1 Texts and Context

1.1 The texts

1.1.1 Gregory's texts

The most important poetic text on the bishops by Gregory is II, 1, 12, titled εἰς ἑαυτὸν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐπισκόπων, *To Himself and on the Bishops*[1]. The poem consists of 836 iambic trimeters, being the longest of the poems on this theme. It treats more or less all facets of Gregory's stance on the theme of bishopric, so that all other related poems can be compared to one or more of its parts. The genre to which the poem belongs is disputed[2]. It begins as a personal invective, in the tradition of iambic poetry, but it soon slips into didactic concerns. This tension between a concrete target and a broader intellectual stance characterises the poem. Because of these multiple influences (iambic invective, didactic poetry, the diatribe), Meier pointedly compares the poem to a homily or sermon[3]. Besides, some interpreters have stressed the apologetic character of this piece[4]: the hypothetical dates of the poem vary from the summer of 381 (immediately after Gregory's resignation from the see of Constantinople) to Lent 382, in any event making the poem a response to the incidents of the ecumenical council[5]. Therefore, apology was a key motive in the composition of this poem. The apologetic as well as homiletic genres also influence the overarching structure of the poem, which Gregory organised as an oration, with its fourfold division of προοίμιον, διήγησις, πίστις, and ἐπίλογος (see below)[6].

There are some interesting fluctuations in the addressee and in the self-representation of Gregory. Regarding the addressee, sometimes the poem seems to address one bishop: this happens notably at 29–32 and 809–810, where Gregory says that if one should feel offended by his speech, then his criticism will have cut the offended to the quick[7]; but it also happens at 225, 432–434, and 570–574, all of which address an unworthy bishop[8]. Yet at 397–401 the discourse slips from a first-person plural to a

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[1] I am adopting the division of Gregory's poem featured in the Patrologia Graeca.

[2] Meier 1989, 15–16.

[3] Meier 1989, 16, repeated in Prudhomme 2006, 68.

[4] McGuckin 2001a, 375–383; 2001b, 160–164; Elm 1999; 2000b; McLynn 1997.

[5] Meier 1989, 17.

[6] For the fourfold division of the oration: Aristot. *rhet.* 1414b 8–9.

[7] Τί τοῦτο; δείξεις· ἂν μάχῃ πρὸς τὸν λόγον, / σαυτοῦ προδήλως ἐκφανῇ κατήγορος. (II, 1, 12, 29–30); Ταῦτα πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοὺς κακοὺς ὑπὲρ καλῶν·/ Οἷς εἴ τις ἄχθεθ᾽, εὗρεν ὃν ζητεῖ, λόγος (809–810).

[8] Σοῦ δ᾽ ἐκτρέπομαι, κἄν τι τῶν σεμνῶν φέρῃς… (II, 1, 12, 225); Σὺ δ᾽ εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε, καὶ πράκτωρ φόρων/ Ἤ καὶ στρατοῦ τιν᾽ ἐκλελοιπὼς ἀξίαν… (432–433); Πῶς δὲ σὺ βλέπων κάτω/ Τοῦτον μένοντα τοῦ Θεοῦ παραστάτην/ Ὑψαυχενεῖς τε καὶ θρόνων στέργεις κράτος, / Ἀλλ᾽ οὐχὶ φρίσσεις οὐδ᾽ ἐπιτρέμεις θρόνοις, / Μὴ βοῦς ἐλάνης κρείσσονας βοηλάτου; (570–574).

second-person singular and, accordingly, from the bishops in charge of the election to the bishop elected[9]. The lines from 709 until the end of the poem are clearly directed to this collective of bishops, at first at the second-person singular but with clear reference to the choice of bishops, then from line 797 at the second-person plural[10]. Furthermore, at 98–101 Gregory uses the second-person plural to call to witness people who knew well his behaviour during his three-year mission in Constantinople[11]. These could well be the bishops, but the sentence is more significant if referred to the Nicene community in Constantinople, the people who were most faithful to Gregory and who could lend support to his case before the other bishops. Finally, line 47 refers to posterity[12].

As regards Gregory's self-representation, sometimes he seems to consider himself a bishop (for example, at line 136); other times not a bishop (for example, at line 35)[13]. These internal clues point to a specific situation: the poem is intended as a fictional last discourse by Gregory, imagined as being uttered before his departure from Constantinople. In this situation, both the bishops convened in Constantinople for the council and a group of representatives, mostly priests and deacons, of the Constantinople community would have been present. The setting is confirmed both by the ambiguous status of Gregory and by his own words: he considers himself a bishop, as this would have been his last address as bishop of Constantinople, and on the other side, as a resigning bishop, he can look on his colleagues as an outsider; moreover, he explicitly defines the end of the poem as "departing discourse" (ἐξιτήριος λόγος, 812), which points clearly to the end of the adventure in Constantinople and his departing from there.

The poem has the same setting as *or.* 42: this speech is a vindication of Gregory's actions during his tenure in Constantinople. This genre, the statement of a retiring

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9 Ἢ κωμικὸν πρόσωπον ἀθρόως τεθὲν / Τῶν εὐτελεστάτων τε καὶ μικρῶν ἑνί – / Πέφηνεν ἡμῖν οὗτος εὐσεβὴς νέος. / ... Χθὲς ἦσθα μίμων καὶ θεάτρων ἐν μέσῳ (II, 1, 12, 397–399); 402).

10 Ἀλλ' εὔστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, / Ὃν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινημάτων· (II, 1, 12, 709–711); Εἰ δ' οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὢν τύχοι... (721); Πῶς οὖν ἄχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ' ἄν; / Ἢ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιόν, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις; (732–735); Τοῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὑρεῖν ποιμένα· / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες! Ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὥσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (747–750); and then Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε, καὶ τυραννίδας / Ὑμεῖς, ἐπεὶ καὶ πρῶτα ταῦθ' ὑμῖν δοκεῖ· / Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας· / Τόπους ἀμείβοιτ' ἐκ τόπων, τοὺς μὲν κάτω / Βάλλοιτε, τοὺς δ' ὑψοῦτε· ταῦθ' ὑμῖν φίλα. / Χωρεῖτ'... (797–803). On Gregory's consciousness and explicit acknowledgement that it is the bishops who elect new bishops; see §3.3.1.1.

11 Ὑμᾶς ἐρέσθαι τἀπίλοιπα βούλομαι / (Ὑμεῖς γάρ ἐστε μάρτυρες μόχθων ἐμῶν)· / Τί σκαιὸν ἢ πρόσαντες ἢ βλάβην φέρον / Ἢ εἶπον ἢ ἔπραξα τοῦτ' ἔτος τρίτον (II, 1, 12, 98–101).

12 Ἀλγοῦντός ἐστιν ἐξερεύγεσθαι πάθη / Θεῷ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὕστερον (II, 1, 12, 45–47).

13 Ἀλλ' οἱ καλοί τε κἀγαθοὶ συμποίμενες (II, 1, 12, 136) and Ἔν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους, / Μηδὲν φοβηθεὶς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν. / Πάντων τὸ ὕψος, οὐχὶ πάντων δ' ἡ χάρις. / Τὸ κώδιον πάρελθε, τὸν λύκον βλέπε. / Μὴ τοῖς λόγοις με πεῖθε, τοῖς δὲ πράγμασι. / Μισῶ διδάγμαθ', οἷς ἐναντίος βίος. / Τὰ χρώματ' αἰνῶν τοῦ τάφου βδελύσσομαι / Τὴν ἔνδον ὀδμὴν τῶν σεσηπότων μελῶν (35-42).

officer, presupposes that Gregory is already certain he will not be bishop of Constantinople anymore (*or.* 42, 25). Hence, the object of persuasion is not the future course of actions of the council (as in II 1 13 and in the speech at II, 1, 11, 1600–1682), but the goodness of Gregory's legacy. Even if *or.* 42 shares themes not only with II, 1, 12 but also with II, 1, 13 and II, 1, 11, 1600–1682 and 1828–1855, its fictive frame is the same as that of II, 1, 12. As in II, 1, 12, 812, in *or.* 42, 25 Gregory wraps up his speech with a "departing discourse", a συντακτήριος λόγος[14]. Moreover, the communication context implied by Gregory's use of grammatical persons and phatic expressions is remarkably similar: Gregory speaks mostly in the second-person plural to the bishops (*or.* 42, 1; 10; 25), calls to witness people who knew his pains (*or.* 42, 2), and presents as a gift to the other bishops the congregation of Constantinople as if it were present to the gathering (*or.* 42, 10–11). Occasionally, he employs a second-person singular to introduce contrasts and objections (*or.* 42, 8) and addresses the congregation of Constantinople directly with the second-person plural (*or.* 42, 26). On top of this, he uses the demonstrative adjective οὖτος to point the church of Hagia Sophia, setting the speech in it[15].

And yet II, 1, 12 is consciously fictional, in that, besides the internal audience, it is addressed to posterity, too. This fictionality has led some interpreters into error: Meier, following De Jonge, thinks that the poem must have been written immediately after Gregory's departure, or at least before he knew of Nectarius's election as his successor, for Gregory seems to imply at line 818 that the election has not yet taken place[16]. However, that many of the critiques advanced by Gregory against bad bishops could be neatly applied to Nectarius's profile, suggests that the poem was in fact written after Nectarius' election[17]. Therefore, Gregory is more subtle: he consciously chose to embed his harsh critiques against his successor in the fiction of his last discourse before the

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14 Ὑμεῖς μὲν οὖν τοὺς προπεμπτηρίους ἡμῖν μελετήσατε λόγους· ἐγὼ δὲ ὑμῖν ἀποδώσω τὸν συντακτήριον (*or.* 42, 25).

15 Address to the bishops: Πῶς ὑμῖν τὰ ἡμέτερα, ὦ φίλοι ποιμένες καὶ συμποιμένες (*or.* 42, 1); Τούτους δωροφοροῦμεν ὑμῖν, ὦ φίλοι ποιμένες, τούτους προσάγομεν, τούτοις δεξιούμεθα τοὺς ἡμετέρους φίλους, καὶ ξένους, καὶ συνεκδήμους (10); Τί φατε; Πείθομεν ὑμᾶς τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις, καὶ νενικήκαμεν; (25). Call for testimony: Τίς οὖν ἡ ἀπολογία; Καὶ εἰ μὲν ψευδὴς, ἐλέγξατε· εἰ δὲ ἀληθὴς, μαρτυρήσατε ὑμεῖς, ὑπὲρ ὧν, καὶ ἐν οἷς ὁ λόγος. Ὑμεῖς γάρ μοι καὶ ἀπολογία, καὶ μάρτυρες, καὶ καυχήσεως στέφανος (2). The congregation as gift: Τούτους δωροφοροῦμεν ὑμῖν ... Ἆρον κύκλῳ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου, καὶ ἴδε, πᾶς ὁ τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων ἐξεταστής. Ἴδε τὸν στέφανον τὸν πλακέντα τῆς δόξης... (10–11). Fictitious interlocutor: Σὺ μὲν ἀριθμεῖς τὰς μυριάδας, Θεὸς δὲ τοὺς σωζομένους· καὶ σὺ μὲν τὸν ἀμέτρητον χοῦν, ἐγὼ δὲ τὰ σκεύη τῆς ἐκλογῆς (8). Address to the congregation: Χαίρετε, Ναζαραίων χοροστασίαι, ψαλμῳδιῶν ἁρμονίαι, στάσεις πάννυχοι, παρθένων σεμνότης, γυναικῶν εὐκοσμία, χηρῶν, ὀρφανῶν συστήματα, πτωχῶν ὀφθαλμοὶ, πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς βλέποντες. Χαίρετε, οἶκοι φιλόξενοι καὶ φιλόχριστοι, καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀσθενείας ἀντιλήπτορες (26). Reference to the Hagia Sophia: Σύ τε ὁ μέγας ναὸς οὖτος καὶ περιβόητος, ἡ νέα κληρονομία, τὸ νῦν μέγας εἶναι παρὰ τοῦ Λόγου λαβών, ὃν Ἰεβοῦς πρότερον ὄντα, Ἱερουσαλὴμ πεποιήκαμεν (26).

16 Meier 1989, 17–18, with reference to Ἄλλον τιν' εἰ λάβοιτε Γρηγόριον, φίλοι, / Φείδοισθε μᾶλλον (II, 1, 12, 818–819).

17 McGuckin 2001a, 375, 377, 382–383; 2001b, 163–164; Elm 2000b, 420–421; McLynn 1997.

election of the successor, in order to give an impression of impartiality to his remarks and to delegitimise the choice of the other bishops and the authority of said successor[18]. Nectarius, he is implying, was elected against the clearest indications of the senior bishop of the council, given on a most solemn occasion, namely the senior bishop's last discourse.

Here I give a brief synopsis of the themes treated in this long poem:

1–69: προοίμιον: motivations to write (**1–32**); the theme of bad bishops (**33–42**); the moral of the entire story, that life is unjust (**43–69**)

70–153: διήγησις: G. is called to Constantinople (**70–92**); G.'s tenure as bishop (**93–113**); his moment of glory (**114–135**); G. is dismissed by the bishops (**136–153**)

154–329: πίστις: criticism of unprepared bishops, divided as follows: against their humble background (**154–175**); against uneducated bishops (**176–191**); the objection of the apostles (**192–198**); first answer, apostolic faith (**199–216**); second answer, knowledge, as a good, was granted to the apostles (**216–244**); third answer, the role of charisma (**245–264**); nature and use of knowledge (**265–287**); the form it ought to have (**288–308**); its contents (**309–329**)

330–708: criticism of morally unfit bishops, divided as follows: morally unfit bishops (**330–354**); their consequences for the church (**355–370**); first reason is a failing selection (**371–396**); second reason is lack of preparation (**397–441**); first objection: the grace of baptism (**442–502**); second objection, the grace of ordination (**503–569**); the relationship between an unworthy bishop and an earnest, faithful believer (**570–633**); the office hinders the moral progress of its incumbent (**634–657**); duplicity and imitation (**658–708**)

709–791: the politician and the monk, divided as follows: Should a bishop be a skilful politician (**709–760**)? Should a bishop be a good polemicist (**761–775**)? The strife for the biggest cities (**776–791**)

792–836: ἐπίλογος: renunciation of further action (**792–810**); last words (**811–836**)

Beside the long iambic poem, three more pieces refer to bishops in their titles: II, 1, 10, titled *To the Priests of Constantinople and the City Itself*; II, 1, 13, *Against the Bishops*; and II, 1, 17, *On the Different Lifestyles and against Fake Priests.* Among these, 10 and 17 are in elegiac couplets, and 13 is in hexameters.

Contrary to what one might assume when reading the title, II, 1, 17 is not one of those confrontational poems between two clearly characterised, and often personified, choices of life—poems such as Gregory wrote and are collected under the heading *Poemata moralia* in the Benedictine edition[19]. Rather, this is one of those elegiac laments so common among the poems of Gregory and collected by the Benedictines, with other pieces, in the *Poemata de se ipso.* In this kind of poem, Gregory moves freely between narration of personal facts and a moralising reflection upon those facts, lamenting his

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18 McLynn 1997, 302.
19 An example of the genre has been edited by Werhahn 1953.

misfortunes and the delusions of earthly experience[20]. Sometimes there is some form of prayer or communication with God. However, these texts don't point unequivocally to a concrete recipient, seeming to be more of a personal outpouring. This is not to say that they did not have a concrete audience, but rather that they did not point obviously to it, thus giving the reader (or hearer) the impression of being engaged in Gregory's soliloquies. This is the case with our text, too. Because it has less of that diatribic quality that pervasively imprinted II, 1, 12, this poem gives a more intimate, reflexive impression, even when treating the same themes: we are led by the text to locate its enunciation not in an assembly context, before the gathered bishops of Constantinople, but in Gregory's own head; it seems to be his personal communication to us. On the theme, even if the title has the phrase "fake priests" (ψευδιερεῖς), it is clear that the bad bishops are implied, as there are not only references to the office of bishop and Constantinople but also criticisms similar to those to be found in II, 1, 12[21]. As regards its chronological setting, the poem seems to represent the whole Constantinopolitan experience of Gregory as an accomplished fact: therefore, no significant discrepancy can be surmised between the time of writing and the time implied by the poem. Whence, then, the title *On the Different Lifestyles*? The title is justified because the poem doesn't lack a confrontational character; it simply delivers it by means of lyric poetry rather than by iamb or diatribe. The behaviour of the good bishops and that of the bad bishops are contrasted by way of not one but two *Priamel*[22], one made of similes at 1–16, the other, more personal, listing refused behaviours and concluding with Gregory's own choice, at 59–95. In a way, this whole poem can be seen as an amplification and a reflection on II, 1, 12, 49–69, where the bad and the good bishop are contrasted, and Gregory takes notice of the success of the former and the misfortunes of the latter. After all, those lines in the longer, iambic poem are more elegiac than the rest of the poem[23].

The poems II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13 are clearly linked, as they begin with the same line. Both of these poems address priests, but while II, 1, 13 clearly addresses the bishops gathered in Constantinople for the council, II, 1, 10 could be read as directed only to

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20 Demoen 1996, 62 (genres of θρῆνοι and of "elegiac autobiographical poems"); Prudhomme 2006, 81.
21 Reference to the office of bishops: Οὐχ ἕδρῃ τίσει με δικασπόλος, ἠὲ συνέδρῳ (II, 1, 17, 63); Οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομ' ἔγωγε (91); Ἔμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται (98–99). Reference to Constantinople: Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὡς τοπάροιθεν, / Γρηγόριος (59–60). Reference to Gregory's experience in Constantinople: Ὡς ἴδον αἴσυλα ἔργα, κακορράφίην τ' ἀλεγεινὴν, / Ἄψ ἀναχασσάμενος ἐκτὸς ἔθηκα πόδα ... Λᾶες ἐμοὶ, κείνων δὲ Τριὰς, θεότης νεόπηκτος· (42–43.46). For the invective against bishops in II, 1, 17 as well as II, 1, 12, see §5.2.
22 The *Priamel* is a rhetorical structure typical of (but not restricted to) Greek poetry, especially Archaic lyric. It consists in a list of elements that are denied or refused, only to affirm the last element, at the end of the list, more strongly. Famous examples are the incipit of Pindar's *Ol.* 1 and Sappho's *frg.* 16 V.. See Gärtner 2006.
23 See also how they are introduced at 45–48: Ἀλγοῦντός ἐστιν, ἐξερεύγεσθαι πάθος / Θεῷ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὕστερον./ Μικρὸν δ' ἀνοίσω τὸν λόγον πόρρωτέρω. On strong, negative emotions as trigger of the poetic utterance see §1.3.2.

the priests of the city[24]. Furthermore, II, 1, 10 addresses the urban community in addition to the priests, whereas II, 1, 13 is directed only to the bishops[25]. The two poems seem to be set on two different occasions: this guess is confirmed by their different themes. II, 1, 10 ends as a kind of epitaph for Gregory (35–36), an impression heightened by its elegiac metre[26]. This is easily linked to the idea of a "parting discourse" (ἐξιτήριος λόγος), mentioned at the end of II, 1, 12. The elegy presumes that Gregory's successor has already been elected (13–15 and 23–24)[27]. However, the spatial setting is not clear. At 24, the expression "this tribune" (βῆμα τόδε) entails the presence of the tribune in the act of speaking, and so Gregory's presence in Constantinople. Yet the use of many aorist participles implies that Gregory has already left the city[28]. In this case, it is also unclear whether he has already reached Nazianzus or not, because the verbs describing his activities in the homeland are in the future[29], whereas he says that he "has dropped [βάλον] the anchor in a steady haven" (33). Regarding this last problem, it can be resolved in two ways: we can take the image of the anchor as referring to the decision not to partake in active life anymore, instead of as referring to his current location in Nazianzus, or we take the future verbs as implying that the activities will begin right after the writing of the present text, and so Gregory is already in Nazianzus. The first problem is much more difficult, for both the aorist verbs and the demonstrative τόδε are very clear. Simelidis proposes a double redaction of the poem, whose first half was written in Constantinople and the second in Nazianzus, so that "this tribune" dates back to Gregory's last days in Constantinople, and the aorist βάλον (33) to shortly after his arrival in Nazianzus[30]. However, βάλον is not the only aorist verb expressing Gregory's departure from Constantinople; and, beyond the reconstruction of compositional stages, this explication doesn't ultimately give a reason for the text as such. In other words, Simelidis is implying that Gregory left his poem incomplete or with a major inconsistency in the setting. This is unlikely both because of Gregory's attention to the fictional settings of these polemical poems and because, given the brevity of the

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24 cf. ταῦτα Θεοῦ θέραπες, / Οἳ δῆριν στονόεσσαν ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἔχοντες, / Χριστὲ ἄναξ, οὔ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα (II, 1, 10, 15–17) with Αὐτὰρ ἐγών, εἰ καί με κακὸν καὶ ἀνάρσιον ἄνδρα / Πάντες ὁμοῦ θείητε, χοροῦ δ' ἄπο τῆλε δίοισθε / Ὑμετέρου, βάλλοντες ἐπασσυτέροισιν ὀϊστοῖς, / Ἀμφαδίοις, κρυπτοῖς τε, τό περ καὶ φίλτερον ὑμῖν· (II, 1, 13, 14–17) and Εἰδόσι μῦθος / Ἡμετέρην κακίην, ὁπόσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι (57–58). The priests at II, 1, 10, 7 are "generous" (Ὑμέας εὐγενέας). See Simelidis 2009, 155.
25 cf. II, 1, 10, 1–4 with II, 1, 13, 1–11.
26 Οὗτος Γρηγορίοιο λόγος, τὸν θρέψατο γαῖα/ Καππαδοκῶν, Χριστῷ πάντ' ἀποδυσάμενον (II, 1, 10, 35–36). Simelidis 2009, 150–151 interprets these lines as "this is *my* version of the facts", a disclaimer against other accounts that probably circulated in Constantinople.
27 Ἄλλον δ' αὖ μόχθοισιν ἐμοῖς ἔπι θυμὸν ἰαίνειν, / Ἀρθέντ' ἐξαπίνης θῶκον ἐπ' ἀλλότριον, / Οὗ με Θεός τ' ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ' ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες (II, 1, 10, 13–15); οἵ ῥ' ἀνέηκαν / Βῆμα τόδ' οὐχ ὁσίως καιροθέοισι φίλοις (23–24).
28 Ἀφορμηθείς (II, 1, 10, 26); προφυγών (28); ἔκφυγον (31).
29 Τέρψομαι ἀτρεμίῃ, (II, 1, 10, 26); θύσω καὶ σιγῇ, ὡς τὸ πάροιθε λόγον (34).
30 Simelidis 2009, 152–155.

poem, Gregory should have spotted the inconsistency, if there was one. Now, the importance of the demonstrative τόδε can be downplayed, since this kind of demonstrative need not point to objects that are literally near the speaker; rather, it can indicate that an object is in the emotional vicinity of the speaker while being literally nearer to the addressee[31]. One cannot deny the emotional relevance of the Constantinopolitan pulpit for Gregory, especially in a poem where his removal from it and its occupation by an unworthy successor are the declared and lamented theme[32]. On the other side, Gregory can express unity of place by reducing the concrete import of the aorist verbs. This can work in the cases of "I flew envy" (φθόνον ἔκφυγον, 31) or "I dropped anchor in a steady haven" (ἐν σταθερῷ πεῖσμα βάλον λίμενι, 33), because they clearly entail a metaphor. However, it is difficult to justify a metaphorical interpretation of "thence departed" (ἔνθεν ἀφορμηθείς, 26) or "having left the court, the city, and the clergy" (βασίλεια καὶ ἄστεα καὶ ἱερῆεας / . . . προφυγών, 28). Therefore, it is more likely that these verbs signal the setting of the poem, while the demonstrative must be read as relating to the thematic significance of the lost pulpit in Constantinople. Then, we can describe II, 1, 10 as Gregory's last letter to the community of Constantinople, written and sent after his departure from Constantinople, probably when he reached Nazianzus. In a way, it is also an epitaph, because the city won't hear from Gregory anymore. From the point of view of content, it is a lament on the workings of envy against Gregory, which justifies his departure from Constantinople and his forsaking those that were faithful to him in the city.

