Gregory of Nazianzus and Apollinarius of Laodicea: Callimachean Polemic in the 4th c. CE

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Good morning everyone, I'm grateful to be among you all. As one who resides within the orbit of this metropole, I welcome you. I hope you're finding us to resemble the Phaeaceans more than the Cyclopes. As is often the case for a scholar of Late Antique Greek verse, I find myself interloping on other's ground. I promise to say very little about Augustine, other than that no matter how often I try to roll my eyes as a hellenist, whenever I return to him I find his writing both fascinating and beautiful. So thank you Madeline and Eric for those stimulating contributions. I've distributed handouts: one side you'll find an outline, a chart, and a bibliography. On the reverse, you'll find the Greek text and my English version of the poem that we will soon be discussing. Links to a digital copy of the handout and an annotated digital text are available on my website, alexpoulos.com. The link is also on the handout.

This morning I wish to discuss two poets of whom most scholars of Greek poetry know very little. What's even worse is that I have to touch, at least briefly, on an abstruse theological debate from the fourth century CE. But do not lose heart: it is all in the service of illuminating a clever and quite funny poem written by one of the most fascinating figures of that tumultuous century, one who, I'll note, wrote a large body of autobiographical poetry a decade or so before Augustine composed his Confessional masterpiece. That person is Gregory of Nazianzus.

An older contemporary of Augustine, Gregory lived from around 330 to 390 CE. He came from a well-to-do family in inner Cappadocia, but was educated extensively, first in Cappadocian Caesarea, then later in Alexandria and finally in Athens. Best known for his theological oratory, Gregory's orations and letters greatly influenced both the form and substance of Christian theology.

As a bishop, for instance, he presided over the beginnings of the Council of Constantinople in 381, which gave us the Nicene creed in the form more or less still in use by most Christian denominations. But Gregory also produced a large and highly variegated corpus of Greek poetry, some 17,000 lines, more than an *Iliad's* worth. He is the first Greek Christian poet whose work survives in any large quantity; this elusive and allusive body of work is still not very accessible: it has yet to be critically edited in its entirety and has not yet been fully translated into English. Though intimidating in its scope and variety, it provides a fascinating entrée into Late Antique literary culture, particularly the ways in which well-educated Christians fused Christian faith and Greek *paideia*.

I direct our attention this morning to a short, 16 line elegiac poem written by Gregory in the early 380s. In this work, *carm.* 1.1.11, Gregory critiques his theological rival Apollinarius of Laodicea. The dogmatic side of the short poem has long been acknowledged: Apollinarius maintained that Christ, in his incarnation, did not assume a human mind, but that the higher functions of his soul were fulfilled directly by the divine *Logos*.[1] Gregory insisted instead that Christ, in the incarnation, took on humanity in its entirety, mind and all. However, there is an aesthetic dimension to this poem that has been missed by the scholars (largely historians or theologians), who read it. In short, Gregory sets out in this poem not simply to prove Apollinarius a heretic, but also an incompetent and boorish poet. As we shall see, Apollinarius becomes a new *Telchin* or *Homerides*, and Gregory a new Callimachus.

I now read the poem for you in my own metrical rendition into English blank verse. This necessarily requires some liberties, and self-indulgence on the part of the translator, but I want to ensure Gregory sounds like a poet to an English ear. Most renderings of Gregory's verse into

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[1] Socr. *eccl. hist.* 2.46.

English are prosaic in both senses; they are generally meant to serve theologians and historians, and so they privilege the theological aspects of the text above the aesthetic.[2]

> Foolish who worships not th' eternal Word
> as equal to the high Father in heaven.
> Foolish who worships not th' incarnate Word,
> as equal to the heavenly Word on High,
> but cuts from Father's might His Word, or else
> severs the Word from human shape, our breadth.
> The Father's Word was God, but made our man
> so that, with mortals mixed, He'd mix in God.
> A single god comprising both: a man,
> to make man into gods: have mercy, thou
> who by those words art wounded yet again!
> For you, no more– why seek from me the knowledge
> of that ineffable and holy mixture.
> Oh mortals, mind the bound'ries of your speech!
> Should I persuade thee, that is all the better;
> yet if you'd stain your page with myriad lines,
> come here and I will scratch these letters few
> onto your books, with pen that bears no stain

