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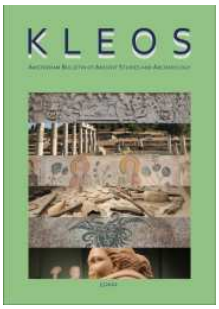

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Narrativity in Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades*

Cagla Umsu-Seifert

Abstract

Olympiodorus, a Neoplatonic commentator from the 6th century AD, has been the subject of much scholarly debate. His commentaries focus more on Plato's literary style than they do on theoretical issues. The philosophical significance of his works is therefore disputed. Following the recent evaluation by H. Tarrant (2021), this paper will reassess Olympiodorus' philosophical approach in light of the analyses on narrativity and classics by I. J. F. de Jong (2014) and on Neoplatonic narratives by M. Asper (2013). After outlining some stories from Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades*, I discuss their contents and functions. In this commentary, Olympiodorus characterises the philosophers, especially Plato, as superior to political authorities. In addition, he identifies certain narrative strategies of Plato and applies them in his own explanations, thus establishing the link between his exegesis and Plato's philosophy. With stories reflecting the superiority of philosophical knowledge, Olympiodorus emphasises the merits of Platonic education and thereby of his own teaching.

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▶ *Profile page*

Introduction

Olympiodorus of Alexandria has been a controversial figure in terms of his role in the Neoplatonism of Late Antiquity. He lived approximately between 495 and 570 AD and was the "head" (σχολάρχης) of the Alexandrian philosophy school.[1] His lectures on the works of Plato and Aristotle have come down to us in the form of commentaries. Researchers on Late Antiquity have taken an interest in Olympiodorus, particularly since he has been called the "last pagan teacher" of philosophy.[2] On the other hand, a number of scholars have dismissed Olympiodorus' commentaries

1 On the Alexandrian School in the Late Antiquity, see Sorabji 2014.

2 For example, by Festugière 1966, 1589 and Westerink 1990, 336.

as instructional texts for students.[3] Their emphasis on the linguistic and literary features of the Platonic dialogs provided a contrast to the works of Proclus, which had a stronger theoretical emphasis.[4] Contrary to this view, H. Tarrant has recently argued that Olympiodorus represents a new understanding of Plato's style.[5] Further study of Olympiodorus' commentaries is still required to determine the specifics of his exegetical method.

This paper proceeds from the thesis that a narratological perspective is helpful in accessing characteristic elements of Olympiodorus' exegesis. First, I will give a brief overview of the concepts of narrativity regarding their relevance both to Plato and to the Neoplatonic commentaries. This is followed by an overview of Olympiodorus' socio-historical context and his *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades* (hereafter referred to as the *Commentary on Alcibiades*). The subsequent sections examine certain narratives in this commentary, based mainly on the story of Plato's life. Finally, I will discuss Olympiodorus' strategies as narrator and his place in the Platonic tradition. His novel contribution to Platonic philosophy can be explained, as this paper will argue, by his use of narratives as a literary device.

Narrativity in Plato and in Neoplatonic Commentaries

First, I should clarify what I understand with the term 'narrative'. As described by I. J. F. de Jong, "[…] a narrative text is a text in which a narrator recounts a series of events".[6] This definition sets two main criteria for a narrative: 1) a narrator and 2) a sequence of events.

If storytelling is an act of communication, it has always a narrator who presupposes a narratee or narratees.[7] The narrator, defined as a necessary main principle of any narrative, is considered as a narrating subject that is not automatically equated with the author.[8] Any narrative is directed to an addressee, which is called a narratee. Narratees do not have a merely receptive role, but they also influence the perception of a narrative by providing the reader with figures of addressees.[9] A sequence of events, on the other hand, is not considered a prerequisite for all narratives:

3 An illustration of this position is Westerink's statement that in Olympiodorus' case "it might be more correct to speak of a teaching routine than of a philosophy" (Westerink 1976, 23).

4 For an overview of the scholarly discussion on this subject, see Griffin 2014.

5 Tarrant 2021, 219, argues that Olympiodorus conceives of inspiration as an experience not reserved for philosophers. Thus, according to Tarrant, Olympiodorus portrays Plato as both humble and exalted through his inspirations and determines the value of a speech not by its style but by the person who speaks.

