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Between Babrius and Ignatios, between Fable and *Metaphrasis*: Rephrasing in Byzantine Dodecasyllables

Abstract: The *Tetrasticha* of Ignatios the Deacon (*c*. 775–847) are fables written in dodecasyllabic quatrains rephrasing the verses of Babrius. With the *Tetrasticha*, the genre of Aesopic fable meets the aim and technique of the *metaphrasis*, which is typical of Byzantine literature. Despite its origin as a school exercise, a *metaphrasis* could occasionally become poetry in its own right. The fable quatrains by Ignatios are not just abridged fables from a longer hypo-text of Babrius. In his *Tetrasticha*, Ignatios addresses the choices, purpose, and features of the Byzantine concept of μεταφράζειν: the Aesopic tale perfectly fits four dodecasyllables not by mere subtraction or substitution of words, but with a clear pursuit of *breuitas*, at the opposite pole from the *auxesis* typical of other kinds of Byzantine *metaphrasis*. Through the analysis of Ignatios' *metaphrasis* and its particular technique, we can appreciate the process of transformation of Aesopic and Babrian ancient fables into Byzantine tetrastich poetry.

1 Introduction

The long journey of the ancient fable as genre and literary product through the centuries — and through other literary genres as well — finally reaches the gates of the Black Sea with a look at Byzantium and its fertile reception of ancient fables. Our discussion begins with the humdrum, together with the conundrum. On the one hand, fables were one of the most common school exercises in Byzantium, so their diffusion and reuse is far from unexpected — this is the humdrum. On the other, the Byzantine *metaphrasis*, here mentioned for its connection with the genre of the Aesopic fables, is not simply a 'genre' — this is the conundrum.

2 Fables in Byzantium and the teacher Ignatios the Deacon

Fables, especially the Aesopic ones, enjoyed a great *fortuna* in Byzantine literature and culture.[1] This fact is particularly highlighted by practical evidence: not only are fables often quoted by other authors or referred to in other works, but the Aesopic corpus (or rather, corpora)[2] has one of the widest and most complicated manuscript traditions,[3] demonstrating the diffusion and survival of the fables in Byzantium and all over the Byzantine Empire. In the Aesopic corpora, it is widely known that the Medieval tradition preserves some fables *written* in Byzantine times and *inspired by* the ancient Aesopic model: they are Byzantine rewritings of ancient fables. And on closer inspection, while some of those 'ancient' fables date back to the Classical Age, many others in the Aesopic corpora are quite late, some of them even Late Antique.

At any rate, the Aesopic material offered Byzantine authors the opportunity to continually rewrite and renew, recall and revive the ancient tradition of fables.[4] Suffice it to mention, as an example of rewriting, the famous paraphrase of Babrius' fables, the so-called *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*:[5] it is considered an inde-

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1 It must be said that Aesopic fables were much appreciated in Byzantium as 'pieces of morality', as well as anthologies of anecdotes and sayings (e.g. the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the like). We should think of the 'fable in Byzantium' as a means to explain and apply moral precepts. This notion helps us understand why 'pagan features' were often permitted when reusing ancient fables: allegory was important in this sense. Of course, the survival of moralistic materials (Aesopic fables included) was ensured by schools, which used fables as didactic material. For fables in Byzantium, see for example Papademetriou 1983; Adrados 2000 (esp. part three 'The Fable in the Middle Ages'); van Dijk 2002.
2 Working with Aesopic corpora can be rather puzzling. Some scholars refer to the fables as 'Aesop's fables', others prefer (as I do) the open definition of 'Aesopic material': the first is a common term (too narrow in scope, in my opinion) that scholars may use for the sake of brevity, but the latter gives more attention to the philological status of the material we find in the manuscript tradition, i.e. more than just one *recensio* of fables and very different manuscript traditions. In the present contribution, I discuss *recensio/recensiones* of Aesopic texts according to the definitions and numberings of Chambry 1925/26, 1–28, Hausrath 1959/1970, and Perry 1952.
3 Other authors whose manuscript traditions are broad and difficult to organize, and whose witnesses are almost countless, are for example Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and John Damascene. Of course, they were very famous and much studied in Byzantium.
4 See on this Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 229–231.
5 On the dating of this group of fables, and its genesis, see also Vaio 1984; Adrados 2000, 463–492. I have studied the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* both as a paraphrase of Babrius and as a precise collection of fables with a moralistic aim, see Scognamiglio 2022a.

pendent Aesopic *recensio* — namely, the fourth one —,[6] and shows the distinctive patterns of paraphrasing an ancient text, such as the prose renderings of Babrius' verses, which are simplified and contain explanations or additional details. The mention of the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* of Babrius here is not arbitrary: it is in a certain way a good term of comparison for our discussion.

Apart from the fables specifically named after Aesop and/or attributed to him, another significant figure in the *fortuna* of fables in Byzantium was an author who decided to stick to one precise model, namely to Babrius and his iambic fables,[7] an author whose work is sometimes so close to the Babrian version that it could be considered almost an indirect witness to the lost Babrian fables, while at the same time the author is an independent poet deeply and creatively reusing the ancient model: Ignatios the Deacon.

Ignatios, a school teacher in Constantinople whose life probably spanned from the late eighth to the mid-ninth century (*c.* 775–847, or *c.* 795–870 CE, according to different scholars)[8] during the Second Iconoclasm,[9] is the author of short verse fables in the 'Aesopic manner', the so-called *Tetrasticha*.[10] The great number

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6 According to Chambry 1925/26, 17–19.

7 Unlike Aesopic corpora and the many textual witnesses that preserve them, Babrius' fables rest on a very poor manuscript tradition: only three manuscripts have their text (and not even the alleged complete collection by the author, as far as we can establish), while the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* can be considered an important indirect witness, preserving the paraphrases of some fables by Babrius that would otherwise be completely lost. The latest critical edition of Babrius' fables is Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, but the edition by Perry 1965 is still important (although the two editions have a different treatment of some fables and the prologues).

