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Autor: Hächler, Nikolas / Polcar, Philip

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A new *comes rei privatae* hidden in Hier. epist. 79

Observations on the Political Career of Nebridius the Younger under Emperor Arcadius

Nikolas Hächler, Zürich
Philip Polcar, Wien

Abstract: Ausgehend von Hier. epist. 79 geht die Forschung von einer prestigeträchtigen politischen Laufbahn von Nebridius dem Jüngeren (PLRE I 620, Nebridius 3) aus, der im Kaiserpalast von Konstantinopel aufgewachsen war und familiäre Verbindungen zur kaiserlichen Familie unterhalten hatte. Bislang konnten Stationen von Nebridius' Karriere allerdings nicht mit Sicherheit eruiert werden. Basierend auf einer eingehenden Lektüre des genannten Quellentextes schlägt der vorliegende Beitrag nun neu vor, Nebridius den Jüngeren als *comes rei privatae* im Dienst von Kaiser Arcadius (395–408) zu identifizieren. Weiterführende prosopographische Vergleiche mit den Amtszeiten der bislang bekannten Funktionsinhaber legen darüber hinaus nahe, dass er diese Stellung 399/400 innehatte.

Keywords: Hieronymus, Herrschaft des Kaisers Arcadius, *comes rei privatae*, spätrömische Prosopographie und kaiserliche Verwaltung, Bischöfe, Armen- und Krankenfürsorge.

Based on Jerome, epist. 79 (399/400 CE),¹ modern scholarship has identified Nebridius (PLRE I 620, Nebridius 3) as the nephew of the empress Flaccilla. He was brought up in the imperial palace together with the future emperors Arcadius and Honorius. According to Jerome's encomiastic letter, Nebridius was a devoted Christian and famous for his charity towards the poor and needy. He was married to Salvina, daughter of the famous North African military commander Gildo. Together with her he had a son, also named Nebridius, as well as a daughter, whose name is not recorded in the sources.

Although it is known that Nebridius held a palatine office in Constantinople, no attempt has been made thus far to identify his *officium*.² Based on a close reading of Jerome, epist. 79 and a prosopographical analysis this paper proposes that Nebridius acted in fact as a *comes rei privatae* (CRP) under Arcadius, thus manag-

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1 I. Hilberg (ed.), *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae I–IV, editio altera supplementis aucta*. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum 54–56/2 (Vienna 1996) 87–101 as well as P. Polcar, *Hieronymus' Witwenbüchlein für Salvina (epist. 79). Text, Übersetzung, Einführung und Kommentar*, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 24 (Berlin 2022).

2 J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364–425* (Oxford 1975) 132–133; A. Fürst, *Hieronymus. Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 2003) 195, Nebridius 1 in his *Prosopographia Hieronymiana* as well does not attempt to identify the office: "N., der als Christ engen Kontakt mit Klerikern und Mönchen pflegte und sich karitativ engagierte, machte früh Karriere am Kaiserhof, starb jedoch jung."

ing the emperor's private finances and estates (*res privata*). This study will first contextualize Jerome's letter in order to evaluate its contents and significance regarding the intended argument. There will follow a comparative examination of relevant passages against the background of known prosopographical data and historical contexts.

Contextualization of Letter 79

Jerome's *epistula 79 ad Salvinam* (399/400) can be counted among his ascetic treatises on chaste widowhood. Together with letter 54 to Furia (395) and 123 to Geruchia (408/409), it is the middle part of Jerome's trilogy for widows: three exhortations to remain a widow, three guidebooks for young noblewomen on why and how to lead an ascetic life after the death of their husbands.³ All three letters are tailored to the addressee's personal situation – Furia is pressured by her father to remarry, the princess Salvina lives in the imperial palace, and Geruchia is faced with the aftermath of the barbarian invasion in Gaul.⁴ Nonetheless, all of the letters are also composed for a wider audience, mainly for women who can – to some extent – put themselves into the addressee's shoes and follow Jerome's ascetic teachings.⁵ Jerome discusses similar themes and topics in the three letters while at the same time avoiding repetition. He composed letter 79 and 123 with an eye on letter 54, and 123 in turn looks back to 79, clearly expecting his readers to appreciate the connections between all three.⁶

While letter 54 is of outstanding rhetorical brilliance, the less polished letter 79 is a highly interesting case in terms of prosopography. The addressee is a member of the imperial family, mother to two imperial children, and possibly the most high-ranking woman to whom Jerome reached out. Jerome addressed her out of the blue, probably at the recommendation of a certain Avitus, who is assumed to have been a central figure of the ascetic community in Constantinople.⁷ This move alone was bold and bore the risk of seeming inappropriate – for what business had a lowly priest-monk with questionable ecclesiastical authority in addressing such a high-standing woman? However, Jerome had one connection to the family

³ A. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome. Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2009) 159; Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 109–115.