II, 1, 13, which begins with the same line as II, 1, 10, is a longer hexameter poem, apparently directed to the council. It develops critiques similar to those contained in II, 1, 12, above all as it refers to the selection of bishops and their behaviour. At line 141, Gregory refers to himself as retiring, yet towards the end of the poem (196–204) there seems to be an alternative[33]: if his discourse persuades the council, then Gregory will have reached his aim; if not, then he will dissociate himself from the other bishops as much as possible. This alternative seems to point to a real discourse that Gregory held at the council, namely when he offered his resignation while hoping to be called back to his place[34]. This poem is the fictionalised version of the last discourse he held

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31 Kühner/Gerth 1898, 644.

32 Simelidis 2009, 153–155; McGuckin 2001a, 361.

33 Χριστὲ ἄναξ, μή μοί τις ἀπαντήσειεν ἀνίη / Χαζομένῳ (II, 1, 10, 140–141); Σχέσθε, φίλοι· λήξωμεν ἀτασθαλίῃ μογέοντες · Ὀψέ ποτ' εὐαγέεσσι Θεὸς τίοιτο θυηλαῖς. / Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνήσομεθ'· εἰ δὲ καλύπτοι / Μῦθον ἐμὸν πολιήν τε νέων θράσος, ἠὲ κολοιῶν/ Οὖλον ἐπικρώζοντες ἐμοὶ νέφος ἀφραδίῃσι, / Μαρτύρομ' ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ χέρα, καὶ τὸ κελαινὸν / Ἦμαρ, ὃ τὴν κούφην πυρὶ βόσκεται ὕστατον ὕλην, / Οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος, οὐχ ὁμοεργός, / Οὐδέ τι συμφράδμων, οὐ σύμπλοος, οὐ συνοδίτης (196–204).

34 McGuckin 2001a, 172–173 and in particular 359–362, where the different speeches Gregory presumably gave in his last days at Constantinople are listed; McGuckin 2001b, 166–167; Simonetti 1975, 533–535. Cf. also the narration at the beginning of this poem (II, 1, 13, 27–58) with the narration at the beginning of Gregory's speech to the council in II, 1, 11, 1600–1610; the remark on incompetent bishops

before the council as rightful bishop of Constantinople. Therefore, its fictional setting falls before that of II, 1, 10 and even of II, 1, 12. That this is the case is also suggested by the manuscript tradition. In fact, II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13 are transmitted in the opposite order (13 before 10) in all but one witnesses[35]. The indication of manuscripts should not be taken as wholly conclusive, since the modern recensors have shown that the collections of Gregory's poems are posthumous, yet it is not impossible that smaller groups of poems were included in later collections as the author had previously ordered them[36]. Again, for this longer poem, II, 1, 13, I offer a brief synopsis:

1–26: προοίμιον

27–74: διήγησις: praise of Constantinople and Christianity (**27–39**); Satan's plan to destroy the church, beginning with its leaders (**40–58**); the church has become a gathering of impurities (**59–74**)

75–115: The herald's discourse: call to the worst people (**75–88**); promise of thrones and grace (**89–99**); allowance of incompetent people as well as the spiritually trained (**100–115**)

116–138: Counterexamples of purity in the Old Testament

139–183: The sins of the church: sins of the leaders (**139–163**); sins of the people (**164–183**)

184–195: Counterexamples of obedience in the Old Testament

196–215: ἐπίλογος

Its poetic nature notwithstanding, the poem is organised yet again as an oration, with the same fourfold division found at II, 1, 12. However, the main bodies of the two poems differ in attitude and concerns. II, 1, 12 develops in a long πίστις, with arguments, objections, and counters to those objections, interspersed here and there with invective and other digressions. II, 1, 13, on the other hand, does not present a proper *confirmatio/confutatio*: instead, the poet alternates between invective and biblical examples, employing rhetorical devices such as *ethopoiia* and similes. These different modes of argumentation correspond to different aims, with II, 1, 12 exposing a reasoned proposal for the betterment of the church and II, 1, 13 aiming at eliciting an emotional response to the abuses Gregory denounces (see §3.3.2.2).

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at II, 1, 11, 1648–1652 is expanded in the central part of II, 1, 13, the invective against bad bishops; the final *peroratio* at II, 1, 11, 1661–1679 finds correspondence at II, 1, 13, 198–217 with the same alternative between successful persuasion and defeat, the same threat of the final judgement in case of defeat and the same intention to retreat to ascetic life. The characterisation of Gregory's opposers is very similar at II, 1, 11, 1680–1682 and II, 1, 13, 198–200. The main difference of the two discourses is that the one at II, 1, 13 omits completely the *casus belli*, namely the question of Meletius' succession to the see of Antioch, in favour of an invective against bishops. In this regard II, 1, 13 exploits its fictional setting to expand into a tableau of general validity. Again, at II, 1, 11, 1724–1732 Gregory pronounces before the council a speech very similar to the herald's speech at II, 1, 13, 75–115.

35 Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 25.
36 Gertz 1986, 172–173.

Therefore, these four poems build an ideal chronological sequence: II, 1, 13 depicts Gregory's last attempt to regain control over the council, II, 1, 12 is his last, grandiose speech before the bishops after he has resigned, II, 1, 10 is his farewell letter to the congregation in Constantinople, and II, 1, 17 is a later reflection on the whole affair, "emotion recollected in tranquillity". 13 is an epic discourse, 12 a long iambic rebuke, 10 a verse letter but also an epitaph and an elegy, 17 an elegiac lament and a moral reflection. The same occasion—Gregory's resigning from his post as bishop of Constantinople and his failure in the council—is presented from different points of view, conveyed by different genre conventions and determined by different communicative conditions. The broader, unifying theme of bad and good bishops offers a lens through which the historical occasion can be interpreted and become widely significant.

These are not the only poems concerned with Gregory's experience in Constantinople: almost every poem and prayer Gregory wrote about himself reflects one or more of the themes developed in these four poems. Among these other poems different categories can be distinguished. Many poems, titled πρὸς τοὺς φθονοῦντας, *Against Those Who Envied Him*, allude, sometimes clearly, sometimes vaguely, to the other bishops: examples of these texts are II, 1, 7–9; 14; 18; 40. II, 1, 7 and II, 1, 9 are brief rewritings of II, 1, 12, 797–802 and 811–822, Gregory's "parting discourse", here conveniently summed up in a few lines. In II, 1, 7 Gregory highlights the importance of his doctrine of the Spirit, a reason that contributed to the hostility against him at the council but that he really wanted to enforce through a creedal statement. However, the theme is less prominent in the longer poems, because in the same period Gregory was working on the edition of his theological speeches (*or*. 27–31)[37]. II, 1, 9 is an instance of comparison between the ascetic and the worldly bishop, as seen notably in II, 1, 17. II, 1, 40 deserves a separate discussion: the poem is part of a triptych comprising also II, 1, 39 and 41. The order witnessed by the manuscripts for these three poems, which are transmitted together, is actually as follows: II, 1, 39; 41; 40[38]. They form a polemical cycle against Maximus. II, 1, 39 is an apology for Gregory's poetry and at the same time an attack against another writer of iambs (ἰαμβοποιός, 70), probably the same Maximus[39]. The following poem, II, 1, 41, is a tirade explicitly aimed at Maximus. Finally, II, 1, 40 is a plea, as before a law court, in defence of Gregory's ministry in Constantinople against those who doubted his skill among whom Maximus was still vocal in 381[40]. Poems like II, 1, 8; 14 and 18, with their sombre tone, can be seen as more similar to those elegiac pieces concerned with the spiritual side of the Constantinopolitan experience—as, for example, II, 1, 15 and 19.

Among these more intimate poems, a group is interesting for the theme of bishops. For Gregory wrote some poems addressed and related to the Orthodox community of

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37 McGuckin 2001a, 324, 376.

38 Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 31.

39 Cf. II, 1, 41, 1–7.15–19.21–25.32.39–40.46–47.54–58 with II, 1, 39, 1–7.68–81. McGuckin 2001b, 161; McGuckin 2006, 207; De Blasi 2020; on Maximus' literary activity, see also Hieron. *vir. ill.* 127.

40 McGuckin 2001a, 315, 324, 350–351.

Constantinople, the first people supportive of his ministry there. As they used to gather in a church named Anastasia, the poems are titled πρὸς τὸν Ἀναστασίας λαόν, *To the Community of the Anastasia.* In these poems, II, 1, 5; 6 and 16, we see the relationship between a model bishop, Gregory, and his model community in a time of crisis: it is in fact a long-distance relationship, due to Gregory's "exile" (so he likes to present it) from Constantinople. II, 1, 5 represents this relationship as a loving one, using the language of desire on the model of Paul's addresses to the churches (see Rom. 1:11; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; 2Tim. 1:4). II, 1, 6, on the other side, presents the situation on the model of Lamentations (see Lament. 1:4), with the congregation grieving for the loss of its shepherd. The longer elegy of II, 1, 16 is much more elaborated: in it, Gregory relates a dream he had, in which he reenacted his career in Constantinople up until the council (or Maximus' affaire); after the dream, we read a long lament on his removal from Constantinople and from the Anastasia church in particular, and how this circumstance is very painful to him. Yet he manages to keep his communion with the congregation through spiritual means. He subtly casts doubts on the dignity of his successor and expresses his only care, namely that Anastasia keeps professing trinitarian orthodoxy. In the same group is II, 1, 15, lamenting Gregory's misfortunes and explicitly addressed to the Anastasia church. Among the autobiographical poems, II, 1, 15 is the most concerned with the problem of orthodoxy and the necessity for a Christian leader to be also an accomplished theologian. These poems can be linked with II, 1, 10, which, as we have seen, is addressed to the congregation in Constantinople and not directly to the bishops.

Another interesting text is II, 1, 30, a polemical piece aimed at the priests in Nazianzus and the bishops of Cappadocia. It revives many themes already employed in our poems against the bishops, but in a new context, namely the problems regarding the choice of a bishop for Nazianzus and the influence of Apollinarist theology among the priests of the town[41]. Finally, the famous poem *On his own life* (II, 1, 11) features many parallels to our poems, being for the most part devoted to an account of Gregory's ministry in Constantinople. Yet in this case, these features are embedded in an autobiographic and apologetic poem, in which the single incident is brought up to paint a broader spiritual and intellectual portrait of the author.

All these other poems will not be examined here: the shortest pieces entail the study of the longer ones, which, though significant, would broaden the scope of this work too much. Sometimes parts or lines from these other poems, most of all II, 1, 11, will be mentioned for the light they can throw upon parallel passages of our four poems (II, 1, 10; 12; 13; 17), as will be the case for some significant texts from *or.*. However, the focus will remain on the four poems against the bishops.

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41 On this period of Gregory's life, see McGuckin 2001a, 384–396; Storin 2011, 236–238; Limberis 2012.

1.1.2 Ephrem's texts

The situation of Ephrem's texts is less chaotic but more mysterious. Our primary witnesses are large cycles of texts contained in early manuscripts (fifth to sixth century). Therefore, we read Ephrem's poems already divided into collections on the basis of their themes. These collections are fairly consistent, and the scarce and sparse material provided by reliable liturgical manuscripts does not challenge the organisation of the early manuscripts. Philoxenus of Mabbug, in a florilegium attached to a letter dated between 482 and 484, some 110 years after Ephrem's death, mentions his Ephremian excerpts as pertaining to cycles that have the same names as those attested in the manuscripts. Moreover, the witness of a later manuscript, containing a guide to the melodies (*qālē*, pl. of *qālā*) to be sung on Ephrem's poems, does not contradict the ancient manuscripts[42]. Whereas Gregory's tradition betrays an almost unceasing work of collection and selection, with numerous variations from witness to witness, the fifth-to-sixth-century collections of Ephrem are an authoritative, but isolated, monolith, which makes it almost impossible to surmise what was before them. This means that we have no element, apart from the texts themselves, to decide how much of the order and division of the texts was intended by the author and how much is a later arrangement. The situation is complicated by the modular form of these texts, in which single stanzas or groups thereof may be added or subtracted from a poem without leaving any sign of reworking[43].

Among these collections, the one known as *CN* contains a cycle of poems about bishops. Our witnesses are remarkably consistent: the whole collection is transmitted by one manuscript, which contains only these works and repeats the title of *Book of the Poems on Nisibis* (*penqītā d-madrāšē da-nṣībīn*) on the heading of each page; but the same title is given by an old manuscript as an introduction to an excerpt from the second part of the collection. An old liturgical manuscript, transmitting various passages of Ephrem's works, confirms the order of the main witness for *CN* 15–21, and then adds *CN* 34 and the second part of the collection. This, in sum, is the situation of the ancient collection, sustained by the consensus of our most ancient witnesses: *CN* is a collection of seventy-seven poems, of which the first thirty-four are concerned with historical facts and people and the other poems treat Christ's descent into Sheol and the liberation from Sin and Death. Despite the neat division between historical and theological poems, the whole collection went together under the same name of *Poems*

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42 de Halleaux 1972; de Halleaux 1974.

43 A partial guarantee against such reworkings comes from the acrostic forms of many poems, although this criterion does not always apply and can be bypassed by a careful redactor. On Ephrem's manuscript tradition, see Brock 1997; Outtier 1975/6; Gribomont 1973 and recently Butts 2017; Hartung 2018. Beck's introductions to the single volumes of his critical edition are also an invaluable instrument. A more optimistic evaluation of the collection of the *hymn. fid.*, as preserving the author's organisation of his poems, in Palmer 1995.

on Nisibis since the earliest known moments of the tradition. However, not even the first part is totally represented by the title: in fact, only *CN* 1–21 are concerned with people and facts of Nisibis, whereas *CN* 25–34 (*CN* 22–24 are missing due to a lacuna) refer to Ephrem's stay in Edessa in his last ten years of life. The *Poems on Nisibis* proper are further ordered in two parts: from *CN* 1 to *CN* 12 the poems are devoted to the Persian sieges and attacks that the city faced before its cession in 363; from *CN* 13 to *CN* 21 run the poems on the bishops of Nisibis. Even though after *CN* 21 there is a lacuna, we can assume that the group of poems on the bishops ended with *CN* 21, because this poem ends with a stanza one line longer than the others, and that one line seems an appropriate ending[44].

The nine *madrāšē* devoted to the bishops of Nisibis (*CN* 13–21) seem chronologically ordered. The poems from 13 to 16 refer to only three bishops in Nisibis, which means they must have been composed during the tenure of the third, Valgash. Their comprehensive title is *On His Holiness Jacob and His Successors.* Despite having the same title, poems 13 and 14 are in one metre, and 15 and 16 are in another[45]. To this metrical difference corresponds a thematic one, since *CN* 13–14 are concerned in a rather general fashion with the three bishops, whereas *CN* 15–16 clearly react to a moment of crisis in the authority of Bishop Valgash (see §4.2).

CN 13 is addressed to a female audience, as shown by the feminine personification at stanzas 10–11 and by the apostrophe in the last stanza[46]. Thanks to this last stanza, which caps the whole piece quite well, we can surmise that it is a self-sufficient poem. The comprehensive title of *CN* 13–16, *On His Holiness Jacob and His Successors*, fits better for this first poem than for the others, since it treats as well the succession of three bishops in Nisibis (Jacob, Babu, Valgash; see §4.1.1), giving pride of place to Jacob, the first bishop (see §4.3). *CN* 14–16, on the other hand, are more concerned with Valgash than with Jacob. *CN* 13 has a bipartite structure, with the two parts further divided in two: each of the two major parts is composed of a statement of the succession of the bishops and a reflection. Therefore, in the first major part stanzas 1–9 introduce the theme of succession (1–3), relate it to the history of Nisibis (4–6), and explain it with the metaphor of the sun (7–9). Then, Ephrem reflects on the relationship between Nisibis's history and the history of Israel (10–11). In the second half, stanzas 12–13 introduce again in a generic manner the theme of succession, stanzas 14–17 link it again

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44 "Glory be unto thee for thy gift!" (*CN* 21, 23, 11). This paragraph summarises Beck 1961a, I-V.

45 On the metres of *CN* 13–16, see Beck 1961a, VI. *CN* 13–14 have stanzas made of six lines of seven syllables (7+7/7+7/7+7) and a refrain of seven syllables. *CN* 15–16 have stanzas made of five lines of seven syllables (7+7/7+7/7) and a refrain of seven syllables.

46 "Who is she, daughter born of vows [*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*], / enviable by all females [*neqbātā*]... It is to the daughter [*ba(r)t-eh*] of Abraham alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows?" (*CN* 13, 10, 1–2.11, 1–3); "Imitate Nisibis, / O eloquent daughters of Nisibis [*mallālātā/ bnāt-nṣībīn*]" (*CN* 13, 21, 1–2). More on this at §4.3.

with the history of Nisibis, and, finally, stanzas 18–21 reflect on the figure of Jacob, the first bishop.

CN 14 has no clear addressee. If the reference to the countryside around Nisibis and its clergy in the first stanza has some significance, then maybe the poem is intended for people coming from the countryside. The last two stanzas are a self-effacing prayer of the poet, a stock close in Ephrem's poetry, which assures us that this poem too is an autonomous piece. The prayer for peace at *CN* 14, 1, 6 places this poem in the context of some Persian raids in the countryside of Nisibis[47]. Yet the topic shifts quickly to the features of Valgash's preaching and his continuity with its predecessors. But what really stands out in this poem is the long digression at the centre (*CN* 14, 5–14). The occasion is provided by Ephrem's metaphor whereby he compares Valgash's preaching to adorning his audience with earrings (*ḥšaltā*, literally "jewel" at *CN* 14, 4, 6), an expression of praise for Valgash's proficiency in this episcopal task. The metaphor recalls the biblical episode of the golden calf, because in that case Aaron took earrings (here *qdāšē*, as in the Peshitta version of Ex. 32:2–3) from the people to melt and cast the idol. The details of both situations are compared and contrasted: Aaron took the earrings from the people and made a calf, which brought spiritual death to the people (stanza 5), whereas Valgash gave earrings to the people made from the nails of the cross and saved the people (stanza 6). Then the comparison shifts to the calf and the cross, the first born of fire (feminine) and death (masculine), worse than its parents (stanza 7), the second born of grace (feminine) and the wood of the tree of knowledge (masculine), better than its father (stanza 8). In the next two stanzas, calf and cross are compared first to their fathers and then to their mothers (stanzas 9 and 10). At this point, Ephrem abruptly asks his tongue to hush on the theme of the cross, as if he had suddenly recognised he was straying from his theme. Yet, before getting back to praising Valgash, he spends four more stanzas (11–14) describing how his straying took place and why he can praise Valgash. The explanation proceeds from the biblical model of Jacob's and Esau's struggle over the birthright. Ephrem's praise of Valgash as Esau managed to get out of Ephrem's tongue before the theme of the cross, but the latter struggled and then obtained the birthright (stanzas 11–13, 3). In fact, as Jacob was destined to reign (Gen. 25:23), so the cross is the genuine firstborn (stanza 14). Therefore, it is right to praise Valgash first, as Esau—though he was not the true firstborn—was born before Jacob (stanza 13, 4–6). In any case, it is thanks to the cross that Ephrem can praise the bishops. What is the meaning of this long digression (stanzas 5–14)? From the point of view of content, Ephrem telescopes Nisibis's bishop against sacred history, creating a contrasting typology between him and Aaron, mediated by the cross. Employing Jacobs and Esau's story to portray the struggle in the choice of themes, the poet enhances the cohesion between the cross theme and the praise of the bishop. In an obvious way, the

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47 "Three shepherds / had many musterers, // one mother in the citadel / had many daughters in every region: // since wrath ruined her folds, / may peace restore her churches! (*nebnē šaynā ʿēdātā*)" (*CN* 14, 1).

image suggests that the two themes are brothers; therefore, they are strongly related. Moreover, Ephrem presents the cross as the cause enabling him to praise the bishop, so that the bishop's ministry is brought in closer relationship with Christ's redemption. This way, Ephrem forestalls a possible criticism of his main theme—namely, that he should not praise a living bishop and should stick to praising Christ. From the point of view of form, the presentation of all these contents as a digression, and then his sudden realisation that he has strayed and his justification of straying in terms of similarity of arguments (which in some sense denies the digressive nature of the digression), give a sense of immediacy to the passage: it is as if the poet was improvising and let himself go, only to correct himself in front of the audience shortly after. Now, this is just an impression, for the ten stanzas show a skilful organisation of the themes and a subtle but effective communication of the content, both characteristics hardly consistent with someone straying from the theme for lack of preparation. However, it is interesting that in stanzas 11–14 Ephrem chose to highlight his rambling, because this gives an oral quality to his poetry. It is difficult to understand why he sought such an immediate, impromptu-like and oral quality: maybe it made the oral performance of the poem more convincing; or maybe the piece was never performed but had to simulate an oral performance. In this case, Ephrem used the same device as Gregory, dropping hints in his poem pointing to a fictive occasion of performance. Yet no clear intent can be found for this fiction[48]. The length of this poem benefits from a synopsis:

> **stanza 1:** introduction

> **stt. 2–4:** the three bishops

> **stt. 5–14:** digression: Aaron vs. Valgash (**5–6**); the calf vs the cross (**7–10**); Esau and Jacob (**11–14**)

> **stt. 15–22:** the succession of the three bishops

> **stt. 23–26:** eschatological scenes: the community judged by God (**23–24**); Ephrem's prayer (**25–26**)

CN 15–16 must be treated in close relation to one another. Written in the same metre, both poems are an apology of Bishop Valgash. They do not present a clear beginning nor a clear end, in the sense that the first and last stanzas of each poem are not particularly marked and don't contain metapoetic statements. However, they both begin with an elaborate image that explains the current situation in terms favourable to the bishop and unfavourable to the community and the critics we can easily imagine in it[49]. The poems then go on for a long stretch reflecting on the situation, often wandering away

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48 More on the meaning of the digression on Aaron at §4.2.