My contention is that this little poem is actually a sophisticated and clever piece of literary polemic, not simply a volley in a theological quarrel. Gregory achieves this primarily through summoning Callimachus of Alexandria. This is most clear in the final two couplets, where Gregory alludes to the famous prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*. In line 14, "myriad lines of verse" (πολλαῖς χιλιάσιν ἐπέων) recalls Callimachus' *Aet.* fr. 1.4–5 (ἐν πολλαὶς ἤνυσα χιλιάσιν), where the Cyrenean poet defends his practice of not writing one continuous poem in thousands of lines. In line 15, Gregory describes his poem as "few-lined" (ὀλιγόστιχα), picking up another piece of Callimachean terminology from the prologue to the *Aetia* (fr. 1.9). This particular compound is quite rare: Gregory's couplet is one of the only instances of the word after Callimachus' use in the *Aetia*. These allusions to Callimachus play a key role in Gregory's effort smear his opponent as an unsophisticated

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[2] The poem has also been rendered into English by Gilbert 2001 and McGuckin 1995.

and boorish writer, for Callimachus is the archetypal sophisticated and erudite poet. Think of the ways that Ovid or Propertius continually invoked Callimachus to defend their poetics.

I would also suggest that Callimachus' influence extends beyond these allusions into the stylistic fabric of the poem itself. In short, Gregory's poem evinces a number of stylistic devices that, though by no means restricted to the Alexandrian poets, were particularly favored among Callimachus and his followers. I'd like to start by noting Gregory's use of juxtaposed prosodic variants. This mouthful of jargon, coined by Neil Hopkinson in a 1982 article, denotes the practice of reusing in close proximity the same word with a different scansion.[3] The most infamous example is Homer's Ἄρες Ἄρες, where Ares' name is initially scanned as a trochee (long short) and then as a spondee (long-long). Hopkinson notes that Callimachus was particularly fond of the practice and lists several examples (e.g. Call. *hZeus* 55 καλὰ μὲν ἠέξευ, καλὰ δ᾽ἔτραφες Οὐράνιε Ζεῦ). I note the following instances in our poem:

- λόγον (1: pyrrhus ˘ ˘, 3: iamb ˘ –, lengthened by position)
- Πατρός (2: trochee – ˘; 5: iamb ˘ –; 7: spondee – –)
- τόσον, ὅσσον, τόσσον (9, 11)

This prosodic variation contributes a Callimachean savor.

Like Callimachus and the other Alexandrians, Gregory indulges in learned etymological word play. The poem opens with νήπιος ("foolish"), which was derived variously in antiquity. The most common derivation makes it equivalent to the Latin *infans*: we have a privative νή- that negates something deriving from ἔπος ("word"). Yet ancient thinkers came up with other solutions. Some, like Clement of Alexandria, read the νή as an intensifier, instead of a negative particle (cf. ναί, still used in Modern Greek to mean "yes").[4] I'd suggest that Gregory is doing something similar: he playfully suggests that νή is an intensifier of something deriving from ἔπος, such that νήπιος comes

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[3] Hopkinson 1982

[4] For what it is worth, Chantraine remains uncertain about the actual etymology of the word.

to mean not just "foolish" but literally, "extremely wordy." This is a subtle, but effective bit of erudite bravado in a poem about Callimachean proportion.

Finally, Gregory revels in intentional ambiguity: he likes to mean multiple things with the same phrase. When Gregory bids his opponents to "mind the limits of their speech," the point is primarily theological: human discourse cannot ultimately capture the divine mystery of the incarnation. Yet the subsequent evocation of Callimachus makes it clear that Gregory also has aesthetic concerns in mind. Apollinarius' works aren't simply wrong, they're long-winded and boorish. The final couplet similarly links stylistic and spiritual purity. Gregory characterizes his poetic pen with the relative clause, ἣ μέλαν οὐδὲν ἔχει. At the stylistic level, μέλαν means "stain," so Gregory's style is spotless. Yet μέλαν can also mean ink: he now doubt means for us to enjoy the image of an inkless pen. We may compare Gregory's inkless pen to Callimachus' skinny muse.[5]