⁴ Regarding letter 123 see Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 166–171.

⁵ In the case of Furia, the letter also addresses her father, and therefore other *patresfamilias*. In letter 123, Jerome explicitly states that he has also spoken to others in this letter, Hier. epist. 123,17,2, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) III, 94,22: *non tam tibi quam sub tuo nomine aliis sum locutus*. Additionally, one should not underestimate the number of male and female readers who would enjoy these texts as literature for personal edification.

⁶ See Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 100–171, esp. 163–166.

⁷ See J. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York 1975) 216; S. Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis. Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, *Historia* 72 (Stuttgart 1992) 125; Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 90; 189–190.

– to the deceased’s father (likewise called Nebridius), the late husband of Olympias; this Nebridius was also a *vir illustris*.⁸ He had been known to Jerome from his visit to Constantinople in the early 380s. Though their friendship was probably not as intimate as Jerome claimed, he made sure to mention it early in the letter, presenting himself as a close friend of the family and thereby justifying his mis-sive.⁹ Consequently, the first part of letter 79 is an epitaph on Salvina’s husband, Nebridius. Here, Jerome delivers a christianized version of a *laudatio funebris*, in which he praises the virtues of the deceased, especially his charity for the poor.¹⁰ Repeatedly Jerome points out that Nebridius, though a rich man, certainly dwells in heaven now. Through his use of the famous parable about the eye of the needle (Mt 19,24; Mk 10,25; Lk 18,25), Jerome makes it clear that rich people stand only a very small chance of entering heaven after death. However, almsgiving could make the impossible possible. Nebridius, therefore, had gained entrance by making for himself “friends with the mammon of iniquity,” the poor of this world, so that they would help him when he entered the hereafter.¹¹ But Jerome was outspoken against the notion that any poor person could help the rich to enter heaven. In his opinion, only the so-called holy poor (*pauperes sancti*), i. e., clerics and monks, had the capacity to help rich people on their journey to eternal life.¹² Though Jerome does not state these teachings explicitly in letter 79, they are easy to spot if one examines other letters written during the late 390s, a very turbulent time for Jerome and his ascetic partner Paula.

In 393 an open conflict over the orthodoxy of the Origenist teachings erupted. In this battle, Jerome sided with his patron Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis (Cyprus), against John, the bishop of Jerusalem. John made use of a pretext to excommunicate Jerome and obtained a decree of banishment from the *praefectus*

⁸ Nebridius the Elder was CRP between 382–384 and *praefectus urbis Constantinopolitanae* in 386. He probably died on June 29, 386, briefly after his marriage with Olympias, see PLRE I 620, Nebridius 2; Rebenich, *loc. cit.* (n. 7) 121–122; Fürst, *loc. cit.* (n. 2) 195.

⁹ Hier. epist. 79,1,4, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 88,11–12: *pater defuncti intima necessitudine copulatus fuit*.

¹⁰ On Jerome and the Latin consolatory tradition, see J. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus. A Commentary on Jerome, Letter 60* (Oxford 1992) 15–34; B. Feichtinger, “Konsolationstopik und ‘Sitz im Leben’. Hieronymus’ ep. 39 ad Paulam de obitu Blesillae im Spannungsfeld zwischen christlicher Genusadaption und Lesermanipulation”, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 38 (1995) 75–90; regarding Hier. epist. 79, see Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 2022, 68–74; broader work was done by C. Favez, *La consolation latine chrétienne* (Paris 1937); R. Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur griechischen und römischen Konsollationsliteratur* (Munich 1958).

¹¹ Hier. epist. 79,4, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 91,12–17: *Noverat enim a domino esse praeceptum: si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende omnia, quae habes, et da pauperibus et veni, sequere me* (Mt 19,21). *et quia hanc sententiam implere non poterat habens uxorem et parvulos liberos et multam familiam, faciebat sibi amicos de iniquo mammona, qui se reciperent in aeterna tabernacula* (cf. Lk 16,9).

