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## HYPATIA

J. M. RIST

**P**RESUMABLY for English-speaking readers the trouble began with Gibbon,<sup>1</sup> who knew the tragic end of Hypatia, daughter of Theon, and used his knowledge, as had some of his predecessors in antiquity, to vilify Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. Gibbon's account should be quoted at length, so that its full force may be grasped and the problems of understanding the circumstances of the career and teachings of Hypatia may be clarified. After describing Cyril's various aberrancies as patriarch, Gibbon continues as follows:

He soon prompted, or accepted, the sacrifice of a virgin, who professed the religion of the Greeks and cultivated the friendship of Orestes [the prefect of Egypt; see below]. Hypatia, the daughter of Theon the mathematician, was initiated in her father's studies; her learned comments have elucidated the geometry of Apollonius and Diophantus; and she publicly taught, both at Athens and Alexandria, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. In the bloom of beauty, and in the maturity of wisdom, the modest maid refused her lovers and instructed her disciples; the persons most illustrious for their rank or merit were impatient to visit the female philosopher; and Cyril beheld, with a jealous eye, the gorgeous train of horses and slaves who crowded the door of her academy. A rumour was spread among the Christians that the daughter of Theon was the only obstacle to the reconciliation of the praefect and the archbishop; and that obstacle was speedily removed. On a fatal day in the holy season of Lent, Hypatia was torn from her chariot, stripped naked, dragged to the church, and inhumanly butchered by the hands of Peter the Reader and a troop of savage and merciless fanatics: her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells, and her quivering limbs were delivered to the flames. The just progress of inquiry and punishment was stopped by seasonable gifts; but the murder of Hypatia has imprinted an indelible stain on the character and religion of Cyril of Alexandria.

This is fine polemic, though the details of the assassination have been rendered even more lurid than they actually were, and it admirably fulfils its author's intention of arousing emotional hostility to Christianity. When Bertrand Russell quoted a part of Gibbon's narrative, he added that "after this Alexandria was no longer troubled by philosophers,"<sup>2</sup> a dramatic and false conclusion. Yet the memory of Hypatia and of Alexandrian philosophy is no better served by this partisan treatment than are those of the victims of the concentration camps by a recent author who in his novel of Nazi Germany introduced explicitly erotic tones into an account of the meeting of his beautiful Jewish heroine with Hitler at a gala occasion in the Berlin of the thirties. For the Alexandrian

<sup>1</sup>Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 47 (The Modern Library: New York n.d.) 2.816.

<sup>2</sup>*History of Western Philosophy* (London 1946) 387.

philosopher has not escaped the attentions of the perverted clergyman Charles Kingsley, whose novel *Hypatia* is full of sadistic eroticism and whose account of the heroine's death reminds Professor Marrou of the writings of Pierre Louÿs.<sup>3</sup>

From imagination and the emotional backwash of history we must turn to facts. Gibbon claims that his account of Hypatia derives primarily from Socrates the ecclesiastical historian (H.E. 7.15). This is not, of course, the only source for the events he describes, and indeed much of his information is drawn from the notice of Hypatia in the *Suda*. The information in the *Suda* probably comes from Damascius' *Life of Isidore*,<sup>4</sup> and additional evidence from that source is preserved by Photius. Further material is to hand in various letters of Synesius,<sup>5</sup> and vague scraps of information have reached the pages of Malalas<sup>6</sup> and Philostorgius.<sup>7</sup> From all this we can see a little more clearly than has sometimes been supposed the true character of the work and importance of Hypatia, especially if we also take into account the views of her immediate successors in Alexandria as they are represented by Hierocles.<sup>8</sup>

Hypatia was born about 370 A.D.<sup>9</sup> and was murdered in 415. Her father Theon was the author of a number of mathematical works and was associated with the Museum at Alexandria;<sup>10</sup> there is no evidence that he was a philosopher, and indeed it was for mathematical as much as for philosophical activity that Hypatia herself became famous, as the letters of Synesius and the lists of her writings show. According to the

<sup>3</sup>H. I. Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 127. For Kingsley's general manner of proceeding in matters of virginity and cruelty see Meriol Trevor, *Newman: Light in Winter* (New York 1963) 326-327. For detailed treatment of the "after-life" of Hypatia in European traditions see R. Asmus, "Hypatia in Tradition und Dichtung," *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* 7 (1907) 11-44.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Damascius' *Vita Isidori* (to be found with Diogenes Laertius, ed. Cobet) and P. Tannery, "L'article de Suidas sur Hypatie," *Ann. de la Fac. des Lettres de Bordeaux* 2 (1880) 199 ff.