8 For the life and works of Ignatios the Deacon, we have an important yet somewhat obscure Byzantine witness: an entry dedicated to him in the *Suda* (ι 84 Adler). It says that Ignatios was a deacon and σκευοφύλαξ of the Great Church of Constantinople, metropolitan of Nicaea, and a teacher (γραμματικός), and that he wrote some prose works and poems. The entry fails to mention many works that in the manuscript tradition are attributed (most probably) to Ignatios; moreover, the *Suda* gives no precise chronology of his positions at Constantinople and Nicaea. Many scholars have discussed the meaning and genesis of the entry in the *Suda* on his life and works, see Krumbacher 1897, 716–720; Wolska-Conus 1970; Makris 1997, 3–22; Mango 1997, 3–18; Efthymiadis 1998, 38–46; Adrados 2000, 493–515; Pratsch 2000; Lauxtermann 2003/19, II 237–241; lastly, Scognamiglio 2022b, 479–481. I will thoroughly discuss other issues about the authorship and context of Ignatios in the critical edition of his dodecasyllabic works that I am currently preparing.

9 The Second Iconoclasm dates from 815 to 843 CE, the victory of the worshippers of icons. The struggle was not only a matter of religion, but also a political struggle between different parties (imperial and patriarchal) in Constantinople.

10 The most recent and only critical edition of his *Tetrasticha* is that of Müller 1897. My view is that some *Tetrasticha* are most probably Ignatios' genuine work (such as other dodecasyllabic

of manuscripts[11] demonstrates the wide survival of Ignatios' tetrastich fables, often as exercises, but also as allegorical expressions of advice and 'pieces of morality' to be recollected. His *Tetrasticha* are rewritings of Babrius' iambic fables, thus a transformation from verse to other verse. Not surprisingly, the main question at this point shall be: what is the difference, then, between Aesopic rewritings in the Aesopic corpora (such as the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, or the different 'arrangements' of the same fable), and Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* as rewritings? As I will show, Ignatios' authorial voice is stronger than in the anonymous rewritings of the other corpora, and his work is enriched with something innovative. Ignatios strives for well-balanced, not merely abridged fables. He is thus not only a 'chapter' of the reception of Aesopic fables in Byzantium, though an important one: he is also a witness to the fruitful meeting of poetry, the reuse of an ancient model, and reflection on the form of a genre, the Aesopic fable. His tetrastich fables can be considered a clear example of *metaphrasis*, the transformation a text underwent by means of rhetorical devices.

Since *metaphrasis* cannot simply be defined as a genre *tout court* — its definition is the subject of critical and scholarly discussion — we will see how the features of this process of transformation can lead to the quasi-definition of an autonomous type (in my view) of poetry, if not a 'genre' in its full sense. Or, at least, this is what I shall attempt.

3 A Genre that is not a genre?

In dealing with the link between ancient fable and other literary genres — to the extent that we have a precise definition of 'genre' in Antiquity and beyond — the important point to make is that, not unexpectedly, a *metaphrasis* (the Byzantine 'brother' of the ancient and late antique term *paraphrasis*) cannot be defined as a 'genre' *stricto sensu*: it refers to a technique, namely for school exercises[12] — or at

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works: *Lazarus et dives*, *Versus in Adamum*, *Acrostichon alphabeticum*), whereas some others are later compositions added to Ignatios' corpus. For the *status quaestionis* concerning the *Tetrasticha*, see below, n. 23.

11 If we consider manuscripts up to the 16th century, the *Tetrasticha* are preserved in around fifty extant ones, in very different types of collections and anthologies. But if we also consider more recent manuscripts, the number of witnesses increases notably.

12 This is the definition by Lauxtermann 2003/19, II 225–228. However, it is not the only possible one: for example, on *metaphrasis* in a hagiographical context with Symeon "the Metaphrastes", see Resh 2015, 754, who remarks about Symeon's rewritings: "This success marked the appearance of

least to the 'final product' of this technique.[13] The *metaphrasis* as a technique may transform a text in length, syntax, vocabulary, style, and in its prose or verse form: the most common practices of *metaphrasis* are (a) αὔξησις (the addition of words), (b) substitution of words, and (c) subtraction of words, *breuitas*.

Speaking of *metaphrasis* as a process of rewriting a hypo-text in a different shape (prose or verse), or with a different purpose, is a demanding task. The concept raises the notions of 'genre', authoriality, literature as an original work of art, the presence of an author — a number of notions that are often questionable, especially in Byzantine literature. In this regard, as for the text that underwent a process of *metaphrasis*, a question may arise: is the final text (i.e. the result of a *metaphrasis*) an independent work of art, or is it merely dependent upon the hypo-text?[14] The concept is rather difficult to investigate. Yet the final text resulting from a process of *metaphrasis* is indeed a literary product, whether independent of its model or not. In a broader sense, then, the *metaphrasis* as the result of a process of 'metaphrasing' has its own features and can sometimes fit into one or more 'genres': this does not imply *sic et simpliciter* that *metaphrasis* is a 'genre', but rather suggests that it can be an independent literary product and so be perceived by the Byzantines — and by modern readers — as something more than the mere 'application of a technique'.

Ne multa, the question is whether the *metaphrasis* can be defined as a genre or not. I would rather say that the question is whether form or content can define the genre, at least in Byzantine literature: once again, a demanding, nearly pioneering task. It would not be implausible, I believe, to consider the *metaphrasis* to be something in-between the two concepts of form and content (and so, 'genre' in a modern sense). Likewise, with the sonnet — say, Shakespeare's or Foscolo's[15] —

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metaphrasis as a genre that dominated Byzantine hagiographical discourse from this point onward, involving a significant number of writers, scribes, illustrators, readers, and listeners", and (*ibid.*) "That is, the success of metaphrasis resided not only in its popularity, but also in the high appreciation that it enjoyed among the learned rhetoricians [...]" (the discussion is focused on Symeon's 'metaphrastic corpus'). As with many aspects of Byzantine literature, the theoretical effort of producing a definition is clearly far from establishing a definitive truth. On *metaphrasis*, see also Roberts 1985 and Constantinou/Høgel 2020, but there is much more work to do.

13 See once again Resh 2015, 756: "In Byzantine Greek, μετάφρασις designates specifically a translated text, not the process of translation in general". However, I believe that both perspectives should be considered in the discussion of *metaphrasis* and Byzantine poetry.

14 The answer to this question can be given according to each single case study. In a broader sense and without any 'aesthetic limit', any creation can be defined as an original work of art and literature.