¹² Jerome meant the monks living in the Holy Land in particular, therefore arguing his own case, see Hier. c. Vigil 14. For a more detailed analysis of Jerome’s *enkomyion* on Nebridius, especially regarding his theology on rich people and the (holy) poor, alms and the afterlife, see Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 82–104, esp. 89–104.

praetorio per Orientem Rufinus. It was not put into action right away since the military was busy with the Huns. Prefect Rufinus was later murdered by his soldiers on November 25, 395. Thanks to Paula, who had good connections to Rufinus' successor, Jerome did not have to go into exile. It is not completely clear how the excommunication was nullified, but it appears that here, too, Paula paved the way.¹³ Although these devastating threats were successfully averted, Jerome's financial problems were by no means resolved. The expenses needed to build and uphold the monasteries in Bethlehem were enormous and exhausted even Paula's vast financial resources. As a consequence, the community was heavily in debt and even on the brink of financial ruin.¹⁴ Against this background, the implicit requests for financial aid become obvious in the letters written during these years. In letter 66 to Pammachius (dated 398), written on occasion of the death of the former's wife, Jerome strongly suggests that Pammachius should give alms to the poor, implicitly stating that it might help Paulina in the afterlife.¹⁵ In addition, Jerome sent a short epitaph to Lucinus' widow Theodora in 398 or 399 (epist. 75), in which he points out the deceased's good deeds to the poor and his heavenly dwelling place.¹⁶ Similar exegetical strategies were applied in the consolatory letter to Oceanus on the death of Fabiola in 399 (epist. 77). She was a Roman ascetic aristocrat, from whose willingness to make considerable donations Jerome had certainly profited during her lifetime. He would have liked to persuade her to settle permanently in the Holy Land as well. Her death was a painful loss for Jerome in many respects.

In all of the mentioned letters, money is not explicitly asked for, but Jerome hits certain rhetorical and exegetical notes. A person is always praised for exemplary charity; subsequently, heaven and hell are brought into play, either as a reward or a punishment in the hereafter. In letter 79, Nebridius is pictured as dwelling in heaven on account of his charity. Thus, the missive was written with the

13 See H. Schlange-Schöningen, *Hieronymus. Eine historische Biografie* (Darmstadt 2018) 254–255.

14 Jerome writes in 404, after the death of Paula: Hier. epist. 108,30,1, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 348,22–23: *Testis est Iesus ne unum quidem nummum ab ea [sc. Paula] filiae derelictum, ... sed derelictum magnum aes alienum*. Thus, Jerome sent his brother to Dalmatia to sell the remains of his father's inheritance. With an allusion to Lc 14,28, Jerome, in a letter to Pammachius (398), suggests that he may have overstretched himself with the costs of the monasteries and the hospice; he then reports on the task assigned to his brother, Hier. epist. 66,14,2, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) I, 665,7–13: *Unde, quia paene nobis illud de evangelio contigit, ut futurae turris non ante computaremus impensas, compulsi sumus fratrem Paulinianum ad patriam mittere, ut semirutas villulas, quae barbarorum effugerunt manus, et parentum communium cineres venderet, ne coeptum sanctorum ministerium deserentes risum maledicis et aemulis praebeamus*.

15 This would be a very early example of post-mortem alms, see D. Shanzer, "Tobit, Alms, and the Vita Aeterna", in A. Cain/J. Lössl (eds.), *Jerome of Stridon. His Life, Writings and Legacy* (Aldershot et al. 2009) 87–103.

16 Hier. epist. 75,2,2 and 75,4,1.

underlying intention to gain Salvina as a wealthy friend, one who could provide Jerome with financial aid in times of need.¹⁷

Nebrius the Younger as *comes rei privatae*

There are some passages in epist. 79 where Jerome alludes to Nebrius' political position in Constantinople. At the beginning of the letter, the author reflects on the deceased's high-standing palatine office, which he apparently obtained despite his young age. This should be interpreted as a sign of great honor according to Jerome: *Mihi a principio statim illud est praedicandum, quod quasi vicinae mortis praescius inter fulgorem palatii et honoris culmina, quae aetatem anteibant, sic vixit, ut se ad Christum crederet profecturum.*¹⁸ In this unnamed position, Nebrius presided over several officials (*apparitores, ministri*).¹⁹ In addition, he was a recipient of imperial *largitio*. Subsequently, he used the funds with which he was rewarded for the care of the poor.²⁰ Most notable, however, is the fact that bishops of the Eastern Empire apparently contacted Nebrius on matters concerning the welfare of the poor, the ransoming of prisoners, and support for the downtrodden.²¹ He in turn demanded that the emperor should donate alms for the needy and liberation money for captives, following well-known ideals of the early church fathers. The imperial couple apparently responded positively to his requests since they realized (as Jerome emphasizes) that many inhabitants of the *Imperium Romanum* would benefit from their gracious decisions: *Totius orientis episcopi ad hunc miserorum preces et laborantium desideria conferebant. Quidquid ab imperatore poscebat, elemosyna in pauperes, pretium captivorum, misericordia in adflictos erat. Unde et ipsi libenter praestabant, quod sciebant non uni, sed pluribus indulgeri.*²²