6 De Jong 2014, 17.

7 Ibid., 28.

8 Ibid., 18.

9 Ibid., 33. Readers can identify with or distance themselves from these fictional addressees.

only in some cases do they comply with a 'story' involving a set of events that are causally related to each other.[10]

It has been argued that a narrator, who comments on the reported events, does so for a purpose.[11] The 'narrativity' of a text corresponds to its use of narratives in this sense.[12] An examination of narrativity is determined by several key factors such as forms and contents of stories, their interaction with narratees, and the identity of the narrator. It is, therefore, necessary to place concrete stories into their overall textual and socio-historical context in order to assess their narrativity.

In search of the ancient examples of narratives, researchers have taken Plato as one of the most notable subjects. The reason for this was not only that Plato laid the theoretical foundations for literary criticism, but also that he used narratives in his philosophical reasoning. Several kinds of narrativity have been exposed in the Platonic dialogues, including those without a narrative frame. The 'dramatic dialogues' such as the *Alcibiades* are not narrated in a third person, but, nevertheless, Socrates reports on historical persons or events in the course of the conversation. Plato also has 'pseudo-diegetic' dialogues, in which the narrator suppresses his role as such and instead presents the real actors as the actual narrators.[13]

The exploration of narrativity in Plato's philosophy, to be sure, is not only an invention of modern scholarship. Neoplatonic commentators regarded the stories of Platonic dialogues as more than subsidiary remarks and recognized their philosophical value. The greatest contribution to this exegetical method in Late Antiquity has been probably made by Proclus (412–485 AD), whose commentaries on several dialogues of Plato are partially extant.[14] Proclus' exegesis is distinguished by an extended philosophical discourse that takes the language of Plato's text as the starting point for the interpretation of its theoretical facets.[15] This approach is followed by a focus on specific aspects of texts, such as narratives, as can be seen in Olympiodorus. He develops Plato's brief references to extended reports, introduces the story behind

10 Ibid., 38. In this paper, I will use the term 'story' not in this technical sense, but in the sense of a single narrative.

11 Lyotard 1984, 27–31, has exposed certain functions of narratives such as legitimisation.

12 On different meanings of the term 'narrativity', see Abbott 2014.

13 Genette 1980, 236–237, and De Jong 2014, 17, describe Plato's *Theaetetus* as an example for this category, since the narrator says that he avoids the tag 'he said', thus describing the scene as it happens actually, and not being a narrative of a past event.

14 On the reception of Proclus in general, see Layne/Butorac 2017; on his *Commentary on Alcibiades*, see Tarrant/Renaud 2015, 177–185.

15 Proclus frequently mentions the explanation of λέξις, "the phrase", referring to the "wording" of the text in his *Commentary on Alcibiades* (185.17–19, 207.19–208.2, 237.13–17, 252.3–5, 330.15–16).

the dialogue and its characters, and explains some arguments with accounts on historical figures.[16] An analysis of the narratives in Olympiodorus' commentaries is therefore of particular importance, as it can shed light on his exegetical approach to Plato and thus contribute to research on Platonism.

In the case of philosophical commentaries, it would be appropriate to speak of narratives with 'overt narrators' who clearly manifest themselves as such throughout the text.[17] Yet particularly in the stories, according to M. Asper, we can glance at the narrator as author through the narrative.[18] In these instances, the narrator speaks as author and refers to subjects beyond the commented text. Furthermore, the implementation of narratives in a commentary gives the exegete the opportunity to present his views without being strictly bound to his source. Several Neoplatonic commentators include narratives in their works. As Asper shows, not only Proclus, but also other Neoplatonist commentators Simplicius, Eutocius and Philoponus (all three studied in the Alexandrian school in the 5th–6th century AD) were aware of the functions of narratives for strategic purposes – either to construct a philosophical 'tradition' or to establish the commentators' status as part of this tradition.[19] This aspect of Neoplatonic exegesis is found also in the commentaries of Olympiodorus, for they are largely concerned with explaining Plato's stories and inventing new ones.

