the mobile image of *Dea Caelestis*¹⁰ wherever he

7 Fowden 1998: 542. His entry in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, entitled "Polytheistic Religion and Philosophy" explores this dilemma in the 4th century sources.

8 Trombley 2001: 305–307.

9 Ammianus Marcellinus *History* xxii.13, (ed. Seyfarth, *Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, Leipzig 1978, I: 279–280): [...] *quod Asclepiades philosophus, cuius in actibus Magnenti meminimus, cum visendi gratia Iuliani peregre ad id suburbanum venisset, deae Caelestis argenteum breue figmentum, quocumque ibat secum solitus ferre, ante pedes statuit simulacri sublimis* [...] "[...] when the philosopher Asclepiades, which we have already mentioned in the history of Magnentius, had arrived from abroad in this city to pay a visit to Julian, he placed before the foot of the high statue a small effigy of the goddess Caelestis, which he had the habit to carry with him wherever he went [...]".

10 *Dea Caelestis* has been thought to represent *Dea Syria*, cf. Drijvers 1981: 248 and den Boeft/Drijvers/den Hengst/Teitler 1995: 232–3.

went and so the gesture of placing it in a temple was, presumably, common. Written evidence for the usage of mobile sacred images is quite scarce. The most important text is the Apology of Apuleius. Apuleius was accused of carrying a mobile image with him,¹¹ but the concern of the text seems to be primarily about keeping it secret, ‘among books’, and not revealing the image’s identity. By bringing the statue into the temple Asclepiades might have removed such possible worries. The tone of the passage, which mentions bringing the statuette into the temple and performing rites in front of it¹² as a *fait divers* implies that this was a common practice as well. For Asclepiades these were means of approaching the divine, but also a means of connecting his private worship with the public sacred landscape. For the temple, sacred images were an important means of self-promotion and of disseminating the cults acknowledged in the temple. These images were very vulnerable to changes in religious tastes and cultic focus. In Late Antique Athens, as we shall see, philosophers faced considerable changes in the sacred landscape, which seriously affected production of newer images as well as the care of existing ones.

The second set of evidence is the reaction of the city to the religious activities of the members of the Academy. These have so far not been fully analyzed. I will look closely at two passages: *NH* 4.18 and the *LP* 30. They show that the city of Athens was overall not interested in the up keeping and continuation of Hellenic cults.

Nestorius appointed as an hierophant *hierophantein tetagmenos*

For the historian, innovations are of paramount importance, for they reveal otherwise dormant realities. One such innovation is presented in the episode of Nestorius *appointed hierophant* in *NH* 4.18 and is worth quoting in full:

[...] and earthquakes occurred in some places. (.2) Crete was also severely shaken as was the Peloponnese and the rest of Greece, and most cities were destroyed. Except for Athens and Attica. These were spared, they say, for this reason: Nestorius, appointed hierophant at that time, had a dream which commanded him to honour the hero Achilles with public

11 Apuleius *Apologia* 63.3: *Nam morem mihi habeo, quoquo eam, simulacrum alicuius dei inter libellos conditum gestare eique diebus festis ture et mero et aliquando victima supplicare.*

12 For the habit of lighting candles in front of sacred images, see Cicero *Officiis* 3.80 and Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.9.

sacrifices in order to save the city. (.3) When he informed the magistrates of this vision and they thought he was foolish and senile and took no notice of what he said, he considered the necessary course of action over in his own mind, and having been instructed by divine thoughts, he manufactured an image of the hero in a small shrine which he set up at the feet of the statue of Athena in the Parthenon. So when he performed the customary rites to the goddess, at the same time he performed the customary rites for the hero as well. (.4) In this way he carried out the advice of his dream, and when Greece was afflicted by earthquakes, only the Athenians were saved, and the whole of Attica shared in the benefactions of the hero. Proof that this story is true is in the account of Syrianus, who wrote a hymn for the hero. I have added that because it is relevant to what I want to show.¹³

The last sentence in the passage opens the question of the source of this episode. The events are placed by Zosimus in 375,¹⁴ a long time before the composition of Zosimus' history, shortly after 498.¹⁵ For most of the 4th century CE Zosimus follows the *History* of Eunapius, whose first installment was written no later than the 380s.¹⁶ The statement of Zosimus that the story 'is relevant' to his point raised doubts to whether Eunapius is indeed the source in this episode. The

13 Zosimus, *New History*, 4.18.1–4, ed. Paschoud 1979 (from now on *NH*). [...] καὶ σεισμοὶ δὲ ἐν τισι συνηνέχθησαν τόποις. (.2) Ἐσεισθη δὲ καὶ Κρήτη σφοδρότερον, καὶ ἡ Πελοπόννησος μετὰ τῆς ἄλλης Ἑλλάδος, ὥστε καὶ τὰς πολλὰς διαρρηῖναι τῶν πόλεων, πλην τῆς Ἀθηναίων πόλεως καὶ τῆς Ἀττικῆς· ταύτην δὲ καὶ περισωθῆναι φασιν ἐξ αἰτίας τοιαύτης· εστορίος ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς χρόνοις ἱεροφαντεῖν τεταγμένος ὄναρ ἐθεάσατο παρακελευόμενον χρῆναι τὸν Ἀχιλλεῖα τὸν ἥρωα δημοσῖαις τιμᾶσθαι τιμαῖς ἔσεσθαι γὰρ τοῦτο τῇ πόλει σωτήριον. (.3) Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐκοινώσατο τοῖς ἐν τέλει τὴν ὄψιν, οἱ δὲ ληρεῖν αὐτὸν οἶα δὴ ὑπέργηρων ὄντα νομίσαντες ἐν οὐδενὶ τὸ ῥηθὲν ἐποίησαντο, αὐτὸς καθ' ἑαυτὸν λογισάμενος τὸ πρακτέον καὶ ταῖς θεοειδέσιν ἐννοίας παιδαγωγούμενος, εἰκόνα τοῦ ἥρωος ἐν οἴκῳ μικρῷ δημιουργήσας ὑπέθηκε τῷ ἐν Παρθενῶνι καθιδρυμένῳ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἀγάλματι, τελῶν δὲ τῇ θεῷ τὰ συνήθη κατὰ ταῦτὸν καὶ τῷ ἥρωϊ τὰ ἐγνωσμένα οἱ κατὰ θεσμόν ἔπραττε. (.4) οὕτω τε τῷ τρόπῳ τῆς τοῦ ἐνουπνίου συμβουλῆς ἔργῳ πληρωθείσης, ἐπιβρίσαντος τοῦ σεισμοῦ μόνους Ἀθηναίους περισωθῆναι συνέβη, μετασχούσης τῶν τοῦ ἥρωος εὐεργεσιῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς Ἀττικῆς ὅτι δὲ τοῦτο ἀληθές ἐστι, μαθεῖν ἔξεστι δι' ὧν ὁ φιλόσοφος Συριανὸς διεξῆλθεν, ὕμνον εἰς τοῦτον τὸν ἥρωα γράφων ἀλλὰ ταῦτα οὐκ ἀνάρμοστα τοῖς προκειμένοις ὄντα παρέθηκα.