<sup>5</sup>Letters 10, 15, 16, 33, 81, 124, and 154 are to Hypatia herself. She is referred to in 133, 136, 137, and 159.

<sup>6</sup>*Chronogr.* 14 (PG 97, 536A).

<sup>7</sup>Philostorgius H.E. 8.9. (GCS 21, p. 111 Bidez).

<sup>8</sup>The chief previous attempts to determine the importance of Hypatia are those of R. Hoche, "Hypatia die Tochter Theons," *Philologus* 15 (1860) 435-474, K. Praechter, art. "Hypatia," *RE* 9<sup>1</sup> cols. 242-249, E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* 3<sup>2</sup> (5th edition Leipzig 1923) 801-803, and C. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène* (Paris 1951) 38-46.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Suda* (ed. Adler) 4.644; Socrates H.E. 8.9; Lacombrade (see note 8) 39. Lacombrade notices that the remark of Malalas (see note 6) that at the time of her death Hypatia was a *παλαιά γυνή* need not conflict with these dates, as was supposed, for example, by Hoche (see note 8) 439.

<sup>10</sup>*Suda*, s.v. "Theon."

*Suda* she commented on the mathematical writings of Diophantus, a third-century Alexandrian, and wrote on the "astronomical canon"—probably, as Tannery and Lacombrade propose,<sup>11</sup> a commentary on Ptolemy—and on Apollonius' *Conic Sections*. Yet although she followed her father's footsteps in mathematics, and although Damascius, comparing her unfavourably with his idol Isidore, can say that he surpassed her not only as a man surpasses a woman but as a real philosopher surpasses a geometrician (*Vit. Isid.* 164), it is as a philosopher that her fame has principally reached posterity.

Mathematics might in turbulent times be a dangerous science, and the *Suda* suggests that it was not only to her philosophical wisdom that Hypatia owed her death, but in particular to her ability in the field of astronomy, a science which might look like astrology to the credulous and sometimes to the practitioners themselves. Astronomy, however, even if it had degenerated into astrology, was still a "Platonic" science, though only a propaedeutic one. But what about the keystone of the Platonic education, dialectic itself? What do we know of Hypatia's activities here? At first sight the prospect does not look encouraging.

According to the *Suda* Hypatia gave public lectures on Aristotle, Plato, and other philosophers;<sup>12</sup> according to Socrates she took over the Platonic way of thinking from Plotinus; and Lacombrade is quite prepared to admit that in some respects Hypatia was reasonably represented by Synesius as a successor of Plotinus.<sup>13</sup> But there is little evidence for this latter idea, while the exposition of Plato and Aristotle was the general preoccupation of the philosophers of the day. It is interesting in this connection to consider the nature of the thought of Synesius. Certainly he knows Plotinus, but his debts to Plotinian philosophy are not extensive. Taking his letters as a rough and ready guide, Fitzgerald<sup>14</sup> claimed 126 quotations from Plato, 36 from Plutarch, 20 from Aristotle, but only 9 from Plotinus and 3 from Porphyry. This gives an idea of Synesius' interests: Plotinus, though known, is far from holding a position of honour. It should be added that his doctrines are no more in evidence than are quotations from his text. It is curious, if Hypatia was a Plotinian, that Synesius, her close friend and contemporary as well as her pupil, is so little interested in Plotinian Neoplatonism. It hardly looks as though Hypatia spent much time studying it with him.

<sup>11</sup>P. Tannery (see note 4) 199; Lacombrade (see note 8) 41–42.

<sup>12</sup>The idea of certain moderns that these lectures were given both at Alexandria and at Athens is due to a misinterpretation of a passage of the *Suda* (4.645.2). What the *Suda* says is that, while Hypatia was teaching, politicians were among the followers of philosophy, as they had once been in Athens. Hypatia herself did not teach in Athens.

<sup>13</sup>Lacombrade (see note 8) 46.

<sup>14</sup>*The Letters of Synesius* trans. A. Fitzgerald (Oxford 1926) 16.