49 "If had not been the head straight, / perhaps would have murmured the limbs, // for from a crooked head / the course of limbs is disturbed, // and they'd find the cause in the head." (*CN* 15, 1); "In this is a mirror culpable, / if its clarity is clouded, // because of its own spots, / because the filth on it became // a veil before the beholder." (*CN* 16, 1).

from the initial image, which, however, briefly returns in the penultimate stanzas of each poem[50]. The poems do not seem to follow any overarching structure, but it must be admitted that, given the seven stanzas missing from *CN* 16, it is difficult to evaluate the structure of that poem[51]. There is a fundamental difference in tone between the two pieces, for, while the first is plentiful in first-person plural forms, the second uses the first-person singular[52]. In *CN* 15 Ephrem styles himself as a peer of the community and calls the congregation "brethren"[53], thereby sharing the rebukes he himself makes with those to whom the rebukes are directed. This functions as a sort of *captatio benevolentiae.* A different mechanism is observed in *CN* 16, where the first-person singular must be intended as a personification of the congregation or the city of Nisibis. Perhaps this rhetorical device enhances the objectivity of the poem's rebukes, detaching them from their real recipients. The personification collapses in the last stanza, where the subject becomes a first-person plural, suddenly involving the audience in the rebukes of the previous verses[54]. Maybe this final appeal to the audience, as the apostrophe in the last stanza of *CN* 13, acts as a threshold for the poem, providing a close, which from the point of view of content is lacking. Thematically, *CN* 15 seems more concerned with defending the preaching of Valgash (see stanzas 7–8 and 10–12), whereas in *CN* 16 the theme is Valgash's mildness, seen by the community as a sign of weakness.

The group of poems numbered *CN* 17–21 presents us with a new metre, common to all the poems[55], with a new title, *On Abraham, the Bishop of Nisibis*, this one also common to all the poems, and with a new context, for Bishop Abraham was the successor of Bishop

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50 *CN* 15, 19 has a reprise of the image of the head and the limbs: "If with the head as first/ the limbs had run as second, // they would have lead the third, / and all the whole body would have // followed them." At *CN* 16, 21, 5, "my adornments (*taṣbyāt(y)*) according to my beauties (*šupray*)", the mirror comparison is not explicitly repeated, but the reference to the ornament of the church thanks to the bishop hints at the analogous development of the mirror comparison at stanzas 2–5 (in part.: *CN* 16, 2, 1, "Since beauty (*šuprā*) is not adorned (*meṣṭbat*) by it").

51 According to Beck 1961b, 43–44, the main manuscript of *CN* (R) lost a folium after *CN* 16, 2, 2 until what is now stanza 9. Stanzas 2 to 8 have been reintegrated through the liturgical manuscript E. This witness, however, must have omitted some stanzas, since it gives just 6 new stanzas, whereas one page of the main manuscript R contains normally 13 stanzas. This means that 7 stanzas are missing between *CN* 16, 2 and 9.

52 Examples of first-person plural: *CN* 15, 2, 2 (*tlēn ḥnan sanyāt-an*); 4, 5 (*nešpar kull-an ʿam kull-eh*); 12, 3 (*ʾakwāt-an*); 13, 3–4 (... *nedaʿ zabn-an / ḥnan-hu l-zabn-an ʾetnakrēn-an*); 15–16. Examples of first-person singular: *CN* 16, 14, 2–5 (*yubbāl(y) / ...da-hwaw lī / ...d-yab lī / ...d-mannī lī*); 16 (*mušḥāt(y) / l-ṭalyōt(y)... / la-ʿlīmōt(y).../ la-ḥkīmōt(y) wa-l-pārušōt(y)*); 17, 2–3; 18–21.

53 "Yet, even if we, my brethren (*ʾaḥay* Beck, but *ʾaḥayn* manuscripts) ..." (*CN* 15, 10, 1). Same vocative at *CN* 16, 9, 2, but after a substantial lacuna and apparently without further forms of the first-person plural until stanza 22.

54 "It is we now, who overthrow / this beautiful succession and order, // since in the time of mildness, / lo!, we are begging toughness, // which may rebuke us as children." (*CN* 16, 22)

55 Ten lines of seven syllables: 7+7/7+7/7+7/7+7/7+7. The refrain corresponds to the last line of each stanza and changes for every stanza, so that it is more apt to call it a final acclamation. See Beck 1961a, VI.

Valgash, so that these poems must follow *CN* 13–16 by a number of years. But their internal chronology is far from clear: one would imagine that whoever assembled the collection with such care must have preserved the same chronological criterion employed for broader sections also in these smaller ones; however, *CN* 17 seems written for Abraham's inauguration, and *CN* 19, 3, 1–2 and 20, 3, 1–2 refer to the flock as waiting for Abraham's tenure or newly experiencing it[56], while *CN* 18, 5 alludes to the death of Julian the Apostate during Abraham's tenure and *CN* 21, 14–23 to the accession of a new emperor (Jovian)[57]. However, no poem suggests that Ephrem knew of Nisibis's cession to the Persians (as he does in the *hymn. c. Iulian.*). Considering that Valgash died probably between 361 and 362 and Julian's death and Jovian's accession were both in the summer of 363, we may date the poems after 361 and before the autumn of the year 363[58].

Fiey's suggestion that the last poems were written as letters from Amida or Edessa, after Ephrem had left Nisibis, is highly unlikely, above all because Fiey himself admits that Ephrem tarried in Nisibis for a while after its cession to the Persians[59]. Indeed, while *CN* 17–21 must have been written *before* the cession of Nisibis, in the *hymn. c. Iulian.* Ephrem speaks of the Persian treatment of the city and depicts himself clearly as present in the city as the Persians entered it and the corpse of Julian passed through it[60]. Therefore, it is impossible that *CN* 17–21 were written outside Nisibis. Papoutsakis[61] dates the poems on Julian after 365/366, claiming that they show an intimate knowledge of Gregory's *or.* 4 and 5. The only argument given for this dependence is that at *hymn. c. Iulian.* 3, 14, Ephrem presents Julian's death by disembowelment as a *contrappasso* for his practice of divination through the entrails of sacrificed victims, an idea present also in Gregory's *or.* 5, 13, 21–25. According to Papoutsakis, Ephrem should have connected Gregory's passage to the Greek text of Act. 1:18 and then should have translated it into Syriac with the same verb as the Syriac of Act. 1:18 for the disembowelment (*prat*) and

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56 "Allow, Lord, my smallness, too, / to cast into your treasury her mite, // like that merchant of our flock, / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven: / I will speak of his musterer, // who became head of the flock: / disciple was of three, // he was the fourth chief." (*CN* 17, 1); "Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!" (*CN* 19, 3, 1–2); "It is meet for a new shepherd (*rā'yā ḥē(d)tā*) / to inspect the flock anew (*ḥa(d)tā'īt*)" (*CN* 20, 3, 1–2).

57 "'Twas not enough this, namely / to suppress heathenism [*ḥanpūtā*] through an old man, // but in its wisdom old age died / and in its time infancy triumphed, // for a young athlete dared / the heinous contest, when violence // attacked, perfecting heathenism, / which like smoke overpowered and passed, // with its beginning found its end." (*CN* 18, 5); "Here, the news of a new king / goes thundering through the lands" (*CN* 21, 14, 1–2).

58 Abraham must have been already bishop at least for a short time during Julian's reign (*CN* 18, 5; §4.1.2), meaning that Valgash died after Julian's accession but before the Emperor's demise; Fiey 1973, 131; Fiey 1977, 33. For Julian's death and Jovian's accession, see Amm. Marc. 25, 5, 1–4.

59 Fiey 1973, 131 against 133–134 and Fiey 1977, 34–36.

60 On the Persian administration of the city: *hymn. c. Iulian.* 2, 22; 27. Ephrem's presence before Julian's corpse and the walls displaying the new banners of the conquerors are an important detail of *hymn. c. Iulian.*, as highlighted by Griffith 1987, 248–250.

61 Papoutsakis 2017, 135–137 and 2018.

with *b-gaw kars-eh* instead of *ba-gway-eh* of Acts for the Greek σπλάγχνα, in order to emphasise Gregory's idea of *contrappasso.* If the link with Act 1:18 seems convincing, the one with Gregory is not: this passage alone is insufficient to prove not only the late date of the texts but also Ephrem's much debated knowledge of Greek. Ephrem's deviation from the text of Acts with *kars-eh* may not be a deviation at all, if he read a different text than ours, and even if it is, and even if it is intended as an emphasis on the entrail divination, this need not mean that Ephrem was inspired directly by Gregory, as divination by entrails was practiced throughout the Mediterranean region and as far as Mesopotamia[62]. Ephrem may have come to the idea independently from Gregory; Papoutsakis himself posits that Ephrem knew of one oracle used in Julian's propaganda independently from Gregory[63], so that he may well have known of Julian's haruspicy by himself. This applies also to *hymn. c. Iulian.* 3, 15, 3–4 and Gregory's *or.* 5, 25, 15–16: Julian's gloating remark may come directly from imperial propaganda. Furthermore, as recognised by Papoutsakis himself[64], even though both Gregory and Ephrem employ 2 Thess. 2 to characterise Julian, Ephrem fails to adopt the most resonant element of Gregory's characterisation, derived from 2 Thess. 2, the moniker ἀποστάτης/*mārōdā*, which would be not conclusive but still very strange, if Ephrem really was reading Gregory.

On this basis, we could tentatively trace a chronology of Ephrem's poems in relationship with contemporary history: after the crisis surrounding Valgash and the raids of 359, prompting the composition of *CN* 13–16, Ephrem composed the [*De ecclesia*] poem when Julian's reign was a known reality[65]. During Julian's reign, Valgash died, and Abraham became the new bishop of Nisibis. Then there are two possibilities: either we take *CN* 17–21 to have been composed at different times and then rearranged in the order known to us, or we suppose that the poems were all composed in the same period. If the poems were composed at different times, then *CN* 17 and *CN* 19–20 were composed for the accession of Abraham shortly after Valgash's death, whereas *CN* 18 and *CN* 21 were composed in the summer of 363, after Julian's death and before the news of the peace treaty and the *hymn. c. Iulian.* If, however, we allow for some time to pass between Valgash's death and Abraham's ordination and we suppose that Ephrem may have written inaugural poems for some months after the ordination proper, then we may consider the poems as a unit, and so Ephrem's performances would have coincided with Julian's death[66].

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62 Maul 2005, 69.

63 Papoutsakis 2018, 399.

64 Papoutsakis 2017, 34.

65 Beck 1957, 67–70; Griffith 1987, 240–243.

66 In the fourth century, having a serving bishop in a city after the demise of a predecessor could take quite a time: even beside the cases of vacant seats, cities whose bishop was exiled (as Meletius' Antioch), or contested (Constantinople torn between Demophilus, Maximus, Gregory and then Nectarius), or had fled (the case of Gregory and Sasima, then Nazianzus after his father's death and finally Nazianzus after his return from Constantinople), dioceses had to do without their prelate for long stretches of time. According to McGuckin 2001a, 171, 177, Basil of Caesarea was elected at the beginning of 371, even if his

CN 17 is set at the inauguration of Abraham's tenure. It has two clear literary thresh-
olds: the first stanza states the intention of the poem, and the last stanza echoes the
first, neatly closing the piece. The two stanzas have a clear extratextual hook, the word
"too" ('*āp*), with which the poem describes itself as part of a wider context of praises to
the new bishop[67]. This context of generalised praise, which involved the whole diocese
and comprised the remembering of the previous bishop, must have been the inaugura-
tion of his tenure[68]. On these thresholds, the poet speaks with his own voice: he styles
himself as the old woman of Lc. 21:2 in the first stanza, and as the "dregs of the flock"
in the last, yet describing his poetry as painting, himself as an "eloquent lamb" and
even God's harp[69]. The presence of first-person plural in two stanzas sets the prominent
character of the poet in a larger group of people, likely the congregation of Nisibis[70]. The
addressee of the communication is shifting: in the first stanza, the poet appeals directly
to God, but the acclamation in the last line has God in the third person; at stanza 3,
God is again in the third person, and in the third person God remains throughout the
poem, and notably in the acclamations closing each stanza, until the last, where the
poet addresses God directly in the second person[71]. Bishop Abraham, conversely, is in

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predecessor, Eusebius, died in September 370. However, the traditional date for Basil's accession is the
14th of June 370; see Meredith 1995, 23. And yet Gregory relates of the difficulties of the election and
the presence of illustrious men from distant places – a circumstance that must have slowed down the
proceedings (Greg. Naz. *or*. 43, 37).
67 "Allow, Lord, my smallness, too ['*āp*], / to cast into your treasury her mite" (*CN* 17, 1, 1–2); "me too
['*āp*], the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due" (*CN* 17, 12, 1–2).
68 The image of the flock to describe the diocese is pervasive, so that, when Ephrem defines himself
"the dregs of the flock" (*CN* 17, 12, 1), the underlying idea is that, beside his praise, other manifesta-
tions of devotion for the bishop were held by other members of the flock. Another recurrent theme is
the continuity between the bishops, to the point that the old dead bishop is seen as living anew in his
successor (*CN* 17, 11). This gives the impression that the poem is also meant as a commemoration of the
predecessor, which would have been most purposeful if his demise was recent or, if not actually recent,
at least meaningful to the occasion. The remembrance of the predecessor and the continuity of his suc-
cessor would have been meaningful at the inauguration (on continuity see §4.1). Moreover, the image
of the "horn of election" alludes to the anointing of the leader, and so to his consecration (*CN* 17, 2, 7–9).
69 "Me too, the dregs of the flock , / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted [*ṣāret*] an image of
both, / with the dyes of both, // that the fold may see their ornaments, / and the flock their beauties; //
and since I am an eloquent lamb, ['*emrā mallālā*] / you, God of Abraham, // in Abraham's tenure I praise
you. / **Blessed is he who made me his harp**! [*kennār-eh*]" (*CN* 17, 12). On *mallālā*, see §4.3 nn. 119–120.
70 "may your fasting be an armour to our land [*l-'atr-an*], / your prayer a shield for our city [*la-mdi(n)t-an*]"
(*CN* 17, 4, 7–8); "He parted from us [*menn-an*], while he's with us ['*amm-an*]: / in you we see [*neḥzē*] all three
of them // glorious, who parted from us [*menn-an*]; / be for us [*l-an*] a wall as was Jacob" (*CN* 17, 11, 4–6).
71 Second person: "Allow, Lord [*mār(y)*], my smallness, too, / to cast into your treasury [*b-gazz-āk*] her
mite, // like that merchant of our flock / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine (*yulpān-āk*)" (*CN* 17,
1, 1–4); third person: "**Blessed he** [*brīk-u*] **who made him our comfort**!" (*CN* 17, 1, 10); "He lifted and
fixed [*šqal qab'-eh*] him as the mind / inside the large body of the church" (*CN* 17, 3, 5–6); second person
again: "You, God of Abraham [*l-āk 'allāh-eh d-'abrāhām*], // in Abraham's tenure I praise You ['*awdē l-āk*]"
(*CN* 17, 12, 8–9).

the third person until stanza 4, where he is addressed in the second person, and the rest of the poem, until the last stanza, speaks of the new bishop with second-person forms[72]. So, all in all there are five characters in the poem: the poet, the congregation, the new bishop, the old bishop, God. If this set of characters reflects a real-life occasion, then it is surely a religious service: the beginning and end of the piece hint at this setting with their hymnic address from the poet to the Godhead, and the frequent mentions of the community imply its presence. The new bishop, too, is addressed as present, whereas the old bishop, mentioned only in the third person, is clearly absent. It is perhaps not haphazard that the poet uses the first-person singular when addressing God, and the first-person plural when addressing the bishop. Thus, he highlights the relationship of the prelate and his community, presenting himself as their mouthpiece; on the other side, his role is legitimised by his one-to-one relationship with God, as "His harp" (*CN* 17, 12, 10). From a structural point of view, the poem can be divided into two halves: *CN* 17, 1–6 defend the new bishop's election, stressing continuity with his predecessor and the new bishop's outstanding qualities; the remaining stanzas (*CN* 7–12) are an exhortation to the new bishop, full of ideal behaviours and advice.

   CN 18, like the three following poems, is much less clear about its setting than *CN* 17. There is no direct intervention of the poet at the beginning, nor at the end, that helps situate the enunciation. In general, these poems present us with the same dynamic as the central stanzas of *CN* 17: the poet speaks at the first-person plural, as mouthpiece of the community, and the bishop is directly addressed with second-person forms[73]. The poem is clearly divided into three parts of equal length: stanzas 1–4 defend the legitimacy of the new bishop, comparing him to his predecessor; stanzas 5–8 narrate his resistance against Julian; stanzas 9–12 are composed of advice given to the new bishop. The two main themes of this poem are the fight against heathenism, which, however, seems a thing of the past (stanzas 5–8), and the envy against the bishop for his election. Since this theme is a recurrent one in these poems, the fact that Ephrem denies so flatly

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72 Third person: "he was [*hwā l-eh*] the fourth chief" (*CN* 17, 1, 9) and *passim*; second person: "may your fasting [*ṣawm-āk*] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [*ṣlōt-āk*] a shield for our city // your thurible [*pīrm-āk*] may obtain reconciliation" (*CN* 17, 4, 7–9) and then *passim*; third person again: "I painted an image of both [*la-tray-hōn*], / with the dyes of both [*da-tray-hōn*], // that the fold may see their ornaments [*ṣebtay-hōn*], / and the flock their beauties [*šupray-hōn*], // ... in Abraham's tenure ..." (*CN* 17, 12, 3–6.9).

73 Examples of second person for the bishop and first plural for the community: "your master didn't leave you [*rabb-āk menn-āk lā šannī*], / in the living we see [*ḥzēn*] the departed" (*CN* 18, 1, 5–6); "May we be the field of your will, / may we be the vine of your labour, // may we be the flock in your fold, / and healthy stock under your crook; // may you be a great leader, / and we the gems embedded in your crown, // may we be fair for you and you for us, / that we may fit, one with another, // people and priest, in harmony. / **Blessed is he who sow harmony among us**!" (*CN* 19, 12); "O virgin that was bridegroom, / stir up a bit your understanding [*re'yān-āk*] // towards the wife of your youth [*ṭalyūt-āk*]" (*CN* 20, 1, 1–3 and see also the expression "my brothers", *'aḥay*, at 6, 1); "In your tenure [*b-qawm-āk*] may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master ouf our freedom [*l-ḥērūt-an*]" (*CN* 21, 7, 1–2).

the presence of envious people in the community must reflect an actual uneasiness in the choice of the new bishop (see §2.1.2.2; §3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.3).

CN 19 is a long moral paraenesis to the bishop, based on typology: it starts, quite aptly, with Abraham and Sarah (stanza 1), then moves on to David (2), Jacob (3), David again (5), Joshua (6), Moses (7), and Elisha (8); after some stanzas, the words of Paul are brought in (13), and finally the three predecessors are the last model of behaviour given to Abraham (15–16). Interspersed in this intensifying progression, moving from Old to New Testament times and then church history, there are stanzas devoted to the metaphor of the shepherd after the manner of Ezekiel's chapter 34 (4, 10) and another jab on envy (9). Compared to *CN* 18, this poem gives us one more clue of a setting: at *CN* 19, 3, 1 the community seems to be present, as Ephrem uses, in front position, an exclamation similar to English "here"[74]. The line gives the impression of the poet presenting the community to its bishop, but the effect is of no further import in the rest of the poem.

CN 20 is the shortest piece of the collection and stands out for its theme and language. The poem is addressed to the bishop, in particular to his intellectual side (*re'yānā*, *CN* 20, 1, 2), in order to make known to the prelate his doctrinal duties. In short, he must fight against heresies in the community: this general theme carries with it a language and some arguments similar to those in the larger collection called *Against the Heretics* (*hymn. haer.*)[75]. Moreover, this piece describes the flock as "new", hinting at the fresh consecration of the bishop, and uses the apostrophe "my brothers", setting its enunciation in a public context.

The long *CN* 21 is divided into two parts. From the first stanza to stanza 13, the poem resumes many themes already mentioned in the collection. It is another moral exhortation against the vices, in particular lust, greed, and gluttony. The poem opens with the example of John the Forerunner and his earnestness against lustful people (stanza 1), and then there is a reference to Elijah and Elisha's poverty (stanza 2)[76]. However, since

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74 "Here is your flock [*hā mar'īt-āk*], o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!" (*CN* 19, 3, 1–2). For the use of the exclamation *hā*, see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 959–960, *s.v.* ܗܐ.

75 In particular, the theme of the name of the community, originating in Paul (1Cor 1:12–13), is extensively developed in *hymn. haer.* 22–24, in the same metre as *CN* 17–21. Were the *hymn. haer.* 22–24 written in Nisibis at the same time as *CN* 17–21? If we add that, according to the *Chronicle of Edessa* 18, 23, the bishop of Edessa until the year 361 was called Abraham, this idea seems less absurd. Now, *hymn. haer.* 22–24 cannot have been written for Nisibis, for they mention Palut as the founder of the addressed Christian community. In Nisibis, Ephrem would have mentioned Jacob; the *Doctrine of Addai*, however, gives Palut as the first bishop of Edessa. Therefore, *hymn. haer.* 22–24 must have been composed for the Edessan community (Hartung 2018, 320). However, *CN* 20, 2, 7 mentions "three farmers" ('*akkārā tlātā*) as the predecessors of the incumbent bishop. Since the idea of the three predecessors is a key motif in the poems dedicated to Nisibene bishops, it is highly likely that also this poem was written for Abraham of Nisibis, and not for Abraham of Edessa. Therefore, *CN* 20 and *hymn. haer.* 22–24 were not written in an unitarian endeavour. Anyway, it is possible (but cannot be proved) that the two groups were written in a time span of few years, maybe two (363 to 365).

76 "John was a lamp / that exposed and rebuked the perverse, // they hurried and quenched the lamp / that the whim of their appetites refused." (*CN* 21, 1, 1–4); "A great bliss was concealed / in Elijah's poverty; // Elisha served him and claimed / a double reward for his service," (*CN* 21, 2, 1–4).

stanza 3 sums up the three vices of gluttony, lust, and greed with biblical characters who have notably overcome them, it is possible that a stanza about gluttony is missing from our witnesses[77]. Now, the examples of chastity and poverty given in stanza 3 differ from the ones in stanzas 1 and 2: instead of John the Baptist, the chaste Joseph, and instead of Elijah and Elisha, Peter (see Act. 8:20). Thence we can surmise that the example of our hypothetical lost stanza was not Daniel, mentioned in stanza 3. Another example of Old Testament fasting could have been Esther (see Esth. 4:16), whose fasting is mentioned by Ephrem in *hymn. ieiun.* 4, 7–8 and in the second poem of the appendix to that same collection (*app.* 2, 5). Yet if we want to preserve the alternation between Old and New Testament paradigms shown by the other two stanzas (John and Joseph, Elijah and Peter), then we should choose a New Testament character to pair with Daniel. In this case, there is little doubt that the paradigm would have been Christ himself, as is often the case in the poems on the Lenten Fast. Finally, if the summary in the first six verses of stanza 3 preserves the order of the previous stanzas, then our lost stanza on Esther or Christ fasting would have been first, before the one on John.