14 Shortly after the death of Valentinian, cf. *NH* 4.18.1. Another sign connected by Zosimus with the death of Valentinian, the burning of Sirmium started by lightning is reported by Ammianus (30.5.16), but placed before the death of Valentinian. Paschoud is hesitant to decide if Zosimus or Ammianus give the correct dates (Paschoud 1979: 366–7, no. 137), but as it stands the narrative well fits the anti-Christian agenda of Zosimus.

15 The terminus *post quem* is the abolition of the *collatio lustralis* in 498, a tax which Zosimus mentions as defunct. The observation was first made by Franz Rühl as far back as 1891 (Rühl 1891), but the date took time to be used by most scholars. For a discussion of the date, with bibliography, see Cameron 1969 a.

16 Liebeschuetz 2003: 181–184, as well as Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 98 (ed. Blockley 1981: 2); Paschoud, *Zosime III*, 2, 82–84. On the relationship between Eunapius and Zosimus there is a

reference to Syrianus may imply that this Neoplatonic philosopher is the source of the story.¹⁷ Yet the reference to Syrianus, more precisely to a hymn by him dedicated to Achilles, is not clear.¹⁸ It seems improbable that a hymn would contain all the details of the story. More likely the hymn praised Achilles (and Nestorius) for having saved Athens from destruction, and thus served as proof of the anecdote. Besides the hymn, another source with the details of Nestorius' actions probably existed. Neoplatonists were keen to emphasize that their rites and religious practices had beneficial public effects. Achilles and Athena saved Athens from the Goths in 396–97.¹⁹ *NH* 5.6 is probably based on the same source as 4.18, in which case this is likely to be Eunapius.²⁰

Whatever the exact source, it is clearly one with an anti-Christian agenda (an agenda shared equally by Eunapius, Zosimus or Syrianus), and one familiar with Neoplatonic practices.²¹ The familiarity with Neoplatonic circles and practices is strengthened by the identity of the people involved in the story and the details of their practices and we must analyze them separately.

There is little doubt that the Nestorius mentioned by Zosimus is the father or grandfather of Plutarch, the first scholarch of the Neoplatonic Academy in Athens.²² For a long time scholars have understood the description of Nestorius as *hierophantein tetagmenos* as a reference to an unnamed hierophant of Eleusis

voluminous bibliography. See most recently Paschoud 2006: 127–142 and the diverging opinion of Cameron 2011: 650–654, with previous bibliography.

17 So Mendelssohn in his 1887 edition (*ad loc* 173, n. 4) and more recently Cameron 2007: 349–350. Doubts in Paschoud 1979: 367–8, and even stronger ones in Paschoud 2006: 446. Syrianus probably died around or after 437 (Saffrey/Westerink 1968: xii–xvii).

18 For the possible role of Syrianus in Zosimus' narrative see also Paschoud 1979: 368–9, who cautiously concludes that Syrianus could not have been a direct source and similarly cautious Cameron 2007: 349–50.

19 *NH* 5.5–6.

20 For a comparison between the two episodes see below, page 10.

21 This anti-Christian agenda seems to have been shared between Zosimus and Eunapius and perhaps also by Syrianus or any other Neoplatonic source that might have been used, making it difficult to distinguish between them. More on the possible sources of the passage and on comparisons with other fragments from Zosimus' work in Cameron 2007: 349–50.

22 Jones, Martindale and Morris 1971: 626 and 708 s. v. (from now on *PLRE* I). Nestorius 2 (grandfather of Plutarch) and Nestorius 3 (father of Plutarch) and Plutarchus 5. See Saffrey/Westerink 1968: xxvi–xxxiv for a more detailed discussion of Nestorius, his family and the Academy. A “Plutarch who is also called Nestorius” (Πλουτάρχου τοῦ ἐπὶ κλην εστορίου) appears in *PH* fig. 64. Based on this phrase Athanassiadi argues that Nestorius 2 and 3 in the *PLRE* I are one and the same, namely the father of Plutarch (= Nestorius 3 in *PLRE* I), and that the phrase of Marinus πάππος Πλουτάρχου (*LP* 28) referring apparently to Nestorius 2 means in fact progenitor and not grandfather and thus refers to the same Nestorius 3 (*ad loc* 173, n. 149).

described in detail in the *Vitae Sophistarum* of Eunapius.²³ As Eunapius is the main source for this part of Zosimus' history, this supposition seemed plausible. Recently, however, Thomas M. Banchich argued strongly that this association must be abandoned.²⁴ Banchich presents a careful study of the terms *hierophantes* and *hierophanteo*. He is right to point out that the term does not need to be understood as a technical reference to a priesthood from Eleusis. There is no mention of Eleusis in the story, and the reference must have something to do with Athens. There are two meanings of the word: a wider one, of someone who is a master of and teaches initiation, and a technical one, of the initiating priest in the cult of Eleusis.²⁵ Zosimus should not be expected to use the word *stricto sensu* to refer to a priesthood that had ceased a long time ago. The words *hierophantes* and *hierophanteo* were liberally used by Neoplatonists, for example about Proclus, without referring to a particular priesthood.²⁶ The wording of Zosimus, who claims that Nestorius had been ordained, or appointed a hierophant (*hierophant-ein tetagmenos*) is misleading, for, as Banchich shows "while *tatto* does not appear in Eunapius, it is a favorite of Zosimus".²⁷ Since no plausible evidence exists for an office of an (Eleusinian) hierophant in Athens,²⁸ outside of this text, the most plausible conclusion is that Zosimus is mixing stories.

A solution, preferred by Banchich, is that the appellative hierophant is added by Zosimus, in which case the connection with the unnamed hierophant of Eunapius is false. There is however another possibility, that a hierophant did appear in Zosimus' source, and that it was confusingly or knowingly applied to our Nestorius. The second scenario is stronger if Eunapius is the source of both passages.

