

EARTHQUAKES IN A.D. 363–368 AND THE DATE OF LIBANIUS, *ORATIO* 18

In his *Epitaphios* on the emperor Julian (A.D. 361–3), Libanius describes a series of earthquakes, which occurred after the death of the emperor on 26 June 363. In this paper I will argue that they cannot be identified with earthquakes that happened during the emperor's reign, as has been done, but that they must be dated in the years 363–8. This implies that the early date of 365 for the *Epitaphios* cannot be correct, and that the traditional date, after 11 October 368, is much more likely.

At the end of his *Epitaphios*, Libanius mourns the death of his hero. All kinds of evils have befallen the Roman empire after he was murdered and the earth has joined in the mourning as well (*Or.* 18.283–93). At the very end of the passage, Libanius writes:

(292) ἡ μὲν γε Γῆ καλῶς τε ἥσθητο τοῦ πάθους καὶ προσηκούσῃ κουρᾷ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐτίμησεν ἀποσεισασμένη, καθάπερ ἵππος ἀναβάτην, πόλεις τόσας καὶ τόσας, ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ πολλὰς, τὰς Λιβύων ἀπάσας. κεῖνται μὲν αἱ μέγιστα Σικελίας, κεῖνται δὲ Ἑλλήνων πλὴν μιᾶς αἱ πᾶσαι, κείται δὲ ἡ καλὴ Νίκαια, σείεται δὲ ἡ κάλλει μεγίστη καὶ θαρρεῖν περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος οὐκ ἔχει. (293) ταῦτα αὐτῷ παρὰ τῆς Γῆς ἦ, εἰ βούλει γε, τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος, παρὰ δὲ αὐτῶν Ὀρῶν λιμοὶ καὶ λοιμοὶ φθείροντες εὐθενεῖν τὰ περὶ γῆν.

(292) Earth, at least, was duly aware of her loss and has honoured our hero with fitting mourning. Like a horse tossing its rider, she has destroyed ever so many cities in Palestine, many, in the provinces of Libya, all. The greatest cities of Sicily lie in ruins, as does every city in Greece except one. Nicaea the lovely is laid low, and our loveliest of cities is shaken and can have no confidence for the future. (293) Such is the honour paid him by Earth or, if you would have it so, by Poseidon: but from the Seasons have come famine and plague, afflicting man and beast alike, as though it is not right that creatures upon earth should flourish once he has departed.

(tr. A. F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library, [London, 1969], 477).

In her influential paper, Martine Henry stated that the earthquakes were used by Libanius as *omina* for Julian's death, having thus occurred before 26 June 363.¹ Starting out from this fundamental assumption, she proceeded to identify and to situate the earthquakes. The destruction of Nicaea and the damage caused to the 'loveliest of cities', Nicomedia,² were due to the earthquake of 2 December 362, about which Ammianus informs us (22.13.5). Palestine was laid in ruins by the well-known earthquake of 18–19 May 363.³ Based only upon the evidence of Libanius, she proposed that two earthquakes occurred in Libya and Sicily during the reign of Julian.⁴ For the one in Greece only very doubtful parallels could be found.⁵

¹ M. Henry, 'Le témoignage de Libanius et les phénomènes sismiques du IV^e siècle de notre ère: essai d'interprétation'. *Phoenix* 39 (1985), 36–61, 59. Her conclusions were adopted by E. Guidoboni, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10th Century* (Rome, 1994), 259–60. Her redating of the earthquakes to A.D. 361–3 constituted an important argument for a redating of Libanius' eighteenth oration (see the works mentioned in nn. 14 and 23).

² Henry (n. 1), 45 has argued that Libanius is referring to Nicomedia, and not to Antioch, as used to be thought. Libanius often praised Nicomedia, sometimes without mentioning its name (*epistula* 1187, *oratio* 1.52), as in this passage. Moreover, no earthquake hitting Antioch is attested for this period. The last one occurred in 341 (Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.10).

³ For an extensive list of sources, see Guidoboni (n. 1), 264–7.

⁴ Cf. Guidoboni (n. 1), 259–60 (Libya), 260 (Sicily).

⁵ Guidoboni (n. 1), 261–2 (Greece). For the earthquake in Greece, Martine Henry adduced

This reconstruction is not very plausible. As can be gathered from the passage quoted above, Henry's basic assumption cannot be correct. The earthquakes were in Libanius' eyes part of the cosmic mourning provoked by Julian's death, and are consequently to be situated after that event; they were not *omina* announcing the murder. Also, even when taking the panegyric exaggeration into account, one feels uncomfortable to notice that Libanius would be the only one to mention three major earthquakes in the Mediterranean, namely in Greece, Libya and Sicily, during the reign of Julian. Finally, Ammianus states that what was left of Nicomedia after the earthquake of 358 was destroyed in 362, and 'a good part' of Nicaea,⁶ whereas in Libanius' words it was the other way round.