15 I am no expert in the field, and I know that the origin of the sonnet is a large subject, but I think that the example here, *mutatis mutandis*, fits our case.

it is clearly a metrical form, yet no one would ever think that Shakespeare or Foscolo could have written, for instance, epic or historical poetry in the form of the sonnet. Hardly anyone, I believe, would perceive the term 'sonnet' merely as a form of poetry: the 'sonnet' is a type (a 'genre'?) of poetry with certain defined contents. The form (sonnet as four stanzas) is directly connected to the content (sonnet as specific type of poetry). I wonder whether the malleable connection between metrical form and specific content can be ontologically considered as 'genre'. Thus, I believe it would not be entirely wrong to speak of the *metaphrasis* as 'quasi-genre': a sonnet can be defined by its form and *also* by content more or less ascribable to a 'genre', just as the *metaphrasis*, therefore, can be.

But let us move from the theoretical discussion of the genre and let us now focus on the practical outcome of this process in Ignatios' fables. As for Ignatios, however, we can say that his *metaphrasis* of Babrius is not only the result of the rhetorical process mentioned above,[16] but a work into which the author has put something new, in either form, style, content, or language. Whatever Ignatios' intention was and whatever our idea of *metaphrasis* is, it is true that his *Tetrasticha* were transmitted not as part of Aesopic corpora and not mixed with other Aesopic materials, even if strictly linked to Babrius' name:[17] for the manuscript tradition, the work of Ignatios was independent enough from his Babrian hypotext, and capable of being an independent collection of (rewritten) fables.

What are the objects, then, and which texts underwent transformation? As has rightly been pointed out,[18] the genre of the Aesopic fable is one of the most

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16 It is interesting to note what happens in the manuscripts as regards the title of Ignatios' collection. In most of them, the fables are described as "tetrastichs from the original Gabrias/ Babrius" (the name of Babrius was often mistaken), but in some manuscripts the fables are defined as τετράστιχα [...] μεταφρασθέντα καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐπαλείφοντα ("tetrastichs [...] metaphrased and set for virtue"). They are not defined precisely as a *metaphrasis* (except in one manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, E 64 sup., of the 15th century, ἰγνατίου διακόνου τετράστιχα δι᾽ ἰάμβων εἰς τοὺς μύθους τοὺς αἰσωπικοὺς μεταφραστικοὺς), also because the very concept of *metaphrasis* arose later. Yet we find a rising awareness of that process of transformation and of its literary outcomes.
17 In the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, Babrius' name (or corruptions of it, such as Gabrias, Fabrias ...) appears in a great number of witnesses together with that of Ignatios himself, so it sometimes happens that the only remaining name is Babrius and not Ignatios (titles very often suffer corruption). The ultimate example of the 'strong presence' of Babrius' name in titles of the *Tetrasticha* is given by the Aldine edition (printed in Venice in 1505): in that edition, the *Tetrasticha* were attributed to a certain 'Gabrias' (i.e. Babrius).
18 Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 225–229, esp. 229: "No literary genre lends itself more to metaphrasis than the fable, a genre that is in a constant process of transformation, from prose to verse and back again [...]".

significant (and suitable) examples of *metaphrasis* in Byzantium, since *metaphrasis* is a typical school exercise. And there is no better school exercise than a *metaphrasis* of a school text itself, such as the Aesopic fables.

In this sense, another point about Ignatios' poetry has to be made: if the *metaphrasis* of Aesopic fables is the school exercise *par excellence*, Ignatios goes a step further in composing fables that are not simply school exercises themselves. Ignatios has written something, the *Tetrasticha*, that can *also* be meant as *metaphrasis* and school exercise, yet the final result is a new collection of fables with its own features and style — and its own manuscript tradition.[19] The *Tetrasticha* are the above-mentioned 'quasi-genre'. Within the transformation there is also an original contribution by the author (in our case, Ignatios), besides the rhetorical technique. With the *Tetrasticha*, the 'genre' of the Aesopic fable matches the aim and technique of the Byzantine *metaphrasis*. Eventually, Ignatios' work as a final literary product can be labelled a *metaphrasis*, 'quasi-genre'.[20]

4 Long story short: fables in four lines

Ignatios followed the common trend of rewriting Aesopic fables and using them mainly as school exercises, yet he had the brilliant idea of writing them in only four lines, as the title *Tetrasticha* makes clear. The tetrastichic form of poetry (i.e. poems in four lines) was most probably nothing odd to Byzantine taste,[21] yet Igna-

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19 There were other genres that were part of rhetorical studies, especially in Late Antiquity: *ethopoiiae*, *chreiai*, proverbs, and so on. They were all *progymnasmata*, preliminary rhetorical exercises very popular in Late Antiquity: important contributions on this subject are, for example, Cribiore 1996 and 2001 (esp. 221–230 for the *progymnasmata*), for Graeco-Roman Egypt.
20 A further insight in this complicated analysis of the *metaphrasis* as technique or genre or product: it is not by chance, in my opinion, that some other poems by Ignatios can be defined more or less as *metaphrasis* (as final product, or just 'metaphrased' poems): this is true of *Lazarus et dives*, a 70-line poem concerning the tale of Lazarus and the rich man from the *Gospel of Luke*, a prose parable that Ignatios rewrites in verse (dodecasyllables). The *Versus in Adamum*, another poem by Ignatios concerning the original sin in *Genesis*, can be considered a *metaphrasis* (from prose to verse, a poetic rewriting), but some other features suggest other ideas (for example: a *dramation*?). The issue both of 'genres' in Byzantium and of 'genres' in Ignatios' œuvre is clearly still a *uexata quaestio*.
21 It occurs, for example, in John Mauropous, Theodore Prodromos, and Manuel Philes, though they are later than Ignatios.

tios' collection of fables is the first one composed *exclusively* of tetrastichs,[22] and his fables in four lines display, in some cases, a keen ability to shorten a model without trivializing it. Ignatios' skill is twofold: not only does he 'metaphrase' Babrian verses with a literary and not just didactic purpose, but he also chooses the difficult form of four lines to rewrite fables that are sometimes very long in their original form.

