

# PRONOIA AT SARDIS

A. THOMAS KRAABEL

The Harvard/Cornell excavations at Sardis in ancient Lydia, now western Turkey, have produced rich new evidence and some real surprises for the student of ancient Mediterranean religions,<sup>1</sup> but nothing more astonishing than the monumental Sardis synagogue, begun perhaps as early as the second century CE, and abandoned finally with the destruction of the city by Sassanian Persian troops in 616. This building, the largest synagogue ever excavated anywhere, was the last and grandest of at least four controlled by a Jewish community which had existed for a thousand years there before this last Persian attack.<sup>2</sup>

Living among their gentile neighbors for centuries, generations of Jews had become a respected and quite powerful segment of the Sardis population, and a permanent part of the city's political and economic life. Local institutions of education for the young played an important role in the integration of young Jews into Sardis society. At the same

1. Generally on Sardis and the excavations, G.M.A. Hanfmann et al., *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), hereafter SPRT. The publishers E.J. Brill plan a volume on Sardis and Lydia in their new series, *Religion in the Later Roman World*.
2. Preliminary studies for this paper were read by Fergus Millar (Oxford) and John Dillon (Dublin). During the 1990–91 academic year later versions were presented as lectures or seminars at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and Minnesota, at Kings College London, and at the Kirchliche Hochschule in Berlin. In this way its arguments were tested and strengthened by many colleagues; its remaining weaknesses are my responsibility.

time these Jews never lost track of their tradition and identity as Jews. Their synagogue above all bears witness to a marvellous mixture of the heritage of Judaism and the urban life and culture of the gentile world under the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The architecture and the art of the synagogue, and the professions and other self-designations of its donors as revealed in their dedicatory inscriptions, all are evidence of this integration. Specific examples abound, such as the largest of some nineteen *menoroth* discovered in the excavations; made of marble and intended to be free-standing, it bears the name of its donor in large letters: ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.<sup>4</sup>

But in my judgment the most fascinating example of the kind of Diaspora Judaism Sardis represents is the utilization of the term *pronoia*, which is attested or is the most likely restoration in eleven of the synagogue donor inscriptions.<sup>5</sup> These are printed next, with explanatory notes following and a full translation of no. 20 *exempli gratia*. The texts are as numbered by epigrapher John H. Kroll, who is responsible for their final publication.<sup>6</sup>

3. A collection and critical review of a number of my writings on Sardis Jews are now available in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, edd. J. Overman and R. MacLennan (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 41: Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), hereafter *Diaspora Jews*.
4. SPRT, page 190 and fig. 268.
5. For a recent study which goes beyond its title, see "Divine Providence in a letter of Judas", in G. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity. A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1978* (North Ryde NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1983) 141–48, hereafter *NewDocs*.
6. In A.R. Seager, I. Rabinowitz, J.H. Kroll and A.T. Kraabel, *The Synagogue and Its Setting* (Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Report 4; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). The texts are reproduced by permission of Prof. Kroll and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

- 12 ----] ἐκ τῶν τῆς Προνοίας
- 16 [Αἰϋρ. Εὐφρόσυνος β' Σαρδ. βο(υ)λ.  
ἐκ τῶν <τῶν> [τ]ῆς Προνοίας ἐσκούτλωσα.]
- 17 Αὐρ. Εὐφρόσυνος [β' Σαρδ. βο(υ)λ. τὸ περιμάσκαλον  
ἐκ τῶν τῆς [Προνοίας] ἐσκούτλωσα.]
- 19 - - - ἐκ τῶν τῆς Προνοίης εὐξάμενος ἐτέλεσα.]
- 20 Κάμῃ ὁ [αὐτός - - - ἐκ] τῶν τῆς [Προνοί]ης εὐξά[μ]ενος ἐσκούτλωσεν.]
- 21 Κάμῃ ὁ αὐτός - - - μετὰ τῆς συνβίου αὐ[τ]οῦ καὶ] τῶν [τέκν]ων ἐκ  
τῶν <ν> τῆς Προνοί[ας] δομάτων ἐποίησεν.
- 22 Λεόντιος θεοσεβῆς ἐκ  
τῶν τῆς Προνοίας δομά--  
των τὸ διαχώρον ὅπερ εὐ--  
χῆς ἐσκούτλωσα.
- 23 Καὶ μαὶ ὁ αὐτός Λεόντιος  
ἐκ τῶν δομάτων  
[τ]ῆς Προνοίας ἐποίησεν.
- 24 [-----Σ]αρδ. βο(υ)λ.]  
[ἐκ τῶν τῆς Προνοίας τὸ [δια-]  
[χώρον ἐσκούτλ]ωσα.
- 58 ἐκ τῶν τῆς Προνοίας δομάτων  
κὲ τῶν γονικῶν ἡμῶν καμάτων.

