

AIAS Workshop:
Cultural Identity and Transmission in Early Christian Literature
Date: 12-14 June

Titles and Abstracts

1. Gianfranco Agosti (La Sapienza, Rome)

Cultural identity and the transformation of *paideia* in Christian verse inscriptions of late antiquity

The paper deals with Christian verse inscriptions from the 4th-6th c. CE as indicators of continuity and transformation of Greek *paideia* in late antiquity, focusing mainly on the possible relevance of poetic language as a signpost of identity. Through close reading of a selected sample of verse inscriptions from both urban centres and marginal areas of the Eastern empire, I will argue that the literary 'allusions/quotations' and the style of poems on stone played a significant role in conveying the intended message, not only in literary terms, but especially in terms of the enactment of a cultural and religious identity. I would like also to suggest that we should give up the standard interpretive vertical model of the high vs the low (i.e., the influence of literary poetry and classical *paideia* on the authors of verse inscriptions) and the aesthetic judgments (sometimes prejudices) connected to it. To understand the functions verse inscriptions had in Christian society we should rather elaborate a horizontal model, taking into account the expectations of commissioners and their intended audience, and the crucial issue of the legibility of inscriptions as well.

2. Carmen Cvetkovic (Göttingen)

Notissima sanctitas loci. The Making of Christian Sacred Space in the Writings of Paulinus of Nola

In the first years after his arrival in Nola, Paulinus embarked on a renovation and construction project which transformed the modest shrine of his patron saint Felix in an opulent site almost unrivalled in Western Christianity. This paper examines three of Paulinus' texts (*Epistula 32*, *Carmen 27* and *Carmen 28*) which describe in detail the lavish Nolan architectural complex in order to understand how a space that had a lot in common with the luxurious villas of late ancient wealthy landowners was presented as a distinctive Christian sacred space. Attention will also be paid to the way in which Paulinus, as the main promoter of Felix' cult, articulated the holiness of his patron saint's site both in verse and deed and to the way in which he conceived his own role in the sacral space of the cult complex.

3. Miriam DeCock (Aarhus University)

The *Alexandrian Museion* and the 'Homilies' of Origen: Genre and Innovation in Early Christian Homiletics

This paper will explore Origen's innovative and influential role in the development of the early Christian exegetical homily. Unlike the homilies of the prior Christian tradition, of which we have but scant evidence, Origen's often lengthy homilies work through large sustained sections of biblical text systematically, verse by verse, exhibiting his use of all the tools of the Greco-Roman grammatical-rhetorical schoolroom toolkit. This latter aspect has of course been well documented and well analyzed. What has not been thoroughly examined is the context, genre, and even the audience of these works, which most scholars describe as "exegetical homilies" delivered in a liturgical context to an audience of Christians at various stages in their ascent to the divine. I will present evidence that, in my view, calls into question the typically assumed genre, content, and audience of the material.

4. Kristoffel Demoen (Ghent University)

The *Paradeisos*: a middle Byzantine upgrade of some *Apophthegmata Patrum*

Paradeisos is the traditional title of a collection of 99 tetrastichs in elegiacs, probably written in the tenth century. It constitutes a remarkable instance of the creative reception of early Christian monastic literature, notably the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, by a Byzantine intellectual who was clearly well acquainted with the classical poetic tradition, including the *Anthologia Palatina*. The collection is only available in outdated editions. This paper will present the ongoing work towards a new edition with full translation or commentary. I will focus on the *Paradeisos* as a *metaphrasis* and two issues that come with this status as a secondary text: the sometimes problematic identification of the source texts (the *Apophthegmata* have a notoriously complex and fluctuating transmission) and the paradoxical transformation of simple ascetic prose sayings into sophisticated highbrow verse. I will also discuss some aspects of the textual transmission of the collection, as this reveals something about its assessment and its afterlife. As a contribution to the interactive character of the workshop, I will propose to the other participants some tough cases: epigrams that present difficulties I have not been able to resolve satisfactorily as it comes to interpretation and textual constitution.

5. Christian Djurslev (Aarhus University)

Semiramis goes West: On the Canonization of the Classical Tradition in Latin Christianity

Semiramis, first and last Queen of Assyria, captivated the Greek and Roman imagination to the extent that scholars have named her one of the 'fantastic four' (Trnka-Amrhein 2018). She joins her consort Ninus, the Pharaoh Sesonchosis, and King Alexander of Macedon in this quadrumvirate of primeval conquerors. Historians and philologists typically investigate the Near Eastern origin of her story (e.g. Stronk 2017), as well as her medieval and later receptions (Samuel 1941 for the Middle Ages; Asher-Grave 2006 for the Renaissance and beyond). Given this focus on other high points of history, less attention has hitherto been invested in the transmission and transformation of her legend in Late Antiquity.

In this paper, I will review her textual tradition in the Latin West from Augustan Rome to the rise of the 'Barbarian kingdoms' in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Using a quantitative method, I will focus on the distribution of *topoi/loci* to detect change and continuity caused by Christian concerns. For example, I will pay particular attention to the disappearance of traditionally 'pagan' topics, such as her origin story, her enthralling beauty, and the alleged sexual affair with her son, Ninyas. The collective streamlining of her story eschews the unwanted features from the 'Classical Tradition' and brings out ones appropriate for Christians sensibilities. Although specific innovations are scarce at content level, Christian writers created new commonplaces among themselves and on their own terms. In so doing, they form their own intellectual identity as opposed to the classical learning of the 'pagan' past that had previously appropriated Semiramis from Near Eastern tradition. The present paper seeks to address that identity formation.