These difficulties indicate that an alternative explanation should be considered. It is indeed possible to identify the earthquakes mentioned by Libanius with those known from other sources as having occurred after Julian's death. According to this interpretation, Libanius even mentions them in the correct chronological order.

I agree with Henry that the destruction of Palestine is to be attributed to the earthquake of 18–19 May 363, taking place a month before Julian's death, while the emperor was still campaigning in Persia. This implies a minor displacement, for rhetorical purposes, of an event which happened just before to the period after Julian's demise. The next earthquake known is the famous one of 21 July 365, causing a tsunami which touched Egypt, Crete, the Peloponnese and Sicily.⁷ This could explain Libanius' references to the destruction of Libya and Greece. The inconvenience of this identification is that Libya itself may not have been struck by the earthquake or the tsunami.⁸ But 'Libya' can also be taken as referring to the whole continent of Africa, including Egypt, which would solve this difficulty.⁹ Recently, however, S. C. Stiros has argued that Libya may have been struck by an earthquake between 364 and 378. If he is correct, Libanius may be referring to that event.¹⁰ Finally, Nicaea was utterly destroyed on 11 October 368.¹¹ An earthquake destroying Nicaea must have been felt in Nicomedia, and can account for the 'loveliest of cities' being 'shaken' but not laid low.

The interpretation presented here is more economic than Henry's—for we do not have to accept that Libanius is the only source for three otherwise unknown

Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.1c ([n. 1], 50–3; cf. Guidoboni [n. 1], 262), but the oracle quoted there only implies that the temple in Delphi had collapsed, not that the event happened recently, nor that it was due to an earthquake. The other sources she mentions (Zosimus 4.18.1–2; Georgius Monachus, *chronicon* 560 [de Boor]; Cedrenus, *chronicon* 592 [Bekker]) date their earthquakes in Greece after the reign of Julian, Zosimus in 375, and the two Byzantine chroniclers during Gratian's reign (367–83).

⁶ Ammianus 22.13.5: *reliqua Nicomedia collapsa est terrae motu, itidemque Nicaeae portio non mediocris*.

⁷ For a full list of sources, see F. Jacques and B. Bousquet, 'Le raz de marée du 21 juillet 365: du cataclysme local à la catastrophe cosmique', *MEFRA* 96 (1984), 423–61, 456–61; Guidoboni (n. 1), 267–74.

⁸ C. Leppeley, 'L'Afrique du Nord et la prétendu séisme universel de 21 juillet 365', *MEFRA* 96 (1984), 463–91, 489–91. Georgius Monachus (*chronicon* 561.2–3 [de Boor]) includes Africa among the provinces hit by the earthquake, but this late text can hardly be considered secure evidence.

⁹ Cf. Libanius, *Oratio* 11.264; *Epistula* 1359. See Henry (n. 1), 54; K. Zimmermann, *Libyen: das Land südlich des Mittelmeers im Weltbild der Griechen* (Munich, 1999) 36–76. On the other hand, the plural *Libyai* could very well refer to the two provinces of Libya.

¹⁰ S. C. Stiros, 'The AD 365 Crete earthquake and possible seismic clustering during the fourth and sixth centuries AD in the eastern Mediterranean: a review of historical and archaeological data', *Journal of Structural Geology* 23 (2001), 545–602, 550. I owe this reference to R. Bittlestone.

earthquakes¹²—and does not violate the sense of the passage by dating the earthquakes after Julian's death.¹³ My reconstruction entails that the *Epitaphios* was written after the earthquake in Nicaea, that is after 11 October 368.

Some arguments against this date have been put forward in the past. F. Jacques and B. Bousquet argued that this section of the *Epitaphios* is of little historical value because Libanius is just expanding upon the themes he had introduced earlier in his *Monody on Julian* (*Or.* 17),¹⁴ dated to the beginning of the year 364 by H.-U. Wiemer.¹⁵ Even if Libanius were simply following the canvas of his earlier *Monody*, it would not preclude him from filling the speech up with more recent events. But, as it happens, concerning the earthquakes there is a distinct change in emphasis and meaning from *Oratio* 17 to *Oratio* 18. In the earlier speech, the earthquakes happened during the reign of Julian and were 'harbingers of the riot and disorder to come'.¹⁶ They announced the calamities Libanius has been summing up in the past paragraphs. In the *Epitaphios*, the earthquakes are, as we have seen, part of the catastrophes that hit the world after Julian's murder. As a matter of fact, this change of perspective may constitute an additional argument for dating the *Epitaphios* in 368. In the four years after the composition of the *Monody*, Libanius had learned of the earthquakes of 365 and 368. These offered him enough material to change a vague reference to earthquakes as *omina* during Julian's reign to an important series of earthquakes expressing the cosmic mourning after his death. Because of their impact, the events of 365 and 368 were well known and remembered,¹⁷ and could, in the eyes of Libanius, serve as a clear proof of the grief caused by Julian's death.