Based on these passages, we propose that Nebrius acted as a *comes rei privatae* (CRP) under Arcadius and Aelia Eudoxia. As its title implies, the official had

17 This thesis is argued in more detail in Polcar, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 81–104, esp. 100–104.

18 Hier. epist. 79,2,2, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 88,21–24.

19 Hier. epist. 79,2,9, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 89,19–21: *Nihil nocuit militanti paludamentum et balteus et apparitorum catervae, quia sub habitu alterius alteri militabat, [...]*. Note that the mention of military service by Jerome is not to be read in this context as an indication of an actual function in the Roman army, but as a reference to the at the time popular *militia* in public services. See as well Hier. epist. 79,5,8, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 93,4–6, where Jerome alludes to those people who apparently stood under Nebrius in public service: *Ministros autem eorum et universum ordinem palatii, quo regalis frequentatur ambitio, sic sibi caritate sociarat, ut, qui merito inferiores erant, officii se pares arbitrarentur.*

20 Hier. epist. 79,4,1, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 91,11–12: *[...] quidquid et imperatoris largitio et honoris infulae sibi dederant, in usus pauperum conferebat.*

21 Similar demands for aiding the needy are found, for instance, in Lact. inst. 6,12, Eus. v. Const. 1,43,1–2; 4,22; 28 or Ambr. off. 15,68–75, who understood appropriate actions as part of (imperial) beneficence and thus as a realization of Christian justice in the world.

22 Hier. epist. 79,4,12–14, ed. Hilberg, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) II, 93,9–13.

to administer the emperor's private finances and estates (*res privata*). However, the demarcation of the emperor's possessions from that of the state and subsequently the determination of the exact competences of the office remained somewhat arbitrary especially with regard to the tasks of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* (CSL) and the praetorian prefects.²³ We know, however, that the CRP was responsible for the transfer of assets by way of grant, request, confiscation (e.g., of the goods belonging to criminally convicted persons or of funds from invalid inheritances) or forfeiture to the imperial treasury. Consequently, vacant lands (*bona vacantia*) as well as heirless properties (*bona caduca*) both usually came into imperial possession via the CRP. He also managed the subsequent lease of imperial property. Furthermore, real estate, which was not mainly intended for economic gain but for the emperor's own use (such as imperial palaces) was also under the supervision of the CRP. Finally, the official played an important role regarding petitions submitted to obtain imperial donations of property that belonged to the imperial *fiscus*.²⁴ Laws concerning such imperial gifts were accordingly addressed to the CRP.²⁵ Note that appeals in fiscal matters did originally not go to this official directly, but to the emperor, on whose behalf the CRP then enacted the relevant processes. Consequently, the *de facto* jurisdiction in fiscal litigation regarding the imperial *res privata* ultimately fell to the CRP.²⁶

As mentioned, Nebridius was asked by bishops of the Eastern Roman Empire for assistance in financial matters concerning matters of relief for the poor and ransoming of prisoners. Note that Jerome's phrasing (*totius orientis episcopi*) does not allow for precise statements as to whether bishops of the East addressed Nebridius individually or if they wrote to him as an episcopal congregation. It was not uncommon that high-ranking members of the church contacted a CRP. Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, addressed a letter to an anonymous office-holder (PLRE I 1010, Anonymous 27) between 370–378 about an apparently unjust impo-

23 See RE 4,1, 1900, 664–670; L. Bréhier, *Les institutions de l'empire byzantin* (Paris 1949) 253; A. Kazhdan, "Comes Rerum Privatarum", in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford 1991) 485–486; S. Barnish/A. Lee/M. Whitby, "Government and Administration", in A. Cameron/B. Ward-Perkins/M. Whitby (eds.), *Late Antiquity. Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*, The Cambridge Ancient History 14 (Cambridge 2001) 164–206; W. Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten. Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Administration im 6.–9. Jahrhundert*, *Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 25 (Frankfurt am Main 2002) 18–48; A. Demandt, *Geschichte der Spätantike* (Munich 2008) 205–212; F. Pergami, "Il comes sacrarum largitionum nel sistema burocratico della tarda antichità" in *Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Costantiniana* 24 (2021) 645–668.