66      Αὐρ.  
Ερμολέ-  
νης Σαρδ.  
θεοσε-  
βῆς ἐκ  
τῶν τῆς  
Προνοίας  
εὐξάμε-  
νος τὸ ἐ-  
πταμύ-  
ξιον ἐ-  
ποίησα.

16      β' = "the second." *Sard[ianos]* = "citizen of Sardis."  
*Boul[eutes]* = "member of the city council." *eskoutlosa* = "I  
paid for the *skoutlosis*-decoration." *Skoutlosis* is a form of  
Late Antique ornamentation in which surfaces are covered with  
small, thin, shaped pieces of marble and colored stone.

17      A *perimaschalon* is the "surround" of one of the seven bays of  
the main hall of the building.

20      "And me too the [same donor], having made a pledge,  
decorated-with-*skoutlosis* [which was paid for] from the [gifts]  
of Providence."

21      This inscription is all on one line; the others are reproduced  
here as they are in the original, line-for-line.

22      *theosebes* = "God-fearer [?], pious one," the most debated of

all terms in the Sardis synagogue inscriptions.<sup>7</sup> A *diachoron* is a cross-wall.

- 23 Here alone in these texts is the basic formula fully spelled out: "...from the gifts of Providence..."
- 58 The only variation on the formula: "...from the gifts of Providence and our family's labors."
- 66 A *heptamuxion*, literally a "seven-wick-er," is a seven-branched lamp or *menorah*. This long, narrow text is inscribed on a small base, probably supporting the *heptamuxion* itself.

*Pronoia* in these texts is best translated "Providence," and refers to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is suggested by the 'more traditional language of no. 29, where a donation is made ἐκ τῶν δωρεῶν τοῦ παντοκράτορος Θεοῦ, "...from the gifts of God Almighty."<sup>8</sup> But this is a rare usage of *pronoia* in the Greco-Roman world, where most frequently the word means human forethought, oversight, planning, as for example in the phrase πρόνοιαν ποιῆσθαι, common in inscriptions, papyri and literary texts.<sup>9</sup> But references to "the *pronoia* of God" may have the same meaning, that is, God's concern or careful treatment or protecting care.<sup>10</sup>

A clear example of a more philosophical or religious usage is the

7. See, for example, the discussion sparked by my 1981 article, "The Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers'," reprinted now in *Diaspora Jews*, pages 119–130; also, *NewDocs* 54–56; more recently, my "The God-fearers Meet the Beloved Disciple," *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. B.A. Pearson, A.T. Kraabel, G.W.E. Nickelsburg, N.R. Petersen: Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 276–84.
8. B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les Synagogues Juives* (Cahiers de la RB, 7; Paris: Gabalda, 1967) [hereafter Lifshitz, *Donateurs*] 28f., no. 20.
9. On the formula πρόνοιαν ποιῆσθαι in gentile inscriptions, see OGIS index 699, SIG index 534, etc.
10. For example, Philo, *Spec.* 1.309, 310, 318, etc.

phrase *θεία πρόνοια*; it occurs in Christian, Jewish and pagan texts alike, and in others where the author's religious allegiance is not completely clear. And the meaning is by no means uniform. I begin with some examples from the papyri. In official documents such as proclamations and petitions it is "clearly a conventional public formula."<sup>11</sup> In private letters the phrase is used in closing phrases such as "May *θεία πρόνοια* keep you safe...,"<sup>12</sup> and in opening formulae where the term approaches being a synonym for "the god" or "God." Thus, "...praying to *θεῖα πρόνοια* for your health...,"<sup>13</sup> but also "I pray to the Highest God and to the *θεῖα πρόνοια* of our Lord Jesus Christ..."<sup>14</sup>

The same vagueness in terminology occurs elsewhere, and often the grammar is imprecise as well. For example, the dative case may be used without a preposition and with nothing in the syntax which specifies exactly what is meant. Thus in the Jewish philosopher Philo it is *θεία πρόνοια* that Moses becomes *νόμος ἐμψυχὸς τε καὶ λογικός* (*Mos.* 1.162), and that misfortune strikes Flaccus, enemy of the Alexandrian Jews (*Flac.* 125).

According to Diogenes Laertius 3.24, it was Plato who first introduced the term *θεοῦ πρόνοια* into philosophical discussion.<sup>15</sup> But in classical times *pronoia* was usually the cosmic, largely impersonal Providence of the Stoics.<sup>16</sup> It is in this sense that Cicero uses the word nine times, written either in Greek letters or in transliteration. Of the nine occurrences, six are in *De Natura*

11. *NewDocs* 143.

12. *PLon* 6.1929.19, mid-fourth century.

13. *PAlbin* 10.5–6, betw. 340–351.

14. *PVindob* G 39838, beginning of the fourth century.

15. See e.g. *Timaeus* 30c, 44c.

16. On the fundamental importance of "Providence" in Stoicism, see the handbooks and the index volume (1924) of *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. J. von Arnim (Leipzig: Teubner).



