This talk will address select letters of Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370-415) in order to examine the relationship between philosophy and location in Late Antique culture. Synesius depicts his home base in Libya in a rich variety of shades, but a consistent feature is his preoccupation with its suitability for his philosophical pursuits. Synesius's sketches and perceptions of the local inhabitants, flora, and fauna, of Cyrenaica are filtered through a dense mesh of *topoi* - literary places in the full sense - drawn from earlier Greek literature (including Plato, Herodotus, and Dio Chrysostom), together with many ethical valuations inherited from those texts. It is instructive to contextualize these epistolary sketches in a historical framework as well, i.e. by estimating as much as possible their likely audience. One thing that thereby becomes apparent is how Synesius uses a combination of classicism and exoticism (which are not at all mutually exclusive) in order to rhetorically position himself as a mediator between educated outsiders and local society.

**Alex Petkas** is a Ph.D. student in Classics at Princeton University. His research interests are in Ancient Greek literature and thought, and especially their reception in the eastern Roman Empire in late antiquity. His doctoral dissertation is a study of the cultural reception of classical philosophy in the letters of Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370-415), a late antique Greek philosophical essayist, poet, and later Bishop of Ptolemais. In December 2015 he co-organized the Princeton conference “Hypatia: Behind the Symbol,” and is editing the proceedings for publication. He is also a teacher and co-founder at the summer language program "Living Greek in Greece," run by the Paideia Institute. He holds a B.A. in Classical Languages from Trinity University (2008) and an M.A. in Classics from Princeton University (2014).