Olympiodorus' Commentary on Alcibiades in its historical framework

The schools of Alexandria played an essential role in the intellectual scene of Late Antiquity particularly through the teachings of Alexandrian Neoplatonists.[20] Even though philosophers might have experienced challenges in the Justinian period (527–565 AD), at the same time Alexandria witnessed the establishment of philosophy as a professional school discipline.[21] Olympiodorus contributed to this development as a teacher by

16 Some of these narratives are already present in Plato and Proclus, such as about Cyrus and Xerxes (Plato, Alcibiades 105b–c; Proclus, Commentary on Alcibiades 150.24–151.8). However, some stories that are either absent or briefly skipped by Proclus are described in detail by Olympiodorus, such as on Plato's encounter with the tyrant Dionysius (see below in section 4).

17 De Jong 2014, 26.

18 Asper 2013, 436. On narrative theory in ancient texts, see Hodkinson/Faulkner 2015, 3 and Finkelberg 2019, 13–14. A further study on narrative strategies in Proclus' hymns is conducted by Devlin 2015.

19 Asper 2013, 442–443.

20 For a general overview of the schools in Greco-Roman Egypt, see Cribiore 2001, 15–44. See also Watts 2006 and Sorabji 2014 on the Alexandrian school of philosophy in Late Antiquity.

21 Watts 2006, 209–210, refers for this thesis to Damascius' statement that the Alexandrian chair of philosophy was publicly funded (Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, fragment 124 in Zintzen 1967).

presenting Platonic philosophy as the best method of education. His commentaries consist of school lectures, his 'narratees' thus being primarily disciples of philosophy.[22] As they are the written form of the lectures, Olympiodorus' commentaries are also directed at the readers.[23] In these texts, it becomes evident that Olympiodorus aims at addressing his audience through an easily accessible level of philosophical interpretation.

In the context of education, Neoplatonic commentators regarded Plato's *Alcibiades* as the starting point for teaching Platonic philosophy.[24] This view is based on the Neoplatonic ordering of the dialogues according to their 'steps of virtue' the first of which is 'political virtue', that is, the excellence of a person who lives and acts in society.[25] In Neoplatonic exegesis, the political virtue is identified with Plato's *Alcibiades*, with which Olympiodorus begins his curriculum. His *Commentary on Alcibiades* consists of 28 sections (πράξεις, mostly translated as "lectures"), explaining in each of them certain parts of Plato's *Alcibiades* in a consequent order. The structure of the text is clearly arranged: each lecture begins with a "sentence" (λῆμμα) taken from the dialogue, expands on its theoretical contents (θεωρία), followed mostly by a section at the end of the lecture that elaborates on grammatical and linguistic details word by word (λέξις).[26]

Before beginning his exegesis of Plato's *Alcibiades*, Olympiodorus introduces Plato and his philosophy in a detailed preamble. This introduction, known as the 'Life of Plato', constitutes a distinctive feature of Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Alcibiades*. Although preliminary lectures played a key role in Platonic education, few introductory texts have survived.[27] Another example which originated contemporary to Olympiodorus,

22 On the concept of narratee see De Jong 2014, 27–28.

23 If it is granted that his commentaries largely correspond to his formulations in the lectures, being written down "from his voice" (ἀπὸ φωνῆς) simultaneously. It was assumed that this task was carried out by one of his disciples (Westerink 1982, VIII). This 'student-editor' does not reveal himself, which may indicate that the text remains faithful to the original lecture. There are other cases where the student claims authorship, as in Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, which is titled as Ammonius' ὑπομνήματα, "edited notes", originated from Proclus' lectures.

24 For a comprehensive overview of the *Alcibiades* in the Platonic tradition see Tarrant/Renaud 2015.

25 The Neoplatonists regarded a certain virtue as σκοπός, "the purpose and the central theme", of each dialogue. On the scale of virtues in Neoplatonism, see Griffin 2015, 7–13.

26 In commentaries, a λῆμμα refers to a – usually summarizing – part of the source text to be commented on in the following section. In a more specific sense, it means, a "statement", something "that is taken to be". The structure of θεωρία and λέξις was common to almost all Alexandrian commentators, which demonstrated, according to I. Papachristou 2021, 4, their educational purposes. On λέξις see above note 15.