*Deorum*,<sup>17</sup> where the concept is articulated on behalf of the Stoics by Lucilius Balbus.

But by the time of the early Empire the idea had passed beyond philosophical discussions to become more widely known.<sup>18</sup> Here are two examples of a more popular usage:

The first is from the *Life of Aesop*, written in the first century CE. Aesop is the famous source of maxims and fables, and he is usually assigned to the sixth century BCE. In this biography he is the slave of a man called Xanthus, who is a philosopher, an arrogant philosopher.

In one story Xanthus and Aesop are out doing the shopping, and Xanthus tries to buy some vegetables from a farmer. But the farmer refuses Xanthus' money. Instead he wants some of Xanthus' wisdom on a problem. Xanthus protests that he is a philosopher and doesn't deal

17. *ND* 1.18.7; 20.8; 22.2; 2.58.12; 73.8; 160.7. *Rep* 4.14.3 *Att.* 173.2.15; 313.1.6. *Providentia* appears some 29 times, and in *ND* 2.58.11 is glossed *Graece... πρόνοια dicitur*.

18. This is not the place to demonstrate the importance and the many-sidedness of *pronoia* and of the idea of "Providence" generally in Hellenistic and later philosophy; that would be to prove the obvious, as a review of the standard reference works would make clear. Indeed it sometimes appears that idea is so firmly embedded that it often need not be explicated in detail unless perhaps it is central to a particular debate, e.g. the question of theodicy or the understanding of history. And the next two examples in the text are clear evidence that familiarity with the conception was not restricted to the intellectual stratosphere. For general background I have found the following helpful: J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), hereafter Dillon, *Middle Platonists*; R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972); E.V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958 [1911]); and the indices in C. de Vogel, *Greek Philosophy III, The Hellenistic-Roman Period* (2nd ed; Leiden: Brill, 1964) and E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, index volume (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1882).

in agricultural advice; but then he realizes that he has a chance to get the vegetables without paying cash for them, and so he agrees. The farmer continues: " Sir, you'll be doing me a great favor [if you can answer this question]...I keep puzzling and asking myself why it is that when I put plants in the ground and then hoe and water them and give them all kinds of attention, the weeds still show up before the things I've planted."

Xanthus is stumped by the question! He can't come up with a direct answer. But he is a philosopher, and he has made an agreement! -- and so he gives a ponderous and philosophical response: πάντα τῇ θεῖᾳ προνοίᾳ διοικεῖται --" All things are ordered by divine providence." (The same vague dative construction without a preposition). Aesop begins to laugh at him, and in the dialogue which follows it becomes clear that such exalted language about *pronoia* is a commonplace. That much is evident even to farmers and slaves.<sup>19</sup>

The other example is from the next century, from the satirist Lucian. In *Jupiter Tragoedus* Lucian has the gods planning to "rig" a debate between two philosophers, the Epicurean Damis and the Stoic Timocles. At the opening Zeus declares that all the gods' interests are staked on Timocles; there will be no sacrifices for them to enjoy if Damis proves his case and calls their existence into question. They hope to bring about the victory of the Stoic, who is arguing for the existence of divine *pronoia*.<sup>20</sup>

The link with Stoicism is still present in many instances, but the idea has clearly gone beyond the boundaries of the debates of the philosophers and is becoming an item of popular vocabulary.

At the same time, the academic discussion continued and broadened. Actual treatises περὶ προνοίας or *de providentia* were written by Seneca and Philo in the first century, in the second by Epictetus and

19. *Vita Aesopi* 35.12, in B.E. Perry, *Aesopica*, vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 48.

20. *J.Tr.* § 4, cf. 20.17; 21.10; 37.7; 38.15, 25; 39.5; 43.3.



Aelian of Praeneste, in the third by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus, and in the fifth by Hierocles and Proclus – to name some which are well attested.<sup>21</sup> The concept in several permutations is influential in the writings of a variety of other authors from the Hellenistic period on: the poet Aratus, Plutarch, Josephus, and in the second century Marcus Aurelius, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre, Arrian,

21. Seneca, *De providentia* = Dialogue 1. Philo, ed. M. Hadas-Lebel (SC 35; Paris, 1973). Epictetus, 1.6, 16; 3.17. Aelian, cf. *Kleine Pauly* s.v. Ailianos

## Galen and the middle platonist Atticus.<sup>22</sup>

I will return to the gentile uses of *pronoia* in the last section of this paper. But before going further we need to take a closer look at the Jewish sources. These are after all synagogue inscriptions. *Pronoia* occurs in the LXX, but less frequently than in the inscriptions of this one excavation! – only nine times in all. It is probably not accidental