F. Jacques and B. Bousquet have also argued that Libanius must have written the *Epitaphios* before the famous tsunami of 365, as he does not mention this specific element, which probably would have been very attractive for the picture the orator wanted to give.¹⁸ This argument *e silentio* has its inherent weaknesses and cannot be

¹¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 7.15; Jerome, *chronicon* a. 368; *Consularia Constantinopolitana* a. 368; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.10.1; Johannes Malalas, *chronicon* 342–3. Cf. Guidoboni (n. 1), 274–5. See already R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanius* (Berlin, 1868), 253.

¹² The same problem affects the reconstruction of Jacques–Bousquet (n. 8), 435–7, who situate the earthquakes in Libya, Sicily and Greece after the one in Palestine of May 363 and before 365, without being able to adduce parallels.

¹³ Note that in *Oratio* 18.177 Libanius mentions the earthquake that hit Constantinople in February 362 (Amm. 23.1.7; cf. Guidoboni [n. 1], 263–4), but that he does not treat it as an *omen* of Julian's death. This can be taken as additional evidence for the fact that the earthquakes listed in *Or.* 18.292 did not take place during Julian's reign; otherwise the orator would have probably included the earthquake in Constantinople in that list. See G. Downey, 'Earthquakes at Constantinople and vicinity A.D. 342–1454', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 596–600, 596–7.

¹⁴ Jacques–Bousquet (n. 7), 428–31.

¹⁵ H.-U. Wiemer, *Libanios und Julian. Studien zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Politik im vierten Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Munich, 1995), 255.

¹⁶ Libanius, *Oratio* 17.30: μελλούσης ἀγγελιο παραχῆς τε καὶ ἀκοσμίας.

¹⁷ See the following contemporary sources for 365: Amm. 26.10.15–19; *Consularia Constantinopolitana* a. 365 (see R. W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* [Oxford, 1993] Fig. 3); Jerome, *chronicon* a. 365. For 368: Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 7.15; *Consularia Constantinopolitana* a. 368; Jerome, *chronicon* a. 368.

¹⁸ Jacques–Bousquet (n. 7), 428–9. See also Wiemer (n. 15), 265–6. F. Felgentreu, 'Zur Datierung der 18. Rede des Libanios', *Klio* 86 (2004), 206–17 rightly criticises this argument *e silentio*. However, his own argument for dating the speech before the summer of 366, that Libanius does not mention the acquittal of the philosopher Maximus (18.287), is equally an argument from silence. One can very well imagine that Libanius did not want to say anything about this event in order to be able to give a universally negative image of Valens' reign in contrast to that of Julian.

considered decisive. As Libanius is a panegyrist, we cannot expect that his descriptions are right in every detail: we would not dare, for example, to assume on account of this passage that the earthquake hitting Sicily laid low every single city on the island. However, it remains difficult to judge what elements Libanius deemed appropriate for his account. The argument can also be inverted and used against those who reconstruct further unknown earthquakes solely on the basis of Libanius. Would these local earthquakes, not recorded in contemporary chronicles or sources, constitute enough mourning for such a great emperor? Would a reader feel persuaded by Libanius' argument that the world was mourning if he cannot link the orator's geographical indications to any major earthquake of the past years? My reversal of the original argument is just as inconclusive, but it shows that the way of reasoning itself is not strong enough to refute any dating of the text.

It has, finally, been maintained by several scholars that Libanius must have written the *Epitaphios* before the usurpation of Procopius (September 365–May 366). R. Foerster stated that it would have been normal for Libanius to mention Procopius' insurrection among the disasters that befell the empire after Julian's death. As he does not, the discourse should be dated before September 365.¹⁹ F. Jacques and B. Bousquet said that the 'polemical tone' of the speech in favour of Julian precludes a publication during the years of the usurpation of Procopius, a relative of Julian, and during the repression which followed it.²⁰ H.-U. Wiemer pointed out that Libanius is very distanced from Procopius, neither stigmatizing him as an usurper (*tyrannos*) nor attracting attention to his blood relationship with Julian.²¹ These arguments do have a certain strength, as Libanius might have kept silent about Procopius to avoid arousing suspicions about his loyalty to Valens. None of them, however, can be considered conclusive. The main problem is that the *Epitaphios* probably never circulated widely and was only published after the death of Valens (378).²² In such a 'private' composition, Libanius could show his admiration of Julian more readily than he would have if his discourse had been addressed to court circles or to a general audience. In addition, his silence about or distance from Procopius can be explained by the fact that Libanius did not want to link his hero to a failed usurper, who was a relative of Julian. Attracting attention to Procopius would only blemish Julian's outstanding qualities. Libanius' silence can also be understood as expressing his fear to rekindle the issue of his suspected sympathy for the usurper, because he had been accused of writing a panegyric of Procopius.²³ We can conclude that Libanius' attitude towards Procopius does not exclude a date of the *Epitaphios* after his usurpation.