27 On the set of preliminary issues in the genre of commentary, see Mansfeld 1994, 2–7 and 10–39.

the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, existed as an individual treatise.[28] By contrast, Olympiodorus appends his introduction to the *Commentary on Alcibiades*. In this commentary, Olympiodorus reinforces the idea of political virtue with stories that introduce role figures. The most important of these figures, Plato, the founder of Platonic philosophy, is presented in detail at the very beginning.

The Life of Plato: The Role of Biographical Narrative

Prior to Olympiodorus, Plato's biography was treated by several authors and examined in the Platonic tradition.[29] It has been assumed that Proclus had written an introduction to Platonic curriculum, though it is not possible to determine if he had Plato's biography in this work.[30] Further, Olympiodorus mentions Damascius as his other source on the *Alcibiades*, whose commentary is completely lost. The only other biography of Plato written in Late Antique Alexandria is contained in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*.[31] As mentioned before, the *Anonymous Prolegomena* was not related to a particular commentator or commentary work, but rather represented an individual introduction. Thus, Olympiodorus provides the unique example of a Platonic commentary that begins with a biography of Plato.[32] A. Motta has argued that Olympiodorus deliberately placed this episode at the beginning of his *Commentary on Alcibiades*.[33] This implies a special function of this biography and makes it particularly interesting as a story. Moreover, this is the only case where one narrative takes up an entire lecture, while other shorter accounts are scattered throughout the commentary. The *Life of Plato* is therefore the appropriate starting point for examining the content and function of Olympiodorus' narratives.

28 According to Westerink 1962, L, this treatise is dated to the later sixth century AD, probably being written by one of Olympiodorus' students or inspired by him. This introduction mentions "the life story of the philosopher" (τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ φιλοσόφου, *Anonymous Prolegomena* 28.3) as the starting point for admiring Plato's philosophy. Motta 2021, 36, states that the importance of biographies in the Platonic tradition was based on the thesis that a philosopher's life and teachings were interconnected.

29 An example in the Platonic tradition is Apuleius' *De Platone*. Doxographical literature such as Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (3.1) provides another source.

30 There is a comprehensive account of the content of the Neoplatonic introductory tradition in the later *Anonymous Prolegomena* (28.1–16). On the thesis of a lost introductory treatise of Proclus, see Mansfeld 1994, 28–30. Westerink 1962, XLI, considers the life of the philosopher, the first point in the *Anonymous Prolegomena*, as not derived from Proclus.

31 *Anonymous Prolegomena* 1.10–6.22.

32 Despite separate publications of Olympiodorus' *Life of Plato* (for example, by Casaubon), the manuscript tradition places this text after the title of the *Commentary on Alcibiades* and thus as its introduction. For a description of the manuscripts, see Westerink 1982, VII–VIII and Duke 1989.

33 Motta 2021, 36.

Biographical narratives in philosophical works do not merely provide 'historical' information about a person, but also help to state an argument effectively. Most of such accounts in the Neoplatonic commentaries might be examined, as Asper suggests, under the concept of 'grand narrative': they construct and establish a 'Platonic tradition' with the function of legitimisation and reproduction of its authority, "[...] which is precisely the character of master narratives."[34] Moreover, according to Asper, the commentators form and maintain a group identity through their expositions on the content of Platonic philosophy, on the character of a philosopher, and on an ideal student.[35]

Olympiodorus depicts Plato in such a manner that the personal development of the philosopher strengthens the status of his philosophy. About Plato's education, he states that the philosopher had been engaged in other domains such as poetry until his encounter with Socrates. This experience represents a turning point in Plato's life for Olympiodorus, after which he devoted himself exclusively to philosophy.[36] In the following passages on his life, Olympiodorus reports on Plato's visits to several outstanding scientific centres, such as Egypt and Persia.[37] These remarks point out the superiority of Plato's knowledge, since he was not only educated in the fields known in Athens, but also by Egyptian priests and Persian Magi. At the same time, Plato was a lover of the works of nature, as a philosopher should be.[38] This reason brought him to Sicily and led him to a life-changing experience: Plato's encounter with Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse. In the following, I will examine Olympiodorus' narrative on Plato's confrontation with Dionysius to highlight his discourse on authority.