The second part of the poem begins suddenly at stanza 14 with an exclamation (*hā*)[78]. In this part of the poem, Ephrem reflects upon the end of Julian's persecution, rejoicing at the turn of fates that Jovian's accession caused but also warning against the misbehaviours Christians may commit when the pressure of persecution is lifted (stanzas 14–18). After these considerations and some well-wishes to the new bishop, the last three stanzas compare the roles of bishop and king, drawing a parallel between the Constantinian dynasty with the latest emperor and the succession of bishops in Nisibis: Jacob and Constantine as founders, Valgash and Constantius II as sons, Abraham and Jovian. Now, both the beginning of this section, with the use of the exclamation, and the end of the poem, with its heartfelt prayer for peace and the extra line after the acclamation, make for a perfect beginning and end of an autonomous poem[79]. After all, the two parts of *CN* 21 seem very tenuously linked, so that two poems may conceivably have been confused in this one, with the loss of a little rubric[80]. If this was the case, then *CN* 21a (stanzas 1–13) was very similar to the previous poems of the collection, and it had no clear ending or beginning, whereas *CN* 21b (stanzas 14–23), the last piece of the collection, had a clear beginning and an ending fitting the whole collection.

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77 "May gluttony succumb to your fasting, / as with the fasting of Daniel; // may lust be ashamed before your body, / as when it was ashamed before Joseph; // may greed succumb to you, / as when succumbed before Simon;" (*CN* 21, 3, 1–6).

78 "Here [*hā*], the news of a new king / goes thundering through the lands:" (*CN* 21, 14, 1–2).

79 The exclamation *hā* can be found at the beginning of a stanza many times (see, for example, *hymn. parad.* 9, 12; 12, 8; 13, 6; 15, 15), and they are particularly significant in *Resurr.* 2, 2.3.8, because the poem has the same metre as *CN* 17–21. Another poem with the same metre, *Crucif.* 2, begins with another exclamation (*'ō*). *hymn. fid.* 73, 75 and 76 begin with our exclamation *'ā*. However, this kind of beginning is not widespread.

80 *CN* 19–21 are introduced by the brief rubric "from the same, in the same melody" (*menn-eh bar qāl-eh*), and *CN* 18 even omits the "from the same" (*menn-eh*).

As has been already said, the different texts in the collection of *CN* 13–21 were written at different times, and chronologically some of them may be nearer to the first part of the *CN* (1–12), while others may have been written at the same time as the *hymn. c. Iulian.* Were they later collected by the author himself, or is this grouping the result of a later editorial work? We don't have material witnesses to support one of these conclusions or the other, because our knowledge stops at the great fifth-to-sixth-century manuscripts. However, no one can deny the care with which these groupings have been compiled. The order of the first half of the *CN* is neither rigidly thematic nor rigidly chronological: *CN* 1–12 share the theme of the sieges and the raids, but they are also written between the third siege, in 350, and shortly after or during the raids in 359; *CN* 13–21 share the theme of bishops, but are also written between the accession of Valgash and Ephrem's departure from Nisibis (after 363). Moreover, the *hymn. c. Iulian.*, which share roughly the same date as *CN* 17–21, form a separate group. Smaller subsets of poems sharing the same metre are not ordered in a rigidly chronological sequence. Another sign of the care and skill with which the collection has been compiled is the uniformity of themes in different poems: there are literary and lexical motives returning from poem to poem, creating a sense of uniformity in the whole group of *CN* 13–21. We see these themes repeated, adapted to different occasions, elaborated, and combined with each other. It is difficult to attach these structuring themes to a particular moment of the poems' tradition: stanzas containing the themes might have been taken from other poems by an editor to give cohesion to the groups he was creating out of poems written around the same time, or the editor might have written some of them himself; or they could be the result of a later work of revision by Ephrem himself, who collected his poems on bishops and gave them internal consistency in view of a written publication; otherwise they could belong to the first composition and performance of the pieces, and their consistency can be explained by recurring themes and problems in Ephrem's preaching. Of these possibilities, I deem the last the most likely, as we don't possess proofs of a later revision by Ephrem himself, and it seems to me very hard to conclude that a later editor would have interspersed Ephrem's poems with his own creations or with patches from other poems in order to create an artificial cohesion. In any case, whoever worked to build the collection, even if he wasn't Ephrem himself, worked very well, so much so that we are drawn to think he preserved some kind of Ephremian lore to guide him in his operation: in other words, if the collection doesn't go back to Ephrem, it must be the work of Ephrem's "school" in Edessa[81].

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[81] This is certain as regards smaller cycles of poems, as in this case the poems on bishops. It is doubtful whether the whole collection of *CN* or even its first half, is the work of an Ephremic school, though the very early evidence in this direction may suggest so. Hartung 2018 is way too pessimist as regards these collections: it is true that Ephrem worked probably on small sets of metrically and thematically related poems, and that the collections are likely more recent. Yet it is hard to believe that complex and personal poems such as the *CN* contain much spurious works, and that the collection are as preposterous as, say, the *Gedichtgruppe* in Gregory's tradition, when as early as a century after Ephrem's death the collections seem already well-established.

The first position in each of the two subsets of poems is given to a poem with a clear beginning and a clear ending, set on a clear occasion (*CN* 13 and 17), perhaps an occasion intended to be the setting of the following pieces as well. In contrast to Gregory's poem, *CN* 13 and 17 give no clear hints that these settings are fictional: first, because as we will see in the next part, the internal settings of the poems fit well with external sources on their delivery, whereas in the case of Gregory it is clear that he could not have recited (e.g.) a long iambic poem at the Council of Constantinople; second, because it is difficult to spot in Ephrem's pieces the same chronological discrepancies Gregory purposefully put in his poems. For example, in Gregory's II, 1, 12 the text is set before Nectarius's election, and yet it alludes unceasingly to Nectarius's credentials, so that the text clearly shows the fictionality of its setting. Yet, if we take, for example, *CN* 21, where a parallelism is drawn between the bishop Abraham and the new emperor Jovian, we could imagine that Ephrem has fictionally conflated the two elections of bishop and emperor so as to present them as a providential coincidence: nevertheless many other explications can be given, beginning with the fact that there is no clear hint that *CN* 21 is set at the inauguration of Abraham; inauguration rhetoric, such as the best wishes given to the bishop, could well have been used for some months after the inauguration, which could have taken place in the same year as Jovian's election; or maybe the part on the new emperor is in reality another poem. As we have seen, *CN* 14 contains a long digression, which gives a sense of orality. If the poem was never performed orally, then this would be a case of fictional setting. However, there are no certain grounds to exclude an oral delivery of *CN* 14, nor is there a clear motivation on the part of Ephrem to feign orality in a written poem. In any case, chronological fictions—even if present— are not thematised in Ephrem's texts as in Gregory's.

Finally, there is another poem concerned with a bishop, namely *CN* 31. The poem dates back to the last years of Ephrem's life, spent in Edessa. It is a rebuke of the community in Harran (Latin *Carrhae*), near the metropolitan see of Edessa, because they refused to comply with their Catholic bishop, Vitus. From the context of the other poems of rebuke against Harran (*CN* 32–34), we can infer that the problem with the city was the persistence of paganism and perhaps a schism between the community of Harran and the bishop of Edessa (*CN* 33, 7–9). However, the poem won't be studied in this work, because of Ephrem's different setting in space and time, his different themes and the different bishops to which it is addressed, and because it would be more earnestly studied with the other poems on Harran, which would broaden too much the scope of the work.

1.2 The audience

In the previous section, I presented the texts with particular attention to the internal setting—that is, the time, place, occasion, and audience the poems suggest. As regards Gregory, his poems are fictively set during true incidents, whereas Ephrem does not seem to imply such a fiction. His poems, though, suggest real-life occasions. In this

chapter, I will compare internal data with external witnesses, both from the same poets and from other writers, in order to delineate the real audience and performance context of the texts.

Traditional scholarship assigned to Gregory and Ephrem two completely different contexts: Gregory's poems would have had a private, almost solipsistic, function and only a written life, while Ephrem composed for performance, and his poems were sung during liturgies in front of the congregation. So, tradition presents us with a series of antitheses between Gregory and Ephrem: written versus oral, private versus public, poetry as part of liturgy and poetry independent of it[82]. However, recent research has revised these stereotypes, showing a more nuanced situation for both Gregory's and Ephrem's poems. This is partly because past syntheses treated the huge poetic outputs of the authors as homogeneous in terms of audience and performance. Recent scholarship acknowledges internal differences in the corpora. A consequence of this nuancing is that Ephrem and Gregory seem less different; one can acknowledge more readily their belonging to similar contexts and their geographic and chronological proximity.

1.2.1 Ephrem between altar and aisle

As has been noted, scholarship has always attributed to Ephrem's poetry a sung performance in the context of Christian liturgy. This stance goes back to the earliest external sources on Ephrem's activity: Jerome (ca. 345–420) and Jacob of Serugh (ca. 452–521). In his *De viris illustribus*, Jerome writes: "Ephrem, deacon of the church in Edessa, wrote much in the Syriac language, and came to such a fame, that his writings are publicly recited after the reading of Scriptures in some churches"[83]. This witness is very significant because it dates back to twenty years after Ephrem's death, and if Jerome observed Ephrem's recitations while he was in Syria in 373–379 (and not in Palestine, where he wrote the *De viris illustribus*), then these recitations spread as far as Antioch shortly after Ephrem's death[84]. Moreover, Jerome's account refers explicitly to Ephrem's Syriac, and therefore genuine, production, for he says, "in the Syriac language" (*Syro sermone*). Scholars quote this passage correctly as a witness of the employment of Ephrem's poetry

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82 For Ephrem see: Wickes 2018, 27n6; for Gregory: McGuckin 2001a, 376; Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004, XL-XLI; McLynn 1997, 299.
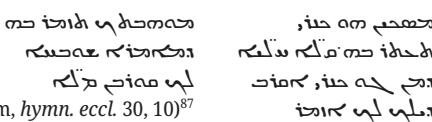
83 *Ephraem, Edessenae Ecclesiae diaconus, multa Syro sermone composuit, et ad tantam venit claritudinem, ut post lectionem Scripturarum publice in quibusdam ecclesiis ejus scripta recitentur* (Hieron. *vir. ill.*115).

84 The *De viris illustribus* is dated by its author at the beginning and at the end to the fourteenth year of Theodosius' reign, which is 394 (Hieron. *vir. ill. praef.* and 135). In those passages, Jerome declares to be in Bethlehem, however we know he travelled to the East before, in 373 (the year in which, according to the *Chronicle of Edessa*, Ephrem died). Jerome stopped in Antioch until 375, when he went to the Syrian Chalcis (some 250 Km west of Edessa on the important commercial road connecting the city to Beroea, modern-day Aleppo) to practise an anchoritic life. He went back to Antioch between 378 and 379. See Maraval 1995, 35–40.

in a liturgical context and in public: in fact, Jerome says that Ephrem's works were recited publicly (*publice . . . recitentur*), and he sets them in churches (*in quibusdam ecclesiis*) right after the readings (*post lectionem Scripturarum*), in the place reserved for the homily[85]. The scepticism towards Jerome's witness shown by recent scholars is ill-founded. First, the twenty-year gap between Ephrem and Jerome's writing is small in comparison to the corresponding gap that characterises much of the biographical information we possess on ancient authors. Moreover, Jerome's information is detailed, and there seems to have been no reason to forge it or exaggerate it. Finally, it agrees with inner clues in Ephrem's poetry.

Much later (fifth to sixth century), Jacob of Serugh presents an image similar to that of Jerome. Writing a poetic homily in honour of Ephrem, he comments on the characteristics of Ephrem's ministry, adding two more elements to the image given by Jerome: first, that Ephrem's poems were sung, and second, that the poet instructed a choir of women to sing them in the church[86]. Jerome and Jacob together give us the traditional setting of Ephrem's *madrāšē*: stanzaic poems that were sung during church services in place of homilies and whose performance was entrusted to a choir of women. However, the concrete modes of performance are far from clear; in other words, we can't assign precisely different parts of the poems—and in particular, the alternating stanzas and refrains—to different performers. Are we to think that the choir of women sang the stanzas and the congregation answered with the refrains? Or that the poet himself, as a deacon, sang the stanzas, and the choir the refrains? Or some mix of these two configurations? It is also possible that different poems or cycles of poems featured different performers or performance practices. Secondary sources give no further hint in this direction.

The very poems suggest the same setting as later witnesses. Frequent references to harps, singing, and music suggest that the poems were set to music; there are many examples among the corpus, but let these lines from *hymn. eccl.* 30, 10 suffice:

ܟܢܪܝ ܗܘ ܡܣܟܢ،
ܗܒܠܗ ܕܝܢ ܡܘܗܒܬܟ ܢܥܬܪ
ܒܩܠܐ ܚܠܝܐ ܕܡܢ، ܕܡܘܟ
ܘܡܢ ܟܢܪܝ ܕܝܠܝ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬܘ

ܡܣܟܢܘܬܟ ܕܗܘ ܒܝ ܗܝ ܕܟܠ
ܕܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ
ܐܢ ܗܕܐ ܩܪܒ ܕܝܠܟ

(Ephrem, *hymn. eccl.* 30, 10)[87]

Some form of participation by a group of virgin women is implied by many passages. Take, for example, two verses from *Nat.* 4, where Herod is contrasted to God, and the dance of Salome to "the voice [*qālā*] of virgins"[88]: here, the word *qālā* can be understood in its generic meaning of "voice", but it is perhaps significant that the same word means also "tune", "sound," and "song". One of the clearest clues to the involvement of virgins in the performance of *madrāšē* comes from two stanzas of *Resurr.* 2. Ephrem describes the festivities of Easter, stressing the contributions of "children" (*šabrē* at *Resurr.* 2, 7, 8 and *yallūdē* at 2, 8, 2) and of "virgin women" (*nakpātā*, 2, 8, 4). Yet while children contribute only with acclamations of "Hallelujah" (*qālē*, 2, 8, 2; *hullālē*, 2, 7, 9), the virgins provide "songs" (*qīnātā*, 2, 8, 4). Then, from the description Ephrem passes on to prescription: every rank of the community is called to add his contribution to the festivity. In this context, from every rank is requested something peculiar to that rank, as is made clear by the metaphor of flowers that everyone should collect "from his own piece of land" (*men dīl-eh*, 2, 8, 6; *habbābē d-ī'aw b-'ar'-eh*, 2, 8, 7). The bishop, for example, should provide his sermons, and the deacons their reading, according to contemporary liturgical habits. Here again virgin women (*nakpātā*) are mentioned, and their proper contribution is "their *madrāšē*"[89]. This passage shows that *madrāšē*, the poetic genre most practiced by Ephrem and the genre of the poems on bishops, were assumed to be the province of virgin women, in the same way as the *munus docendi* and the homilies were the bishop's province. In fact, external witnesses agree with this idea: fifth-century canonical documents, such as the *Canons of Rabbula* and the *Canons of Marutha of Maipherkat*, assign to the "Daughters of the Covenant" (*bnāt qyāmā*) catechetical tasks, and the twentieth canon of *Canons of Rabbula*, in particular, reserves the task of singing *madrāšē* to the daughters[90]. The canons, as well as their reference to the "Daughters of the Covenant", mirrored by Ephrem's use of the word *nakpātā*, "virgins", hint at an organised institution, recognised by the community. This is important because it can widen the scope of Ephrem's activities, as we shall presently see.

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88 "the dance of impurity / pleased the tyrant; // You, o Lord, may please You / the voice [*qālā*] of virgins. // You, o Lord, may appease / the voice of virgins // You who kept their bodies / in holy chastity" (*Nat.* 4, 62–63).

89 "Now too at this festival / does the crowd of children scatter for You, Lord, // halleluiahs like blossoms. / Blessed is He who was acclaimed by young children. // It is as though our hearing [has embraced] / an armful of children's voices, // while songs coming from chaste women, Lord, / fill the bosoms of our ears. // Let each of us gather up a posy of such flowers, / and with these let each intersperse // blossoms from his own piece of land, / so that, for this great feast, // we may plait a great garland. / Blessed is He who invited us to plait it! // Let the chief pastor weave together / his homilies like flowers, // let the priests make a garland of their ministry / the deacons of their reading // strong young men of their jubilant shouts / children of their psalms // chaste women of their songs / chief citizens of their benefactions // ordinary folk of their manner of life. / Blessed is He who gave us many opportunities for good!" (*Resurr.* 2, 7, 7–9, 10, transl. Brock/Kiraz 2006, 175–177).

90 On these themes, see Harvey 2005 (in particular 129–130) and McVey 2007.

The last element of the traditional frame, the liturgical setting, is more difficult to pinpoint in Ephrem's own words, partly because of our ignorance of fourth-century Syriac liturgy. As noted by Wickes, only the *Poems on Nativity*, *Poems on Easter*, and *Poems on the Unleavened Bread* refer clearly to a fourth-century festivity and to its cele-bration: the *Poems on Easter*, in particular, have been thoroughly studied in relation to liturgy by Rouwhorst[91]. However, it would be wrong to extend this setting aprioristically to all Ephrem's poems. The presence of a refrain in the structure of the *madrāšā* may suggest a liturgical employment, because through the refrain the congregation could be involved in the meditation. This could enhance the assent of the community to the doctrinal proposals put forth by the poems. Perhaps it is to such a dynamic between preacher and people that a passage of the *Homilies on Nicomedia* by Ephrem points: the tribune (the βῆμα) at the centre of the church is described as a spring, whence the ears of the community can drink life in the form of doctrine; then, Ephrem switches to a financial metaphor, saying that the ear got into debt and that the mouth must settle it, so that praise from the mouth corresponds to the doctrine coming from the tribune and feeding the ears[92]. Palmer interprets this passage as a reference to the perfor-mance of *madrāšē*, with a leading voice exposing doctrinal contents and the assembly answering with the refrains, often in the form of acclamations and praise[93]. Admittedly, this is not the only interpretation possible: the passage could also describe the ordi-nary dialectic of liturgy, with the homily coming from the *bema* and the congregation singing and praying. What this passage basically conveys is that doctrine and teaching can come only from a *bema*, whereas the congregation is supposed to praise and pray. Furthermore, the refrains, as such, cannot be seen as a sure hint of a liturgical context, especially since in many cases (such as *CN* 17–21), the wording of the refrain changes for every repetition. It would be inconceivable that the congregation could chant the refrain unless instructed beforehand or, even more unlikely, provided with a written copy of the refrains. In conclusion, some *madrāšē* certainly had a liturgical use; many more could have had it; but we cannot be sure that *all* poems were performed during the liturgy.

In fact, recent scholarship has questioned the liturgical setting of many of Ephrem's *madrāšē.* Wickes criticises the traditional division of Ephrem's works into poetic ones, aimed at the larger audience of a congregation during its liturgy, and prose treaties, written for a few advanced students, probably ascetics[94]. He questions the tendency to compare Ephrem's poems to John Chrysostom's sermons, as two corpora set in the

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91 Wickes 2018, 38; Rouwhorst 1989.

92 "Le bêma que l'on avait construit au milieu / était une source au milieu. // Des oreilles avides ac-coururent près de lui, / et y burent la vie // Ils y burent l'enseignement, / ils en reçurent et lui rendirent. // La bouche paya à la place des oreilles, / la louange en échange de l'homélie." (*Homily on Nicomedia* 8, 619–626; transl. in Renoux 1975).

93 Palmer 1998, 128–130.

94 Wickes 2018.

liturgy and with a similar function of education of urban masses. In particular, Wickes says that, since Ephrem was not a bishop, his function in the community cannot be assimilated to that of so important a bishop as Chrysostom. No doubt, Ephrem could not muster the same authority as Chrysostom in Antioch. However, he may not have been so far from the authority of a bishop as Wickes assumes he was: Ephrem remained a deacon throughout his life, and deacons had great importance in many early Christian communities, often greater than that of priests. One need only remember the examples of Saint Lawrence and Damasus in Rome and Athanasius in Alexandria, or of Gregory the Great later, to notice the great power of some deacons. This power usually sprang from two sources: first, deacons were entrusted with the finances of the congregation, and hence they were responsible for the almsgiving and could command the support of urban masses; second, a deacon often served as a sort of secretary for the bishop, and in this capacity, he could develop a preferential channel to the bishop and his authority[95]. If we keep this in mind, we see that Ephrem's praises for his bishops and his defence of Valgash *against* the community in *CN* 15–16 (see §4.2) demonstrate the poet's strong link with the episcopal see in Nisibis and suggest that he acted as a kind of mouthpiece for the bishop's agenda. His poetry stood in an ambiguous position: it was not the voice of the bishop himself, as it purportedly spoke for the congregation, the women, or the poet; however, it was clearly linked with the bishop's agenda. Thus, Ephrem's poetry represented itself as a spontaneous reaction by the laity, while channeling that reaction in a way suited to the bishop's requirements. Therefore, it is true—as Wickes says—that this poetry cannot be put side by side with Chrysostom's episcopal sermons; however, this is not enough to exclude its appeal to the masses or its link with the bishop's authority.

Indeed, there are other reasons to doubt of the uniformity of Ephrem's poetic corpus. As Wickes has clearly demonstrated, the *hymn. fid.* stand out from the rest of the corpus for their theological sophistication and their lack of liturgical references. Moreover, these poems often refer to the theme of teaching and doctrine, and in some cases, they seem to be addressed to someone who will in turn teach other people. As such, *hymn. fid.* (and maybe other poems scattered throughout the corpus) would find their setting not in the aisle, but in the classroom. Since there isn't any witness in the fourth century on a formalised Syriac education, in which Ephrem's poems could be of use, the setting cannot be a literal classroom, such as the ones in which late antique children learnt to read Homer and Hesiod[96]. Ephrem's poems point to an educational

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95 On deacons in general: Symonds 1955; Koet/Murphy/Ryökäs 2018; Smeets/Koet 2021. Admittedly, there is not much on the topic coming specifically from Ephrem's time and space. A useful document may be the *Didascalia apostolorum*, describing the relationship of deacon and bishop as that of the Father to the Son. For the tendency of the bishop in the Syriac church of the time to delegate teaching, see §3.1.3.2.