The work of Ignatios was much appreciated, so even later poets imitated his tetrastich fables: in fact, in the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, there are some fables that, although inspired by Ignatios and his quatrains, are indeed later.[23] In any case, rewriting in verse was a common practice in Byzantium: no wonder, then, that there are some (late) verse fables in the Aesopic corpora as well.[24]

In comparison to other Byzantine verse fables, Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* display some unique features: besides the four lines, their metrical *facies* is correct,[25] and

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22 To the best of my knowledge, this is true of the first period of Byzantine literature. Ignatios' choice can be appreciated even more in this light. A precise study of the evolution of the tetrastich form in Late Antique and Byzantine poetry is still lacking, but there are some clues to why the four-line form (or a multiple of four) was appealing as poetry. For example, even Babrius wrote some fables with the recurring number of four or eight or twelve lines. The path of the tetrastich form in Greek poetry is something that needs deep but careful investigation. A certain taste for a 'four-line poetry' can be found in the epigrams of the *Anthologia Palatina*. I cannot be certain that the path of the tetrastich poetry in Byzantine times led from that specific source, but it is extremely likely: tetrastichic poetry would be a 'new side' of the epigrams. Yet the question badly needs a more in-depth investigation. For Hellenistic epigrams and the *Anthologia Palatina*, see for example Gutzwiller 1998 and Cameron 1993.

23 The division into 'genuine' and 'later' (i.e. spurious) Ignatian fables was first made by Müller in his critical edition, dividing the fables into two sections. Most recently, Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 232–234, has stated that all the fables under the name of Ignatios (or corruptions of his name) should be divided into three groups for metrical and stylistic reasons (with which I absolutely agree): the first group, the original ones, is 1.1–45 (in Müller's numbering); the second group, the "spurious but prosodic", is 1.46–57 and 2.1–17, 28; and the third group, 2.18–27, 29–32, is the spurious and "unprosodic". Moreover, this three-way division is strongly supported by the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, as I have discovered and as I will show in the critical edition.

24 The so-called *recensio Vindobonensis* (thus Hausrath 1959/1970, xi–xiii; this is the second *classis* according to Chambry 1925/1926, 10–12; see also Perry 1936, 185–190, and Adrados 2000, 429–462) preserves many fables rewritten in Byzantine verses, sometimes attested only in single manuscripts (*codices unici*). This is also true of the *recensio mixta* (the fifth *classis* according to Chambry 1925/1926, 19–24). In those cases, the verse fables appear to be precise rewritings of previous fables, not independent of the model — unlike Ignatios' more original work. For anonymous Byzantine fables, see also Adrados 2000, 472–492.

25 Ignatios' verses are consistent with the 'rules' of the dodecasyllable of his time: paroxytonism, isosyllabism, and (in most cases) isometry. To be brief, in the time of Ignatios (8th–9th centuries) skilled poets (i.e. the 'classicizing' ones) were able to write dodecasyllables with prosodic accura-

the choices in rewriting are not simply done in order to shorten the Babrian model. The division into four lines reveals an internal structure of the tale. It can be outlined as:

1. introduction,
2. breakpoint,
3. turning point,
4. the end.[26]

Some questions may arise: what happens to a fable when it is transformed from several lines to only four? Is its internal message clear enough, at the end of such a 'metaphrastic process'? Or what happens to the style and vocabulary of Babrius, in Ignatios' *metaphrasis*?

The three following examples[27] will show how Ignatios managed to write fables with their own literary character, even while cleverly imitating Babrius. Ignatios did not simply summarize the fables or cut what was unnecessary — and even in that case, reducing several lines to just four without losing any important narrative feature would be challenging enough. Reading Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*,[28]

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cy, according to ancient rules of prosody, demonstrating their ability to still 'feel' syllabic quantity. On Byzantine metrics, the most important and up to date study is that of Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 265–383, 'Appendix metrica'. Though not among the most gifted poets of Byzantine literature (gifted poets as Christopher of Mytilene, John Mauropous, Theodore Prodromos, and Nicetas Eugenianos) according to several scholars, Ignatios the Deacon nonetheless fits into the legacy of the learned poetry of his era, and his verses can be considered 'correct' — however that is defined — in metre, rhythm, and syntax. The later Byzantine verse fables attested in Aesopic corpora are less accurate in metre, prosody, and style, which is one of the main differences between them and Ignatios' fables.

26 The 'internal structure' divided into four lines is also supported by the isometry, the Byzantine 'rule' in poetry of "full correspondence between form and content" (Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 350), which derives from the aim to give full information (when possible) in each line: this criterion holds true for some fables by Ignatios, though not for all. I will discuss this topic in the *Prolegomena* to my critical edition.

27 I have chosen fables only from the group of 'original' tetrastichs by Ignatios, nos. 1.1–45 (see above, n. 21).

28 I am well aware that all the remarks on Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* are something of a *hysteron proteron*, since the text we will analyse in detail in the next paragraphs is still that of the latest edition (Müller 1897, but see below), unless otherwise indicated. The reader may rightly argue that reflections based on an 'old' text may mislead without a modern, complete critical apparatus. However, in this paper I have chosen fables whose text is more or less 'certain', even in its corruptions, as we will see. Some technical and literary features (such as rearrangement of lines or precise lexical choices or structural changes) can be easily recognized and outlined, even while a critical edition is in progress and before its completion.

we find that there is some technique in rewriting, not by mere substitution or subtraction of words: Ignatios' work cannot be labelled a 'mechanical' exercise, an arithmetical reduction of lines and words in a brief re-arrangement of a previous text. There are three recurring patterns (or devices) in the process of transforming (i.e. 'metaphrasing') Babrius' fables into a new tetrastich fable:[29] the striking ending, the pursuit of narrative *breuitas*, and the total line-to-line reshaping.[30]

4.1 *Fulmen in clausula*: the fox, the crow, and the cheese

(Ignat. Diac. 1.15 ~ Babr. 77; see Aesop. 124 P. [= 126 Hsr.; 166 Ch.])

In a short tale, every part (and every line) has its own importance and meaning. But in a moral tale, such as a fable, the moral message is an important feature, usually given at the end of the fable as a revealed universal truth that the reader grasps while reading the fable: in this way, the ending can easily become a 'striking ending'.[31] This is something that happens very often in fables, either in prose or in verse, since the solution or moral must be clear at the end of the story. In Ignatios this is even more evident, as the following example shows: a crow takes a piece of cheese, and the fox wants to eat it as well. So the fox deceives the crow with a lot of fake and fancy compliments in order to get the cheese, and successfully.[32]

> Κόραξ δεδηχὼς στόματι τυρὸν εἱστήκει·
> τυροῦ δ' ἀλώπηξ ἰχανῶσα κερδῴη
> μύθῳ τὸν ὄρνιν ἠπάτησε τοιούτῳ·
> "κόραξ, καλαί σοι πτέρυγες, ὀξέη γλήνη,
> θεητὸς αὐχήν· στέρνον αἰετοῦ φαίνεις,   5
> ὄνυξι πάντων θηρίων κατισχύεις.