Contrasting authorities: philosopher and politics

Several authors have discussed Plato's first trip to Sicily in terms of his political philosophy.[39] To provide a rationale for this journey, Olympiodorus combines the previous explanations with an emphasis on Plato's political ambitions, thus setting a different accent. First, he presents the traditional reason for Plato's first

34 Asper 2013, 444, uses 'master narrative' as a term for grand narrative. A grand narrative is described as an account that constructs origins and progress in a particular field, creates a definition of 'correct' science, and the identity of its practitioners (Lyotard 1984, 38).

35 Asper 2013, 454.

36 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.76–77.

37 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.135–145. Riginos 1976, 64, suggests that Plato's Egyptian journey is probably a later invention, for which Cicero and Diodorus are the earliest sources.

38 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.94–95.

39 On Sicilian voyages and the anecdotes related to them see Riginos 1976, 70–85.

trip, namely that the philosopher went to Sicily out of scientific curiosity to see the volcano on Mount Aetna.[40] Subsequently, Olympiodorus notes that Plato also met Dionysius the Great there. This encounter was by no means a coincidence, as Olympiodorus asserts this in the remark that follows. In fact, he adds, Plato's goal from the beginning had been to transform the tyranny of Dionysius into an aristocracy.[41] The same reason recurs on Plato's second journey after the death of Dionysius the Elder, when his son Dionysius comes to power. Olympiodorus reports that Plato again travelled to Sicily after being informed of the political situation by a letter from Dion, who had accompanied him on his first trip.[42] Only the third journey, according to Olympiodorus, is not primarily political, but is intended to help Dion, who had been thrown into prison by Dionysius the Younger.[43]

In his account on Plato's Sicilian trips, Olympiodorus relies mainly on the literary tradition.[44] His narrative, for its part, requires special attention since it takes up a considerable portion of Plato's life, although Olympiodorus is aware that it causes some inconsistencies. Firstly, Olympiodorus remarks that with these journeys he interrupts the section on Plato's education.[45] Nevertheless, he decides to retain this narrative, implying that it has special significance. Secondly, the *Anonymous Prolegomena* skips the Sicilian episode in a single sentence.[46] Not for all Neoplatonists, then, did these journeys constitute an essential part of Plato's biography.[47] As a result, it seems obvious that Olympiodorus' account of this episode in Plato's life has the purpose of raising a particular issue. With reference to the Sicilian episode, Olympiodorus introduces a central discussion of Platonic political philosophy: the tension between the political authority and the authority of knowledge, which is identified with the figure of the philosopher.[48]

40 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.94–96.

41 Olympiodorus gives this explanation in the *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.97–100, with the finishing remark διὸ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφίκετο, "this is why he went to him".

42 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.117–119.

43 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.128–133.

44 According to Riginos 1976, 72, a register of three voyages with their reasons became the standard version after Apuleius. On other accounts on the Sicilian episode, see Riginos 1976, 70–85.

45 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.143–144.

46 *Anonymous Prolegomena* 4.11–13.

47 Westerink 1962, XXXIII, states that in the traditional form of Plato's life the Sicilian episode does not interrupt Plato's education, while in the version of Olympiodorus it does. This, according to Westerink, might have been a reason for the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena* to dismiss this episode.

48 On the conception of authority in Platonic tradition see Erler et al. 2021, 1–11 and Umsu-Seifert 2021, 102–104.

The divergent positions of Plato and Dionysius are traditionally expressed through their conversation.[49] Dionysius' first question is about whom Plato regards as happy. Plato's answer is Socrates, although the tyrant thought that the philosopher would give his name. This first question demonstrates that happiness cannot be reached through political power without knowledge. The literary *topos* of a tyrant's inquiry about the happiest person can be traced back to Herodotus' description of the encounter between Solon and Croesus.[50] In response to another issue about the duty of a statesman, Dionysius says that it consists in distributing justice properly.[51] Plato, however, disapproves of it as a subordinate part of politics and says that a statesman should rather make his citizens better. To the last question, whether a tyrant is courageous, Plato offends Dionysius stating that a tyrant fears everyone – and that leads to his ejection from Sicily.[52]

