

Summary

THE REAL AND THE SYMBOLIC GEOGRAPHY IN THE WORK OF SYNESIOS OF CYRENE

Two geographies meet in the textual work of the rhetorician, philosopher and bishop Synesios of Cyrene. First, the real geography of the world of the late 4th and early 5th century AD, as observed from one particular place, namely an ancient Greek city of Cyrene, Libya. The other, the “literary” geography, common to Synesios as well as to all other classicist intellectuals of the Late Antiquity. The real, “experienced” geography of Synesios has four main points: 1) Cyrene = the homeland; a local intellectual center of the past; at present in decline. 2) Athens = the universal intellectual center of the past; at present in decline. 3) Alexandria = the universal intellectual center of the present; a local administrative center of the present. 4) Constantinople = the universal administrative center of the present. Other places are introduced into this system either through the addressees of Synesios’ letters or through his literary education. Besides the four points described above, the geography includes: 1) Sparta = “mother city” of Cyrene; consequently, the Cyrene is given the meaning “the daughter city of Sparta”. 2) Cythera = dreamed-off refuge. 3) Heracleia Pontike = another ancient Greek city on the (northern) edge of Barbarian world; consequently, the Cyrene is given the meaning “an ancient Greek city on the southern edge of Barbarian world”. Both the “northern Barbarians” and the “southern Barbarians” occupy the spaces beyond the borders of the civilised world. Moreover, Synesios uses several geographical terms in a transposition. Particularly it is Constantinople which is never named directly. It is described either as “Rome”, or as “Thrace”, or, in a fiction work *Egyptian Tales*, as “Thebes”. This way of avoiding the “non-classical” term represents the ultimate proof of Synesios’ stubborn classicism. Thus, the Synesios’ literary work, being held in honour as a work of a possibly saint Christian bishop, reproduced the model of a “pure” classical geography to the classicistically tuned intellectuals of the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Synesios of Cyrene; Greek Literature of Late Antiquity; Geography of Late Antiquity; Literary Classicism of Late Antiquity

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