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29 The three patterns that I will discuss are not the only ones, and they are not strictly independent: sometimes the different patterns (or rhetorical devices) are used together to obtain an effective line, or a vibrant ending, or a precise narration. The three patterns mentioned above are the most significant, and most easily identifiable.

30 For each fable by Ignatios or Babrius quoted here, the corresponding tale in the Aesopic corpora is also cited.

31 The moral in Babrius, Ignatios' model, is a rather difficult issue: we are not sure whether the *epimythia* are original or not; if not, then the 'striking ending' ought to be found not only in the *epimythia*, but also in the last lines of the poem. On the *epimythia*, see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, xci–xcvii, and Holzberg 2019, 13–17.

32 All translations of Ignatios here are mine, whereas for Babrius I use the translation of Perry 1965, sometimes slightly modified. The fable from the Aesopic corpus (printed below) is also translated by me.

Ὁ τοῖος ὄρνις κωφός ἐσσι κοὐ κρώζεις.”
Κόραξ δ’ ἐπαίνῳ καρδίην ἐχαυνώθη,
στόματος δὲ τυρὸν ἐκβαλὼν ἐκεκράγει.
Τὸν ἡ σοφὴ λαβοῦσα κερτόμῳ γλώσσῃ   10
“οὐκ ἦσθ’ ἄφωνος” εἶπεν “ἀλλὰ φωνήεις·
ἔχεις, κόραξ, ἅπαντα, νοῦς δέ σοι λείπει.”

(Babr. 77)

A crow, holding in his mouth a piece of cheese, stood perched aloft. A crafty fox who hankered for the cheese deceived the bird with words to this effect: “Sir Crow, thy wings are beautiful, bright and keen thine eye, thy neck a wonder to behold. An eagle’s breast thou dost display, and with thy talons over all the beasts thou canst prevail. So great a bird thou art; yet mute, alas, and without utterance.” On hearing this flattery the crow’s heart was puffed up with conceit, and, dropping the cheese from his mouth, he loudly screamed: “Caw! Caw!” The clever fox pounced on the cheese and tauntingly remarked: “You were not dumb, it seems, you have indeed a voice; you have everything, Sir Crow, except brains.”

(Transl. Perry)

Τυρὸν κόραξ ἔδακνε, κερδὼ δ’ ἠπάτα
“εἰ γλῶσσαν εἶχες, Ζηνὸς ἧς ὄρνις μέγας.”
ὁ νήπιος δ’ ἔκραζεν, ἡ δ’ εἷλεν †τυρόν.
“ἔχεις, κόραξ, ἅπαντα, νοῦν κτῆσαι δ’ ” ἔφη.

Ἐχθρῶν ἐπαίνοις μὴ πιστεύειν.

(Ignat. Diac. 1.15)

A crow bit a piece of cheese, and the sly <fox> deceived him: “Had you a tongue, you would be Zeus’ great bird!” The foolish one cawed, and she took † the cheese. “Crow,” she said, “you have everything, but you should acquire brains.”

Do not trust enemies’ praises.

(Transl. F.S.)

As we can clearly see, the fable by Babrius is longer than the Ignatian one, yet the tetrastich has everything needed to understand the fable, and it seems that Ignatios stressed its moral message. In fact, as we have said, every line of the tetrastich has a precise function: every fable has four major moments (introduction, *actio*, *reactio*, and conclusion), and in the tetrastich every line contains one of these moments. The first line is a presentation of the actors of the story (the crow, the fox, a piece of cheese), and, if possible, with verbs or other details of their distinctive characteristics; the second line is the breakpoint of the story (the dishonest and unkind compliment); the third line is the turning point, turning towards the end and the resolution (the fox takes the piece of cheese); finally, the fourth and last line is the striking ending, often given in direct speech, to make it sharper and more effective (the fox

taunts the crow). Comparing the two fables, Ignatios' story's division into four parts is evident, as is the fact that he quotes only the essentials. The four lines of fancy compliments in Babrius (4–7) are summarized in one line in Ignatios (2), but with mention of none other than Zeus himself: the one-line compliment in Ignatios' fable finds room for (and even needs) a hyperbole. In the third line, something happens all of a sudden:[33] the crow drops his precious piece of cheese and the famished (and deceitful) fox takes it. Finally, the *fulmen in clausula*: Ignatios writes almost along the same lines as Babrius — the first hemistich is, in fact, identical — and the strong juxtaposition makes the unpleasant compliment ("you have everything but brains") clear. Only in the epimythium following the tetrastichs does Ignatios warn against trusting the flattery (however effective) of enemies; whereas in the fourth line of the fable he chose to stick to the model and kept the effective direct speech. The example of the fox and the crow with the cheese shows how important it is that the final words be striking, especially with only four lines available.

4.2 Pursuit of *breuitas*: the jackdaw and the fake plumage

(Ignat. Diac. 1.29 ~ Babr. 72; see Aesop. 101 P. [= 103 Hsr.; 163 Ch.])

Although summarizing is neither the main purpose nor the most brilliant technique of Ignatios in rewriting Babrian fables, it is undeniably an important part of his process of *metaphrasis*, as illustrated in our second example.

Ἶρίς ποτ' οὐρανοῖο πορφυρῆ κῆρυξ
πτηνοῖσι κάλλους εἶπεν ἐν θεῶν οἴκοις
ἀγῶνα κεῖσθαι· πᾶσι δ' εὐθὺς ἠκούσθη,
καὶ πάντα θείων ἔσχεν ἵμερος δώρων.
Ἔσταζε πέτρης αἰγὶ δυσβάτου κρήνη,   5
ὕδωρ τε θερινὸν καὶ διαυγὲς εἱστήκει·
πάντων τ' ἐπ' αὐτὸ φῦλον ἦλθεν ὀρνίθων,
πρόσωπα δ' αὐτῶν ἐξέλουε καὶ κνήμας,
ἔσειε ταρσούς, ἐκτένιζε τὰς χαίτας.
Ἦλθεν δ' ἐκείνην καὶ κολοιὸς εἰς κρήνην,   10
γέρων κορώνης υἱός· ἄλλο δ' ἐξ ἄλλου

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33 The third line is very problematic. Müller printed it with a *crux* (since the line-ending is certainly wrong), but it is reasonable to think that: 1. the original text was not very different, and perhaps we should change only the last word; and 2. even if the original word is lost, the surviving readings (for example, a line rewritten as κόραξ δὲ ῥίπτει τυρὸν ἢ δ' εἶλεν τάχος, or even χαίνει κόραξ· πίπει τυρός· κερδὼ δ' ἔφη) in the different manuscripts show us what happened in that line.