Olympiodorus relates this passage to Plato's political philosophy to further illustrate the contrast between philosophical and political authorities. By claiming that Plato had a political goal from the beginning, Olympiodorus intends to express the juxtaposition of Plato and Dionysius as the philosopher's elaborate opposition to the tyrant. As A. S. Riginos remarks, the three questions by Olympiodorus are not closely related, but combined to show an increasing boldness in Plato's answers.[53] In addition, Olympiodorus suggests on several occasions that a philosopher can be superior to a tyrant with the help of reason, since a tyrant's power is deprived of reason.[54] This idea appears in Plato's reply to the second question concerning a ruler's duty: in Olympiodorus' representation, Plato highlights the ethical duty of the ideal ruler, that is, improving citizens, which stands against the merely pragmatical work of administration. On the contrary, a philosopher's power is the knowledge that a tyrant cannot take away.[55] Finally, the timidity of the tyrant, a traditional topic, is given as Plato's last response, showing that the philosopher was not afraid of the increasing threats posed by Dionysius.

In this manner, Olympiodorus contrasts the courage of a philosopher with the fearfulness of a tyrant. A similar point is taken up in other passages of the commentary, as in the case of

49 For an overview of the several versions of this conversation, see Riginos 1976, 75–79.

50 Ibid., 75. Cf. Herodotus 1.29–33.

51 Cf. ibid., 78 on the sources of this view in Platonic dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, as well as in Diogenes Laertius and in Plutarch.

52 The cowardice of tyrants was a literary topos in Antiquity, for example in Plutarch's *Life of Dion*, 9.8. Diogenes Laertius (3.18–19) differs in this point and notes that Dionysius was offended because Plato told him that a tyrant should be superior in virtue.

53 Riginos 1976, 76.

54 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 226.10.

55 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 36.15–17, 55.15–16, 146,11.

the philosopher Anaxarchus, who did not fear death against the tyrant Nicocreon.[56] Another example concerns the question of whether a philosopher teaches for money, where Olympiodorus refers to Zeno, who accepted money not for himself, but to help students in need. From this point, Olympiodorus proceeds to Zeno's opposition against Nearchus, the tyrant of Elea, since these both cases – taking money and his reaction against the tyrant – are examples of Zeno's strategy of 'pretending'. Here we find the story of how Zeno deceived Nearchus: when asked if he knew who was conspiring against the tyranny, Zeno pointed to the tyrant's bodyguards. After they were killed, the tyrant himself was an easy target.[57]

All these examples taken together suggest that Olympiodorus composes Platonic stories in such a way as to underline his philosophical theses. He uses several other methods to convey his narratives with greater efficiency, which will be discussed in the following.

Olympiodorus' role as narrator of Plato

In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates occasionally takes the role of an interpreter of the emotional responses of other speakers. This feature presents Socrates, the narrator, as omniscient, which also renders Plato as an author, an authority on knowledge.[58] As illustrated by K. A. Morgan, Socrates' remarks on the thoughts and emotions of other speakers do not serve merely as descriptions, but also show him in full control of the conversation as well as relaying the emotional reactions of other speakers as an omniscient narrator.[59]

Olympiodorus applies the same technique for demonstrating his knowledge of Alcibiades and Socrates in his *Commentary on Alcibiades*. As an example, he comments that Alcibiades does not have an answer to give, which shows that the commentator knows about Alcibiades' state of knowledge. He also visualises Alcibiades as a young man at a loss and ashamed of his own ignorance in the presence of Socrates.[60] Furthermore, Olympiodorus interprets Socrates' strategy and the reasons that lead the philosopher to behave and speak in a certain way. Since the philosopher was in love with Alcibiades in a godlike manner, he approached the young

56 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 105.5, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* 36.3.9–11. This account probably draws on Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 9.59.

57 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 140.5–15. A possible source of this story is the account of Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 9.26.

58 Morgan 2004, 361–362.

59 Ibid., 363.

60 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 83.18–20.

man to bring him to perfection.[61] Through similar remarks, Olympiodorus presents his knowledge of Socrates' 'inner world' and thoughts. This puts him as the narrator on the *Alcibiades* to the same status as Plato.