Nestorius' family may have been priests (of Asclepius) in Athens.²⁹ If so, Zosimus is unwittingly mixing the cult of Asclepius with the title of *hierophant*. If not, he is connecting wrongly an epithet used elsewhere in Neoplatonic circles with a priesthood because the story demands a public and civic dimension, and because he knew that such an office did exist in other places, such as at Eleusis.

²³ Eunapius *Vitae Sophistarum* 7.3.1–5/475–76, ed. Giangrande 1956: 45–46.

²⁴ Banchich 1998, followed by Cameron 2007: 349–350.

²⁵ Banchich 1998: 366–368.

²⁶ *LP* 30.19. Other Platonic mentions can be found in Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 15, ed. Boissonade or Proclus, *In Rem Publicam* (ed. Kroll) I, 71. A fuller list in Banchich 1998: 368, n. 18.

²⁷ Banchich 1998: 365.

²⁸ The title is used of several priesthoods and priests outside Athens, both in literary and epigraphic material, collected in Banchich 1998: 365–366.

²⁹ In 308 a Plutarch, perhaps the father of Nestorius, became the priest of Asclepius at the instigation of a dream: IG IV2 436–437. Cf. Saffrey/Westerink 1968: xxix–xxx.

Perhaps the term was connected with Nestorius in some other context or perhaps it was just a confusion.

Whatever his intention, and whatever the connection between Nestorius and the hierophant of Eleusis from Eunapius, Zosimus is actually referring to a *hierophant of Athens*. He is, in effect, the only source for this priesthood. This detail, perhaps one of the most important of the story, has so far escaped from observation. For him the office of a hierophant fits the moral of the story – that the cult of Achilles should have been a civic responsibility. It would seem that his source did not offer any priesthood for Nestorius, or Zosimus would have used such an important detail. In Zosimus' Neoplatonic source, Nestorius acted as a private individual and the original story was probably one of telestic prowess³⁰ and not of civic cults.

In the text of Zosimus, the relationship between Nestorius and the community is a key theme in the story. The philosopher proposes a public cult of Achilles, insisting that the cult of the hero must be a civic gesture. In 375 public rites had not yet been forbidden.³¹ Yet the city seems completely indifferent to his proposal. The lack of interest of the city in the ancient traditions of pagan religion is a subject close to Zosimus' heart, who gathered and presented a large number of such stories.³² Like Olympiodorus, Eunapius and Ammianus Marcellinus before him, Zosimus is keen to emphasize that disasters came about because the traditional public cults were abandoned and forsaken. He points out that he introduced the episode of Nestorius precisely because it fit into the line of these arguments (*NH* 18.4). The story was a fortunate case, and Nestorius managed to avert disaster, but, Zosimus argues, this was an exception. Most of Crete and Greece were destroyed, and the implication is that they did not honor the right gods and heroes. The stroke of lightning which struck Sirmium is also mentioned

30 See below, pages 102–3.

31 For the historical context of the episode see Nilsson 1961: 351 and Cracco Ruggini 1972: 35, n. 64.

32 Gathered in Paschoud 1975: 137–8. Hellenic rites protect the empire only when they are performed at public expense in *NH* 4.59.3, 5.38.2, 5.41.3. In 4.59.3 he states: [...] διὰ τοῦτο τότε τοῦ θυηπολικοῦ θεσμοῦ λήξαντος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα τῆς πατρίου παραδόσεως ἦν ἐν ἀμελείᾳ κειμένων, ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἐπικράτεια κατὰ μέρος ἐλαττωθεῖσα βαρβάρων οἰκητήριον γέγονεν, ἢ καὶ τέλεον ἐκπεσοῦσα τῶν οἰκητόρων εἰς τοῦτο κατέστη σχήματος ὥστε μηδὲ τοὺς τόπους ἐν οἷς γεγόνασιν αἱ πόλεις ἐπιγινώσκειν. “[...] since the rite of sacrifices ceased therefore for this reason and all the other cults inherited from the ancestors were neglected, the Roman Empire was weakened progressively and became a land of barbarians; abandoned by its inhabitants and reduced to such a state that one could not even recognize the place where cities used to stand.” The relationship between Zosimus and the Polybian cyclical view of history has been the object of many studies. See in particular Petre 1965 and Paschoud 1975: 1–8.

by Ammianus (30.5.16), although there it is a sign that announces the death of Valentinian. Sicily was kept safe both from invasions and from eruptions of Etna, argues again Olympiodorus, until a Christian magistrate destroyed a consecrated statue.³³ Enigmatic silver statues from Thrace had kept the Goths at bay, until they were buried and forgotten.³⁴

What Nestorius does next is apparently perplexing: he fashions a statue of the hero himself and places it besides the feet of the statue of Athena in the Parthenon. Christopher Faraone has interpreted this to mean that he hid the statue of Achilles under that of Athena.³⁵ In his view the statue was supposed to be a phylactery, on the model of an attested Neo-Assyrian practice of placing statuettes under other statues. Faraone's belief that these Neo-Assyrian realia were somehow reflected through the Chaldean oracles into Neoplatonism is far-fetched and not very plausible. Digging the rock that served as the base of the statue of Athena in the Parthenon would have presented many difficulties. The verb Zosimus uses for this action, ὑπέθηκε τῷ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἀγάλματι, does not necessarily mean place under, but also to place in a lower position, 'place at the feet of', as Paschoud rightly translates. Nestorius' gesture resembles that of Asclepiades discussed above, who put the image of Caelestis at the feet of the main statue of the temple (*ante pedes simulacri sublimis statuit*). The statue of Achilles was placed above ground, in an 'oikos' or, perhaps, in a 'naiskos', a miniature temple.

The acts of Nestorius have parallels in the theurgic practices of the Neoplatonists. The vocabulary of the passage, which no doubt Zosimus inherited from his source, is very similar to that in the writings of Proclus about statues set up according to telestic arts.³⁶ Telestics, as understood by Proclus in the 5th century CE, included the art of divinely activating statues by means of symbols. Nestorius knew how to shape (*demiourgeo*) the statue because he partook of 'divine thoughts' (*theoeidesin ennoiais*).³⁷ What exactly this phrase means is difficult to know, as it only appears once as such in the work of the philosophi-

33 Olympiodorus (ed. Maisano 1979), fr. 18.

34 Olympiodorus (ed. Maisano 1979), fr. 34.

35 Faraone 1988: 228–9.

36 The subject has received a lot of attention recently. See in particular Boyancé 1955 on the nuanced differences between theurgy and telestics, Johnston 2008 for a general image about animating statues and Tănăseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, forthcoming for an extensive chronological commentary on the theurgist and their different conceptions of theurgy.