96 Barhadbshabba, in his *Reason of the Foundation of the Schools*, 63.67, dated to the sixth century, reports that Ephrem was made head of the school of Nisibis by the bishop Jacob and that, after his

institution with peculiar characteristics: it was prevalently Syriac-speaking; its students were meant to teach other; the curriculum was advanced, comprising biblical exegesis and theology; and, last but not least, the community had ascetic leanings. Wickes identifies such a community with the *bnay qyāmā*, the early Syrian ascetics, through a comparison of Ephrem's ascetic ideals and those expressed by Aphrahat in his *Demonstrations*, together with other earlier Syriac witnesses[97]. Perhaps the link witnessed by the sources between *madrāšē* and women, and in particular with the female ascetics of the *qyāmā*, can be brought up in this respect: Ephrem's teaching, conveyed by the *madrāšē*, was aimed at the *bnāt qyāmā* in particular. As Harvey has noted, these ascetics had forms of organisation even before the arrival of Egyptian monasticism. The women had catechetical responsibilities towards other women and helped to keep communities alive in villages and peripheral centres, where ordinary clergy could not always be present. Moreover, the canonical documents of the fifth century require a minimal hierarchy for these women, with a female teacher and supervisor, who was made deaconess[98]. Perhaps *madrāšē* particularly concerned with education and treating difficult subjects of theology and exegesis could have been aimed at educating the deaconesses, who were in turn to educate their sisters and the women in the community. After all, groups of ascetic women interested in theology who were united around a prominent thinker are found not only in Syriac Christianity but in many other places and times of the early church: Eusebius relates that Origen had to castrate himself because of the many women attending his teachings[99]; Jerome and Rufinus made a living off of Roman women of senatorial rank, like Paula and Melania; maybe they learnt their business from Damasus, who was maliciously known as *auriscalpius matronarum*[100]; the deacon Glycerius gathered a group of virgins around him as their "patriarch"; so relates Basil.[101] Assuming this educational context, it is still difficult to define the concrete circumstances of poetic performance: it is likely that such groups are responsible for collecting and organising Ephrem's works in the form known from fifth- and sixth-century

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move to Edessa, he kept teaching there, forming a school. Sozomen (3, 1, 16) witnesses that Ephrem had pupils. However, Barhadbshabba could be projecting the scholastic reality of his days onto Ephrem, and Sozomen doesn't mention any formal educational institution. These data are interesting, because they demonstrate a perception of the educational value of Ephrem's writings and as a historical figure; nonetheless, to argue a fully functioning school from these passages would be too long a stretch.

97 Wickes 2018, 44–51. Palmer 1998, 133–134 recognises a didactic use in the inner circle of the Children of the Covenant to Ephrem's poetry, but he divides the oral performance (aimed at the congregation at large) from the written collection and organisation of poems for the ascetics.

98 Harvey 2005, 129–130. For a more general assessment of the role of women in the Syriac world, Harvey 1993.

99 διὰ τὸ νέον τὴν ἡλικίαν ὄντα μὴ ἀνδράσι μόνον, καὶ γυναιξὶ δὲ τὰ θεῖα προσομιλεῖν, ὡς ἂν πᾶσαν τὴν παρὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις αἰσχρᾶς διαβολῆς ὑπόνοιαν ἀποκλείσειεν, τὴν σωτήριον φωνὴν ἔργοις ἐπιτελέσαι ὡρμήθη (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 8, 2).

100 *Coll. Avell.* 1, 10, 4–5; Fontaine 1988; Rapp 2005, 216; see also: Amm. Marc. 27, 3, 14.

101 Rapp 2005, 202; Basil, *ep.* 169–171.

manuscripts, but there isn't any clue on the poems' oral performance. One can surmise that short cycles, like the *Poems on Paradise*, or the "Poems on the Pearl" now at the end of the *Poems on Faith*, were delivered as a series of lectures on a given theme, each lecture being something between a show and a theology lesson. Though aimed at an inner circle, performances on hot topics could attract a wider public, even of adversaries, giving rise to controversies. Such, for example, were the conditions under which Gregory's *or.* 27–31 were given, according to McGuckin[102].

To sum up, ancient sources and modern scholarship propose two extreme models of delivery for Ephrem's poems: on one side, the liturgical pieces, whose chief examples are the *Poems on Nativity* and *Poems on Easter*, were addressed to the whole community and were correspondingly easier, performed during the liturgy after Bible readings, likely with the involvement of a choir of women and the participation of the assembly; on the other side, the educational pieces, many of which are among the *Poems on Faith*, aimed at instructing an inner circle of lay ascetics, and in particular the deaconesses leading the *bnāt qyāmā*, in order to prepare them for their tasks in the community. For both occasions, the concrete modes of performance are not clear, maybe because they could change from piece to piece: Palmer, for example, imagines that some pieces required a male soloist for the stanzas and a trained choir for the refrains; or the congregation, guided by the choir, sang the refrains; or the choir delivered the stanzas and the congregation the refrains; sometimes a female soloist could be used, or the soloist could change from stanza to stanza, enhancing the dramatic and dialogic structure of some poems[103]. The question is, To which model do the poems on the bishops belong? Are they meant for the aisle or for the classroom?

The poems on bishops contained in the *CN* are very different from the *Poems on Faith* that Wickes set in an educative context. In particular, *CN* 13–21 lack almost completely the concerns for right teaching and for the right use of words that are so apparent in the *Poems on Faith.* They never treat philosophical themes and only rarely theological ones: the notable exception is *CN* 20, a short guide to orthodoxy clearly addressed to Bishop Abraham. Even here, however, the approach is more polemical than educational. The poems dedicated to Bishop Abraham (*CN* 17–21) are particularly clear in their setting: they purport to be the voice of the community; hence their systematic use of the first-person plural, entreating and praising the community's bishop in the second-person singular. Many passages imply this setting, as when in *CN* 19, 1 and 3 Ephrem presents "his flock" to the bishop, in a way that suggests both the bishop and the flock are present[104]. That this flock is not limited to ascetics is made clear in stanza 3, where different ranks in the church are listed, and in stanza 6, where it is said

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102 McGuckin 2001a, 277–278.
103 Palmer 1998, 128–130.
104 "Aptly your name is Abraham, / for you are father of many; // yet, since you had no spouse / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse is your flock!" (*CN* 19, 1, 1–5); "Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!" (*CN* 19, 3, 1–2).

that "the third and fourth part" of the flock is consecrated[105]. Then, in stanzas 12–14, the concern for the whole community is even more apparent, because, after having associated "people ['ammā] and priest in harmony" (*CN* 19, 12, 9), the poet quotes Paul's declaration of love for the church in Corinth (*CN* 19, 13 and 2 Cor. 11:2) and finally explicitly speaks of "church" (*ʿēdtā*, *CN* 19, 14, 4) and of "priest" and "flock" (*CN* 19, 14, 8). *CN* 20 has a similar presentation of the flock to the bishop (*CN* 20, 3), and the flock certainly comprises the whole congregation, because it is defined by the redemption accomplished by Christ's blood[106]. After all, in stanza 4, it is clear that this flock is the church (*CN* 20, 4, 4)[107]. It is safe to interpret the word "church" as meaning the whole congregation, because at *CN* 21, 5, Ephrem lists again the ranks of a Christian community (the bishop, priests, deacons, infants and elderly people, the virgins), and the ascetics are mentioned as "the covenant" (*qyāmā*, *CN* 21, 5, 8), while the last line, clearly summarising the preceding lines, speaks of "church" (*ʿēdtā*, *CN* 21, 5, 9)[108]. Of these poems, only *CN* 17departs from the scheme, because its perspective shifts between the "us" of the community and the "you" of the bishop, and the "I" of the poet becomes prominent. Anyway, in the light of *CN* 18–21, frequent mentions of the flock and the use of the first-person plural hint at a public occasion where the whole community was present. One could suggest that the lyrical "I" was not meant to be the poet but a deaconess of the *bnāt qyāmā*, but the self-effacing in stanzas 1 and 12, coupled with the self-attribution of the title of "Harp of God" (*kēnnār-eh*, *CN* 17, 12, 10), are so much Ephremian that it is inconceivable to attribute them to another poetic persona. Furthermore, this title of "Harp of God" gives a hint on the delivery of these poems, since it is in a refrain. In these poems, the refrain coincides with the last line of each stanza, and every refrain is different. Given the personal title employed at *CN* 17, 12, 10 and the lack of repetition in the refrains, it is more likely that they were recited or sung by the soloist, or by a rehearsed choir, than by the whole assembly. Regarding the nature of the gathering, there are no

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105 "Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds, / you order this rational stock, // make the chaste shine purely, / the virgins modestly, // lead the priests purely, / the suffragan bishops modestly, // and the people righteously. (*CN* 19, 3); "Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold whose half was wolves, / whereas to you a flock was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated." (*CN* 19, 6, 6–9).

106 "It is meet for a new shepherd / to inspect the flock anew, // to know how great is its number / and to see which is its need. // This is the flock redeemed by the blood / of Him, Who is Master of the shepherds." (*CN* 20, 3, 1–6).

107 "Here's the betrothed of your Lord, / keep her from all harms, // and from any man violating her, calling / the churches by their own names." (*CN* 20, 4, 1–4).

108 "Be thou a crown for priesthood/ and through you be glorified the worship, // be thou a brother for the priests, / a chief for the deacons, too, // be thou a master for the infancy, / a staff and help for old age, // be thou a bulwark for the virgins, / may the covenant in your tenure be splendid, // and the church by your beauty adorned" (*CN* 21, 5). In the same way, *CN* 19, 3 listed the different components of the community, ending with the "people" (*'ammā*) as a summary: "make the chaste shine purely, / the virgins modestly, // lead the priests purely, / the suffragan bishops modestly, // and the people righteously." (6–9).

straightforward clues pointing at a liturgical context. One could surmise such a context by the hymnic nature of some stanzas in *CN* 17 and the contents treated (§1.1.2). The image of the bishop's praise as the offering of a garland recalls similar images in *Resurr.* 2 and could point to a liturgical context. Moreover, the frequent enumerations of the ranks of the community (priests, deacons, ascetics, old and young, rich and poor) pre-suppose their presence, as the direct addresses presuppose the presence of the bishop: where could the bishop meet the whole congregation outside liturgy? Certainly not in a classroom. Given our information in ancient sources on Ephrem's delivery, these poems could have been delivered only during a liturgy.

CN 15–16 present us with a similar situation: here again there is an "us", but the bishop is addressed in the third-person singular most of the time. Significantly, the only exception is the refrain of *CN* 15, "Blessed is he who chose you, pride of our people [*'amm-an*]!". A more straightforward expression of the relationship between commu-nity and bishop could not have been found. In this case, as for the refrain of *CN* 16, it is likely that the assembly took part in the singing. That the situation is similar to that of *CN* 17–21 is shown also by the vocative "my brethren" (*'aḥay*), appearing both at *CN* 15, 10, 1 and at *CN* 16, 9, 2: the same vocative was used at *CN* 20, 6, 1, and since there it referred to the whole congregation, it is safe to assume that here, too, refers not to a limited group of ascetics, and certainly not to female ascetics, but to the whole con-gregation. Furthermore, Ephrem's poems here seem to expand beyond the Christian community to take even a civic scope: in fact, at *CN* 15, 20, 4, he mentions the behaviour of "citizens" or, more literally, "those inside" (*gawwāyē*) as opposed to "those outside" (*barrāyē*)[109]. In the poems on the sieges, the situation to which these lines refer, these two substantivated adjectives represented the besieged, who are "inside" the wall, and the besiegers, who are "outside" it. However, these two terms have also a cultural and a religious meaning, because Ephrem tends to conflate the political identity of the com-munity—that is, Nisibis as a city of the Roman Empire defending itself against a Persian attack—with its cultural and religious identity—namely, as a Roman culture and eth-nicity opposed to an alien Persian one and as a form of Nicene Christianity opposed to heathenism. Needless to say, these three groupings were by no means coextensive in reality. In any case, the opposition *gawwāyē/barrāyē* is a clear sign that the whole com-munity of Nisibis is meant. The prevalent use of the third person to speak of the bishop in these poems is grounded in their topic. Since these poems are a rebuke to the people and a defence of Bishop Valgash, Ephrem speaks directly to the community, including himself in it[110]. In order for this to be effective, the community had to attend; and to make it even more effective, the same community that questioned the bishop probably

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109 "It's because the citizens (*gawwāyē*) neglected each other, // that the foreigners (*barrāyē*) too trod them down." (*CN* 15, 20, 4–5). See §4.3 n. 109 for this antithesis.

110 See §1.1.2. On the inside/outside antithesis: §4.3 n. 109; on the crisis of Valgash's episcopate §4.2.

acclaimed him with the refrain. But, since the refrain is directed to the bishop, he too should have been there.

In *CN* 16, at stanza 14 and until stanza 21, the first person shifts from the plural to the singular. This peculiarity ushers us into *CN* 13–14, the most problematic grouping regarding delivery. The first-person singular speaker of *CN* 16, 14–21 speaks of herself as a developing subject, passing through different ages and stages, each of which is directed and instructed by one of the bishops. The same rhetorical device is employed at *CN* 14, 17–24—here, however, with the third-person singular feminine. It is used also at *CN* 13, 3–4 and 15, 15–17—here, however, in the first-person plural. Hence, when Ephrem speaks in the first person at *CN* 16, 14–21, he is speaking in the person of the church of Nisibis, as demonstrated by the use of the feminine third person in *CN* 14, 17–24, since *ʿēdtā*—the Syriac word for "church"—is a feminine, and the church is ordinarily represented as a woman[111]. Therefore, as in *CN* 15 and 16 the whole community was meant to be present, so in *CN* 13 and 14 the first-person plural and the third-person singular feminine seem to point to a presence of the community. However, there are also clues in *CN* 13–14 that go in the opposite direction. For example, Ephrem never speaks to the bishop in the second person, nor are the refrains addressed directly to the prelates. Neither does he speak directly to the community, except maybe at *CN* 13, 11–12. He does employ direct address, but the addressees are the "eloquent daughters of Nisibis" (*mallālātā bnāt-nṣībīn*). Given the attribute "eloquent" and the indirect reference to the choir of women in the Song of Songs, i.e. the "daughters of Sion" or "daughters of Jerusalem", it is probable that these Nisibene women are in fact the *bnāt qyāmā*[112]. The attribute "eloquent" could be a clue to a group of ascetics particularly focused on literacy and study. Such a group of ascetics, as demonstrated by Wickes, could be the target of Ephrem's didactic poems, as were similar groups in late antique Mediterranean[113]. Ephrem speaks clearly in his own persona, because at the end of *CN* 14 there is the stock self-effacing prayer: therefore, he cannot represent the whole community in this case. Finally, the long digression in *CN* 14 is perhaps the most theologising section of the poems on bishops, and its complexity could work well in a more advanced context. How can one make sense of these conflicting hints? A key to the understanding of the context of these poems can be found in *CN* 13, 10–11:

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111 At *CN* 14, 20, 1 the word is *marʿītā*, literally "flock", but the word is regularly used to mean "diocese" (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, *s.v.* ܡܪܥܝܬܐ); this too is a feminine (more on this at §2.2.1.3). Murray 2004, 131–158 explains the complex feminine imagery used to describe the church in early Syriac literature. On the contrary, Wickes 2015, 8–9n30 interprets the first-person singular of *CN* 16 as referring to Ephrem himself, therefore pointing at his personal development – from child to man – under the three bishops of Nisibis. Reading *CN* 16 in the context of the other poems on bishops clearly refutes this interpretation.

112 Cant. 3:10–11. More on these allusions at §4.3.

113 Wickes 2018, 44–51. On *mallālātā* see §4.3 nn. 119–120.

ܣܘܡܥܠܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܢܩܕܬܐ   10 ܡܢ ܗܝ̇ ܒܪܬܐ ܕܐܕܫ ܢܕܪ̈ܐ
ܘܚܠ̈ܝܐ ܗܘܘ ܦܠܐ̈ܬܚܣܘܢ   ܕܗܟܢ ܗܘܘ ܫܘ̈ܒܠܝܗ̇
ܗܢܝ ܣܘ ܗܘܘ ܐܚܢܝܗ̇   ܘܗܟܢ ܗܘܘ ܪܘ̈ܪ ܓܢ̈ܝܗ̇

ܗܘ̇, ܗܘ̇, ܗܠܝ ܕܨ̈ܘܪܬܐ   11 ܠܒܪܬܗ ܕܠܚܘܕ ܕܐܒܪܗܡ
ܕܠܘܡܚܠ ܥܦܘ̈ܢܗ ܗܝ ܚܝܠܗ̇   ܐܘ ܐܦ ܕܐܕܫ ܢܕܪ̈ܐ
ܘܐܝܟ ܥܕܢܗ̇ ܓܢܐ ܥܒܕܗ̇ [114]   ܐܝܟ ܝܘܚܢܗ̇ ܓܢܝ ܨܒܬܗ̇

(*CN* 13, 10–11)

Here, Ephrem refers to a "daughter born of vows" (*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*), an expression which seems to single out the ascetics in the community: a *bar/ba(r)t-nedrē* is the child of sterile parents who have vowed that if God would give them a child, they would give the child to God; a *bar/ba(r)t-nedrē* is destined to take the vows[115]. However, the reference to different "ranks", to "generations," and to the "teachers"—namely, the bishops—applies to the whole community in Nisibis. The rhetoric of the fit ornament and the apt help is used to talk about the different bishops and their different approaches to the community. Furthermore, the comparison with the "daughter of Abraham" is decisive: the "daughter of Abraham" must be a periphrasis to mean the synagogue, and therefore Judaism; but if the "daughter born of vows" is compared to the synagogue, she cannot be only the ascetic community, but must be the church at large. This is demonstrated later, when at stanza 18 Ephrem mentions Nisibis by name. Both the name "daughter born of vows" and the *peroratio* to women ascetics at the end of *CN* 13 highlight the presence of the "daughters of the covenant" in the performance, but this does not exclude that the community at large attended, too. In fact, *CN* 13 and maybe also *CN* 14 must have been set during a liturgy in which the community and the bishop were present, but the *bnāt qyāmā* had a prominent role, as I have argued in the previous section.

In conclusion, even if it must be acknowledged that the liturgical setting was not the only context of performance of Ephrem's poems, as recent scholarship has shown, nevertheless, the poems on bishops in the *CN* show strong signs of such a setting. This comes as no surprise: their very content has strong ties with the community at large, and it mattered to all Christians in Nisibis. In these poems, Ephrem has a mediating function between the bishop's agenda and the community. He poses either as a third party between the two or as part of the community, while at the same time he promotes the bishop's agenda. Thanks to his intermediate position, he could present episcopal proposals as spontaneous requests from the community, in fact manipulating

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114 "Who is she, daughter born of vows, / enviable by all females, // whose generation flowed thus / and whose ranks increased thus // and whose progress rose thus, / and whose teachers shone thus? /// Is it to the daughter of Abraham alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows? / For her ornament corresponds to her beauty, // because her help is like her time, / and her servant is like her help."

115 This sense of the expression is listed at Payne-Smith 1879–1901, 2293 *s.v.* ܢܕܪܐ. After all, *bar-/ba(r) t-* at the constructed state does not express only origin from, but also membership in something, as in the expression *bnay-qyāmā.*

communal response to the bishops. He achieved this in part by proposing sung refrains to the community, as exemplified in *CN* 15–16.

1.2.2 Gregory's theatre of words

As regards Gregory's production, the scholar can rely on contemporary Greek and Latin literary practices, which are much more documented than Syriac ones. This allows for a clearer picture of Gregory's audience and modes of performance and publication. Such information is useful not only for his letters and speeches but also for his poetry. Clearly, different groups of poems had different targets and aims; nonetheless, some general remarks can be made, before we concentrate on the poems on bishops.

Late antique literature was disseminated in written form. Authors prepared copies of their works (or of a collection of works) and spread them through their social network, at times accompanying the work with a letter to the first reader, which could be the dedicatee or commissioner of the work. An author could lend his own copy of the work to one or more friends, who copied it and perhaps spread it to their friends. This was what Gertz, in his analysis of Gregory's tradition, called the "snowball" system of publication: the single exemplar, like a snowball, replicated through the social network of the author, becoming an avalanche of copies in the case of a successful work[116]. For example, Origen, Jerome, and Rufinus wrote on commission: they dictated to stenographers, probably making several copies of the same work simultaneously, then sent the finished product to the commissioner with a dedicatory letter, many of which are still extant[117]. On the other side, we know from two of Synesius's letters that he lent his own copy of some of his poems to a friend who had the booklet copied (but failed to give it back)[118]. One might guess that the first mode of publication concerned writers coming from a lower background who, more or less, wrote for a living. After all, Eusebius explicitly links Origen's productivity with Ambrosius's commissions[119]. Better-off authors, such as Synesius (a landowner), circulated their works among acquaintances

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116 Gertz 1986, 172–173.

117 For Origen, see Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 5, 1; 6, 2, 6; *c. Cels. praef.*. and the first sections of books 3–7 and 8, 76. For Jerome, the prefaces to his translations are emblematic. For Rufinus: Orig. *princ. praef. Ruf.* 2.

118 αἰτῶ γὰρ τὸ ἐν ἰάμβοις ἐκεῖνο συνταγμάτιον, δι' οὗ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ γεγραφὼς διαλέγεται. … Ἀντίγραφον οὖν τῆς τετράδος ἀπόστειλον, πρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς, ἣν κοσμεῖν βούλεται τὸ βιβλίον (Synes. *ep*. 141, 5; 14); ἐν τῷ τετραδίῳ τῶν ἰαμβείων εὗρον... (143, 52).

119 Ἐξ ἐκείνου δὲ καὶ Ὠριγένει τῶν εἰς τὰς θείας γραφὰς ὑπομνημάτων ἐγίνετο ἀρχή, Ἀμβροσίου παρορμῶντος αὐτὸν μυρίαις ὅσαις οὐ προτροπαῖς ταῖς διὰ λόγων καὶ καρακλήσεσιν αὐτὸ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀφθονωτάταις τῶν ἐπιτηδείων χορηγίαις. ταχυγράφοι τε γὰρ αὐτῷ πλείους ἢ ἑπτὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸν παρῆσαν ὑπαγορεύοντι, χρόνοις τεταγμένοις ἀλλήλους ἀμείβοντες, βιβλιογράφοι τε οὐχ ἥττους ἅμα καὶ κόραις ἐπὶ τὸ καλλιγραφεῖν ἠσκημέναις· ὧν ἁπάντων τὴν δέουσαν τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἄφθονον περιουσίαν ὁ Ἀμβρόσιος παρεστήσατο· ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἐν τῇ περὶ τὰ θεῖα λόγια ἀσκήσει τε καὶ σπουδῇ προθυμίαν ἄφατον αὐτῷ συνεισέφερεν, ᾗ καὶ μάλιστα αὐτὸν προύτρεπεν ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ὑπομνημάτων σύνταξιν. (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 23,

or groups of peers sharing the same preoccupations: in the case of Synesius, he sent his works to people in Hypatia's circle—that is, other landowners with an interest in Neoplatonic philosophy[120]. Gregory's situation was more similar to that of Synesius: he was no middle-class professional like Jerome, Rufinus, or Augustine, but rather a wealthy landowner. As such, he did not depend on a commissioner for his literary activity and could rely on a wide and strong network of like-minded peers to spread his products, as his letters show[121]. These acquaintances could appreciate the intricacies of Gregory's rhetoric at its best, thanks to their classical education and, in many cases, to their Christian upbringing: hence, it is only appropriate that Gregory addresses his readers in the programmatic II, 1, 39 as "experts" (σοφοί, lines 52, 58, and 78).

For all its relevance, especially as regards the beginnings of the manuscript tradition, the writing and circulating of copies were just one way that late antique texts became known. For, while book reading in modern times seems a chiefly private and silent activity, the sources give clear indications that in late antiquity it was not so. The texts, though written, were enjoyed through an oral performance. Actually, the relationship between orality and writing was much more complex: the two mediums interacted not only in the final steps of publication and transmission, but also in the initial one of

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1–2). Though likely well-born, Origen had to rely on teaching and a patroness to sustain his family after his father's martyrdom and the confiscation of the family's properties: 6, 1, 12–14.