Olympiodorus' method of interpretation is further supported by another strategy that directs the perceptions of his audience. He calls his narratees' attention to particular literary features of the dialogue, so that "[…] the narratee is drawn into a world."[62] This is achieved at first by emphasising the perception of the text through seeing and hearing. Olympiodorus' frequent use of the second person imperative 'see' (ἰδού) can be regarded in this sense.[63] The narratee is invited either to 'see' a statement in the text and understand its meaning, or there is a visualization of the elements in the dialogue through vivid descriptions of characters as well as historical events or persons.[64]

The second person imperative enables Olympiodorus at the same time to address his narratees directly. In this way, he reproduces the effect of the Platonic conversation between different speakers. Direct addresses to the second person imitate Socrates' speech to Alcibiades, with phrases such as 'here you have' (ἔχεις), meaning an idea, or theory.[65] Olympiodorus points out that Socrates addresses Alcibiades at the right time and in an appropriate manner, to wake him up and bring him to the path of knowledge.[66] In a further implication, he also refers to Plato's text as talking to us.[67] These remarks accentuate the point that Olympiodorus wants to establish a direct interaction between the reader and Plato's text, which he asserts to have originated with Plato and Socrates. Consequently, he adopts the same strategy to ensure that his narratees enter an interaction with the dialogue from his perspective. The status of Socrates and Plato is thus transferred to Olympiodorus, who becomes an omniscient commentator and shapes the reception of Platonic philosophy.

61 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 44.1–15.

62 Morgan 2004, 362.

63 In total 268 times in all his commentaries. This imperative is also used with similar frequency by Philoponus, while it is completely absent in Proclus' works. An interesting parallel is found in Christian commentators such as Origen, who uses this imperative in more than 450 instances, as a TLG text search shows.

64 Cf. the expression ἰδοὺ ὁ κανών, "see the rule" or "principle" (Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 112.8). Further, Socrates addresses Alcibiades with "see in me intellect and god" (8.5), and Olympiodorus states that one should see the meaning of the text (46.10–11). An example for the descriptions of characters is that one can "see" Alcibiades' care for reputation (101.1–2).

65 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 140.16–17, 145.6, 185.7.

66 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 191.1–5.

67 With the remark "as the text says", ὥς φησιν ἡ λέξις (Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 177.11; cf. 204.3).

Closing remarks

This overview has shown that Olympiodorus applies narrativity to constitute his approach as a precise interpretation of Plato's philosophy. In the *Life of Plato*, Olympiodorus expresses his authority as a commentator on Plato by presenting the philosopher as a character in his narrative. He demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Plato's life and thought, similar to what Socrates does as narrator in the Platonic dialogues. By highlighting philosophical authority in the context of Plato's life, Olympiodorus sets two hierarchies: 1) the superiority of the life led according to knowledge and philosophy; and 2) the philosopher's power against the tyrant. Both hierarchies design Platonic philosophy as the most reliable way to gain any authority. This in turn asserts and strengthens the authority of the commentator that is based both on his status as a teacher of Platonism and on the overall superiority of the philosophical knowledge. Accordingly, Olympiodorus emphasises his belonging to the Platonic tradition and enables his students as 'narratees' to position themselves within this philosophical heritage.

The significant role Olympiodorus grants to stories does not mean that he simplifies philosophical theories or presents simple elements of common knowledge. His narratives have multiple functions, such as constructing and assuring philosophical authority, establishing the link with the Platonic tradition and approaching his audience appropriately. References to philosophers in opposition to tyrants, such as Plato against Dionysius or Zeno against Nearchus, draw attention to the discourse on the Platonic education and political authority. These stories about the philosophers serve as interpretive and educational tools in Olympiodorus' teaching concept. By adopting a communicative style, Olympiodorus further addresses his narratees and invites them to interact with the Platonic dialogue. In conclusion, the analysis of Olympiodorus' narratives reveals the pedagogical and identity-forming character of his philosophy. Examining Olympiodorus' commentaries from a narratological perspective, therefore, provides the means for understanding the specifics of his exegetical method.

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