2. Alexander, *De fato*, cf. quaestiones I, ch. 25; II, ch. 21, ed. I. Bruns (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, suppl. 2.2; Berlin: Reimer, 1892). Plotinus, περί προνοίας = *Enneades* 2.2–3. Hierocles, περί πρόνοιας, fragments in Photius, *Bibl.* 214, 251. Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam* and *De providentia et fato*, fragments of the Greek text and William of Moerbeke's Latin translation in H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi tria opiscula* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960). This list and the next include non-philosophers in order to show the broad interest in or acquaintance with this idea; they omit some obvious Stoic sources for the same reason. Parma, defining terms more narrowly, argues that before Plotinus there are no monographs in Greek or Latin on this idea, Ch. Parma, *Pronoia und Providentia: Der Vorsehungsbegriff Plotins und Augustins* (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 14.
22. Aratus, see the Proem (lines 1-18) with the comments of M. Erren, *Die Phainomena des Aratos von Soloi* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1967) 9–31, and his final statement, 300. Plutarch, from many examples see *De fac.* 927A-928D, cf Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 208–11. Marcus Aurelius, see 2.11.3 P.A. Brunt, "Marcus Aurelius in His *Meditations*," JRS 64 (1974) 14–18. Josephus, see among others G. Delling, "Josephus und das Wunderbare," NT 2 (1958) 291–309. Apuleius, see *De Plat.* 12, *De mundo* 24, cf. Dillon 320–326. Maximus of Tyre, *Orat.* 13 ed H. Hobein (*Maximi Tyrii Philosophumena*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1910), cf. Dillon 399f. Arrian is included on the basis of G. Schepens, "Arrian's View of His Task as Alexander Historian," *AncSoc* 2 (1971) 154–168, espically 267 and his frequent reference to Arrian 7.30.3 Galen, *De usu partium* 3.10 and all of book 17, cf. the notes in the translation of M.T. May (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968). Atticus,

that those nine instances are found only in LXX passages composed originally in Greek.<sup>23</sup> Greco-Roman "Providence" was too abstract and impersonal an idea to translate the Israelite conception of Yahweh.

With the philosopher Philo the situation was different. He uses *pronoia* some 67 times in the corpus represented in TLG,<sup>24</sup> which does not include fragmentary works. In addition it occurs five times, for example, in the preserved Greek sections of *De Providentia*. Philo shows the same range of meanings we have already observed in other sources. For example, the word appears just twice in *De Opificio Mundi*. Once it indicates God's care and oversight which, when manifested in the world, acts as a powerful stimulus to true piety (*Opif.* 9); and once it means human "(malice) aforethought" (*Opif.* 128). There are also just two occurrences in *De Decalogo*. In *Decal.* 58 it is again in that ambiguous construction, the dative singular without a preposition: the *pronoia* of the Creator. *Decal.* 141 describes a human action ἐκ προνοίας, a common phrase with adverbial meaning: intentionally, deliberately. Similarly, of two occurrences in *De Virtutibus*, in the one instance it is God's *pronoia* (*Virt.* 215). In the other (*Virt.* 135), προνοία τινί (the same vague dative without a preposition) is close to "with the proviso that..."

Philo was fully aware of the philosophical debates on the existence or non-existence of Providence (see, e.g. *Ebr.* 199 and *Conf.* 114-15) and toward the end of his life he wrote his own Περὶ Προνοίας, known by its Latin title *De providentia*. But apparently he felt no need to restrict this particular word to a single meaning, religious-philosophical or otherwise.

The historian Josephus uses the noun some 160 times, in the same

23. Wis 14:3; 17:2. Dan 6:18 (19) LXX. 2 Macc 4:6. 3 Macc 4:21; 5:30. 4 Macc 9:24; 13 :19; 17: 22.

24. For access to the resources of *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on CD-Rom, with the requisite hardware, I am indebted to Oxford's Faculty of Classics and the staff of the Classics Reading Room, Bodleian Library.

range of meanings we have already seen. In the *Antiquities*, for example, God can talk to Moses of "my *pronoia*" (1.46), but the word is also used of Joseph's "oversight" of Pharaoh's household (2.39). Moses calls upon God to send an earthquake to discomfit his enemies: "Prove now that once again all things are ordered by your *pronoia*" (4.47). But later in the same book Moses uses the term to mean the oversight or concern of the leaders who will succeed him (4.184).

Samson is born according to God's *pronoia* (5.277), and his life thereafter was in harmony with it -- at least until he met Delilah (5.312). Josephus himself was providentially saved from a shipwreck (*Vita* 15), and many times delivered from his enemies "by God's *pronoia*" (*Vita* 425). Indeed, in one instance the illness and death of an enemy is a proof of God's *pronoia* (BJ 7.453).