37 See also Paschoud's thoughts on the subject (Paschoud 1979: 368): "comment faut-il entendre *theoeidesin ennoiais*: 'manière de penser', ou 'projets' des dieux, ou encore tout simplement 'théologie'?"

cally aware Gregory of Nyssa.³⁸ In our case divine wisdom served as the background on which the dream was interpreted. In his commentary *In Timaeum* Proclus argues that statues set up according to teletic arts have attributes known only to the ritual experts.³⁹ This type of particular knowledge could explain why Nestorius built the statue himself. From this point of view, the original story of Nestorius, may be understood as designed to praise teletic prowess. The salvation of Athens from earthquake mirrors the equally powerful theurgic activities of Proclus who is said to have saved Athens from drought and from earthquakes through the use of talismans.⁴⁰ Yet in Zosimus the teletic dimension of the story is minimized. Nestorius' gesture of building the statue itself is only used to show the lack of civic interest in the cult.

The two statues were worshipped together according to custom (κατὰ θεσμόν). Within the story κατὰ θεσμόν can only mean the rites of the priesthood of hierophant. Given the fact that Zosimus invented the priesthood, he must have also added, *pro causa*, that the rites were κατὰ θεσμόν. In Eunapius, it was the rites of the unnamed hierophant from Eleusis that saved Greece from destruction. When his place was taken by a false hierophant, and with the treacherous help of monks,⁴¹ the invasion of the Goths devastated the peninsula:

when Alaric with his barbarians invaded Greece by the pass of Thermopylae, as easily as though he were traversing an open stadium or a plain suitable for cavalry. For this gateway of Greece was thrown open to him by the impiety of the men clad in black raiment, who entered Greece unhindered along with him, and by the fact that the laws and continuity of the hierophantic customs had been rescinded [...]⁴²

The similarity of the vocabulary is matched by that of the theme. Whatever the source of the episode of Nestorius, the language and agenda of Eunapius were clearly on Zosimus' mind. This parallelism also proves, in my view, that Zosimus is more interested in the theme of abandonment of public religion, thus recycling

38 Gregory of Nyssa, *In sanctum pascha iii*: ὕτη τοίνυν ἡ ἡμέρα, ἣν ἐποίησεν ὁ κύριος, ἀγαλλιασώμεθα καὶ εὐφρανθῶμεν ἐν αὐτῇ μὴ μέθαις καὶ κώμοις, μὴ χοροῖς καὶ παροινίαις, ἀλλὰ ταῖς θεοειδέσιν ἐννοίαις.

39 Compare with Proclus, *In Timaeum* 273.11:

40 *LP* 28.

41 The same invasion and the fate of Athens is mentioned in many sources, gathered in Frantz et alii 1988: 52–53. *NH* 5.6.1–3 attributes the salvation of Athens to Athena and Achilles.

42 Eunapius *Vitae Sophistarum* 7.3.5–5 (ed. G. Giangrande Rome 1956), 46, italics mine: ὁ [τε] Ἀλλάριχος ἔχων τοὺς βαρβάρους διὰ τῶν Πυλῶν παρῆλθεν, ὥσπερ διὰ σταδίου καὶ ἵπποκρότου πεδίου τρέχων· τοιαύτας αὐτῷ τὰς πύλας ἀπέδειξε τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἢ τε τῶν τὰ φαῖα ἰμάτια ἐχόντων ἀκωλύτως προσπαρεισελθόντων ἀσέβεια, καὶ ὁ τῶν ἱεροφαντικῶν θεσμῶν παραρραγεῖς νόμος καὶ σύνδεσμος [...].

the vocabulary of previous authors, than in the cultic details of Nestorius's episode (and their possible Neoplatonic significance). The importance of the theme of abandonment explains why he introduces in *NH* 4.18 elements of civic importance, such as the bogus priesthood of a hierophant of Athens or that the rites were customary (κατὰ θεσμόν) into what was otherwise a story of telestic prowess.

The act of introducing a cult into a temple was not new, and has many parallels in Roman religion.⁴³ The introduction of a new protective cult in the sanctuary of Athena Parthenos was, for Nestorius, not an innovation, but an attempt to preserve ancient religious traditions. The cultic initiative came as the result of a dream, a common practice in Greek and Roman religion. The novelty, the very reason which explains the anecdote, is that Nestorius acted alone. In fact, authorities were present, but they seemed to remain to be untouched by Nestorius' arguments. There is no mention of priests, no consultation of the divine, in Athens or anywhere else. In short, the entire network through which traditional institutional religion would have sanctioned the appearance of a new cult is entirely missing or is opposed to the introduction of the cult. Already in the 4th century a division existed between the Neoplatonic Academy and the rest of the city of Athens, a division centered on the continued practice of Hellenic religion. Episodes of religious conflict are often mentioned when the religious diversity of Late Antiquity is discussed. Yet another reaction, perhaps much more common, is often neglected. The city of Athens did not react with violence to Nestorius, but with apathy.

Another important question is why Nestorius chose to focus on the hero Achilles. Neoplatonists, such as Plutarch and Proclus attempted to honour and preserve the traditional cults of Athens,⁴⁴ but there is very little evidence for a cult of Achilles in Athens before Nestorius. Why did Nestorius not choose a cult of Athens that had fallen into disuse? And why a hero at all? The cult of Achilles is attested in areas particularly important to the myth, such as Ilium or the Black Sea, but, like the cult of other heroes, it had never become general nor been introduced to Athens. Two observations may serve here as basis for the interpretation. The first is that Nestorius' and Zosimus' interest⁴⁵ was shared by

43 For the introduction of new cults was constant in Roman Religion, see the introductory but still fundamental discussions in North 1976 as well as Ando 2007.

44 See for example the activities of Proclus in *LP* 27–32 towards deities such as Hecate, Athena or Asclepius, Pan or Cybele, all deities well attested in Athens or Attica in the Roman period.

45 Achilles appears again twenty years later when together with Athena he protects Athens from the Goths in *NH* 5.6.1–3.

contemporaries, outside of Athens, such as the emperor Julian.⁴⁶ Zosimus says that Syrianus wrote a hymn to Achilles, and he seems to have been well informed, for Proclus states that it was Syrianus who had initiated him in the rituals imitating the funeral pyre of Patroclus.⁴⁷ For Syrianus the rites Achilles performed for Patroclus' body, as described in the *Iliad*, were analogous to the rites of the theurgists. The second observation is that the cult of Achilles had received a lot of interest in the writings of the Second Sophistic which were read widely in Late Antiquity. Before analyzing these texts we must first briefly describe the cult of Achilles in the Roman world.