πτερὸν καθύγρων ἐντὸς ἁρμόσας ὤμων
μόνος τὰ πάντων ποικίλως ἐκοσμήθη,
καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς ἦιξεν αἰετοῦ κρείσσων.
Ὁ Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἐθάμβει, καὶ παρεῖχε τὴν νίκην   15
εἰ μὴ χελιδὼν αὐτὸν ὡς Ἀθηναίη
ἤλεγξεν ἑλκύσασα τὸ πτερὸν πρώτη.
Ὁ δ᾽ εἶπεν αὐτῆι· "μή με συκοφαντήσῃς."
Τὸν δ᾽ ἄρα τρυγὼν ἐσπάραττε καὶ κίχλη
καὶ κίσσα καὶ κορυδαλλὸς οὖν τάφοις παίζων,   20
χὠ νηπίων ἔφεδρος ὀρνέων ἴρηξ,
τά τ᾽ ἄλλ᾽ ὁμοίως, καὶ κολοιὸς ἐγνώσθη.
Ὦ παῖ, σεαυτὸν κόσμον ἴδιον κόσμει·
ἀλλοτρίοις γὰρ ἐμπρέπων στερηθήσῃ.

                              (Babr. 72)

Once Iris, heaven's bright-hued royal messenger, proclaimed a contest in beauty for the feathered tribe, to be held amid the dwellings of the gods. The news at once was heard by all, and every bird was filled with yearning for the prize forthcoming from the gods. There was a spring dripping from a rocky cliff that scarce a goat could tread, and there the water in a pool stood summer-like and clear. Thither birds of every kind now came, to wash their feathers and to comb their crests. Among them to that fountain came a jackdaw, an old fellow, the son of a crow. Taking one cast-off feather from one bird and another from another, he fitted them to his wet shoulders, and thus having plumed himself variously with all their feathers, he darted off to the gods more impressive than an eagle. Zeus marvelled and was on the point of giving him the victory, had not the swallow, like the true Athenian that she was, confuted him by being the first to pull out her own feather. In vain the jackdaw said to her: "Don't show me up!" The turtle-dove clawed him viciously, so too the thrush, and the jay, and the lark who plays about the tombstones, and the hawk who lies in wait for fledgling birds, and likewise all the others. So came the jackdaw to be known for what he was.
Deck yourself out in fine clothes of your own, my boy; if you parade in finery that belongs to others, you'll be stripped of it.

                              (Transl. after Perry, modified)

Ἀλλοτρίοις πτεροῖσιν ἠμφιεσμένος,
ηὔχει κολοιὸς ὀρνέων ὑπερφέρειν.
Πρώτη δὲ δῶρον ἡ χελιδὼν ἡρπάκει,
μεθ᾽ ἣν ἅπαντες· εἶτα γυμνὸς εὑρέθη.

Τὸ ἐξ ἐράνου θράσος αἴσχει διαλύεται.
                              (Ignat. Diac. 1.29)

Once he was clothed with others' feathers, the jackdaw was confident that he would surpass all birds. But the swallow first took off the gift, and after her everyone else: then, he [the jackdaw] was naked.

The arrogance from a loan is dissolved by shame.
                              (Transl. F.S.)

We can see that the hypo-text by Babrius is far longer than the tetrastichic one by Ignatios. In Babrius, the backstory of the birds' contest proclaimed by the gods occupies the first nine lines. Then, the jackdaw steals other birds' feathers, but he is caught out by the swallow first, and then by other birds. In Ignatios, we find only the essentials, yet with smart hints towards the longer text.

Regarding *breuitas* and the 'rule' of putting all the information in the smallest possible space, it is interesting that the first line consists of only three words, a 'three-word trimeter' — or, here, a three-word dodecasyllable.[34] Although the contest is absent in Ignatios' tetrastich, we can imagine it: in line 2, the jackdaw is confident of surpassing (ὑπερφέρειν) all other birds with the stolen feathers, and this evokes the contest even without mentioning it.[35] Further, a 'gift' is mentioned in both texts, albeit with slightly different meanings and at different moments of the story. The list of birds is shortened, but the swallow, the one who brings justice in this fable, is still mentioned in Ignatios. By the end, just three words clearly sum up the ending of the story.

4.3 Rephrasing line-to-line: the cat and the sick bird

(Ignat. Diac. 1.16 ~ Babr. 121; see Aesop. 7 P. [= Hsr.; 14 Ch.])

The last characteristic is rewriting almost anew, according to Ignatios' own 'taste'. This is the case in an intensive rephrasing, and, we should note, the case in which Ignatios introduces something new, i.e. a distinctive detail at the end. In our third example, the fable in Babrius and Ignatios is the same, but the outlook is different.[36]

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34 On three-word trimeters, their definition and use (and their diffusion in some Byzantine poets), see Marcovich 1984, esp. in the appendix (200–211) on Byzantine authors. The feature is common in ancient trimeters, and also in Late Antique and Byzantine dodecasyllables, though a deeper investigation is badly needed. In this case, it is all the more impressive that Ignatios chose to write a three-word dodecasyllable (a difficult verse) within the already difficult structure of four lines.

35 We assume that an ideal reader of Ignatios' fables would not have had to read Babrius' fables (or other Aesopic fables) to understand Ignatios' short tetrastichs. I believe that the main theme would have been clear to a reader who knew which fable he was reading. Yet it is an important question still to be discussed thoroughly. I will address it in the *Prolegomena* of my critical edition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*.

36 The fable by Babrius is four lines long, since one line (which I print in square brackets) must be deleted as spurious: see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986 *ad loc*. The spurious line is attested only in the *tabulae ceratae Assendelftianae*, a Late Antique witness to Babrius (see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, xxx), whereas the Medieval tradition of Babrius (the ms. Athous Mus. Brit. Addit. 22087, see Luzzatto/La

Ὄρνις ποτ' ἠσθένησε. Τῇ δὲ προσκύψας
αἴλουρος εἶπε· "Πῶς ἔχεις; Τίνων χρῄζεις;
ἐγὼ παρέξω πάντα σοι· μόνον σῴζου."
[ἡ δ' ὄρνις εἶπεν μῦθον ἄξιον γνώμης·]
Ἡ δ' "ἢν ἀπέλθῃς", εἶπεν, "οὐκ ἀποθνήσκω."