Josephus can tell the same story with (BJ 1.593) and without (AJ 17.71) a reference to God's *pronoia*. Religious charlatans try to demonstrate that they act κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν (AJ 20.168). Josephus can affirm that Herod the Great escaped assassination "in accordance with God's *pronoia*" (AJ 14.463). The emperor Vespasian is represented as being able to recognize God's *pronoia* (BJ 3.144) but he can also believe himself being aided by δαιμόνιος πρόνοια (BJ 4.622). And, in an instance beyond the usual range of meanings, Josephus can suggest that a terrible massacre of Jews seemed to occur ὡσπερ ἐκ δαιμονίου προνοίας (BJ 2.457).

But to a degree all these examples are exceptional. Josephus' usual use of the term too is to refer to human planning, care, concern, oversight. While *pronoia* occurs a dozen times in his autobiography, and with some frequency in his retelling of the biblical story in the early books of the *Antiquities*, most instances in both texts lack specific religious or philosophical loading. For Josephus, for Philo and for other Greek-speaking Jews, the term had not taken on the specificity it appears to carry for Sardis Jews in a later age.

*Pronoia* occurs only four times in synagogue inscriptions outside

Sardis. In CIJ 682 = Lifshitz no. 11,<sup>25</sup> from Olbia on the Black Sea, it indicates the "prudent foresight" of the donors themselves.<sup>26</sup> In the three instances from the recently discovered synagogue at Philippopolis (Plovdiv) in Bulgaria the formula is similar to that at Sardis: ἐκ τῶν τῆς προνοίας.<sup>27</sup> In the other major group of Jewish inscriptions, the epitaphs, it is found only once, in CIJ 123, from the Via Appia catacomb in Rome; there it means human prudence or thoughtfulness.<sup>28</sup>

I conclude that the sources behind the use of this term in the Sardis synagogue were probably not Jewish. The reasoning here needs to be made very clear. There are essentially two arguments against assuming that Jewish texts such as the LXX, Philo, Josephus are behind this use of *pronoia* by the Jews of this city. The first is that in none of the Jewish sources does the word carry the singleness of meaning which it has in these inscriptions. Sardis uses *pronoia* narrowly and formulaicly; the earlier Jewish texts offer a wide range of meanings.

To that argument from specificity add the other, that from frequency. If, say, the LXX, Philo or Josephus – or all of them together – are where the Sardis term originates, then the influence of these texts should have been seen in other synagogues besides Sardis. If the word in the Sardis inscriptions is taken from texts supposedly available to all

25. Lifshitz, *Donateurs*.

26. On the common formula προνοίαν ποιησθαι in gentile inscriptions, see OGIS index 699, SIG index 534, etc.

27. See E. Kesjakova, "The Ancient Synagogue of Philippopolis." *Archeologia* [Sofia] 1 (1989) 20–33, in Bulgarian with French summary. While the mosaics with inscriptions were preserved, the building no longer exists. I owe this information to Dr. Gideon Foerster of the Hebrew University.

28. See the translation in P.W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 2; Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1991), 144f., no. 1. My thanks to Dr. David Noy of The Jewish Inscriptions Project of the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge for the computer search which verified these results.



Jews, then some other synagogue community should also have picked it up. Other Jews should have taken up this idea which Sardis is so enthusiastic about, if its source is Jewish. But that did not happen. Sardis and Plovdiv are the only two examples known.

As the examples given at the beginning of this paper make clear, the term was both familiar and popular in the Sardis synagogue. And it may have an absolute meaning in the Sardis inscriptions which is not evident elsewhere, in Jewish or gentile sources, in inscriptions or in written texts. Where did it come from, and what does its presence tell us about this Jewish community? Is Christianity a possibility?

It is well known that Christians in the post-apostolic period rapidly took over a conceptual vocabulary from the non-Christian world. They did this first for missionary purposes, but then also to be able to express themselves to new Christians whose thought world was not at all that of the Hebrew Bible, and at times far from the New Testament as well. Christian theology in these times uses *pronoia* frequently.<sup>29</sup> According to TLG, there are some 910 occurrences just in John Chrysostom. (But then he *is* TLG's most voluminous author, with 450,000 words in his sermons on the Gospel of Matthew alone.)

One Christian whose usage of *pronoia* is close to that of the Sardis inscriptions is the Emperor Constantine. He had sound political reasons for utilizing abstract terms at times in his writings and speeches, rather than specific divine names. He found *pronoia* a particularly congenial idea and employed the idea frequently.<sup>30</sup> It is tempting to see in the synagogue inscriptions a reflection of Constantinian vocabulary, but given the dynamics of the religious situation at Sardis, Christians are a most unlikely source.

In other Greco-Roman religions, Greco-Roman paganism if you

29. Note the references e.g. in one recent study, A. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars. A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

30. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins* Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil. Hst. Klasse, 3 Folge 34 (Göttingen,

will, the term is encountered quite frequently; indeed it was so common that it may have been avoided deliberately in the LXX and the New Testament as a result.<sup>31</sup> Here, however, *pronoia* rarely means "divine providence" in the sense of the Sardis inscriptions. It is rather the epithet of a particular deity, Athena or Isis for example, or the proper name of a goddess, Pronoia, a kind of deified abstraction<sup>32</sup>. In coins and inscriptions associated with ruler cult it usually means the "divine prudence and foresight" of the emperor, less commonly the divine *pronoia* which has bestowed the emperor on his subjects.<sup>33</sup>

There is one source remaining, by far the most likely one, at least for an academic dean: Greco-Roman "higher education." It is to that possibility that we finally must turn.