We should resist the temptation to directly connect the Roman cult of Achilles with the gesture of Nestorius. True, Achilles is called a hero, in a traditional fashion. But the cult of Achilles, as that of most other Greek heroes, never became widespread in the Roman world. The cult was particularly active in places significant to the hero,⁴⁸ but above all in Ilium at the Mound of Achilles and on the island of Leuke in the Black Sea where the body of the hero was said to have been transported. The latter was the most important and received abundant literary attention. A cult image of the hero had been worshipped on Leuke (Paus. 3.19.11) which Nestorius had probably never seen. Very little has been discovered at Ilium, but Black Sea archaeology suggests that the cult is overall abandoned by the latter half of the 3rd century CE.⁴⁹ Thus, the vanishing cult of Achilles cannot explain the interest of Nestorius. To understand it we must turn to the literary interest in the hero. L. R. Farnell in 1921 linked the cult of the hero to his literary popularity, but the arguments did not convince entirely. Today we know a lot more about the connection between the two. The literary evidence, for the most part, comes much later than the cult. It seems that it was the cult of Achilles, together with the hero's place in the *Iliad* that led to a large number of literary references of the hero. The two phenomena, cultic and literary, seem to follow divergent paths from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.⁵⁰ In

46 Julian, *Letter 79* (ed. Bidez), an episode which reveals religious tourism but no specific details of cultic activities.

47 Proclus *In Rem Publicam* (ed. Kroll) I, 152 f.: εἰ δὲ δεῖ καὶ τῶν ἀπορρητότερον ὑπὸ τοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἡμῶν ... See Tănăseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, forthcoming.

48 These places include Croton in South Italy, Laconia and Elis in the Peloponnese, Astypalaia in the Cyclades, and Erythrai in Asia Minor. See J. Escher, s. v. Achilleus, RE I, 1894 (cols. 221–245), cols. 222–223 for references.

49 Hedreen 1991: 329–330 and Hupe 2006: 165–233.

50 For the revived (literary) interest in the cult of Achilles in Late Antiquity, see the forthcoming article by the present author, "Achilles' Last Stand. The Revival of the Cult of Achilles in Late Antiquity".

contrast to the literary evidence mentioned before, the Second Sophistic saw a flourish of interest in the hero. Hymns to Achilles appear in several sources and the hero occupies an important place in, among others, Dio of Prusa, and in the *Vita Apollonii* and in the *Heroikos* of Philostratus. In the *Heroikos* Hadrian is said to have rebuilt the tomb of Ajax when the structure had been washed away by the sea, exposing his bones.⁵¹ Caracalla is said to have honored Achilles with sacrifices and races in armor around his tomb, presumably at Troy.⁵² Apollonius of Tyana is credited with finding the buried statue of Palamedes right where Achilles had told him it would be, and set it up in a temple.⁵³ Particularly relevant is *Heroikos* 53. There the ‘dreaded and cruel hero’, angry with the Thessalians for having abandoned his sacrifices, punished them with a series of grave natural disasters. The same theme is central in the hymn to Achilles in Heliodorus:⁵⁴ ‘receive well the offerings/remove from our city all fear’. In both sources, public rites to Achilles are meant to avert natural disasters, the very theme of the anecdote of Zosimus.

In both *NH* 4.18 and 5.6 Achilles is associated with Athena. The reason for the association is alluded to in 5.6:1: Athena is fully armed, appearing as Athena Promachos, as she appeared fighting for the body of Patroclus, in bk. 17 of the *Iliad* (l.544 ff.). Athena also restrains Achilles in bk. 1 of the *Iliad*, a passage commented upon repeatedly in Late Antiquity.⁵⁵ The statue of Athena Promachos was still standing on the Athenian acropolis in Late Antiquity and still played an important role in the civic landscape. A statue of Herculus was placed on the acropolis, next to the statue of Athena Promachos in the early fifth century.⁵⁶ The members of the Academy no doubt shared with the city a high esteem of the statue as a civic symbol, but to them the statue was also important for religious reasons. This value must have been well known by Christians and yet the statue was not destroyed. The statue will eventually be moved to Constantinople, where it was still seen by Niketas Choniates.⁵⁷

51 Philostratus *Heroicus* 8.1.

52 Dio Cassius *Roman History* 78.16.7 (Exc. Val. 385). Another version of the episode can be found in Herodian 4.8.3.

53 *Vita Apollonii* 4.13.

54 Heliodorus *Ethiopica* III.4 (ed. Rattenbury and Lumb).

55 Plotinus *Enneads* 6.5 as well as Augustine of Hippo *De Civitate Dei* 9.7, a passage apparently based on Porphyry. See Lamberton 1986: 93–95 and 260–1.

56 IG II² 4225.

57 Niketas Choniates, *Historia* (CSHB): 738–740. See also Frantz, Thompson and Travlos 1988: 76–77.

The lack of any available existing historical tradition about Achilles, either in Athens or elsewhere in the late 4th century CE argues against a direct connection between the 4th century episode and the earlier cult of the hero, and suggests that literary texts are the most likely inspiration for the cultic innovations of Nestorius. Since Zosimus' text is what we could call a third hand account, there is no way to pinpoint which texts inspired the father of Plutarch in choosing the object and particularities of the cult. We can however notice that Achilles plays an important place in the writings of Proclus and that the interests of Neoplatonists to use theurgy to avert disasters and invoke the protection of divinities fits well the Second Sophistic dossier about Achilles. Furthermore, these sources are full of references about the revival of the cult of ancient but forgotten heroes. Of all 'neglected' heroes, Achilles was the most important, and this more than outweighed the lack of existing connections of Achilles with Athens. It is likely that it was writings such as these that provided the source for Nestorius' interests.

Understood in this way, the gesture of Nestorius has three distinguishable dimensions. First, tradition: the need to continue Hellenic worship as in the past, especially on a public level. Second, literature: inspiration for new ideas comes from Nestorius' *paideia*, rather than from other cults. Third, philosophy: abandoned by the community, he turns to his philosophical interests for knowledge on how to make and worship the statuette. The background that forces or rather enables Nestorius to play such an influence on the Athenian acropolis is the lack of interest of the community in religious matters. The shrinking of the active Hellenic community means that more and more the institutional religion of Athens is a reflection of the private religion of leading Neoplatonists like Nestorius.

Proclus and Athena

The second episode took place around 480. It is related in the *LP* by Marinus that Proclus had a dream from the goddess Athena.