Nor is Hypatia interested in the Platonism of Athens, where perhaps the influence of Plotinus was somewhat stronger than at Alexandria.<sup>15</sup> Letter 136 of Synesius is important here. It was written by Synesius at Athens to his brother. The writer is full of complaints that the good old days have passed. Athens, he says, is a city of great names, but nothing more. While in Egypt there flourishes the fruitful wisdom of Hypatia, in Athens there is nothing more than bee-keepers to interest the visitor. There are a couple of wise Plutarchians—he seems to mean Plutarch and Syrianus—whose eloquence is so inadequate that they have to bribe students with pots of honey from Hymettus if they want an audience! It seems certain from this that, whatever the teachings of the Athenian school, Synesius was not disposed to learn from them. Might one say that he had already come to feel some distaste for philosophy which differed from that traditionally taught at Alexandria?

But what was traditionally taught at Alexandria? What did people think of Plotinus there in the fifty years before A.D. 400? Henry has reminded us that Plotinus' whole vast work was virtually ignored in the East in the fourth century:<sup>16</sup> "Si l'on excepte quelques citations tacites des *'Αφορμαί* de Porphyre, ouvrage dont on ignore la date de composition, mais qui est vraisemblablement antérieur a la publication des *Ennéades* [probably in A.D. 301], si l'on excepte les extraits d'Éusèbe qui proviennent de l'édition d'Eustochius [this may or may not have existed], si l'on excepte enfin quelques très vagues allusions de Jamblique et les adaptations très libres de saint Basile, on ne rencontre en Orient, dans tout le cours du quatrième siècle, aucune trace des oeuvres de Plotin." Synesius' own writings indicate that he was at least slightly informed of the work of Plotinus, and during the fifth century the great Alexandrian came into his own all over the Greek East. Yet Alexandria itself had been in no hurry to recognize his importance.

We know comparatively little of philosophy in Alexandria during the fourth century. We do not know who carried the Platonic torch between the pupils of Ammonius Saccas, such as Origen, and the contemporaries of Theon, father of Hypatia. What we do know indicates that Plotinus was not the dominating influence. But if Hypatia did not learn of Plotinus from her teachers, perhaps it was she who revived interest in him at Alexandria. The attitude of Synesius does not indicate that Plotinus was a favourite of his teacher, but Synesius was a Christian and perhaps the Plotinian stream could more easily be transmitted to non-Christian Neoplatonists.

Our next task, therefore, is to determine what happened to philosophy

<sup>15</sup>For Plutarch's position in the Athenian school see below.

<sup>16</sup>P. Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident* (Louvain 1934) 15. Henry is a little too sweeping. He has not, for example, mentioned Gregory of Nyssa.

at Alexandria after Hypatia's death in 415. Synesius himself died before his teacher, and the fellow-pupils whom he mentions in his letters are mostly little known figures. Yet we do know the name of the next major Platonist in Alexandria; it was Hierocles. And an enquiry into the nature of Hierocles' thinking may shed light on the kind of philosophical tradition left behind in Alexandria after Hypatia's death.

About Hierocles we are fairly well informed, not only through the accounts of his work on Providence preserved by Photius (*Biblioth.* 214, 251), but also through his commentary on the *Carmen Aureum*.<sup>17</sup> He is, as scholars of Alexandrian thought agree, a very old-fashioned Platonist, whose work once again bears little mark of the influence of Plotinus, or of the Athenian school, but which harks back at least to Origen and beyond him to the Middle Platonists of the second century of our era. Like Hypatia Hierocles had both Christian and pagan pupils; and Praechter has suggested<sup>18</sup> that his thought likewise bears marks of Christian influence, though this is much more doubtful. It is true that there are many parallels between Christian thought and the Platonism of Hierocles, but these could easily exist without the necessity of postulating the influence of Christianity on the pagan master. After all Hierocles himself admits (*Biblioth.* 214) that Origen the pagan is one of his mentors, and Origen composed a treatise, possibly in opposition to Plotinus, which might well have pleased Christian ears: it was called *The King, The Sole Creator*.<sup>19</sup> The King, of course, is the first God of the Middle Platonic systems.