120 The addressee of Synesius' *ep.* 141 and 143 is Herculianus, a fellow-disciple of Hypatia (see *ep.* 137, 7–9: αὐτόπται γάρ τοι καὶ αὐτήκοοι γεγόναμεν τῆς γνησίας καθηγεμόνος τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων, a clear reference to Hypatia). *ep.* 154, addressed to Hypatia herself, seems the accompanying letter to a copy of the *De insomniis* and the *Dion*: Τῆτες ἐξήνεγκα δύο βιβλία, τὸ μὲν ὑπὸ θεοῦ κινηθείς, τὸ δὲ ὑπὸ λοιδορίας ἀνθρώπων. (154, 1–2). After having recalled the circumstances under which he wrote the *Dion*, Synesius explicitly entrusts the work to Hypatia, in order that she may judge it and then he could proceed to a wider (but equally exclusive) publication: ὑπὲρ δὴ τούτων ἁπάντων σε κρίνουσαν περιμενοῦμεν. κᾂν μὲν ψηφίσῃ προοιστέον εἶναι, ῥήτορσιν ἅμα καὶ φιλοσόφοις ἐκκείσεται· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἥσει, τοὺς δὲ ὀνήσει, πάντως γε, εἰ μὴ παρὰ σοῦ τῆς δυναμένης κρίνειν διαγεγράψεται. εἰ δὲ μὴ φανεῖταί σοι τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀκοῆς ἄξιον, καὶ σὺ δὲ δήπου μετ' Ἀριστοτέλους πρὸ τοῦ φίλου τὴν ἀλήθειαν θήσῃ, πυκνὸν καὶ βαθὺ σκότος ἐπηλυγάσεται, καὶ λήσεται τοὺς ἀνθρώπους λεγόμενον. (90–98). And, ending the letter, he says: σὺ γὰρ δὴ μετ' ἐμὲ πρώτη τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐντεύξῃ. ταῦτα τῶν τέως ἀνεκδότων ἀπέστειλα. καὶ ἵνα τέλειος ὁ ἀριθμὸς ᾖ, προσέθηκα τὸν περὶ τοῦ Δώρου, πάλαι γενόμενον ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς πρεσβείας πρὸς ἄνδρα παρὰ βασιλεῖ παραδυναστεύοντα· καί τι τοῦ λόγου τε καὶ τοῦ δώρου Πεντάπολις ὤνατο. (113–118). Another kind of publication mentioned in this letter was theft (or the claim of a theft): not only Synesius claims that someone stole and spread some of his works, prompting criticism (11–18), but a similar story is told by Jerome in his famous *ep.* 57, 2–4. There, he retorted to criticisms against his translation of a letter of Epiphanius of Salamis (Jerome's *ep.* 51) accusing his critics of having stolen the text. The "stolen manuscript" trope can clearly be a self-defensive commonplace, but it bears witness to the difficulty of authors to keep track of the readership of their works, a difficulty largely due to the "snowball" system of publication in late antiquity.

121 On Gregory's social network as shown by his letters see McLynn 2001; 2006 and 2012a. More recently, Storin 2017b. Gregory's versified letters give us a glimpse of the kind of readership he intended, as says Demoen 1996, 67–69. These Cappadocians social networks, and the complex language they employed to communicate and negotiate are analysed in Van Dam 2002, 71–156; Van Dam 2003a, 131–154.

composition, because dictation played a strong role in it, and we know of texts—mostly homilies—written down by stenographers during their oral delivery, thus passing from written notes to oral performance to written record and transmission to renewed oral performances[122]. Oral performance was the expected publication context of rhetorical and literary texts, much more than it was for technical treatises such as pagan and Christian running commentaries. Letters, poems, and speeches were meant to be showcased in front of an audience. Oral performance of late antique poetry has been thoroughly demonstrated by Agosti, who highlights the survival even of forms of poetic competition[123]. As regards homilies and orations, public performance was intrinsic to the genre, even if not all orations composed in late antiquity were meant for a performance. An eccentric prose work by Synesius, the *On Providence*, was certainly read in instalments among literary circles of Constantinople[124]. Even letters were sometimes read in front of an audience: this is clear from *ep.* 101 by Synesius, a message addressed to Pylemenes, a lawyer in Constantinople. Synesius praises the addressee for his eloquence, as displayed in his last letter: in fact, the letter has become a matter of widespread admiration, after Synesius gathered a "Hellenic theatre" (θέατρον Ἑλληνικόν) of literary enthusiasts to hear it[125]. At the end of the letter, Synesius explains why he renounced sending a letter

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122 See, for example, Eusebius' remark on Origen's homilies: ὑπὲρ τὰ ἑξήκοντά φασιν ἔτη τὸν Ὠριγένην γενόμενον, ἅτε δὴ μεγίστην ἤδη συλλεξάμενον ἐκ τῆς μακρᾶς παρασκευῆς ἕξιν, τὰς ἐπὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ λεγομένας αὐτῷ διαλέξεις ταχυγράφοις μεταλαβεῖν ἐπιτρέψαι, οὐ πρότερόν ποτε τοῦτο γενέσθαι συγκεχωρηκότα (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 36, 1). Gaudentius of Brescia's sermons survive because a wealthy member of the congregation requested them in written and re-worked form after their delivery by the bishop around the time of Easter: Lizzi 1998, 100. On recitations and dictation see Cavallo 1992, 44–47 (the pages refer to the Early Empire, but with the exclusion of the role of private writing workshops – as explained at 113–118 –, they aptly describe the late antique situation) and Cavallo 2019, 101–103. Cavallo distinguishes between the composition of prose and poetry, saying that dictation was employed mostly for prose, whereas poetry was more commonly written by its author. In the poems on his vow of silence, Gregory highlights the paradox of producing a discourse while keeping silence, and of the hand as substitute of the mouth: Ἴσχεο, γλῶσσα φίλη· σὺ δέ μοι, γραφίς, ἔγγραφε σιγῆς / ῥήματα, καὶ φθέγγου ὄμμασι τὰ κραδίης (II, 1, 34, 1–2). Storin 2011, 246 believes the importance of this theme lies in the fact that normally Gregory would have dictated his compositions, whether letters or poems. Renouncing dictation by way of a vow of silence meant renouncing to the elite status of a wealthy landowner, embracing the middle- or lower-class task of a secretary, a form of ascetic humiliation. This could mean that Gregory, contrarily to the praxis as represented by Cavallo, normally dictated even his poems, or that Gregory chose poetry to communicate because the genre in itself entailed renouncing to dictation.
123 Agosti 2006.
124 Γέγραπται μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς Ταύρου παισί, καὶ τό γε πρῶτον μέρος, τὸ μέχρι τοῦ κατὰ τὸν λύκον αἰνίγματος, ἀνεγνώσθη καθ' ὃν μάλιστα καιρὸν ὁ χείρων ἐκράτει τῇ στάσει περιγενόμενος προσυφάνθη δὲ τὸ ἑπόμενον μετὰ τὴν κάθοδον τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν αἰτησάντων, μὴ κολοβὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀτυχημάτων μεῖναι τὸ σύγγραμμα (Synes. *provid. praef.* 1–7); see also the whole *provid.* 1, 18.
125 Φυκούντιος ἄνθρωπος (Κυρηναίων δ' ἐπίνειον ὁ Φυκοῦς) ἐπέδωκέ μοι φέρων ἐπιστολὴν τὸ σὸν ἐπιγεγραμμένην ὄνομα. ταύτην ἀνέγνων ἡδέως τε ἅμα καὶ ἀγαμένως· ὠφείλετο γὰρ τὸ μὲν τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸ δὲ τῷ κάλλει τῆς γλώττης. καὶ δῆτα παρεσκεύασά σοι θέατρον ἐπὶ Λιβύης Ἑλληνικόν, ἀπαγγείλας ἥκειν ἀκροασομένους ἐλλογίμων γραμμάτων. καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς παρ'ἡμῖν πόλεσιν ὁ Πυλαιμένης

directly to Marcianus, a common acquaintance of his and Pylemenes's, saying that he feared the letter could be read in the "Panhellenium" (Πανελλήνιον), a place where literates met to hear and read ancient and new texts[126]. Moreover, Jerome witnesses a case of public performance for a Christian polemical work: in his *De viris illustribus*, he says that Gregory of Nyssa read the *Contra Eunomium* to him and Gregory of Nazianzus[127]. Speaking of Gregory of Nyssa, his *ep.* 14 is worth mentioning, as it witnesses to a public reading of a letter from Libanius (in much the same way as Synesius's congratulations to Pylemenes) and at the same time to the close relationship between written and oral publication: after the reading, Gregory lent the letter to many other aficionados so that they might copy from it sentences and expressions[128]. In sum, we can assume that many texts had an oral performance besides their written circulation.

Synesius's letter is particularly interesting because it gives us a glimpse of the real-life situation in which these performances took place. In fact, Synesius writes of a "theatre" of educated people he gathered for the reading. The fact that this theatre is labeled "Hellenic" (Ἑλληνικόν) links it to the "Panhellenium" mentioned at the end of the letter. In both cases, educated people convene to a place, literally a theatre or

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πολύς, ὁ δημιουργὸς τῆς θεσπεσίας ἐπιστολῆς. … γράφε οὖν ὁσάκις ἂν ἐγχωρῇ, καὶ ἑστία Κυρηναίους τῷ λόγῳ· ὡς οὐδὲν ἂν αὐτοῖς ἥδιον ἀνάγνωσμα γένοιτο τῶν Πυλαιμένους γραμμάτων, ἤδη κατεσχημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ δείγματος. (Synes. *ep.* 101, 1–9; 20–24). This passage is analysed by Hose 2003 as a clue to an authorial edition of Synesius' letters. Other examples of public reading of letters in theatres: δήλωσόν δέ μοι καὶ ὅπως ὑμῖν ἔχει τὸ φροντιστήριον, καὶ εἰ πλῆθος ὁμιλητῶν σοι περιφράττει τὸ θέατρον (Procop. Gaz. *ep.* 89); μὰ γὰρ τὸν σὸν Νεῖλον καὶ τὰς παρούσας σοι Χάριτας, θέατρον λογικὸν τὴν σὴν παρέσχον ἐπιστολήν, κἂν τῇ Γάζῃ μέσῃ πρὸς πάντας ἐλέγετο. κἀγὼ μὲν ἀλαζὼν ἡδούμην ὑπὸ τῶν σῶν γραμμάτων καλούμενος, ἐγέλα δὲ τὸ θέατρον ἐπ᾽ ἐμοί· σὺ δὲ τῶν λόγων εὐδαίμων ἐδόκεις. (91, 50); Ἔλαβόν σου καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν πλείστου ἀξίαν ἐπιστολὴν καὶ ἀνέγνων οὐ μόνος, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον μόνος, θαυμάσας δὲ καὶ θέατρον καθίζω τοῖς γράμμασι τὴν βουλήν. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν οὐ βουλευόντων ἐπέρρεον γνόντες, ἐφ᾽ ὅτῳ γε συγκαθιζοίμεθα (Liban. *ep.* 1259).

126 ἐπιστολὴν δὲ ἐξ εὐθείας πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐπιθεῖναι καίτοι προθυμηθεὶς ἐνάρκησα, ἵνα μὴ εὐθύνας ὑπόσχω τοῖς πανδέκταις τοῖς ἀποσμιλεύουσι τὰ ὀνόματα· οὐ γὰρ μικρὸς ὁ κίνδυνος ἐν τῷ Πανελληνίῳ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀναγνωσθῆναι. καλῶ γὰρ οὕτω τὸν τόπον, ἐν ᾧ πολλάκις ἐφρόντισα τὰς βαρείας φροντίδας, τῶν ἀπανταχόθεν ἐλλογίμων συνιόντων ἐφ᾽ ᾧ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀκοῦσαι τοῦ πρεσβύτου φωνῆς, παλαιὰ καὶ νέα καταμαστευούσης διηγήματα. (Synes. *ep.* 101, 66–78). The reference to ancient texts is interesting, because it is early evidence of a practice widespread in Byzantine times and witnessed notably by Photius' *Bibliotheca*: circles of literary enthusiasts met to read works of past authors. See Cavallo 2019, 248–249; Cavallo 2007.

127 *Gregorius Nyssenus episcopus, frater Basilii Caesariensis, ante paucos annos mihi et Gregorio Nazianzeno contra Eunomium legit libros, qui et multa alia scripsisse et scribere dicitur* (Hieron. *vir. ill.* 128); McGuckin 2001a, 349–350.

128 οὕτω γὰρ συνέβη κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ἐπιφοιτήσαντά με τῇ μητροπόλει τῶν Καππαδοκῶν ἐντυχεῖν τινι τῶν ἐπιτηδείων, ὅς μοι τὸ δῶρον τοῦτο, τὴν ἐπιστολήν, οἷόν τι σύμβολον ἑορτῆς προετείνατο. ἐγὼ δὲ περιχαρὴς τῇ συντυχίᾳ γενόμενος κοινὸν προὔθηκα τοῖς παροῦσι τὸ κέρδος, καὶ πάντες μετεῖχον τὸ ὅλον ἕκαστος ἔχειν φιλονεικοῦντες, καὶ οὐκ ἠλαττούμην ἐγώ· διεξιοῦσα γὰρ τὰς πάντων χεῖρας ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἴδιος ἑκάστου πλοῦτος ἐγίνετο, τῶν μὲν τῇ μνήμῃ διὰ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἀναγνώσεως τῶν δὲ δέλτοις ἐναπομαξαμένων τὰ ῥήματα (Greg. Nyss. *ep.* 14).

auditorium, or a βουλευτήριον adapted to the aim, to hear a literary work being read[129]. The author could be present; perhaps he himself could be the reader, as in the case of Gregory of Nyssa reading the *Contra Eunomium* to Jerome and Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople, or Synesius reading the *On Providence* to his circle in the city; but the author could also be far away, as is the case of letters read by the addressee to local circles. In fact, the abundant evidence of letter-reading in front of an audience in comparison with other genres can be explained by the fact that in the case of letters the author could not be present and hence the addressee felt the need to inform him of the reading, whereas other genres, such as homilies and speeches, presuppose and don't address the context of the performance. These literary circles and their activities have been studied by Guglielmo Cavallo: on the subject of readings, he stresses the performative aspect, stating that reading was an outright recitation meant as a kind of show. The practice went back to Second Sophistic *recitationes* in the imperial age and continued in Byzantine times with circles such as that of Photius[130]. The exclusive milieu of the participants to these recitations, as witnessed by Synesius, meant that the audience of an oral performance—especially in the case of letters or other elaborate writings—did not differ substantially from the target of a written publication of the same kind of works. Declamations, poetry, and skilfully crafted letters circulated orally and in written form through social networks of educated and competent acquaintances of the author.

There are traces of such practices in Gregory's works. An interesting example is in the poem against Maximus, II, 1, 41:

> Λέγειν, γράφειν, θέατρα συλλέγειν, σύγε
> Κρότους ἐγείρειν μηδὲν εὐλαβούμενος.
> Βραχεῖς μέν εἰσι τῶν ἀκουόντων σοφοί·
> Πολλοὶ δὲ Μάξιμοί τε καὶ παράφοροι.
> Τούτοις ἀρέσκειν, τοὺς δὲ σοφοὺς χαίρειν ἐᾶν,
> Τοὺς ἐσμιλευμένους τε καὶ συνηγμένους
> (II, 1, 41, 24–29)[131]

> declaiming, writing, gathering theatres,
> to arouse applauses you clearly had no reserve:
> few are the experts in the audience,
> but many the Maximuses and the deranged;
> agreeable to these, and goodbye to the experts,
> those thoroughly polished and frowning.

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129 Particularly relevant for Synesius' case are the *auditoria* found at Kom el-Dikka (Alexandria; see Derda/Markiewicz/Wipszycka 2007), as well as the *Odeion* in Tolemais and the theatre attested in Cyrene (see Kreikenbom 2012, 23). These spaces are good candidates for the oral performance of learned works of rhetoric and poetry, and may well have been present outside of Egypt and Lybia.
130 Cavallo 2007, 73–86; Cavallo 2010.
131 See also Prudhomme 2006, 199.

The passage, referring to Maximus's literary activity, is full of terms familiar from Synesius's letters: the verbs of literary activity are "declaiming" (λέγειν) and "writing" (γράφειν), stressing the double channel, oral and written, of literature; the gathered audience of public performances is called θέατρον; and, contrarily to what was clearly the norm, Maximus's theatres are poorly supplied with true experts (σοφοί), those whom Gregory describes as "thoroughly polished" (ἐσμιλευμένοι), with the same verb Synesius used for the audience of the Constantinopolitan Panhellenium (ἀποσμιλεύοντες). The rarity of the verb and the shared context of recitations in Constantinople lead one to suspect that this is not a coincidence, but that this substantival participle was something of a nickname for a concrete circle in Constantinople[132]. Anyway, these common traits between Synesius and Gregory clearly suggest that Gregory knew the reality of declamations for educated circles. This can be confirmed with more references. Another interesting passage is in Gregory's *or.* 4, a speech that scholars think Gregory never delivered, but only circulated in written form[133]. Almost at the beginning of the speech, Gregory asks the rhetorical question of "who shall install a theatre worthy of the thanksgiving" represented by his speech[134]. As noted by Elm, the theme of theatre is a red thread of this oration, and it has the function of criticising Julian's religious practices[135]. However, in this case, given its position at the beginning of the discourse and its phatic function, the reference to a theatre could point to the expected audience of a declamation, whether or not this was in fact recited in front of a "theatre". There are other passages in which Gregory employs the word "theatre" (θέατρον), and in some

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132 The root is most common in the composite διασμιλεύω, a verb used to express refinement and subtlety since its first attestation, a fragment of Alexis on the Pythagoreans transmitted by Athenaeus (πυθαγορισμοὶ καὶ λόγοι / λεπτοὶ διεσμιλευμέναι τε φροντίδες, Athen. *dipnos.* 4, 52, 20–21). With the same meaning, the verb is employed frequently by Cyril, to signify a clear-cut, articulated or subtle line of argument (Συνίεμεν δὲ ἡμεῖς λεπτῶς τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως, Cyrill. Alex. *De trinitate* 622; ὀρθῶς ἔχοντά τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως, *De incarnatione* 678; λεπτῶν τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένων ἐννοιῶν, *De adoratione et cultu* 17; λεπτῶς τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως δοκιμάζειν, *AConcOec*, 1, 1, 6, 13). The verb is employed on one of Cometas' epigrams on his edition of Homer, to signify the correct division he introduced in the exemplars: στίξας διεσμίλευσα ταύτας ἐντέχνως (*Anth. Gr.* 15, 38, 3). In two of Dioscorus' poems, the term is a title of prestige: πανταρίστου καὶ διεσμιλευγμένου (*frg.* 10, 4; 11, 4). The form employed by Synesius, ἀποσμιλεύω, is rarer but attested in contemporary literature: it occurs in another letter by him (ἵνα ἡμῶν τι τοῦ βαρβάρου μέρους ἐντεῦθεν τυχὸν ἀποσμιλευθείη, Synes. *ep.* 159) and in the *Dion* (τὸ λέξιν καθῆραί τε καὶ ἀποσμιλεῦσαι, 8, 29) always in the sense of linguistic purity; and both Julian and Themistius use it with the same meaning (Ἐργάτης γάρ ἐστι καὶ τούτων ἀγαθός, οὐκ ἀποσμιλεύων οὐδὲ ἀπονυχίζων τὰ ῥήματα οὐδὲ ἀποτορνεύων τὰς περιόδους καθάπερ οἱ κομψοὶ ῥήτορες, Iulian. Imp. *or.* 2, 77A; ἐκμελετᾶν διὰ βίου συγκοπάς τε ὀνομάτων καὶ ἀποθλίψεις καὶ ῥήματα ἀποσμιλεύειν, Themist. *or.* 21, 251B). The simple form σμιλεύω employed by Gregory is a *hapax*: using the simple instead of the composite is a known poetic gesture, which proves Gregory's care for poetic language even when writing iambs (Prudhomme 2006, 104–120).
133 Demoen 1996, 69.
134 Ἐμοὶ δὲ θύοντι θυσίαν αἰνέσεως σήμερον, καὶ τὴν ἀναίμακτον τῶν λόγων τιμὴν ἀνάπτοντι, τίς θέατρον περιστήσει τῇ χάριτι παρισούμενον; (*or.* 4, 3)
135 Elm 2012, 348–253.

he means the audience of a speech: this is often the case in passages with a phatic function—that is, where Gregory addresses his audience[136]. In two cases, the word is used for the audience of someone teaching or declaiming, as an emblem of ambition[137]. All the passages referred to here prove that Gregory knew the practice of θέατρα, recitations of literary works in front of a selected audience of connoisseurs. Furthermore, McLynn has demonstrated that one of Gregory's poems, II, 2, 1, was recited during such an occasion and then prepared in written form as a gift to the addressee, who was present at the performance[138]. Here again, oral and written publication cross, as the two different mediums, the target of which was, however, the same. Finally, *ep.* 176 proves clearly that in at least one instance Gregory's poetry was orally performed by other people: writing to the rhetor Eudoxius, Gregory mentions some outrageous iambs written by himself and recited to his addressee by a third person, Valentinus[139]. It is likely that Gregory had spread a poetic invective among his acquaintances and then one of those, Valentinus, read it to other people of his circle, to which Eudoxius also belonged.