These inscriptions make it all but certain that *pronoia* was an idea "in the air" at Sardis in the fourth century, a subject of discussion in leading Jewish circles. Other sources strongly suggest that the idea would also have figured in the *education* provided to young men there. As a late antique "metropolis" Sardis was eligible for state subsidy for her

1954) 352–56, cf. R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987) 627–62.

31. IDB s.v. "Providence."

32. RL s.v. *pronoia* (1907), cf. RE Supp. 14 (1974) s.v. *providentia*. In the second-century *Dreambook* of Artemidorus it is assumed that the figures of Pronoia, Physis and Heimarmene could appear in one's dreams, see *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V.*, ed. R. Pack (Leipzig: Teubner, 1963) 176.8.

33. See RE s.v. *pronoia* (1957) 747, and M. Charlesworth, "Providentia and Aeternitas." HTR 29 (1936) 106–22.

teachers.<sup>34</sup> In this period particularly in Asia Minor philosophy and rhetoric were subjects widely taught.<sup>35</sup> For Sardis there is quite a bit of information about the long careers of two pagan intellectuals, Chrysanthius and Eunapius, and so I will take them as examples.<sup>36</sup> Their teaching may well have taken place in that baths-gymnasium complex in one unit of which the synagogue itself was located.<sup>37</sup> The social situation in Sardis which the archaeological evidence reveals was such that some Jewish young men, particularly those from leading families, would have participated in the kind of education which Chrysanthius and Eunapius offered.

Chrysanthius (ca. 310 - ca. 390) first taught in Pergamum and Ephesus, where the future ruler Julian became one of his most devoted pupils.<sup>38</sup> Then Chrysanthius returned to Sardis. When Julian became

34. C. Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Monograph 5 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) 22, hereafter Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis*; to the references there add S. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (London: Methuen, 1977) 156–62, hereafter Bonner, *Education*.
35. Sardis had also produced a philosopher earlier, in the second century BCE, Iollas the Academic, C. Habicht, "Der Akademiker Iollas von Sardes," *ZPE* 74 (1988) 215–18; SPRT 114, 115, 135–37.
36. Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis*, 20–28; generally R. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists in the Fourth century AD. Studies in Eunapius of Sardis* ARCA, v. 28 (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1990), hereafter Penella, *Greek Philosophers*.
37. See SPRT, 148–61, F. Yegül, *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis*. Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, report 3, (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986); Bonner, *Education*, chap. 10, "The Problem of Accommodation," pages 115–25; RAC s.vv. "Eunapios" (1966), "Hochschule" (1990).
38. Julian's religious and philosophical view were eclectic; nevertheless it is clear from Eunapius how important Chrysanthius and his ideas were to Julian,

Augustus, he twice summoned Chrysanthius to court to be one of his close advisors. Chrysanthius twice refused, saying each time that the omens indicated that the gods wanted him to remain in Sardis. Whereupon Julian appointed Chrysanthius high priest of Lydia.<sup>39</sup>

Chrysanthius was from one of the leading families of Sardis; some of his relatives would have been members of the city council, as were some leading Jews during his lifetime. A contemporary of the philosopher, bearing the same name, is known from our excavations. Flavius Chrysanthius died sometime after the middle of the fourth century, and his richly decorated tomb was discovered in 1976. A painted text in the tomb indicates that this Chrysanthius was a Christian.<sup>40</sup>

Chrysanthius the teacher left no written texts, but we have a biography of him by his fellow townsman Eunapius with some good evidence for Chrysanthius' philosophical ideas and educational style. Two other sources add details to the picture of the intellectual world of which Chrysanthius and Eunapius were a part. These are the writings of Julian's close associate the philosopher Sallustius<sup>41</sup> and those of the Emperor himself.<sup>42</sup> The brief text called *On the Gods and the*

not only when the latter was "in school," but right to the end of his life.

39. The importance of education as a conveyor of Hellenism, and the transformation of Hellenism itself into a syllabus, a subject for teaching, are themes important in Julian's writings and in his political program, see P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism. An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), hereafter *Julian*.