24 See Cod. Theod. 9,42,7 (May 5, 369); 10,1,9 (March 9, 365); 10,8,2 (March 11, 319); 10,5 (April 29, 398); 10,9,2 (November 14, 395); 10,10,11 (December 11, 369); 10,14,2 (June 17, 348); 10,16,1–4; 10,23,1 (369/370); 10,26,1–2 (March 6, 425; January 3, 425); Nov. Theod. 6,3.

25 Cod. Theod. 10, 8; 10,10, 6; 10,12–13,1; 10,18; 10,21–22; 10,24; 10,31–32; 10,32; 10,34; Cod. Iust. 11,62,6. Nov. Theod. 5,1.

26 Cod. Theod. 11,30,41; 10,30,45. Compare, however, Cod. Theod. 10,10,7 (May 15, 435), where it is stated that no palatine should be allowed to accept former charges of informers regarding the *res privata* until the matter has been treated by the CRP himself. Also similar is Cod. Theod. 10,10,14 (September 20, 380).

sition on the people of his city regarding contributions of mares to the Roman state.²⁷ At an earlier point in time, when Basil lived in isolation before he became a priest in 364, he wrote an epistle to the imperial treasurer Arcadius (PLRE I 99, Arcadius 3), informing him that he had been chosen by the people of Caesarea to interact with him and to tell him about their worries and needs.²⁸ It was thus not unusual for influential representatives of Christian communities to contact the CRP, or rather his *officium*, with their petitions.

Against this backdrop, Nebridius might have played a crucial role in linking ecclesiastical interests and institutions with the emperor in the capital. Unfortunately, we do not know precisely what he was asked to do by the bishops. The process to which Jerome alluded in his letter is reminiscent, however, of official petitions to the rulers. Through this legal instrument, *petitores* could make claims within the context of imperial *munificentia* to property and assets that were part of the imperial estate and usually administered by the CRP, i. e., in this case Nebridius the Younger.²⁹ It appears that the imperial couple Arcadius and Aelia Eudoxia responded to such requests and sought to meet them as part of imperial benefaction.³⁰ The procedure for dealing with such imperial donations is presented exemplarily in an imperial decree (Cod. Theod. 10,9,2) by the emperors Arcadius and Honorius, addressed to the CRP Eulogius (PLRE I 294, Eulogius 1):³¹

Quicumque a nobis caducas vacantesve meruerit facultates, sive cum auro vel argento, quod specialiter rarum erit, nam saepius habita horum exceptione praestantur, post allegationem beneficii principalis omnium bonorum, id est immobilium moventium vel, ut plenissime loquamur, praediorum urbanorum aedium mancipiorum animalium argenti auri ornamentorum vestium pecuniae fiscus incorporationem traditionemque percipiat. Et cum

If any person should obtain vacant and ownerless property from Us along with its gold or silver, an occurrence which is especially rare, for such property is more commonly granted with the exception of the gold and silver, after the grantee has filed his allegation of the special grant of imperial favor, the fisc shall obtain the incorporation and the delivery of all the property, that is, both immovables and movables, or to speak most fully, of all the

²⁷ Basil. epist. 303.

²⁸ Basil. epist. 15.

²⁹ For the *petitores*' role, see F. Mercogliano, "Die petitores in der Fiskalgesetzgebung", *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Romanistische Abteilung* 111/1 (1994) 449–457.

³⁰ Imperial involvement in the care for the poor and sick is not unusual. On the contrary, it was expected by many at the time, especially among the Roman nobility, see J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops. Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford 1990) 141–143. Already before that time, emperors were caring about the poor, as an imperial proclamation by Valentinian I and Valens from July 8 369 to the PPO *Illyrici, Italiae et Africae* Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus (PLRE I 736–740, Probus 5) emphasizes (Cod. Iust. 1,4,2). Clerks that had recourse to an appeal, thereby causing fruitless delay, were to pay a fine that was to be expended for the benefit of the poor and was not to be paid (as was usually the case) into the *res privata*.