Once we have assessed the methods and occasions of literary publication, it is necessary to identify some concrete traits of Gregory's audience, in particular the audience of his poems on bishops. To do so, we have to adopt the distinction between an implied or inner audience and a real-life or intended audience—that is, between the characters addressed in the poems, to whom the poems are purported to be aimed, and the people who, in the mind of the author, should have read the poems[140]. The inner audience and purported occasion of the poems have been already analysed at §1.1.1. Even though the four poems that are the subject of the present book's discussion of Gregory treat the same subject and share many themes and images, each has a different implied audience: II, 1, 10 is aimed at the congregation in Constantinople, II, 1, 13 to the bishops of the council, II, 1, 12 moves between the bishops and the congregation, sometimes addressing a single counterpart, and II, 1, 17 seems to be a soliloquy. A clue to the context of these poems comes from the beginning of II, 1, 11, *On His Own Life*, a work scholars have frequently linked both thematically and chronologically to II, 1, 12,

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136 ἐμοὶ δὲ λύει τὴν γλῶσσαν, καὶ ὑψοῖ τὴν φωνὴν, ὡς σάλπιγγος, ἡ παροῦσα εὐεργεσία, καὶ τὸ κάλλιστον τοῦτο θέατρον, τὰ τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ διεσκορπισμένα, συνηγμένα εἰς ἓν (*or.* 6, 7); Βούλεσθε δάκρυα τῷ θεάτρῳ κινήσω, καὶ αὐτῷ γε ἴσως τῷ καρτερικωτάτῳ, καὶ τῶν παθῶν κρείσσονι, ἑνὸς τῶν τότε γενομένων ἐπιμνησθείς; (25, 10); Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνεκαθήραμεν τῷ λόγῳ τὸ θέατρον, φέρε τι περὶ τῆς ἑορτῆς ἤδη φιλοσοφήσωμεν, καὶ συνεορτάσωμεν ταῖς φιλεόρτοις καὶ φιλοθέοις ψυχαῖς (39, 11).
137 πᾶσιν βοῶμεν· "ὃς θέλει, δεῦρ' εἰσίτω, / κἂν δίστροφός τις ἢ πολύστροφος τύχῃ. / θέατρόν ἐστι πᾶσιν ἠνεῳγμένον, / πανήγυρις ἔστηκεν· (referring to bad bishops, II, 1, 11, 1725–1728); Θέλεις λόγοις βοᾶσθαι, / Καὶ συλλέγειν θέατρα; / Ποθεῖς νόμους πιπράσκειν / Οὐκ ἐνδίκοις παλαισμοῖς, / Φέρειν τε καὶ φέρεσθαι / Πρὸ βημάτων ἀθέσμων; (referring to the usual ambitions of a rhetor, II, 1, 88, 41–46).
138 McLynn 2012a, 187–188.
139 Ἦ που τῶν ἰάμβων ἡμῖν μνησικακεῖς, ὧν ὁ κακῶς ἀπολούμενος Οὐαλεντῖνος προσέπτυσε, καὶ ταῦτα σοῦ θέλοντος (*ep.* 176, 2). McLynn 1997, 300.
140 Demoen 1996, 64–65; Elm 2012, 465.

On Bishops, and which presents a shorter version of the speech Gregory revisited in II, 1, 13[141]. Since II, 1, 13 is tightly linked to II, 1, 10, it is not wrong to say that the *On His Own Life* is at the centre of our texts, with the exception of II, 1, 17, which, both for its genre and its less polemical style, can be considered the group's outlier. Now, the *On His Own Life* is clearly aimed at the congregation in Constantinople:

> Πρὸς δ' ὑμᾶς λόγος,
> τοὺς ἦν ὅθ' ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ νῦν ἀλλοτρίους,
> ὅσοι τε ὁμοδοξοῦντες, εἴτε τις νόθος·　　　　　10
> πάντες γὰρ ἡμῖν εὐμενεῖς μεμυκόσιν.
> ἄνδρες, τὸ κλεινὸν ὄμμα τῆς οἰκουμένης,
> οἳ κόσμον οἰκεῖθ', ὡς ὁρῶ, τὸν δεύτερον,
> γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης κάλλος ἠμφιεσμένοι,
> Ῥώμη νεουργής, εὐγενῶν ἄλλων ἕδος,　　　　　15
> Κωνσταντίνου πόλις τε καὶ στήλη κράτους,
> ἀκούσατ', ἄνδρες, ἀνδρὸς ἀψευδεστάτου
> καὶ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντος ἐν πολλαῖς στροφαῖς,
> ἐξ ὧν ὑπάρχει καὶ τὸ γιγνώσκειν πλέον.
> (II, 1, 11, 8–19)

> For you are these words,
> those once mine but now estranged,
> those of the same faith and the bastard, if any,
> for all are benevolent towards us, now that we shut up.
> Oh men, glorious renown of the world,
> you who seem to inhabit the second universe,
> wrapped in the beauty of land and sea,
> Oh, newly built Rome, seat of the other nobles,
> city of Constantine and pillar of the empire,
> hark, o men, a most truthful man,
> and a much suffering one, through many tides,
> whence comes more understanding.

One could not ask for a clearer definition of the congregation of Constantinople and its role as addressee of Gregory's apology. These lines even contain the name of the city, Κωνσταντίνου πόλις (16). Hence, it is no surprise that scholars have been consistent in defining Gregory's intended audience: both his autobiographical poem and the anti-bishop polemic of II, 1, 10; 12 and 13 are aimed at Gregory's supporters and contacts in Constantinople, whom, we know from his letters, he kept entertaining[142]. These poems, as recognised by McLynn, offer talking points to Gregory's loyalists to counter differing narrations of the events in 379–381[143]. Gregory had to defend his legacy in a context of competing interpretations of the council, among which the Antiochian line defended

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[141] McLynn 1997, 299–301; Elm 1999, 9; McGuckin 2001a, 371–385; McGuckin 2001b, 160. On the common themes of II, 1, 11 and II, 1, 13 see §1.1.1 n. 34.

[142] Demoen 1996, 66; McLynn 1997.

[143] McLynn 1997, 302.

Nectarius and Flavian and the Western and Alexandrian one supported Maximus and Paulinus[144]. In the first years after the council, matters were far from settled, and it made sense for Gregory to try to influence the outcome and interpretation of the council. His poems were instrumental in making his influence felt in the capital and, possibly, even at court. Since poems underwent the double process of publication already described, they could be sent in written form to the city from afar and at the same time spread to Gregory's nearer acquaintances in Cappadocia, in order to both build a local consensus and exert an influence on the capital. In the city, they were not only a suitable and convincing résumé of the main arguments of Gregory's polemic, as McGuckin says[145]. Their oral performance could nourish the life of local circles of Gregorian supporters or respond to similar pieces of polemic from other parties. Furthermore, the choice of poetry tells us something of Gregory's room for manoeuvring in Constantinople: because poetry could hardly be directed to the great majority of Christians in the city, but was usually performed for the special few, we can suppose that Gregory could not claim the attention of the whole community, but only of small groups of supporters. Even some formal features of these poems find a justification in their aim: the repetition of themes and arguments from one poem to another, for example, even though it is a feature of the whole of Gregory's works, here could have the function of hammering on the same concepts for the sake of persuasion. At the same time, the variations that these concepts undergo in metre, context, and choice of words, which have led scholars to doubt Gregory's command of the difference between genres, could be explained as virtuosic "variations on a theme" by a skilful rhetor for his educated audience. The selected few in Constantinople surely could appreciate Callimachean versatility.

1.2.3 Conclusion

Concerning the audience and the modes of publication of Ephrem and Gregory's poetry, many differences remain, but the overall frame is more similar than it appeared at the beginning. Of the antitheses mentioned at the beginning, only the one regarding liturgy is really relevant. We now know that both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry developed in an environment where writing and orality were by no means strictly distinguished: poems were composed with the prospect of an oral performance, and orality could play a role in their composition; and yet writing allowed for a wider circulation of the product and for its survival after the performance. In this environment, no private poetry could exist, because there was always a community around the poet, whether a social network of Christian landowners or a group of ascetically minded pupils. These

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144 See §5.1.2; for Maximus in particular: §3.1.1.3 n. 57.
145 On Gregory's hijacking of the conciliar formulas and his literary and political moves after the Council: McGuckin 2001a, 371–385.

people not only attended to the written dissemination of the poets' works in space (circulation) and time (transmission), but they were also the texts' preferred audience. Both Gregory and Ephrem could count on an inner circle of connoisseurs and supporters. The difference lies in the relationship between the inner circle and the community at large. Ephrem's liturgical poetry passed *through* the inner circle of the *bnay qyāmā* to the whole congregation, and therefore it had more popular features. The foundational moment of such a poetry was liturgy, the moment in which the selected few, the *bnay qyāmā*, brought to God their own offering in the form of song, thus displaying it to the whole community. However, at least in the case of the poems on bishops, the social width of Ephrem's audience was balanced by its geographic limitations: these poems are concerned with the relationship between bishop and community; therefore, they have no clear bearing on disputes affecting the church at large: they are not, in other words, ecumenic. On the contrary, Gregory's poems rarely address his relationship with the larger congregation in Constantinople, a theme he could address in the homilies preached in the city. The selected few in Cappadocia and in Constantinople, and even the community at large when it is mentioned, are the centres from which Gregory's poetry should radiate to the whole ecumene. Gregory is concerned with the battles fought in the church at large and which involve opposite arrays of bishops, and not with the relationship between bishop and community.

On the one hand, the different perspectives through which Ephrem and Gregory consider the figure of the bishop are due to their different geographic contexts: Ephrem is at the extreme border of the empire, whereas Gregory is trying to defend his tenure as the bishop of the most central see of the church of his days. On the other hand, the different foci influence the choices of publication and performance methods, which, as we have seen, were flexible enough to accommodate different needs both in the Syriac and in the Greek context. For we are not to assume that the foregoing considerations can be indiscriminately extended to the whole of Gregory's or Ephrem's corpora. It is likely that, if we compared different works—as, for example, the *Poemata arcana* of Gregory with Ephrem's *Poems on Faith*—we would have found many more similarities. However, the differences highlighted in the case of the poems on bishops show clearly the different perspectives through which the two poets, due to their different environment, treated the same subject.

1.3 Why poetry?

In the third part of this chapter, I will try to answer a fundamental question: Why poetry? Specifically, why did Ephrem and Gregory choose to comment on such a prosaic theme as bishops through the medium of poetry? In doing so, I will take as a starting point the four reasons given by Gregory to write poetry in his II, 1, 39 (33–57), but will also expand on them with reference to contemporary sources in order to contextualise the speech act of poetry in the cultural codes of their time. For this reason, the four

sections of my treatment do not coincide with (but do cover completely) Gregory's four motivations. In the first section, I will show the peculiar aesthetic value poetry had for Gregory, Ephrem, and their contemporaries, relating that value to the domain of rhetoric (in the case of Gregory), the domain of theology (for Ephrem), and the contexts of publication the genre required. In the second section, I will analyse the less studied motivations given by Gregory, those that connect poetry with the poet's own spiritual welfare, thereby recovering the complex strategy of self-presentation he deploys in the poems on bishops to acquire legitimacy and to delegitimise his opponents. Such a self-presentation would have been impossible outside the genre of poetry, which becomes for this reason an essential facet of these texts. Less can be said of Ephrem in this respect. In the third section, beginning with the expression ξένοι of II, 1, 39, 48–50, I will discuss the relationship between poetry and heresy witnessed by ancient sources, especially fifth-century ecclesiastical histories. This relationship is not wholly absent from Gregory's and Ephrem's poetry, but it needs to be downsized in favour of a more generically public role of poetry in conducting polemics and politics. Both our authors are easily read in this context. Finally, I will examine the didactic import of poetry in late antiquity, demonstrating how both Ephrem and Gregory did not write only to affect current events and people, but to exert a lasting influence on Christian education. At the end of this discussion, it should appear clearly what complex of motivations—partly similar, partly different—brought Gregory and Ephrem to choose poetry, of all genres, to talk about bishops. This will also justify my proposal to study these texts together with the methods of literary analysis.

1.3.1 Aesthetic value of poetry

From our modern perspective, the author's choice of a genre tends to be motivated by aesthetic reasons. If an author chooses to express himself through poetry, it is because he believes poetry has a peculiar aesthetic value—because, for example, the metre or the imagery adds something to his expression—that could not have been achieved by other means. However, this stance is by no means obvious, especially when we speak of ancient authors. The matter is all the more worthy of discussion because we treat poems concerned with themes remote from our notion of lyricism: Ephrem's poems praise and defend different bishops, while at the same time presenting them as models of behaviour; Gregory criticises bishops through a fictive reconstruction of real acts of expression (speeches and letters), which, however, did not occur in poetic form, nor in the same manner as that in which they are presented in their poetic reconstruction. In both cases, we face a content that, according to our standards, is more suited for a prose elaboration than a poetic one.

In the case of Gregory, we even have an osmosis between prose and poetry, by way of common themes and even literal reprises between speeches and poems[146]. This has been noticed by scholars throughout Gregory's oeuvre, with reprises of words and themes occurring not only in poems and speeches, but also in poems in different metres and different genres. This circumstance has led many scholars to doubt that Gregory had a clear perception of the boundaries between genres or that he appreciated poetry as in any way different from rhetoric: it goes without saying that this stance is usually coupled with a harsh, when not outright scornful, judgement on the value of Gregory's poetry[147]. For Milovanovic-Barham, Gregory is concerned only with the content of his works and pays little attention to the various forms he uses[148]. Her claim leans on a passage from Gregory himself (II, 1, 12, 267–287), in which the poet stresses the independence of content and form and the greater importance of content compared to form[149]. As a confirmation, one could quote also the acknowledgement at II, 1, 39, 47–51, that θεωρία—that is, "the inner meaning" of a text—is much more important for Christians than the outward appearance of style[150]. Moreover, Gregory's tendency to blur the boundaries between prose and poetry originates in the classroom practice of the paraphrase and in contemporary rhetorical thought, where poetry is subsumed under rhetorical categories—for example, panegyric[151]. Hose echoes Milovanovic-Barham's judgement in the context of a wider consideration of late antique Greek poetry, in which he stresses the restraining power exercised on it by educational systems: in his view, Greek poetry in late antiquity fails to emancipate itself from the classroom exercises, and it can be reduced to those exercises and nothing more[152]. Besides the fact that Gregory's poetry fails to be independent from prose, Milovanovic-Barham, in keeping with Keydell's results, highlights also Gregory's lack of command of poetic language

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146 The phenomenon is attested throughout Gregory's oeuvre. The specific cases occurring in our poems will be considered when commenting singular themes present in the poems.

147 Fundamental in this line of studies are Keydell 1953 (especially 137–139 and 142) and Jungck 1974, 22–-24.

148 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 498.

149 Ἔχει γὰρ οὕτω· διττὸς ἡμῖν πᾶς λόγος, / Λέξεις τε καὶ νοῦς· αἱ μὲν, οἷον ἔκτοθεν / Ἔσθημ', ὁ δ' ἔνδον σῶμα ἠμφιεσμένον. / Καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄμφω καλά, τοῖς δὲ θάτερον, / Ἢ αἰσχρὸν αὖθις – ὡς μάθησις ἢ φύσις. / Ἡμῖν δὲ τοῦ μὲν ἐκτὸς οὐ πολὺς λόγος, / Ὅπως ποθ' ἔξει, τοῦ δ' ἔσω λίαν πολύς· / Ἐν νῷ γάρ ἐστιν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτηρία, / Πλὴν ἐκλαλουμένῳ τε καὶ δηλουμένῳ / Πηγῆς τί κέρδος ἐστὶν ἐμπεφραγμένης; / Τί δ' ἡλιακῆς ἀκτῖνος, ἣν κρύπτει νέφος; / Τοιοῦτόν ἐστι νοῦς σοφὸς σιγώμενος, / Οἷον ῥόδου τὸ κάλλος, εἰ κάλυξ σκέπει / Οὐκ εὐπρεπής· τὸ τερπνὸν ἐκφαίνει δ', ὅταν / Αὔραις ῥαγεῖσα τὸν τόκον θεατρίσῃ. / Εἰ δ' ἦν ἀεὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐσκεπασμένον, / Οὐδ' ἄν τις ἦρος ἦν χάρις τοῦ τιμίου (II, 1, 12, 267–287).

150 Τούτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχρωσμένοις λόγοις / Εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ (II, 1, 39, 50–51).

151 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 499. See: πανηγυρικὸν γὰρ πρᾶγμα δήπουθέν ἐστι ποίησις ἅπασα καὶ πάντων γε λόγων πανηγυρικώτατον ... ὅπερ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Δημοσθένης ἡμῖν κατὰ τὸν πολιτικὸν λόγον ἔν τε τῷ συμβουλευτικῷ καὶ δικανικῷ καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἐν τῷ πεζῷ πανηγυρικῷ, τοῦτ' ἂν Ὅμηρος εἴη κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν, ἣν δὴ πανηγυρικὸν λόγον ἐν μέτρῳ λέγων εἶναί τις οὐκ οἶμαι εἰ διαμαρτήσεται. (Hermogenes *De ideis* 2, 10). Cf. the oratorical structure of the longer poems II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 (§1.1.1).

152 Hose 2004, on Gregory especially 21–24; Hose 2006.

proper, especially in regard to the distinctions of metres and styles in relation to different contents: it appears that Gregory can express the same theme in the same manner using iambs and hexameters and in dramatic, elegiac, and Homeric language[153]. Given these premises, the motivations Milovanovic-Barham attributes to Gregory for his choice of poetry are unrelated to the genre itself and its structural characters: in Milovanovic-Barham's view, the value of poetry for Gregory is neither expressive (that is, the form is not chosen to suit the content) nor practical, because poetic diction could not reach (in Milovanovic-Barham's view) a wide public. It is more of a pragmatic value, like a gesture accompanying the words proper: Gregory wrote poetry to appropriate the prestige associated with classical models and to claim back those models for Christianity after Julian's effort to bind them to pagan religion[154]. While there is more than a parcel of truth in this view, it still needs much nuancing, especially in light of more recent research.

Prudhomme, with a detailed analysis of a wider corpus of Gregory's poems, has concluded that, despite the apparent equivalence of metres and genres, there is in fact a general trend towards assigning the same themes to the same metres in Gregory: apologetic and polemic poems are overwhelmingly written in iambs, laments are written in the elegiac metre, and biblical and theological subjects tend to be cast in hexameters[155]. Gregory diversifies not only the epic and elegiac lexicon from the palette of iambic poetry, but he consciously looks for more poetic solutions in iambs than in prose. This demonstrates that his poetry is no mere versification of prose works, but an authentic literary effort[156]. His tendency to blur the boundaries of genres must be understood, according to Prudhomme, as an adherence to the experimental poetic of Callimachus.

Gregory's appreciation of the peculiar aesthetic value of poetry is apparent also from his explicit statements. Poetry, it is often repeated, has a peculiar sweetness, the ability to entertain, give pleasure, or enchant the audience, independently from its contents. This theme is prominent in Gregory's II, 1, 39, where he adopts the commonplace image of honey poured on the brims of a cup containing a bitter medicine in order to make a child drink the medicine: the medicine is stern content; the honey is the sweetness of poetic form[157]. But this idea keeps coming up in the poem: pagan poetry is

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153 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502.
154 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 503.
155 Prudhomme 2006, 78–106.
156 Prudhomme 2006, 106–120.
157 II, 1, 39, 37–41; Prudhomme 2006, 211; the *topos* is most famously found in Lucretius, 1, 936–942. Prudhomme points out that Clement of Alexandria used it to justify the presence of poetry in the Bible, whereas the passage she adduces seems more of an allegorisation of music (note the key-word of allegory, ἀληθινὸν), with no reference to concrete songs: Ἄιδει δέ γε ὁ Εὔνομος ὁ ἐμὸς οὐ τὸν Τερπάνδρου νόμον οὐδὲ τὸν Κηπίωνος, οὐδὲ μὴν Φρύγιον ἢ Λύδιον ἢ Δώριον, ἀλλὰ τῆς καινῆς ἁρμονίας τὸν ἀίδιον νόμον, τὸν φερώνυμον τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ᾆσμα τὸ καινόν, τὸ Λευιτικόν, «νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθες ἁπάντων»· γλυκύ τι καὶ ἀληθινὸν φάρμακον πειθοῦς ἐγκέκραται τῷ ᾄσματι (Clem. Alex. *protr.* 1, 2, 4). Gregory uses the same language of sweetness, pleasure and persuasion, but turns it concrete. Hermo-

"ornate" (κεχρωσμένοι λόγοι), and so also Christian speaking can have "leonine grace" (χάρις λεόντιος); Old Testament hagiographers used the pleasure (τὸ τέρπνον) of poetry as a vehicle for its good content (ὄχημα τοῦ καλοῦ); in the same way, Gregory mixes a bit of pleasure in the hard contents of Christianity to allow younger people to progress gradually in Christian education, like those who spice up their meals[158]. The pleasure of poetry is linked to that of games and playing, which in one sense belittles it, but at the same time acknowledges a peculiar place and value to poetry[159]. The very same passage of II, 1, 12, 267–287 used by Milovanovic-Barham to argue for Gregory's lack of interest in poetry can be brought up in connection to II, 1, 39 to argue the opposite: it is true that Gregory sharply distinguishes form and content of language and that he adopts a utilitarian view, stressing the value of content as a κέρδος, a gain; yet, at the same time, he underlines that this content must be expressed and that, even if any expression is good enough, an effective expression is much better. For, says Gregory, if an ugly cup covers the petals of the rose, then its beauty has no use and spring has no pleasure, whereas if the cup "pushes" the flower "on stage" (θεατρίσῃ, 281), then the beauty becomes apparent. Language must "put" content "on stage"[160].

Admittedly, Gregory conceives form and content as each having much more autonomy than they do in the system of genres of classical antiquity: this autonomy is due both to rhetorical education, as pointed out by Milovanovic-Barham, and to Christian exegesis, especially that of Origen, which carefully distinguished more layers of meaning for single forms in the Bible and stressed apologetically the contrast between the lack of refinement of biblical Greek and the deep truth of its content[161]. This contrast goes back ultimately to Paul[162]. However, in the frame of the autonomy of form and content, Gregory holds poetry as a decoration of form, capable of creating pleasure in the audience and, in this way, enhancing persuasion. Poetry has also the character of a game,

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genes, too, stresses pleasure as one of the aims of poetry: καὶ κατ'αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν ποίησιν φύσει οὖσαν γλυκεῖαν παρὰ τὸν ἄλλον λόγον ἐκφαίνεται τὰ ἐπίθετα καὶ γλυκύτερά πως ὄντα καὶ πλείονα ποιοῦντα τὴν ἡδονήν. ... Σχήματα δὲ γλυκύτητος, ἅπερ καὶ ἀφελείας ἐλέγομεν εἶναι καὶ ἔτι καθαρότητος, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις καὶ τὰ τοῦ κάλλους καὶ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ κεκαλλωπισμένου (Hermogenes *De ideis* 2, 4).

158 II, 1, 39, 50.53.86–87.90–98.

159 II, 1, 39, 42–46.52; Prudhomme 2006, 212–213 for the connotations of this reduction of poetry to game.

160 Same interpretation of these lines as mine in Gautier 2002, 121, who rightly points to Sir. 20:30 (= 41:14–15) as a biblical precedent.

161 Prudhomme 2006, 476–478. See: ...τῇ κεκρυμμένῃ λαμπρότητι τῶν δογμάτων ἐν εὐτελεῖ καὶ εὐκαταφρονήτῳ λέξει ἀποκειμένῃ. 'ἔχομεν γὰρ θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν, ἵνα λάμψῃ ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ μὴ' νομισθῇ εἶναι 'ἐξ ἡμῶν' τῶν ἀνθρώπων. εἰ γὰρ αἱ κατηναξευμέναι τῶν ἀποδείξεων ὁδοὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐναποκείμεναι τοῖς βιβλίοις κατίσχυσαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 'ἡ πίστις' ἡμῶν ἂν εὐλόγως ὑπελαμβάνετο 'ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων' καὶ οὐκ 'ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ'· νῦν δὲ τῷ ἐπάραντι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς σαφὲς ὅτι 'ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα' παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς δεδένται 'οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως' (Orig. *princ.* 4, 1, 7, a passage contained in the *Philocalia* excerpted by Basil and Gregory, from which see also the fourth excerpt, *in Joh. comm.* 4).