"[...] when her statue, up to then erected in the Parthenon, was moved by those who move that which should not be moved. The philosopher had a dream in which a woman with a beautiful appearance approached him and announced him that he must prepare his house as quickly as possible: 'for Lady Athena, she said, desires to live in your house'".⁵⁸

58 *LP* 30: [...] ἦνίκα τὸ ἄγαλμα αὐτῆς τὸ ἐν Παρθενῶνι τέως ἰδρυμένον ὑπὸ τῶν καὶ τὰ ἀκίνητα κινούντων μετεφέρετο. ἐδόκει γὰρ τῷ φιλοσόφῳ ὄναρ φοιτᾶν παρ' αὐτὸν εὐσχήμων τις γυνὴ καὶ

The language of this passage is not straightforward. Who is ‘the very beautiful woman’ who appeared in the dream? Was it the goddess herself or a messenger? She speaks of the goddess in the 3rd person and calls her *kuria*, a common appellative of goddesses in both epigraphy and literary texts.⁵⁹ What is most striking about this text is the lack of any iconistic representation of deities, the most usual way divine beings appeared in Greek and Roman dreams.⁶⁰ One explanation is that the messenger in the dream was not the goddess, but some lesser being.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the dream concerns a very particular statue, *the* Athena of Pheidias from the Parthenon. This statue was one of the most famous pieces of art in antiquity, even after its repairs. The particularity of the statue makes the lack of iconistic details strange. In the same chapter Asclepius appears in the traditional shape of a snake, proving that iconistic representation of deities was still present around 480. This passage is usually seen as a proof that the statue of Athens was removed from the temple. The passage however provides only a *terminus ante quem* for this event. The removal may have taken place some time before the dream, which may explain the lack of graphic details in Marinus’ description.⁶²

For Proclus Athena was very important. The goddess occupies a prominent part in the writings of Proclus.⁶³ According to Marinus, who calls her simply ‘the goddess’, Athena inspired Proclus to come to Athens and study philosophy.⁶⁴ Her absence from the city must have been acutely felt. The reaction was to replace the public cult of Athena with a private one.

The story is paralleled by the enigmatic episode about Sophocles having introduced the cult of Asclepius in his house. The dossier for this episode is exclusively Roman and Byzantine, both literary and epigraphic. The most impor-

ἀπαγγέλλειν ὡς χρῆ τάχιστα τὴν οἰκίαν προπαρασκευάζειν· “ἡ γὰρ κυρία Ἀθηναία” ἔφη “παρὰ σοὶ μένειν ἐθέλει”.

59 Saffrey and Segonds 2002: 165, n. 2.

60 In earlier centuries, the way messages from the gods were received in dreams was very different. Gods appeared in dreams and communicated with humans in the shape of statues. This happened to such an extent, Artemidorus reports, that to dream a statue was to dream the deity it represented (Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 2.39). For commentaries on this passage see the classical remarks of Eric Dodds (Dodds 1966: 102–104) and the recent Cox Miller 1994: 28–30.

61 On dreams being conveyed by demons see Lewy 1956: 93.

62 The question of iconistic dreams of statues is closely connected with the question of availability of statues. See Harris 2009: 38–9 for one of the latest discussions of this issue.

63 Besides his hymn to Athena (Proclus *Hymns* ed. van den Berg 2001: 274–314) he devotes a lot of space to the goddess in his works. See for example Proclus *Platonic Theology* VI.11.20, (ed. Saffrey/Westerink) for the virtues of Athena as goddess of wisdom and of war.

64 *LP* 9.10.

tant text for our purpose is from the *Etymologicum Magnum*.⁶⁵ To these we can add an epigram in the Palatine Anthology, in which Sophocles introduces the cult of Asclepius into his own house.⁶⁶ The familiarity of Sophocles with Asclepius is further mentioned in Plutarch and in the so-called Paeon of Sophocles.⁶⁷ Finally, Sophocles' familiarity with Asclepius was well known to Neoplatonists such as Proclus, as attested by Marinus. Marinus, in *LP* 29, describes the Asclepeium on the Acropolis as 'famous since the time of Sophocles'.⁶⁸ The story of Sophocles having introduced the cult of Asclepius in his house was known in Athens under the Principate and was well known in Late Antiquity. To Proclus, to whom the cult of Asclepius in Athens was very important,⁶⁹ this tradition was well known, and may have served as an inspiration for his own introduction of a household cult of Athena.

Proclus attached a similar importance to sacred images as had his predecessor Nestorius one century before. Yet in contrast to the story of Nestorius, the activities of Proclus focused on the private sphere, within his own house.

Houses of the Academy

The literary introduction of private cults in the houses of Neoplatonist philosophers is not without archaeological foundation. Excavations have brought to light several very large houses containing statues in a secondary contexts and dating to Late Antiquity. Foremost amongst them are the so called "House of Proclus" or Building Chi and the so called House Omega. Detailed descriptions of the structures, sculpture and other inventory has already been published, and

⁶⁵ *Etymologicum Magnum*, 256.6–11: Δεξιῶν ὕτως ὠνόμασθη Σοφοκλῆς ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων μετὰ τὴν τελευτήν. Φασὶν ὅτι Ἀθηναῖοι τελευτήσαντι Σοφοκλεῖ, βουλόμενοι τιμὰς αὐτῷ περιποιῆσαι, ἠρώϊον αὐτῷ κατασκευάσαντες, ὠνόμασαν αὐτὸν Δεξιῶνα, ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ δεξιῶσεως. Καὶ γὰρ ὑπεδέξατο τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ οἰκίᾳ, καὶ βωμὸν ἰδρύσατο. Ἐκ τῆς αἰτίας οὖν ταύτης Δεξιῶν ἐκλήθη.

⁶⁶ *Anthologia Palatina* 6, 145: βωμοὺς τοῦσδε θεοῖς Σοφοκλῆς ἰδρύσατο πρῶτος/ὄς πλεῖστον οὐσης εἶδε κλέος τραγικῆς.

⁶⁷ The literary dossier is gathered in Radt 1977: T69. The most recent discussion of the epigraphic dossier is in SEG XXVIII (1978): 96 and n. 225.

⁶⁸ *LP* 29, 10, and Saffrey and Segonds 2002: 163 and no. 11.

⁶⁹ Besides *LP* 29, 10 quoted above, the *LP* presents in chapters 29 and 30 the Asclepeium as a place used by Proclus for prayer and very dear to him. Proclus also had visions of Asclepius in *LP* 30, which suggests that he worshiped the god as he did Athena, in his house.

does not need to be repeated here, but a brief introduction is needed in order to understand the context in which the statues were placed.