So what of this Apollinarius of Laodicea?[6] The son of a grammarian of the same name, Apollinarius was contemporary with Gregory, and like our Cappadocian, remembered as an exceedingly gifted author. Philostorgius, the 5th c. Arian historian, groups him together with Basil of Caesarea and Gregory as the leading pro-Nicene authors in the late 4th c. Like Gregory, Apollinarius had close contacts among Pagan elites. Moreover, Apollinarius produced an extensive body of both prose and verse: Philostorgius tells us the Laodicean excelled in exegetical oratory. Sozomen in turn notes that Apollinarius composed numerous short poems for his partisans to sing throughout the day. Only one poetic work survives that is attributed to him, a paraphrase of the psalter into Homeric Greek (ed. Ludwich 1912). Since 1960, scholars have generally followed Joseph Golega

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[5] Cf. also 2 Cor. 3.2–3: 2 ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἡμῶν ὑμεῖς ἐστε, ἐγγεγραμμένη ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, γινωσκομένη καὶ ἀναγινωσκομένη ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, 3 φανερούμενοι ὅτι ἐστὲ ἐπιστολὴ Χριστοῦ διακονηθεῖσα ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν, ἐγγεγραμμένη οὐ μέλανι ἀλλὰ πνεύματι θεοῦ ζῶντος, οὐκ ἐν πλαξὶν λιθίναις ἀλλ᾽ ἐν πλαξὶν καρδίαις σαρκίναις.

[6] The ancient evidence for Apollinarius is collected in the introduction to Ludwich's edition of the *Metaphrasis*: Ludwich 1912. These are, Socr. *eccl. hist.*2.46, Soz. *eccl. hist.* 5.18, 6.25; Philostorgius, ???; the Suda.

and rejected the authenticity of the work (Golega dates it instead to the 5th c.).[7] But Andrew Faulkner and Christos Simelidis have cast doubt on Golega's argumentation, and the poem may well be authentic, or at least 4th century.[8]

If the poem is authentic, we may make one noteworthy observation: Gregory's characterization of Apollinarius as a "son of Homer" may, in part, be justified. Agosti and Gonnelli have shown that in certain formal features, the paraphrase resembles Homeric practice much more than near contemporary works from Nonnus and Gregory. The ratio of the feminine caesura to the masculine caesura is the most striking example of the *Paraphrase's* Homeric style. For those do not revel in the arcana of Greek metrics, I have provided definitions and examples of a feminine and masculine *caesurae* on the handout. A masculine caesura occurs when there is a word break after the first long of the 3rd foot. A feminine instead occurs with a word break between the two shorts of the 3rd foot. The *Paraphrase* has a feminine caesura 62% of the time, which is quite close to Homer's 57%. Nonnus and Gregory, by contrast, use the feminine caesura about 80% of the time, following Callimachus' figure of 74%. Moreover, the *Paraphrase* follows Homer also in permitting several lines without a third foot *caesura*, a practice rejected by Gregory, Nonnus, and Callimachus. Gonnelli rightly notes that these features of *Paraphrase* lend the poem a Homeric, or archaizing flavor.[9]

Let us now bring this all together. Through this brief entrée, we've seen that the parry and thrust of Late Antique theological debate is more complex and engaging than one might expect, even on a purely literary level. In a brief 16-line poem, Gregory and Apollinarius become heirs to a centuries-old literary quarrel between Callimacheans and *Homeridae*. This has broader implications, I

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[7] Golega 1960
[8] Simelidis 2009
[9] Agosti and Gonnelli 1995. Statistics for Gregory, Nonnus, and the *Met. ps.* are taken from here. The statistics for Homer are taken from West 1982 36; for statistics of Callimachus' *Hymns*, I've consulted Stephens 2015 31.

think, for the literary criticism of early Christian poetry. There is a tendency in the literature to attribute anything new within a Christian poem to the author's faith. Certainly most discussions of Gregory's originality see his primary contribution as the introduction of Christian themes to classical verse forms.[10] Yet though these poems are marked indelibly by their authors' religious convictions, their faith by no means predetermined the shape of that verse. Christian themes found expression in a variety of metrical forms and poetic styles: from paraphrase of biblical texts to autobiographical lament. Moreover, Christians were just as often competing with other Christians as they were with non-Christians; this provided the need for Christian poets to differentiate themselves not just from pagan poets, but from other Christian ones too. In short, sophisticated Christian poets not only had theological, but aesthetic agendas, and our readings of their poetry are much more engaging when we are sensitive to both the ideological and the aesthetic aims of their work. Thank you.

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[10] For Gregory's poetic originality, see Poulos 2019 53–84.