We learn from Photius something of Hierocles' philosophical training. Hierocles apparently regarded himself as in the main stream of Platonic thinking which stemmed from Ammonius Saccas (*Biblioth.* 241, 285H). He claims as links between himself and Ammonius, Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and his successors down to Plutarch of Athens. We should not attach much weight to this as far as doctrines are concerned. There may well be some similarity between the positions of Hierocles and those of Origen, but Plotinus is not a major influence on Hierocles, as we have seen, and the traces of Iamblichus seem negligible. The matter of Plutarch of Athens is important, however, for he is commonly regarded as the founder of the Athenian school which attained its greatest development under Syrianus and Proclus. On the basis of this section of Photius, in which Hierocles calls Plutarch *καθηγητὴν αὐτοῦ τῶν τοιούτων . . . δογμάτων*, Zeller<sup>20</sup> named Hierocles as one of

<sup>17</sup>Printed by Mullach in *Fragm. philos. Graec.* 1. 416-486.

<sup>18</sup>K. Praechter, "Christlich-neuplatonische Beziehungen," *BZ* 21 (1912) 1-27.

<sup>19</sup>Porph. *Vita Plotini* 3.

<sup>20</sup>Zeller (see note 8) 812. This view is also held by A. H. Armstrong, "Platonic *Eros* and Christian *Agape*," *Downside Review* 79 (1961) 120.

Plutarch's pupils, thus in effect linking him with the introduction of Plotinian or Iamblichan Neoplatonism into Alexandria.

If Zeller was right to believe that Hierocles was a pupil of Plutarch, we should have to conclude that he learned practically nothing from his master; for although it may be true<sup>21</sup> that Plutarch was hostile to the excesses of religiosity that were acceptable to Iamblichus, and later to Syrianus and the Athenian school, there can still be little doubt that he is far from that freedom from credulity and superstition which characterizes Plotinus. Fortunately Zeller need not be right. We do not have to assume that because Hierocles refers to Plutarch as his *καθηγητής* he necessarily studied under him at Athens.<sup>22</sup> It need only mean that Hierocles accepted Plutarch as one of his eminent predecessors. Hierocles then is a very traditional Platonist. Origen the pupil of Ammonius is perhaps his major authority, as Weber believes,<sup>23</sup> though something of Porphyry may also be detected. As Damascius tells us, his teachings included an exposition of Plato's *Gorgias*,<sup>24</sup> and it seems likely that he regarded himself as primarily a commentator on Plato or "Pythagoras" and a corrector of those whose novelties offended against the master's text.

Our enquiry into the teachings of Hierocles was undertaken in order to determine the nature of Alexandrian philosophy after Hypatia's death. We can now see that our view that Hypatia was not an exponent of the philosophy of either Plotinus or Iamblichus is given further confirmation: these philosophies do not appear to have been established in Alexandria until long after her death. In fact Alexandria seems only to have abandoned its "old-fashioned" Platonism when the effects of the pupils of Proclus made themselves felt in the latter part of the fifth century. Hypatia, then, as far as we can determine, taught a Platonism like that of Hierocles, though with more emphasis on mathematics—an emphasis which was appropriate in her scientific city and serves to link her still more closely to the Middle Platonic, un-Plotinian tradition to which Origen, the pupil of Ammonius, and Hierocles also largely belonged.

Do such conclusions provide the only knowledge we have of Hypatia's philosophical ideas? Her writings have not survived and the only example of her conversation to have been preserved by Synesius is the description of himself as an *ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν* (*Ep.* 81). Yet, as Lacombrade indicates,

<sup>21</sup>For this view of Plutarch see E. Evrard, "Le Maître de Plutarque d'Athènes," *L'Antiquité Classique* 29 (1960) 396.

<sup>22</sup>For this view, with reference to the treatise on Providence, see K. Praechter, *art.* "Hierocles (18)," *RE* 8, cols. 1481-1482 and R. Beutler, *art.* "Plutarch (3)," *RE* 21, col. 963.

<sup>23</sup>K.-O. Weber, *Origenes der Neuplatoniker: Versuch einer Interpretation* (*Zetemata* 27, Munich 1962).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. *Vita Isidori* 54.

the account in the *Suda* gives the patient enquirer a little more help.<sup>25</sup> Hypatia not only lectured to initiates and close disciples like Synesius; she had some kind of public position. She was, as the *Suda* and Socrates agree, a well-known public figure. In fact there is little doubt that she gave public lectures in virtue of some kind of official appointment: *διὰ μέσου τοῦ ἄστεως ποιουμένη τὰς προόδους ἐξηγεῖτο δημοσίᾳ τοῖς ἀκροῦσθαι βουλομένοις* is how the *Suda* expresses it. This seems to indicate, as Lacombrade supposes, that she held an official teaching post in the city.