I have shown that it is possible to identify the earthquakes mentioned by Libanius in *Or.* 18.292 with those having occurred in A.D. 363–8, and that none of the arguments hitherto brought forward in support of a dating of *Oratio* 18 before 365 is conclusive. As a consequence, the earthquakes that, according to some scholars, hit Sicily, Libya and Greece during the reign of Julian did not take place. Although lately scholars have in general preferred an early date for the *Epitaphios*, in the first half of

¹⁹ R. Foerster, *Libanii Opera* (Leipzig, 1904), 2.224.

²⁰ Jacques-Bousquet (n. 7), 428, n. 20.

²¹ Wiemer (n. 15), 264–5. See Libanius, *Oratio* 18.214, 260.

²² Wiemer (n. 15), 267.

²³ Libanius, *Oratio* 1.163.

365, before 21 July,²⁴ my reconstruction implies that the traditional date, shortly after October 368,²⁵ is preferable.

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²⁴ Cf. most recently G. Fatouros, T. Krischer and W. Portmann, *Libanios. Kaiserreden* (Stuttgart, 2002), 132–3.

²⁵ Cf. Sievers (n. 11) 253; J. Bidez, *La vie de l'empereur Julien* (Paris, 1965), 336; E. Bliembach, *Libanios. Oratio 18 (Epitaphios). Kommentar (Par. 111–308)* (Würzburg, 1976), xlv.

HOMER, THE BIBLE AND BEYOND: A NOTE ON *CHR. PAT.* 83–7

The dramatic text known as *Christus Patiens* is still badly in need of a good edition and commentary;¹ recent research has demonstrated that, despite the unanimous manuscript attribution (followed amongst others by the latest editor²), it is not the work of Gregory of Nazianz, but rather a much later Byzantine product, perhaps dating from the eleventh or twelfth centuries.³ Its author has often been charged with having composed a mechanical and tasteless cento of lines drawn from ancient tragedies, and only recently have some scholars rehabilitated him by highlighting some of his indisputable merits.⁴ In this note, I shall point to one particular instance of pregnant and meaningful poetic reminiscence in the *Christus Patiens*.

Lines 1–90 of the drama are a long monologue in which the Virgin Mary, having a premonition of the Passion about to take place (we are in the night of Judas' treason), complains about the faults of mankind, about her son's fate and about her own suffering. Towards the end of this monologue, the Mother of God speaks about the Annunciation and recalls her reaction of joy as well as the 'sacrifice' she made on that occasion: she combines a long quotation from the words of Clytaemestra (ll. 79–82 are almost entirely drawn from the queen's *rhesis* in Aesch. *Ag.* 594–7)⁵ with an

¹ A seminar work on this topic is currently being carried out at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa) under the direction of Glenn W. Most. This note grows out of a session of that seminar, and I am grateful to the participants for their suggestions.

² Grégoire de Nazianze, *La Passion du Christ*, ed. A. Tuilier (Paris, 1969).

³ I believe the lexical arguments brought by W. Hörandner, *Lexikalische Beobachtungen zum Christos Paschon*, in E. Trapp (ed.), *Studien zur byzantinischen Lexikographie* (Wien, 1988), 183–202, to be almost conclusive in this respect.

⁴ I especially refer to two recent articles, which also give full bibliographic references to the debated issue of the date and authorship of this text: K. Pollmann, 'Jesus Christus und Dionysos. Überlegungen zu dem Euripides-Cento Christus Patiens', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 47 (1997), 87–106; W. Puchner, 'Theaterwissenschaftliche und andere Anmerkungen zum "Christus Patiens"', *Anzeiger der Österr. Akad. der Wiss. – Phil.-hist. Klasse* 129 (1992), 93–143.

⁵ Ll. 79–82: ὁμως δ' ἔθνον καὶ γυναικείῳ νόμῳ / ψυχῆς τ' ἔπεμπον ἀλαλαγμὸν ἐκ μέσης, / λάσκουσ' ἀνευφημοῦσα τὴν ἀγγελίαν, / θυγάτηρ φέρουσά τ' εὐώδη φλόγα. The ἀλαλαγμός might be understood as a hint to the *Magnificat*, a prayer that immediately follows the Annunciation scene in the Gospel of Luke: see Luc. 1.26–38 and 46–55. I owe this point to Carlo Pernigotti.