(Babr. 121)

A hen once fell sick. A cat bent over her and said: "How are you getting along? What do you need? I'll get you anything you want. Only take care of yourself and don't die." Said the hen: "If you'll just go away from here, I won't die."

(Transl. Perry)

Κάμνουσαν ὄρνιν εἶδεν αἴλουρος νόσῳ.
πρὸς ἣν ἔφησε "Πῶς ἔχεις τὰ τῆς νόσου;"
Τρέμουσα δ' εἶπεν "εἰ παρέλθοις μακρόθεν,
ζωὴν ὑπέλθω δορκάδων ὑπερτέραν."

Φυλάττεσθαι πολεμίων ὑπόκρισιν.

(Ignat. Diac. 1.16)

A cat saw a bird who was sick, and told her: "How about your illness?" The frightened bird then said: "If you pass by keeping your distance, I will have a life longer than that of deer."

Beware of enemies' hypocrisy.

(Transl. F.S.)

In Babrius, we find a bird and then a cat, in Ignatios instead there is a cat looking at a bird — it may seem a very slight difference, but Ignatios has tried to be brief and perhaps to give more details in less space. The most effective part of this re-writing is the answer of the bird in Ignatios' tetrastich. While in Babrius we have the bird saying "if you leave, I won't die" in just one line, in Ignatios' fable the answer merits a line and a half, and, above all, the bird says something that is not traceable in Babrius: "I will have a life longer than that of deer." Ignatios did not simply paraphrase and rephrase the Babrian half-line "I do not die" (οὐκ ἀπο-θνήσκω): the brilliant and 'new' image of deer and their long life represents the personal addition of Ignatios from his own cultural heritage — an image that may have been common in Late Antique and Byzantine outlines of that animal.[37]

Penna 1986, xxiii–xxv) has the fable in only four lines. It is most likely that Ignatios read Babrius' fable in the four-line form attested in the Medieval tradition.

[37] This image seems to be borrowed from the *Physiologus* (or, better: from the Greek version of the text), an anthology of moral outlines of animals (the snake, the deer, the swallow, and so on) and descriptions of their behaviour, often with allegorical hints. Sometimes the descriptions are

But we can go a step further. The work of Ignatios is precise, and quite different from another Byzantine (and later) rewriting of the same fable:[38]

Ὄρνις δέ ποτε κατακλιθεὶς ἠρρώστει·
εἰς ὃν αἴλουρος προκύψας ἔφη ταῦτα·
"Πῶς ἔχεις, φίλε; τί δέ σοι ἂν τι χρήζῃς,
ἀνάγγελόν μοι καὶ πάντα σοι παρέξω.
Ὅμως ἔγειρε, καὶ τεύξῃ τῆς ὑγείας."   5
Ἡ δ' ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς τὸν αἴλουρον ταῦτα·
"Εἰ σὺ παρέλθῃς, ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀποθνήσκω·
ζωὴν γὰρ ζήσω δορκάδος ὑπερτέραν."

Τοὺς δολίους ὑποκριτάς, τοὺς λέγοντας φιλεῖν, ὁ μῦθος ἐλέγχει.
(Aesop. 14 Ch. aliter [recensio Vindobonensis])

Once a bird was lying down and was sick; a cat pointing at him said these words: "How are you, dear? Whatever can be useful to you, tell me and I will provide for you. Nonetheless wake up, and you will recover." But the bird replied to the cat: "If you pass by, I do not die: in fact, I will live a life longer than that of deer."

The fable refutes the deceitful pretenders who claim to love.

(Transl. F.S.)

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enriched by quotations from the *Septuaginta* or the *NT*; more often, the description of the animal and its behaviour serves the exegesis of biblical references and quotations. The edition of the *Physiologus* is still that of Sbordone 1936: its text has been transmitted in three versions (*redactio prima*, *redactio Byzantina*, and *redactio pseudo-Basiliana*). For the image of the deer, the *Physiologus* is a likely source (to the best of my knowledge), in the chapter on deer and snakes, 2.4 (i.e. in the *redactio Byzantina*): οὗτος μὲν ζῇ ἔτη πεντήκοντα [...] διὰ τοῦτο ἔλαφος ὀνομάζεται, διὰ τὸ ἑλεῖν τοὺς ὄφεις ἐκ βάθους. λαβὼν δὲ τὸν ὄφιν, τρέχει εἰς τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων· ἐὰν γὰρ διὰ τριῶν ὡρῶν ἀφ' οὗ τὸν ὄφιν λάβῃ οὐ πίῃ ὕδωρ, τελευτᾷ, εἰ δὴ πίῃ ὕδωρ, ζήσεται ἄλλα πεντήκοντα ἔτη ("It [*scil.* the deer] lives for fifty years [...] Which is why the deer is so called, because it catches the snakes from the depths. When it catches the snake, it runs to the streams of water: in fact, during the three seasons after which the deer catches the snake, if the deer does not drink the water, it dies, but if it drinks the water, it will live for another fifty years"). The long life of deer was not unknown to Ancient Greek literature; see for example Hes. *fr*. 304.1–2 Merkelbach-West: ἐννέα τοι ζώει γενεὰς λακέρυζα κορώνη | ἀνδρῶν ἡβώντων· ἔλαφος δέ τε τετρακόρωνος ("the cowing crow lives for nine generations | of adult men; but the deer has four times the life of the crow"). Yet for a Byzantine author writing of animals and their (more or less realistic) features, the most likely source was indeed the *Physiologus*.

38 Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter* in dodecasyllables belongs to the second *recensio* (the so called *Vindobonensis*), in which a lot of late verse fables are preserved. Incidentally, the fable is attested also in manuscripts of the fifth *recensio* (the *recensio mixta*). The same tale but with some different stylistic features is also found in the *recensio Augustana* and in the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* (i.e. the prose paraphrase of Babrius). I will not discuss the 'metrical features' of this later version thoroughly: it differs from Ignatios, and the 'rules' of a learned dodecasyllable are not always respected.