But the fact that she was a woman must never be forgotten. Female philosophers were a comparative rarity in antiquity and were regarded as a marvellous phenomenon. The robe of Athena did not prevent many of the auditors of such blue-stockings from thinking in terms of the Birth of Venus. Generally speaking, famous intellectual women of antiquity are free and easy in matters of sexual morality, for the mere act of being a philosopher would involve abandoning the traditional pursuits of women and entering into debate with men. Men for their part protected themselves by treating such intrusions as acts of immodesty; the female philosophers tended to retaliate by shocking their frivolous male detractors or distractors into respectful silence. As told by Diogenes Laertius, the story of the aristocratic Hipparchia, wife of the Cynic Crates, is instructive. An unusual feature of her life, according to Diogenes, was that she went to banquets with her husband. On one such occasion, when she had silenced a fellow-guest named Theodorus with an ingenious piece of sophistry, she found that his reaction was so far from philosophical that he tried to remove her *ἱμάτιον* (D.L. 6.97). Such happenings help us to understand the case of Hypatia. Socrates (*H.E.* 7.15) speaks of her as follows: "She was not ashamed to be present in the company of men: for all respected and stood in awe of her the more because of her surpassing *σωφροσύνη*." The treatment of this matter in the *Suda* is more elaborate and more revealing: "She also took up the other branches of philosophy [other than mathematics], and though a woman she cast a *τρίβων* around herself and appeared in the centre of the city." Such manners in the Greek world must remind us of the Cynics, as Lacombrade has pointed out,<sup>26</sup> though he has not observed that Hypatia even wears the *τρίβων*, the rough cloak which was virtually the uniform of the Cynic preachers and their monastic successors. And Hypatia, as female philosopher, is in some ways more striking than Hipparchia, for even though Hipparchia apparently "lived with" her husband in public (*ἐν τῷ φανερῷ συνεγίνετο*), she at least had a husband. Hypatia's public appearances were not under the protection of a man, though fortunately for Kingsley and the other writers of romance she is

<sup>25</sup>Lacombrade (see note 8) 44-45.

<sup>26</sup>Lacombrade (see note 8) 44-45.

attested by the *Suda* to have remained not only σώφρων and virgin,<sup>27</sup> but also very beautiful and possessed of fine features.

Hipparchia had to seek out her partner Crates; Hypatia had no desire of partners but had to employ Cynic means to keep them off. A certain youth became enamoured of her and revealed his passion to her. The *Suda* gives two versions of what happened, one clearly designed to remove the Cynic element in what seems certainly to have been the true and original story. According to ἀπαιδευτοι λόγοι Hypatia recalled the youth to higher things by reminding him of the nature of culture. But the truth is, says the *Suda*, that cultural interests had long faded from his mind, and that she only brought him to his senses by throwing the ancient version of a used "feminine napkin" at him with the remark τούτου ἐράς, ὦ νεανίσκε, καλοῦ δὲ οὐδενός. This display of τὸ σύμβολον τῆς ἀκαθάρτου γενέσεως so shamed and amazed the youth, as the story goes, that his soul was turned to righteousness and he lived σωφρονέστερον ever after.

Here then is further information about Hypatia; her Platonism is at least in part the Platonism of the Cynic preacher. This is another feature which links her with the popular semi-Platonic teachers of the second century A.D.; and Socrates speaks of her σεμνή παρρησία. The unkind might almost hear the Cynic dog barking.

We must now turn from her doctrines and public attitudes to her public position and therefore inevitably to the causes of her death. Here there are a number of matters which deserve consideration. First of all it seems most unlikely that she was murdered *because* she was a philosopher. Despite occasional disturbances there was never the great hostility in Alexandria between the pagan teachers and the Christians that later arose in Athens. Hypatia certainly had Christian pupils, as did her successor Hierocles, and such pupils, including persons of some eminence like Synesius, would not have attended her school against the expressed wishes of the leaders of the Christian community. It is true that violence could and did occur in the philosophical schools in theological disputes. Zacharias records that in about 486 certain pagan students murdered a fellow-student named Paralios who, having delivered himself of public abuse of the goddess Isis, announced his intention of becoming a Christian.<sup>28</sup> But this is an exceptional circumstance, an occasion of what was virtually provocation to violence. A public denunciation of Isis among her worshippers could be construed as the expression of an over-pious desire for martyrdom. But this kind of situation clearly did not

<sup>27</sup>The *Suda* contradicts itself on this point. In one place the heroine διετέλει παρθένος (4.644.20); in another she is the wife of the philosopher Isidore (4.644.2). Fortunately we can be sure, as has been generally noticed, that the reference to Isidore is an absurd interpolation. Isidore's *floruit* is at least sixty years after Hypatia's death.