6. Jakob Engberg (Aarhus University)

Superstition and Conversion. Literary(?) antecedents and the purpose of Arnobius' description of his own conversion.

Around 305 the North African rhetor Arnobius wrote an extensive apologetic work, not addressed to any of the emperors, who at that time were persecuting the Christians, but rather addressed at the public. Arnobius followed in the footsteps of other apologists and in his argumentation he oscillated between polemic and defense and between claims of Christian originality (and superiority) and finding common ground with his addressees (their worldview, literature and authorities familiar to them). Scholarship has established that Arnobius knew and drew on a very comprehensive and long list of ancient authors.

This paper will focus on a remarkable passage in Arnobius' work. Here Arnobius describes his past life and relates how Christ liberated him from superstition. I will discuss this passage,

its context, its purpose and its relationship to possible (literary) antecedents, pagan and Christian.

7. Andrew Faulkner (AIAS, Aarhus University)

The Martyrdom of Saint Cyprian: Eudocia and Poetic Hagiography

This paper explores the paraphrastic technique of Eudocia's poem and contextualizes it within the tradition of late antique biblical paraphrase. Close readings of selections of the Martyrdom of Saint Cyprian elucidate the relationship to the prose original and her engagement with the Hellenic poetic tradition, as a means of cultural expression and the legitimization of hagiographical narrative.

8. Anders-Christian Jacobsen (Aarhus University)

Cyril of Jerusalem's Catechetical Lectures and Christian Identity

In the mid-fourth century, Cyril was bishop in Jerusalem. He catechized the catechumens in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. His catechetical lectures were written down by himself or others and give us access to Cyril's ideas about the basic content of Christianity and about the baptismal rituals practiced in the Jerusalem congregation. This paper will explore how Cyril used catechetical instruction and ritual practice to transform the identity of the catechumens who became Christians through baptism. The paper will also explore whether elements from previous traditions and rituals of cleansing and initiation can be identified in Cyril's catechetical lectures.

9. Rachele Ricceri (Ghent University)

Gregory of Nazianzus Praying the Psalms: Religious Practices and Poetic Models

As it is widely known, the poetic production of Gregory of Nazianzus is an outstanding example of Christian appropriation of both biblical and classical heritage. The cultural operation carried out by Gregory of Nazianzus in order to promote a form of poetry acceptable to a Christian audience includes an extensive use of classical sources and, at the same time, is deeply grounded in the scriptural tradition. The present paper aims at investigating how the cultural model proposed by Gregory is also shaped by means of a conscious use of some biblical literary models, among which the Psalms are not negligible. This paper firstly explores the role played by psalmody in fourth-century religious life, as reflected in Gregory of Nazianzus's prose and verse writings. Chanting the Psalms was a daily activity –as well as a school practice– which is referred to in many Gregorian passages. The all-pervading character of the Psalms in Christian people's life makes these texts an

unavoidable reference point to study the cultural identity expressed in patristic texts, and especially in Gregory's oeuvre.

Moreover, on a literary level, my paper proposes an analysis of the motifs and formal structure of some prayers in verse included in Gregory's poetic corpus. A close-reading of some poems *de seipso* will show that the Psalms constitute a valuable poetic antecedent to which Gregory refers when composing prayers, both thematically and structurally.

10. Nicholas Richardson (University of Oxford)

Gregory of Nazianzus' Poem on Virtue (*Carm.* I. 2. 9)

This paper explores in detail Gregory of Nazianzus' poem on Virtue as an example of his moral poetry.

11. Christos Simelidis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Euthymius the Athonite and the Metaphrastic movement

Euthymius the Athonite (died 1028) cofounded, with his father John, the monastery of Iveron on Mount Athos. He translated numerous Biblical, patristic and hagiographic works from Greek into Georgian, and was celebrated as "the enlightener of Georgians." As a rule, Euthymius combined verbatim translation with minor and major changes, such as excerpting and editing the texts under translation, inserting extensive interpolations from other sources, or compiling two texts into one. In this paper I argue that Euthymius is very likely to have been influenced by the metaphrastic procedures followed by his contemporaries Symeon Metaphrastes and Nikephoros Ouranos, whose works were in his library and whom he likely knew personally. He must have seen his translations more as metaphrases, although, in his case, not with purified and rhetorically embellished language, but rather with content and language adjusted to make them accessible and comprehensible to a public which lacked a thorough grounding in theology and philosophy.

12. Andreas Westergren (Lund University)

Civilizing, Colonizing Saints: The History of the Monks in Light of Civic ideals

Hagiographical accounts such as the History of the Monks of Egypt – and Syria – have long been studied as witnesses to the rise of monasticism; texts that negotiate the distance to society, rather than depicting the creation of society, a city in the desert as Athanasios famously stated in the *Vita Antonii*. At the same time it is clear that civic identity in many ways was renegotiated in Christian terms in Late antiquity, that ktisis poems celebrating the foundation of a city still were written, and that the relics of the saints created a new cultic

focus which was not altogether different from the cult of heroes or gods. In this presentation, we shall observe how the narratives about Theodoret of Cyrrhus' ascetics resemble the foundation myths of cities. In fact, a large portion of his *History of the Monks of Syria* (*Philotheos Historia*) concerns saints that live near the city of Antioch and that actively participate in the life of the city, especially in times of crises.