The first is the house found at Kekrops Str. 7–9, where two Hellenistic Cybele reliefs, a late 4th century BCE hero relief as well as a head from a Late Classical relief figure were found. Besides the excavator's notes, the house remains unpublished.⁷⁰ The second is an opulent villa found in the National Park. A 3.5x4.5 m apsidal room with niches, dated to the period within the 3rd quarter of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century CE, contained among others two marble statuettes of Cybele and one of Hygeia as well as an Asclepius and another Cybele reliefs. Information on this house is also very scarce.⁷¹

A third house, called House Omega, after the name of the trench in which it was found, was excavated on the north slope of the Areopagus. In its excavated form the house comprises sixteen rooms covering a large area, largely 25x35 m. The house is built around two covered courtyards and contains a large number of apsidal rooms.⁷² The house was richly decorated with marble columns of the Ionic order, marble steps, mosaic floors and an elegant horseshoe-shaped pool. A very large collection of sculptures was found spread throughout the house.⁷³ A headless statue of Athena and a relief of the Cave of Pan were found in the courtyard, and six portraits as well as a relief of Artemis as huntress were found in three separate wells. The statues were probably thrown down into wells when major renovations took place, with a pronounced Christian character. The two reliefs, left on the surface, were mutilated and a fine mosaic floor panel was torn up and replaced with marble slabs.⁷⁴ Some of these changes could, by themselves, be ascribed to new tastes and others to space clearing, but the mutilation of the two reliefs is clearly intentional and it is not unlikely that the treatment of all the sculptures is connected and should be interpreted uniformly. The mutilation most probably took place in the first half of the 6th century and is connected with a major renovation of the house, as a consequence of which the house took on a significant Christian character.⁷⁵ Since the relief of Artemis, found in a well, was

70 Excavation notes in Alexandri 1969. See also Karivieri 1994: 137 and Baumer 2001: 64 with full bibliography.

71 Excavation notes in Spathari/Chatzioti 1983. See also Karivieri 1994: 137 and Baumer 2001: 64 with full bibliography.

72 Frantz 1971 and 1973; Camp 1992: 203–212.

73 The statues were published in Frantz 1971 and 1973. See also the comments in Camp 1992: 209–212.

74 Frantz 1973: 172 and Camp 1992: 145.

75 Camp 1992: 209–212.

beheaded in a similar fashion to the relief of Pan, found on the surface, we can conclude that defacement and throwing down in a well were connected.

Of particular interest is the relief of Pan, which an inscription which identifies the donor as Neoptolemos, who was active in the 4th century BCE.⁷⁶ The relief was dedicated in a sanctuary, possibly the sanctuary of Pan on the North Slope of the Acropolis itself, not very far away.

The last house is the so-called “House of Proclus”, on the south side of the Acropolis, between the Odeion of Herodes Atticus and the Theatre of Dionysos.⁷⁷ Only the northern part of the house was excavated, revealing a building complex erected soon after the invasion by Alaric in CE 396.⁷⁸ Only parts of the complex were excavated, measuring 32 meters in width. The center is dominated by a large room terminating at the northern end in an apse surrounded by smaller rooms. The room was decorated with mosaics. To the East there was a small room with a recess in the thick wall facing the large apsidal room. This recess was embellished by the addition of two reliefs and a relief base. The rest of the Eastern sector seems to have been disturbed by later activity, but to the West side was well preserved. Several rooms were found there including one with a rectangular exedra with three niches.⁷⁹

Some statues were found in the vicinity and are thought to be connected with the house, but the context is not sure.⁸⁰ These include, but are not limited to the head of a philosopher of the early 5th century CE and the fragment of a marble portrait of a philosopher. A fragment of a larger-than-life statue of Isis of the 2nd quarter of the 1st century CE, originating perhaps from a nearby temple, was found in the filling of one room. The piece had been recut to form a bust.⁸¹

In the north wall of a small rectangular room of 2 x 3 m. Behind the apse near an entrance was installed a private sanctuary and all used pieces of sculpture were re-used: a small shrine of Cybele seated in a naiskos with a tympanum and a

76 Camp 1992: 210–211 with photos.

77 The house is first published by I. Miliadis in 1955.

78 This date was provided by Miliadis as a *terminus post quem*, without excluding however the possibility of an earlier phase (Miliadis 1955: 48). The recent analysis of Karivieri did not find any conclusive evidence for a more secure or a more accurate date, based on the existing material (Karivieri 1994: 126–7). Miliadis also provided an abandonment date for the 6th century, but this is not based on securely dated stratigraphic contexts (Miliadis 1955: 50).

79 Miliadis 1955: 47–48.

80 Karivieri 1994: 131–132. On the portraitheads see the forthcoming publication of M. T. Kovacs' dissertation *Ut virum nostra aetate mirabilem statuarum diuturnitas tradat oculis posterorum Studien zur Chronologie, Typologie und Hermeneutik des spätantiken, männlichen Privatporträts vom 4. bis zum 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, Göttingen 2010.

81 Brouskari 2002: 56–83.

lion on her knees and a relief dedicated to Pankrates have been set into one side of a small niche with stucco decoration.⁸² The shrine of Cybele, a sculpture of high quality can be dated to the 4th century BCE.⁸³ The statue was originally dedicated in a sanctuary. In the vicinity of the house, on the West Slope of the Acropolis, M. J. Vermaseren postulated the existence of a Metroon⁸⁴ and the relief may have originated there, but the small size of the shrine, about 40 cm in height, does not exclude a more distant sanctuary. The second relief, depicts a seated goddess on a throne with a cornucopia and originally a phiale, in front of an altar and an attendant for a sacrifice with a sheep and two persons. Lorenz Baumer has convincingly identified the relief as belonging to a family of reliefs from the sanctuary of Pankrates near the Ilissos, very close to the city wall, and dated to the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century BCE.⁸⁵ The arrangement of the two pieces of sculptures in the room suggests a small shrine (Pl. I, 4). In front of the shrine and of the relief, a base from a grave monument from the 4th century BCE was integrated into the niche, perhaps as an offering table.⁸⁶

The connection between the house and Proclus is not based on very strong evidence. Although the location, as described in *LP* 29 as “neighboring the Asclepeium, famous from the time of Sophocles and the temple of Dionysus, close to the theater” and “within sight of the Acropolis of Athens”⁸⁷ provides only a general location. The position of the sculpture in the house strongly indicates a cultic function, but not necessarily a Platonic one. For example, the finding of the ritually buried piglet cannot be convincingly connected with Neoplatonism.⁸⁸ However, the finds clearly connected the “House of Proclus” with Hellenic cults. The nature of the inventory and above all the size of the house also connect the structure with a Late Antique Athenian school.