<sup>28</sup>Zacharias *Vita Severi* (*Patrologia Orientalis* 2) p. 38 Kugener.

arise in the case of Hypatia. It is highly unlikely that she had anything public to say about Christianity. It may be added further that if Hypatia's philosophical teachings had a Cynic, popularly Platonic, rather than a Plotinian or Iamblichan ring, they would certainly not have immediately aroused public hostility. The Cynics, if any philosophers, were tolerated by the Christians of later antiquity.

What Philostorgius has to say about Hypatia's death can be discounted. His bald statement that she was lynched by the orthodox party (*ὑπὸ τῶν τὸ ὁμοούσιον πρεσβεύοντων*) can be regarded as the malevolence of an Arian who hated Alexandria, home of the great enemy Athanasius. And in this matter the *Suda* seems as unreliable as Philostorgius. According to that source on one occasion the patriarch Cyril passed Hypatia's house, and, noticing the great crowd of men and horses coming and going, grew so envious that he plotted her assassination, which was, as the author writes, doubtless choosing his words carefully, the most unholy assassination of them all. The implication would be that Cyril was the most unholy bishop of them all.

That Cyril was a violent and hot-headed man, his dealings with Nestorius and the general tenor of his administration of his see make clear. But there is nothing in his career which would suggest that he would plot a murder through mere envy of someone else's popularity, as the *Suda* suggests. No evidence is offered by the *Suda* that Cyril had any hand in the crime. All that the *Suda* knows is that the actual criminals were *θηριώδεις ἄνθρωποι*, by which he certainly means monks. Monks were men who renounced city life; and such a renunciation made them for the average Greek "either beasts or gods," as Aristotle puts it in the *Politics* (1253A 29). For the authors of the murder of Hypatia "beasts" is clearly the more likely alternative.

The failure or unsatisfactory nature of our other sources compels us to rely mainly on Socrates for an account of what actually happened in 415. Socrates' narrative has the immediate advantage that the murder of Hypatia is placed in context. Chapters thirteen and fourteen of the *Ecclesiastical History* show how there had been considerable rioting in Alexandria, a not infrequent phenomenon, how much of this had taken the form of conflict between Jews and Christians, and how the prefect Orestes and the bishop Cyril had found themselves on opposite sides. Various monks had come down to Alexandria from their monasteries in Nitria and on one occasion had attacked and insulted the prefect as he was driving through the city. Their charges against him were that he sacrificed to the ancient gods and that he was a "Hellene," meaning a supporter of the Greek way of life.

We should remember that religious tension at Alexandria was still high at this time. The Christians were by now the dominant party, but they

were still nervous of the demonic aid granted to their adversaries. A few historical facts should be recalled: it was in 391 that the Emperor Theodosius had forbidden all pagan cults and indeed passed a specific law against such cults in Egypt. The destruction of the great temple of Serapis at Alexandria followed amid considerable civic disorder.<sup>29</sup> The years 392–394 saw the last struggle of the pagan cause in the West under the leadership of Eugenius and Flavianus and the inevitable defeat of the pagan party. Yet these events of twenty years back doubtless still worried the men of 415. They could recall that, thirty years before Eugenius, Julian the Apostate sat on the Imperial throne.

With this in our minds we can see that the charge against Orestes of sacrificing to the ancient gods was a serious one. He was lucky to escape with his life, but escape he did, and his rescuers arrested a monk named Ammonius who had struck the prefect with a stone. Ammonius was put to death with torture, to the intense indignation of Cyril who not only reported the whole affair to the Emperor but hailed Ammonius as a martyr for his faith. According to Socrates even the moderate Christians thought this action of Cyril's intolerable and he found it expedient to let the matter drop. But hostility between the bishop and the prefect remained intense.