40. SPRT 208.

41. On Sallustius, see Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian*, 68–70, cf. 154–60.

42. Julian can use the word as an epithet on occasion, for Athena (*Helios* 149B–150A) or the Mother of the Gods (*Mother of the Gods* 166B); elsewhere it is the *pronoia* of Helios, e.g. *Helios* 132C, Letter 11 (425B) He can also use *pronoia* interchangeably with *prometheia* on occasion, in Letter 11 contrast 425B with 425C; both nouns appear in *Mother of the Gods* 166B. But

*Universe*, by Sallustius, also shows the importance of this idea to Julian's contemporaries. It contains an extended discussion of *pronoia* in chapter 9, where the word itself is used seven times, usually as "the *pronoia* of the gods."<sup>43</sup>

For the thought of Eunapius (ca. 345 - ca. 420) we may consult his *Lives of the Philosophers and the Sophists* and the fragments of his *History*. In addition there is the *New History* of another pagan historian, Zosimus, written in the early sixth century and based heavily on Eunapius.

*Pronoia* in these writers is not the impersonal Providence of the Stoics. It is very much tied up with traditional religion and is often "the *pronoia* of the gods." Thus Eunapius can say that the death of the villain Ablabius demonstrates that "*pronoia* had not abandoned humankind" (VS 464). He tells us that Julian had been preserved from death "by the *pronoia* of the gods, against everyone's expectation" (VS 476). The career of a philosopher called Prohaeresius was governed by "some divine *pronoia*" or "by the *pronoia* of some deity" – θεοῦ τινὸς προνοίας is deliberately ambiguous here (VS 486) because Prohaeresius, Eunapius' revered teacher, was a Christian.<sup>44</sup>

Zosimus' assumptions are obvious in his first chapter: "the

these deities, particularly Helios, are understood on the broadest terms; it is likely that Sallustius and Julian actually differed very little on the subject, not particularly Helios 132C–34A and Julian's use of *pronoia* in an epistolary formula, e.g. the closing lines of letters 13 and 30. Generally on the close ties between the thought of the two, G. Rochefort, "Le *Peri Theon kai kosmou* de Saloustios et l'empereur Julian," REG 69 (1956) 50–66, and "La demonologie de Saloustios et ses rapports avec celle de l'empereur Julien," BAGB, ser. 4, 16 (1957) 53–61.

43. 16.12, 16, 22, 24, 29; 17.1, 27; the phrase also appears at 28.10 and 34.1 *Sallustius, Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, ed. A.D. Nock (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1926).

44. Penella, *Greek Philosophers* 79–99.



administration of human affairs, [he says,] is in the hands of a divine *pronoia*, so that when it guides souls there is prosperity, but if it is not present the affairs of state are brought to their present sorry condition."<sup>45</sup> For Zosimus, cosmic *pronoia* clearly had taken a negative turn; for him "divine *pronoia*...abandoned mankind when the Romans [turned to Christianity and] ceased to worship the gods according the prescribed traditional religious ritual."<sup>46</sup>

Zosimus here is continuing and intensifying a theme in his source, Eunapius. Indeed, one of the major issues between pagan and Christian historians in the fourth century and thereafter is just this point. Christians would say that Providence is under the control of the God of the Christians, and that the truth of Christianity is proved by their providentially ordered triumph over unbelief. But Eunapius and especially Zosimus point to the ills of the Empire. They argue that the Romans in particular are paying for their rejection of their traditional gods. For Zosimus, the "*pronoia* of the gods" shows itself now as punishment: in strife within the government, in the troubles and degeneration of society, and in the threats from external enemies.

I am not for a minute implying that all of this (or even much of it) is loaded into these inscriptions. Nor is it necessary that Chrysanthius or Eunapius have influenced the Sardis Jews directly, though that is surely a possibility. The young men of Sardis had other teachers than the two of them and before the two of them. My intent is to recreate a context to explain the inscriptions, to give the story behind them.

This is that story. I suggest that in the cultured atmosphere of the Sardis baths-gymnasium-teaching complex, early in the fourth century if not before, the general conception of a cosmic Pronoia came to the attention of Sardis Jews. They took it up because it was a term which made sense philosophically and religiously to them, to their children

45. Translation revised from W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968) 111], hereafter Kaegi, *Byzantium*.

46. Kaegi, *Byzantium* 111.

and to their gentile neighbors. In particular it reflected the universality of the Jewish tradition as they would have understood it – not tied to the Holy Land any longer in any exclusive sense, but world-wide. If Philo could do something similar four centuries before, why not the Jews of Sardis?<sup>47</sup>

If this seems unlikely in the Judaism of late antiquity, recall the background of these particular Jews. At Sardis in particular they represented a Jewish tradition which had been a part of the Greek world for nearly a thousand years. At Sardis in particular they were descendents of Jews who had come to Anatolia not from the Holy Land directly, but from an eastern diaspora in Babylonia. Educated Sardis Jews in particular would want to talk about their tradition in a more expansive, global language.

Recall that Jews in this community had been speaking Greek and thinking in Greek for nearly 900 years. For a very long time Greek had provided the formative vocabulary of their thinking. It had become much more than just a tool for getting along in daily life. It was the language by means of which their world-view was articulated.