There is no secure connection between the houses and the Neoplatonic Academy led by Plutarch and Proclus. However, the schools are very probably connected with one school or another. This is suggested not only by the general history of Athens after the Herulian invasion, but also by the architectural and sculptural elements found in the houses.⁸⁹

82 Miliadis 1955: Plates 6 b and 7 a.

83 Baumer 2001: 58.

84 M. J. Vermaseren in *CCCA* II, 51 Nr. 189.

85 Baumer 2001: 58–60.

86 More on this in Baumer 2001: 63.

87 As most of the area is still unexcavated, the location of the house could remain undiscovered.

88 More on the possible interpretations of this find in Karivieri 1994: 133–135.

89 On the general history of Athens in this period, see Frantz 1965: 1988, Castrén 1994: 1–15 and Camp/Mauzy 2009.

How can we interpret the movement of statues from the public to the private sphere? Many statues of course became available after the Herulian invasion and others from closed or abandoned temples. Within this context, the reuse of abandoned statues for esthetic and cultural reasons is paralleled in other cities. Of similar scope, albeit on an immensely larger scale was the Constantinian program for Constantinople.⁹⁰ Statues are also reused in Rome, through the efforts of city magistrates.⁹¹ It should be noted that in Athens magistrates are not recorded as undertaking similar actions.

However, the movement of statues in Athens has a singular and particular dimension. The absence epigraphic attestation of civic attention to the preservation of statues and temples is not due to a particular epigraphic habit but to real civic neglect in the city. Proof of this interpretation is not only the atmosphere from the previous passages analyzed above, but also the very presence of the statues in private residences. Secondly, the statues seem to have had more than decorative value. This is clear in the case of the “House of Proclus” where the reuse of the statues is suggestive of a cultic function.⁹² The original contexts of the other statues are unknown, but the presence of so many statues from closed Athenian or Attic temples and sanctuaries, unparalleled in other cities in Late Antiquity strongly suggest a care for the cultural and religious past of the city. The movement of statues from sanctuaries to private residences is the result of the same type of concern which is visible in the activities of Nestorius and Proclus.

What was the attitude of the city towards this relocation of statues? It would be difficult to believe that such a project could have been undertaken in secret. The movement of large scale statues and their display in large scale villas situated in the center of the city could not have escaped notice. However, this movement can well be understood within the background of apathy and neglect on the part of the city as a whole. The writings of Church Fathers contain many references to private underground groups of statues, found and destroyed by Christians. None of those episodes refers to Athens where the situation seems to have very different: Hellenic temples and sanctuaries were neglected, abandoned and when not plundered for works of art to be taken to Constantinople, open to private local collectors.⁹³ This particular situation was due above all to the particular situation

⁹⁰ On Constantinople see Mango 1963 and more recent Bassett 2004.

⁹¹ On Rome see Coates-Stephens 2001 and 2007.

⁹² The same conclusion was reached by Lorenz Baumer (Baumer 2001: 64).

⁹³ One example is the famous Stoa Poikile, removed by the local governor sometime towards the end of the 4th century. Cf. Synesius *Letters* 56 and 136. Athens was also included in the Constantinian appropriation program (Bassett 2004: no. 3–12).

of Athens in Late Antiquity. The treatment of statues in House Omega seems to suggest that by the end of the 6th century CE this situation had changed.

Hegias and the restoration of holy sites

In the 5th century, Hegias is said to have restored the sacred places (τὰ ἱερά) of his relatives all over Attica.⁹⁴ The restorations were met with opposition from members of his family, even though Hegias was using his own funds. The text of Damascius does not give the reasons for this opposition. At least one commentator, Alan Cameron, argued that Hegias' family was Christian.⁹⁵ Perhaps the family was worried about the conspicuous nature of these repairs. The text states that τὰ ἱερά were on private property in Attica. We are dealing most probably with rural shrines on privately owned estates.⁹⁶

Rural shrines are more conspicuous than household statues, and could have been construed as liable to attract passers-by to the ancient cult. Nevertheless they were located on private property.

The *PH* also obscurely states that Hegias performed rites in secret at these shrines (*PH* 145), but what exactly is meant by that is difficult to know. Watts rightly concludes that Hegias “was quite ostentatious in the rites he performed”.⁹⁷ It was even less difficult to keep the repairs secret. These were no more hidden than the statue collectors discussed in the previous pages. Rural religious structures cannot be kept secret and the repairs must have been well known in Athens and Attica. The lack of any mention of violence against the shrines and the simple fact that they had resisted for so long without being destroyed further proves that the community of Athens as a whole showed little or no interest in them.

The repair of decaying shrines can also be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the cultural and religious landscape of Athens and Attica. From this

94 *PH* 145.

95 Cameron 1969 b: 10 and n. 4, commented on by Athanassiadi 1999 *ad loc.*: 319 and n. 380.

96 There is an excellent recent book on private shrines in Late Antiquity: Bowes 2008.

Unfortunately we know very little about how a Hellenic shrine looked like, as all the archaeological examples she discusses are Christians. One of the latest examples of non-Christian shrines is the so called *lararium* from the Via Giovanni Lanza in Rome, dating to the reign of Constantine, but it is not a rural example (see Ensoli 1993 and Ensoli/La Rocca 2000: 517–526, with full bibliography).

97 Watts 2006: 124.

perspective the repairs seems to be connected to the same efforts as those that led to the creation of the statue collections discussed in the previous pages.

Conclusion

A chronological look at the activities of Nestorius, Syrianus, Proclus and Hegias shows a gradual diminishing of the practice of Hellenic rites within the Athenian Academy. From this perspective a Gibbonian view on the gradual decay is inescapable. The main reason for this decline was the lack of interest of the community in religious affairs. On the contrary, if we look at the details of the activities of each Neoplatonist, the view is quite different. The members of the Academy tried to improvise and adapt to the situation by introducing new rites, adapting others to their philosophical beliefs and by drawing on their expertise of classical literature. They also expended a lot of efforts to preserve and repair the existing shrines and statues of Athens. The city did little either to prevent or to help their efforts.

An important aspect is the role of sacred images. In all episodes analyzed above, statues played an important role in the religious activities of the Academy. The availability of these statues was an ever growing concern. The efforts of a few who gathered and collected statues to prolong their life can only be understood as a pendant of a general apathy of the community in this regard. Ultimately the lack of interest of the city in sacred images shows their lack of interest in Hellenic religion.

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