Such is the context of the murder of Hypatia as Socrates describes it. Feelings were running high; fanatical monks were roaming Alexandria prepared to murder if necessary. Hypatia was, according to Socrates, a close associate of Orestes and the rumour spread that it was her influence which prevented the bishop and the prefect from being reconciled. This opinion grew up "among the church people" (*παρά τῶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας λαῶ*); there is no suggestion that Cyril himself held it. It is far more likely, as the passage itself suggests, that the fanatical rabble, maddened by fastings—it was during Lent that the murder occurred—conceived the notion that Hypatia was trying to play the role of Maximus of Ephesus to Orestes' Julian. It is, of course, highly unlikely that this was the case, for, although we know from other sources, for example, Synesius, that Hypatia had considerable influence, there is no evidence whatever to show that she exploited her power to forward the political position of Neoplatonism. Let us listen to Synesius speaking of Hypatia's position: "You always have power and long may you have it and make good use of that power. I recommend to your care Nicaeus and Philolaus, two excellent young men united by the bond of relationship. In order that they may come again into possession of their own property, try to get

<sup>29</sup>For the suppression of paganism see now H. Bloch, "The Pagan Revival in the West at the end of the Fourth Century," *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 198.

support for them from all your friends, whether private individuals or magistrates.”

It is likely enough both from this story and from what we know of the adherents of Platonism generally at this time that many of the followers of Hypatia would be men of influence. Philosophy was very frequently an aristocratic pursuit; many even of the eminent Cynics were of aristocratic origin. It was from these friends that Hypatia's danger came; they formed a group unsympathetic to Christianity and potentially hostile to it. Among such dangerous friends we should not perhaps include a large percentage of Hypatia's most serious-minded philosophical students, although some men of rank, like Synesius himself, were serious enough. But philosophy in ancient times always attracted the able aristocrat, the Alcibiades or the Critias, men who were impressed by the personalities of the teachers, though not sufficiently to warrant their adopting a philosophical life themselves. The circle of Socrates is illuminating: we see three types of individual: Alcibiades, Chaerophon, Plato. Alcibiades is the aristocratic dilettante, Chaerophon the serious bourgeois professional, Plato the aristocratic professional. If Synesius corresponds to Plato, then the Christians might fear that Orestes and his circle corresponded to Alcibiades.

According to the *Suda* Hypatia was *ἐμφρονά τε καὶ πολιτικήν*. It seems that it was to this public activity and to her public position rather than to her purely philosophical or even astronomical interests that she owed her death. There appears no reason to implicate Cyril in the murder itself; Cyril's crime was more probably to try and hush the matter up—bribery is mentioned in the *Suda*—in the vain hope of turning the spotlight of publicity away from such a disreputable event in the history of the Alexandrian church. His efforts to secure this only led to the belief, so welcome to such writers as Philostorgius and so gleefully accepted by latter-day haters of ecclesiastical power, that he himself was the organizer of the assassination.

Hypatia's fame then is in many ways unrelated to her historical position in the sequence of Alexandrian thinkers. Within the context of Platonism she appears as merely another to pass on the torch. Untouched or virtually untouched by the influence of Plotinus she accepted, taught, and handed on a conservative Platonism to a mixed pagan and Christian audience. The fact that she was a woman increased her fame in an age where the educated woman was comparatively rare; her dreadful end secured her a posthumous glory which her philosophical achievements would never have warranted. Her reputation in her lifetime was great; her death ensured that although we hear little of her in the philosophical writings of her successors she could win the admiration of that less professional

audience which to this day has reacted so favourably towards her. A short poem in the Greek Anthology, claimed by some to apostrophize Hypatia, sums up her legendary significance if not her philosophical importance:<sup>30</sup>

ὅταν βλέπω σε, προσκυνῶ, καὶ τοὺς λόγους  
 τῆς παρθένου τὸν οἶκον ἀστρῶν βλέπων.  
 εἰς οὐρανὸν γὰρ ἔστι σοῦ τὰ πράγματα,  
 Ἵπατία σεμνή, τῶν λόγων εὐμορφία,  
 ἄχραντον ἄστρον τῆς σοφῆς παιδεύσεως.

<sup>30</sup>*Greek Anthology* 9.400. For scepticism about the author and subject of this poem compare G. Luck, "Palladas: Christian or Pagan?," *HSCP* 63 (1958) 462–467.