³¹ See also Cod. Theod. 10,10,21 (April 24, 396); 10,10,12–13 (January 30–31, 380); 9,42,17 (January 19, 401); 10,10,32 (May 13, 425) for additional explanations about the procedures.

officii palatini brevibus fuerint cuncta competenter inserta, omne illud, quod ex quibuslibet corporibus est repertum, nostris auribus intimetur. Nec quicquam horum ad petentem ante perveniat, quam suggestione sublimitatis tuae informata mansuetudo nostra traditionem secundario praecepto prioris liberalitatis imperat: ut, nisi denuo a nobis fuerint confirmata, quae videntur impetrata, nihil valeant. Dat. XVIII kal. decemb. Mediolano Olybrio et Probrino cons.

urban estates, buildings, slaves, animals, silver, gold, ornaments, clothing, and money. When all the property has been duly listed in the inventories of the palatine office, all pieces of property that are found shall be reported to Our ears. Nor shall any of this property come to a petitioner until, by the official report of Your Sublimity, Our Clemency shall be informed and shall grant the delivery by a secondary order of Our former liberality. Thus, unless the grant has been confirmed anew by Us, whatever appears to have been impetrated shall be invalid. Given on the eighteenth day before the kalends of December at Milan in the year of the consulship of Olybrius and Probinus. November 14, 395. (Tr. C. Pharr/T. Sherrer Davidson/M. Brown Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* [Princeton 1952] 273, with minor adaptations)

In his position as CRP, Nebridius would thus have served the imperial self-representation according to contemporary expectations concerning the just and generous behavior of a Christian emperor,³² while simultaneously meeting the demands of bishops in the East. It fits very well in this context that Nebridius' homonymous father (PLRE I 620, Nebridius 2) already appeared as CRP in the years 382–384 before he became *praefectus Urbi Constantinopolis* in 386.³³ According to Stefan Rebenich, Nebridius Maior had also been receptive to the idea advocated by Jerome and probably even supported him in Constantinople.³⁴

The question arises as to when Nebridius could have been active as CRP. Based on prosopographical data, we know that around 400, a total of four senators held the named office, namely Silvanus (PLRE II 1011, Silvanus 1) sometime between 395 and 402, Laurentius (PLRE II 658, Laurentius 1) in 396, Studius (PLRE II 1036, Studius 1) in 401, and Nestorius (PLRE II 779, Nestorius 2) between 401–

32 P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 325–550 AD* (Princeton/Oxford 2012) 81–82; 333.

33 Cod. Theod. 10,10,16 (January 18, 383); 10,3,4 (January 19, 383); Cod. Just. 11,66,4; 11,71,2 (August 25, 383); Cod. Just. 11,66,5 (August 30, 383); Cod. Theod. 10,10,18 (October 11, 383); Cod. Theod. 6,30,5 (March 30, 384); Cod. Iust. 11,62,6. See as well Fürst, *loc. cit.* (n. 2) 195, Nebridius 1.

34 Rebenich, *loc. cit.* (n. 7) 122.

405.³⁵ It follows, first, that Silvanus acted as CRP either in 395 or between 397–400 because of Laurentius' attested official activities in 396. Nebridius could therefore possibly have been active as well in 395 or between 397–400. However, a later date seems more plausible in this context, especially since letter 79, which was written in the year 400 (shortly after his presumed death in 399/400), does not hint at any further offices held by Nebridius. Regarding the known CRP around 400, we therefore propose the following order of officeholders (with dating):

- Laurentius (396)
- Silvanus (395 or between 397–398?)
- Nebridius (399/400)
- Studius (401)
- Nestorius (between 401–405)

In combination with an entry from the Codex Theodosianus, it is possible to define the career of Nebridius even more precisely. Thanks to Cod. Theod. 11,30,56, we know that Nebridius acted as *proconsul Asiae* in 396 as a *vir spectabilis*. When he became CRP at the end of the 4th century, he was granted the rank of a *vir clarissimus*. It is finally possible that, like his father, he was to complete and crown his political career by holding the prestigious city prefecture of Constantinople. His early and apparently unexpected death put an abrupt end to such hypothetical plans.

Correspondence: Nikolas Hächler, Historisches Seminar UZH, Culmannstrasse 1, CH-8006 Zürich, nikolas.haechler@hist.uzh.ch
Phillip Polcar, Universität Wien, Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät, Institut für Kirchengeschichte, Schenkenstraße 8–10, A-1010 Wien, philip.polcar@univie.ac.at

³⁵ For Silvanus see Cod. Just. 11,78,1 (between 395/402); for Laurentius see Cod. Theod. 10,10,21 (April 24, 396); for Studius see Cod. Theod. 9,42,17 (January 19, 401); for Nestorius see Cod. Theod. 10,3,6 (August 12, 405); Cod. Theod. 6,30,18 (December 30, 402 or 406); Cod. Just. 4,44,19.