The synagogue inscriptions indicate that Sardis Jews were ready to appropriate or even invent terms in Greek and to incorporate them

47. In the second century BCE another Alexandrian Jew, called Ezekiel, had turned the central story of Jewish history, the Passover/Exodus, into a drama in the style of Euripides, see H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); P.W. van der Horst, "Some Notes on the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel," *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984) 354–75; and E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar et al. [hereafter Schürer-Vermes-Miller] III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 563–66. Both he and Philo had written as committed Jews. Both had been trying to express central Jewish stories and ideas in the language and conceptions which their Hellenistic educations had provided them. Both had thus already done, much more elaborately, something like what the Sardis Jews were attempting in these inscriptions.

creatively into community vocabulary: *nomophulakion*, *heptamuxion*, *sophodidaskalos*, *pantokrator* and probably *theosebēs*. So too with *pronoia*. At some time in the fourth century this term suggested itself as an up-market variation or replacement of the more traditional language of, e.g. inscription no. 29, cited in the first section of this essay. It became accepted in the synagogue community as part of its religious vocabulary. Finally, it became so familiar, and appeared so appropriate to wealthier members of the community, that they began to use it in this formula in their donation inscriptions. They took over an important gentile word in the same way that they had appropriated gentile sculpture, hauling Roman eagles and Lydian lions into their building to adorn it, boldly making them Jewish in the process. Or so I would suggest.

It is possible to carry the story of these inscriptions one step further, by looking beyond the noun *pronoia* to the formula which contains it, and doing a comparison with other donor inscriptions. Gentiles were usually matter-of-fact in designating the source of the funds for their benefactions. One common phrase is ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων, "from my / our own resources." If the *pronoia* inscriptions and the related no. 29 were a deliberate variation on such formulae, then the intent of the Jewish version was most likely a theological one. No. 29 is a clear statement of monotheism in that case, and the *pronoia* texts should be understood in similar fashion. These well-prepared Jews were using the common language of the educated person in Late Antiquity, but the tradition they made that language carry would be their own. Then these texts would mean: There is [but] one God, and he is the source of our prosperity.<sup>48</sup>

48. I have Cilliers Breytenbach to thank for the ideas in this paragraph. Both ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς and several variations of the "from the gifts of God" formula will occur in Christian inscriptions later. Studies in DACL attribute both concepts to Judaism, citing Jewish inscriptions and tracing the original idea back to 1 Chron 29:14, DACL 4:1507–10, 7:689, see also R. van Bremen, "Women and Wealth," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, edd. A. Cameron and

Whatever its meaning for a given individual at Sardis, *pronoia* was now a Jewish word. Its importance in this context is unique in the Diaspora Judaism of this period, as far as we know. No other Mediterranean Jewish community had such a term so embedded in its common vocabulary.

That uniqueness is not the result of a community drifting away from its traditions. Sardis Jews would endure too long, and overcome their competition too convincingly, for that to have been true. Nor is the idea the product of a single individual's philosophical system, some great mind in Sardis, a fourth-century Philo, as it were. For that there is no evidence whatsoever. Rather, as far as we can tell, it grew naturally out of the cultural and religious life of a 900-year-old community of Jews, many of them educated now, all of them fully at home in their Lydian surroundings and at the same time fully loyal to their ancient traditions as they understood and expressed them.

Another inscription from the same period provides a final illustration. It is the epitaph of a man of Antioch in Pisidia, east of Sardis:

Gaius Calpurnius Collega Macedo, member of the city council, a man most worthy, Who dwelt in every virtue, as the ancient [poet] says, An orator [as accomplished as] the ten best of Athens, A philosopher [of the school] of Plato and Socrates, A senior physician, [following] Hippocrates in word and deed. Who lived among men thirty years and [twelve] days, Who by the *pronoia* of God went from among men to heaven, in the company of holy angels, leaving his parents more quickly than was right, Putting off the mantle of clay (to consign it) to this place. I, [his father,] Gaius Calpurnius Macedo, [honor him,] having prepared a hero's tomb for my most wonderful, sorely missed son.<sup>49</sup>

A. Kuhrt (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 223–42.

49. SEG 32 (1982) 1302, translation my own.

*This paragraph which follows the inscription quoted on page 96 (footnote 49) has been erroneously omitted:*

\* \* \*

Gaius Calpurnius Collega Macedo provides another example of the sort of blend of philosophy, culture and liberal education which I see at Sardis. It is that tradition which is central to this epitaph, not any particular religion. Despite the use of pronoia in a now familiar way in the epitaph, nothing suggests that father or son was Jewish or, for that matter, Christian.

Some among the Jews of Sardis may well have been the intellectual equals of this senior physician from Antioch; in any case they participated with him in that same culture, like fish swimming in the same deep pond. And even as they retained a firm grasp on their Jewish identity, they also reflected that thought-world in the formula we have been discussing. That at least is my hypothesis to explain these eleven texts.