This anonymous verse fable can be considered a rewriting of the Babrian one as well, yet it also recalls the structure of the fable in the *recensio Augustana*. Although the phrasing is very similar to that of Babrius in being very barebones, the cat here pretends to be a doctor: in fact, the cat speaks about recovery (καὶ τεύξῃ τῆς ὑγείας), as happens *only* in the *Augustana*.[39] But, finally, the epimythium given in this late version sticks to what the epimythium of the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* of this Babrian fable says.[40] The anonymous fable thus 'mixes' the *Augustana* (the mention of the recovery) together with the elements of the Babrian fable (the beginning of 14 Ch. *aliter*: ὄρνις δέ ποτε ~ Babr. 121: ὄρνις ποτ᾽, or the use of direct speech, asking whether the bird is fine or not) and its paraphrase (the epimythium similar to the one in the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*), and finally with Ignatios by mentioning the deer and their long life (almost a quotation, 14 Ch. *aliter*: ζωὴν γὰρ ζήσω δορκάδος ὑπερτέραν ~ Ignat. Diac.: 1.16: ζωὴν ὑπέλθω δορκάδων ὑπερτέραν). It may be difficult to reconstruct the exact process of imitation and tell who is the imitator, who the model, but it seems most likely that influences developed in this way:
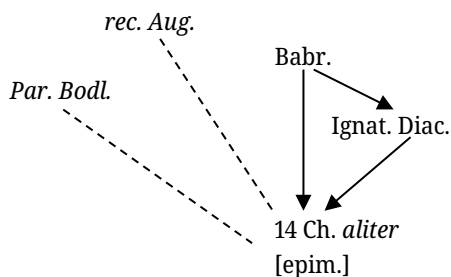
The 'contamination process' beneath the text of the anonymous fable Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter*, together with its stylistic and metrical features,[41] proves that it is a late

39 Aesop. 7 P. [= Hsr., 14 Ch.]: [...] σχηματίσας ἑαυτὸν εἰς ἰατρὸν καὶ τὰ τῆς ἐπιστήμης πρόσφορα ἀναλαβὼν ἐργαλεῖα [...] ("disguising itself [*scil.* the cat] as a doctor and taking the tools relevant to the science [...]").
40 The epimythium reads (Chambry 1925/1926, 57): [Ὅτι] ὑποκριτὰς δολίους φιλεῖν λέγοντας ὁ μῦθος ἐλέγχει ("the fable puts to shame the deceitful hypocrites who claim to love"). We may suppose that the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, late as it may be, was written before the later Byzantine *recensiones* of Aesopic fables: in that case, it is most likely that a late rewriting (such as this one from the *recensio Vindobonensis*) may have borrowed from both the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* and the *Augustana*, rather than being a model for the *Paraphrasis* (let alone for the *Augustana*!).
41 As well as the mere rearrangement, as a juxtaposition of previous sources and their phrasing, the anonymous fable also has metrical features (let us say, metrical 'mistakes') that prove its

rewriting of the topic, later than Babrius, the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, and also later than Ignatios.[42] The late anonymous fable is clearly a mixture of different materials and different sources available to the writer, with no precise aim of being either brief, lengthy, or explanatory. This is notably different from what Ignatios did in his fable.

The example of the anonymous version from the *recensio Vindobonensis* is striking. The comparison, however, between Ignatios' tetrastich fable and the anonymous one, besides supporting the late chronology of the latter, proves *per differentiam* the skills and the personal contribution of Ignatios in (re)writing Babrius. Not only did Ignatios choose a specific author (not simply mixing Aesopic fables *tout court*) as main source and hypo-text for his rewritings, but he managed to write poetry with its own literary dimension, combining form, function, and content — a delight for learned eyes.

5 Conclusions: tetrastich poetry

Without setting precise boundaries of 'genres', Ignatios wrote his fables both as *metaphrasis* (i.e. the school exercise) and independent poetry (the 'quasi-genre') by using the form of the tetrastich. As regards their genesis, Ignatios' quatrains cannot just be defined as 'fables': they are *metaphrased* fables. Moreover, as regards their literary status, they cannot be labelled simply 'metaphrased fables': they are a *poetic metaphrasis* of fables.

Had Ignatios not chosen the tetrastich form with all its features, his fables would probably have been *only* school exercises, or been similar to the later anonymous fables that were quite common in Byzantine anthologies of Aesopic materials, as is commonly known and clearly demonstrated by the evidence of the manuscript tradition. But Ignatios *chose* the tetrastich form, its features, and its stylistic demands. The fables remain fables but their shape distinctly changes.

As for the connection between fables and other genres, Ignatios' fables elude precise definitions: the content is the fable, the form is tetrastich poetry, the origin is the process of *metaphrasis*, and the genre is a 'quasi-genre'. In this case, Ignatios

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language to be later than that of Ignatios: there is no correct (or rather, 'classicizing') prosody in the lines of the anonymous versifier, unlike Ignatios' verses.

42 Moreover, it is interesting that the anonymous Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter* used different sources, and not all of them were easily available — for example, Babrius' fables. It would be interesting to find out how the anonymous fables (such as those of the *recensio Vindobonensis*) quoted and re-elaborated their sources, and how they read them.

chose to stick to poetry, the ancient form of Babrius' collection: albeit in the didactic context of preliminary school exercises, Ignatios' fables *are poetry*. His collection cannot be labelled a 'collection of exercises' (incidentally, Aesopic fables): it is a corpus of refined, carefully produced short poems. The manuscript tradition, in this regard, teaches us an important lesson of *Textüberlieferung*: Ignatios' fables were copied as an autonomous collection of poetry, and they were *perceived* as such. It is useful to note that Ignatios' tetrastich fables have something in common with epigrams and their witty *breuitas*, and we may wonder whether the epigram as genre had some influence on the tetrastichs of Ignatios and later Byzantine poets. At any rate, epigrammatic wit seems to perfectly match the style of Aesopic fables, and the interaction between the two genres — epigram and Aesopic fable — may be pivotal to the definition of Ignatios' tetrastichs.[43]

It is certainly no coincidence that in the following centuries the tetrastich as a poetic form became increasingly popular in Byzantium (either tetrastichs alone or groups of four lines in a longer poem): the 'tetrastich aesthetic', so to speak, and its internal balance found an initial, though already well defined example in the early Byzantine period in Ignatios the Deacon, who transformed the ancient fables not as anonymous copyists might do, but as an author, *a poet*. His fables remain fables, but in the Byzantine manner.

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43 A thorough analysis of the origin of Ignatios' tetrastich and the interaction with other previous genres is badly needed: I aim to do so myself in the near future, while working on the critical edition.

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