162 1Cor. 2:1–5; 2Cor. 4:7; 1Thess. 1:5. See the poignant considerations on the aesthetic of formlessness brought about by Christianity in Averincev 1988, 91–94.

something futile but also suitable in certain moments of life. Therefore, Gregory's take on the value of poetry per se is very ambiguous, in that he belittles it and at the same time acknowledges its value as a mean of pleasure and persuasion. Maybe monastic criticisms of classical poetry, growing in the last part of the fourth century, account for Gregory's defensive and belittling attitude[163]. One could object that Gregory's notions of poetry were commonplace and therefore not very significant for ascertaining his attitude. However, the fact that Gregory repeats traditional views on poetry need not mean that he is employing them as simple arguments of defence, without any sincere adherence to them. If such claims were to be effectively persuasive, then they had to be perceived as true despite all their triteness: therefore, if in defending his poetry Gregory says that he employs this medium to draw young people near God's commandments with its pleasantness, we have to think that for Gregory and his readers poetry was, at least in theory, characterised by a pleasantness that could not be achieved with any other means. Saying, as does Hose, that the motivations Gregory gives for writing his poetry are false because the poetry doesn't meet our taste or is not of the same aesthetic value as that of classical poets is a *non sequitur*[164].

We can find this "decorative" conception of poetry in Ephrem, too. In particular, when criticising Bardaisan, Ephrem stresses the duplicity of his poetry, which conceals through sweet forms and music a dangerous content[165]. Here, as in Gregory's case, there is an element of cultural appropriation, in that Bardaisan is said to have written poetry only to usurp David's prestige, thus lending credibility to his own inventions[166].

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163 Prudhomme 2006, 26 and below, §1.2.3: in Sozomen, for example, admiration for *paideia* and the notion that poetry is above all a mean for propaganda, mostly employed by heretics, coexist. A similar ambiguity is found in Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellinus*: against the "pure and simple" (ἀκεραίοι), he defends the use of psalm-singing saying that it is not because of the pleasure of music, but for the beneficial effects on the souls that poetry and music were included in Scripture. Mentioning, though only to refuse it, the pleasure inherent to poetry and music, he confirms the idea that poetry was seen as pleasurable: Διὰ τί δὲ μετὰ μέλους καὶ ᾠδῆς ψάλλονται οἱ τοιοῦτοι λόγοι, ἀναγκαῖον μηδὲ τοῦτο παρελθεῖν. Τινὲς μὲν γὰρ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀκεραίων, καίτοι πιστευόντων εἶναι θεόπνευστα τὰ ῥήματα, ὅμως νομίζουσι διὰ τὸ εὔφωνον καὶ τέρψεως ἕνεκεν τῆς ἀκοῆς μελῳδεῖσθαι τοὺς ψαλμούς. Οὐκ ἔστι δὲ οὕτως· οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἡδὺ καὶ πιθανὸν ἐζήτησεν ἡ Γραφή· ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο ὠφελείας ἕνεκεν τῆς ψυχῆς τετύπωται (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 27, PG 27, 37); Τὸ ἄρα μετὰ μέλους λέγεσθαι τοὺς ψαλμοὺς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐφωνίας σπουδὴ, ἀλλὰ τεκμήριον τῆς ἁρμονίας τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ λογισμῶν. Καὶ ἡ ἐμμελὴς δὲ ἀνάγνωσις σύμβολόν ἐστι τῆς εὐρύθμου καὶ ἀχειμάστου καταστάσεως τῆς διανοίας (29, PG 27, 41).
164 Hose 2004, 24.
165 "With garments and beryls / he [Satan] adorned Bardaisan // on Marcion he put sackcloth / to blacken the children of Light" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 12, 1–4, where the adornment is a metaphor of the language); "In the dens of Bardaisan / tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (17, 1–6); "He distributed to the innocent / bitterness with sweetness" (53, 5, 7–8). Here, too, poetry is linked to young people.
166 "To David he wanted to look / to adorn himself with his beauty // to be lauded like him" (*hymn. haer.* 53, 6). In the case of Gregory, Milovanovic-Barham claimed that his employ of poetry was motivated by the desire to appropriate the prestige of Greek culture.

However, it is clear that Ephrem's conception of poetry is not limited to an imitation of David but has aesthetic values, for the forms of Syriac poetry, which Ephrem clearly mentions when speaking of Bardaisan's operation, are different from those of the Psalms. Therefore, the usurpation of David is linked to the choice of expression through poetry and music in general, while the idea of "edulcorating" heretic content is ascribed to poetry per se.

Except for the criticisms of Bardaisan, Ephrem is not very eager to distinguish content from form, even though we can read numerous passages stressing the pleasantness of poetry and singing and hence its aesthetic value[167]. In the case of our poems on the bishops, stanzas 2 and 12 of *CN* 17 are a good example of this idea: the poem is compared first to a garland offered to the bishops of Nisibis, and then to a picture of their virtue[168]. In the first image, Ephrem stresses the ability of poetry to order reality (the characters of the bishops) and to reproduce it in a pleasant form. Comparing poetry to a faithful painting, he underlines the capacity of the poem to represent faithfully and effectively the inner characteristics of people, in a manner similar to how the younger bishop was able to imitate his predecessor in his manners. Yet this is not clearly linked with Ephrem's choice to express himself in poetry: passages explaining the value of the pleasure conveyed by poetry in educating or persuading, as found in Gregory, are absent from Ephrem. This may hint that poetry was more favourably received in the Syriac-speaking area than in the Greek one and that Ephrem therefore felt less pressure to defend his choice of form than did Gregory. If this deduction is safe, then the idea that the ambiguous standing of poetry in contemporary Greek culture was due to Plato's criticism on the pagan side and to Egyptian monasticism and Origen's legacy on the Christian side gains credibility[169].

Among Ephrem scholars there is a widespread notion that the medium of poetry gave a peculiar character to Ephrem's thought, differentiating it from Greek and Latin theology, which was expressed mostly in prose. A similar claim has been put forward about Gregory, but it met scarce success precisely because the distinction of prose and poetry in this author is less marked than in Ephrem[170]. In the latter's case, scholars claim that poetry allowed for a more symbolic and less philosophical approach to theol-

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167 For example, *Resurr.* 2 is all concerned with the offering of the chant as a garland, thereby emphasising its pleasant nature and its dignity (because it can be offered to God), its ability to express joy and its liturgical value.

168 "In one love I will mix them / and a garland I'll weave them, // their flowers bright, / their blossoms sweet, // of him who was chief, and of his disciple" (*CN* 17, 2, 1–5); "Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted an image of both, / with the dyes of both, // that the fold may see their ornaments, / and the flock their beauties; // and since I am a speaking lamb / for You, God of Abraham, // in Abraham's tenure I praise You." (12).

169 Proudhomme 2006, 20–26, 476–478.

170 Špidlík 1985. A similar claim regarding Ambrose's poetry is put forward in Dunkle 2016.

ogy[171]. Ephrem's poems lack precise dogmatic definitions and the dialectic pace of their Greek and Latin counterparts. Instead, they employ typology, personifications, metaphors, striking antitheses, and parallels to convey a theological or exegetical message. Ephrem avoids giving a straightforward and abstract treatment of his subject and tends to weave together different passages or images from Scripture in an original way. That this attitude was purposeful is clear from many passages of the *hymn. fid.*, where the poet warns against an overly rationalistic approach to God, resulting in limited definitions and ultimately in heresy. After all, the Syriac theologians of the fifth century and onwards testify to this peculiarity of Ephrem's stance: in the midst of the christological controversies, they found their countryman increasingly unsatisfying and began to translate and lean on Greek writers to defend their positions. Ephrem's texts were accordingly purged of their more ambiguous statements[172]. For all this consensus, it is difficult to prove beyond doubt that poetry was an integral part of Ephrem's theological approach as opposed to prose, because Ephrem never draws such a distinction between prose and poetry, nor does he comment on his choice of the one or the other. There is a risk of superimposing (as some interpreters have consciously done) our postsymbolistic or phenomenological notion of poetry and symbol on Ephrem's choices. Nonetheless, at the beginning of his *Commentary on Genesis* (*comm. in Gen.*), a prose work, Ephrem says that he began the work unwillingly, at the insistence of friends, because he thought he had already explained everything in the homilies (*mēmrē*) and in the *madrāšē* (probably a reference to the *hymn. parad.*)[173]. Here, the difference between poetry and prose is that in poetry Ephrem expresses himself abundantly (*b-saggī'ātā*)—that is, exhaustively—while in prose he writes briefly (*b-karyātā*), explaining only the problematic passages of the biblical text[174]. Given Ephrem's clear preference for the poetic medium, as testified by the quantity and importance of his poetic works compared to prose, one can interpret the beginning of the *comm. in Gen.* as referring not to an accidental preference for poetic treatment over prose on this occasion, but to a more general trend of the author towards treating theological themes extensively in poetry and using prose for more circumstantial occasions and aims. This can corroborate my view that Ephrem used poetry as an integral part of his theological approach, even though the author does not explicitly say so or offer a precise definition of the features of poetry that commend its use to the theologian.

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171 I find the following works exemplar of this line of thought: Murray 1975; El-Khoury 1985; Brock 1992; Den Biesen 2006; Narinskaya 2013; the studies of T. Bou Mansour. See Mathews/Amar/McVey 1994, 45–47 (with notes), for a similar approach and more bibliography.

172 Butts 2017.

173 "I had not wanted to write a commentary on the first book of creation, lest we should now repeat what we had set down in the metrical homilies (*mēmrē*) and hymns (*madrāšē*). Nevertheless, compelled by the love of friends, we have written briefly of those things of which we wrote at length in the metrical homilies and in the hymns" (*comm. in Gen.*, translation at Mathews/Amar/McVey 1994, 67).

174 Mathews/Amar-McVey 1994, 60.

Until this point, the discourse has been rather general: we have determined that both Ephrem and Gregory acknowledge a peculiar aesthetic value to poetry, but we still have to understand why they chose to apply this value (or others still to be ascertained) to the theme of bishops. Ephrem's image of the garland suggests that the reason he chose poetry to praise the bishops was that he perceived poetry as more valuable than prose. The beauty of poetry embellishes its content, and a genre that embellishes is the most suitable for praise. However, one must not overemphasise aesthetic reasons in the choice of poetry: considering what we know about the performance conditions of Ephrem's *madrāšē*, this was also the genre that allowed the most direct connection of the poet with the congregation. In the case of Ephrem, genre still defines an occasion and an exclusive channel of communication. The possibility of addressing the congregation directly on the topic of its bishop during the liturgy was a powerful means for sending messages about the bishop and defending his legitimacy.

Gregory, in the four poems against bishops, does not state why he chose to express himself in poetry. As we will see, aesthetic considerations were not the only reasons to choose a genre, even in the case of Greek literature, where rhetoric and educational practice had considerably liberated the ancient genres from their original contexts and constraints. The long iambic poem II, 1, 12 is a poetic rendition of the real discourse, whose edited version is preserved as *or.* 42. In general, we can say that iambic poetry was traditionally divided into two strands, one of harsh invective and the other of moralising poems[175]. Therefore, it is only right that Gregory should choose iambic metre as the mode in which to launch his full-fledged attack against the bishops while at the same time moralising on the state of contemporary church. Furthermore, what he had written in iambs he could transpose into other genres without losing face: this is demonstrated by the already mentioned *ep.* 176, where Gregory asks the rhetor Eudoxius for a favour after admitting that he wrote denigratory iambs against him and downplaying the importance of this kind of attack[176]. Similarly, Gregory managed to open a cool but courteous exchange of letters and favours with his successor Nectarius, notwithstanding his clear and violent verbal attacks on Nectarius's person[177].

Gregory's last speech before he resigned at the council was never edited in prose, but only in the dramatised forms of hexametric poetry (II, 1, 13) and in a section of the iambic *On His Own Life* (II, 1, 11, 1828–1855). The epic version of the discourse is considerably expanded and focalised on the worthlessness of bishops, a theme the

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175 Agosti 2001, 231–233.

176 Ἤ που τῶν ἰάμβων ἡμῖν μνησικακεῖς, ὧν ὁ κακῶς ἀπολούμενος Οὐαλεντῖνος προσέπτυσε, καὶ ταῦτα σοῦ θέλοντος. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν ῥήτορος ἀνδρὸς καὶ δεινοῦ ἄνδρ' ἐπαμύνασθαι, ὁπότε τις πρότερον ἰαμβοποιεῖν τοιαῦτα κατετόλμησεν. Ἀλλ', Ἀχιλεῦ, δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν καὶ κίνησον αὖθις ἡμῖν τὴν γραφίδα, τὴν σὴν μελίαν· μὴ δόξῃς, μικρὰ πεπονθώς ... Ἡ μὲν οὖν παιδιὰ τοσαύτη καὶ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον. Ὁ δὲ οὐκέτι παιζόντων ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν σπουδαζόντων, τὸν γλυκύτατον υἱὸν ἡμῶν Νικόβουλον αὖθις ἐγχειρίζομέν σοι. ἀπαντᾶν εἰς μείζω, τὸν ἐπισκοπικὸν τρόπον (*ep.* 176, 2–3; 5).

177 McLynn 1997; McGuckin 2001a, 375–377; McGuckin 2001b, 163–164, 167.

iambic version doesn't even touch. The retellings of biblical episodes are abundant, which may account for the choice of Homeric poetry for this discourse: it mythologises the actual incident, which becomes a groundbreaking and epic moment, linking it to the epic Greek past and the biblical sacred history. The choice of hexameter for an invective is not without parallels: Claudian's two invectives, *In Rufinum* and *In Eutropium*, are framed as epic poems, except for the first book of *In Eutropium*, which is an inverted panegyric, a ψόγος. In the case of Claudian, however, the model of Roman satire is at work, too, so that occasional use of low language and aggressive "iambic" content feels more appropriate than in Gregory's Homeric diction[178]. II, 1, 10 and 17, with their elegiac form and content, are part of a larger constellation of poems, in which Gregory reflects on his past through the form of lament. Lament allows for a vaguer grasp on reality and for a representation of Gregory's own situation as a moral example relevant for anyone. In other words, these poems are not concerned with the exact narration of historical episodes, but with the communication of a certain image of their author. Through these frames, one can understand the choice of poetry to talk about bishops.

1.3.2 Poetry as spiritual exercise and the poet as ascetic

In this longer section, I will examine the first and fourth motivations for writing poetry that Gregory gives in *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39). The first motivation, in particular, can be brought into relation with the ancient practice of spiritual exercise, which in that period was being appropriated and adapted also by Christian authors. This idea, however, does not explain well Gregory's own presentation of our poems. Here, the fourth motive given at II, 1, 39 is much more interesting. I will then show how contemporary interpretations of the Psalms and classical poetry provided Gregory with the justification and form to vent his negative passions. His aim in this venting is not so much personal therapy, but to project a certain image of himself to the reader; to demonstrate that this is the case, I will analyse Gregory's treatment of two negative feelings, pain and rage. Pain, vented thanks to the elegiac and erotic tradition, allows Gregory to present himself as a martyr of public life, and therefore a legitimate public actor. Rage, on the other hand, seems more problematic for its deeply negative connotations in late antiquity, but the tradition of iamb, comedy, and Socratic enquiry allows for a justified expression of this socially destructive feeling. Gregory can thereby present himself as an outsider and the chastiser of bad bishops. Taking all these elements together, I will delineate the complex strategy of self-presentation that Gregory developed in the poems on bishops, which was possible only through the medium of classicising poetry. On the other side, Ephrem appears as a much more traditional Christian writer, anticipating trends of the subse-

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178 Long 1996, 65–106; see also Fo 1982, 70; Koster 1980, 298–351; Cameron 1970, 83–84. More on this at §5.2.

quent hagiography but without departing from Christian models of self-presentation. The cause of this difference between the two writers may be that, while Gregory speaks as a bishop to bishops in the second person, Ephrem praises bishops in the third person.

Of the four reasons Gregory gives for his writing poetry in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39), the first and the last are the ones less examined by scholarship[179]. Maybe this has to do with their prevalent psychological import and their apparent lack of cultural interest: Gregory says he writes in metre (μέτρα) to give a measure (μέτρα) to his logorrhoea and as a means of relief in his illness[180]. Yet there is something striking about the first reason, for Gregory explains that the constraint of metre should slow down his writing, thereby limiting the quantity of his output, whereas we know from the massive quantity thereof that he had no particular difficulty in writing metrically. How can we explain such a contradiction between statements and facts? Cues in this regard come from studies by McGuckin and Storin[181]: the whole poem should be read as an attempt by Gregory to recover the authority lost at the Council of Constantinople, and this idea of metre limiting excess in talking is no exception. In fact, the ambivalence of the word "measure" (μέτρον) and its derivatives is the common theme of the whole poem, where remarks about style and genre are conflated with moral critiques[182]: writing without metre is also writing without measure; a stylistic failure reflects a moral failure in controlling one's own expressions.

As was noted by Storin, this theme features prominently in the so-called *Poems on Silence* (II, 1, 34–38), a series of poems written during Lent 382, when Gregory took a temporary vow of silence, until Easter[183]. Gregory's vow didn't exclude writing, but instead encouraged it, so that Gregory wrote, with his own hand, a number of letters and poems during that Lent. The aim of this practice was to withdraw for a while from

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179 Some scholars did not even address them: Demoen 1993; Milovanonvic-Barham 1997; Hose 2004, 24; Simelidis 2009. McGuckin 2006, 209 takes into account the first motive. Proudhomme 2006, 205 quotes a passage of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which however is irrelevant, because it refers to the difference between stichic poetry and other genres, where the poet could vary the measure of the lines.

180 Πρῶτον μὲν ἠθέλησα, τοῖς ἄλλοις καμὼν, / Οὕτω πεδῆσαι τὴν ἐμὴν ἀμετρίαν· / Ὡς ἂν γράφων γε, ἀλλὰ μὴ πολλὰ γράφω, / Καμὼν τὸ μέτρον … Τέταρτον εὗρον τῇ νόσῳ πονούμενος / Παρηγόρημα τοῦτο, κύκνος ὡς γέρων, / Λαλεῖν ἐμαυτῷ τὰ πτερῶν συρίγματα, / Οὐ θρῆνον, ἀλλ' ὕμνον τιν' ἐξιτήριον (II, 1, 39, 34–37.54–57).

181 McGuckin 2006; Storin 2011.

182 Πολλοὺς ὁρῶν γράφοντας ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ / Λόγους ἀμέτρους, καὶ ῥέοντας εὐκόλως, / Καὶ πλεῖστον ἐκτρίβοντας ἐν πόνοις χρόνον, / Ὧν κέρδος οὐδὲν ἢ κενὴ γλωσσαλγία· (II, 1, 39, 1–4); οἱ γὰρ πλείονες / Τοῖς σφῶν μέτροις μετροῦσι καὶ τὰ τῶν πέλας, (29–30); Μέτρον κακίζεις· εἰκότως, ἄμετρος ὢν, / Ἰαμβοποιὸς, συγγράφων ἀμβλώματα. / Τίς γὰρ βλέποντα, μὴ βλέπων, ἐγνώρισεν; / Ἢ τίς τρέχοντι, μὴ τρέχων, συνέδραμε; / Πλὴν οὐ λέληθας, ὃ ψέγεις, ὠνούμενος. / Ὁ γὰρ κακίζεις, τοῦτό σοι σπουδάζεται, / Καὶ σφόδρ' ἀμέτρως, τὸ γράφειν ποιήματα. (69–77); Πλὴν ἴσθι πολλὰ καὶ Γραφαῖς μετρούμενα, / Ὡς οἱ σοφοὶ λέγουσιν Ἑβραίων γένους. / Εἰ μὴ μέτρον σοι καὶ τὰ νεύρων κρούματα, … (82–84); Τί οὖν κακίζεις τὴν ἐμὴν εὐμετρίαν, / Τοῖς σοῖς μέτροις σταθμώμενος τὰ τῶν πέλας (101–102).

183 Storin 2011, 243; Χείλεσι θῆκα θύρετρα. / Τὸ δ' αἴτιον, ὥς κε μάθοιμι / μύθων μέτρα φέρειν, παντὸς ἐπικρατέων (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 34, 11–12).

the public arena, eventually to come back with renewed authority[184]. After the council, Gregory had not resumed his role in Nazianzus, probably exploiting the ambiguity of his canonical position to spread his writings as the words of the bishop of Constantinople[185]. In that early phase, he battled rather directly his adversaries both in Cappadocia and in Constantinople through personal poems, letters, and the edition of some of his homilies. However, beginning from Lent 382, he changed his strategy and self-styling. To do so successfully, he had to withdraw from the political arena and restore an authoritative image. Hence, the choice of silence, accompanied by the rhetoric of measure in speaking: Gregory refused to become embroiled in violent and sterile polemics and presented himself as the detached ascetic, talking only with God. This way, the writings that issued from his silence purported to be devoid of any passion and personal interest, because they were not hasty reactions to the polemic of the day, but an exercise in detachment and *apatheia*. At the same time, Gregory's silence and his "measured" expression indicted his talkative enemies. We can interpret the first motivation for writing poetry in II, 1, 39 in a similar way. Indeed, II, 1, 39 may even belong to the same writing campaign as the poems written for Lent 382. In any case, Gregory presents his choice of writing poetry as an ascetic exercise in control and limitation of speech. This way, he invites us to see his poetry as impartial and disinterested, while he presents himself as an ascetic.

Gregory's first motivation implies the idea that the activity of writing poetry can exert a psychological effect on the agent. In particular, the constraint of metre should favour economy of words and thoroughly thinking through one's expressions. In this way, the product will be measured not only in terms of poetic metre but also as regards the passions expressed. Given this description, one can easily connect this notion of poetry to that of "moral" or "spiritual exercise": an act or proceeding which consciously influences itself, in order to produce a moral effect, to modify the self of its agent[186]. The association between writing and spiritual exercise is by no means new: the practice of a written examination of conscience, in particular, has both pagan and Christian precedents. In an often-quoted passage of the *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius has Anthony advise his fellow monks to write down their actions and the movements of their souls. In Anthony's words, the act of writing should serve as a substitute for the sight of other people, thereby enhancing shame for one's own falls and increasing awareness of the sins[187]. It is not at random that this exercise is introduced as a παρατήρησις, a word meaning

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184 Storin 2011, 242, 251, 253, 256–257.

185 McLynn 1997, 302.

186 See the definition of "moral exercise" quoted in Hadot 2005, 70.

187 Ἔστω δὲ καὶ αὕτη πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν τοῦ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν παρατήρησις· Ἕκαστος τὰς πράξεις καὶ τὰ κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς, ὡς μέλλοντες ἀλλήλοις ἀπαγγέλλειν, σημειώμεθα καὶ γράφωμεν· καὶ θαρρεῖτε, ὅτι, πάντως αἰσχυνόμενοι γνωσθῆναι, παυσόμεθα τοῦ ἁμαρτάνειν, καὶ ὅλως τοῦ ἐνθυμεῖσθαί τι φαῦλον. Τίς γὰρ ἁμαρτάνων θέλει βλέπεσθαι; ἢ τίς ἁμαρτήσας, οὐ μᾶλλον ψεύδεται, λανθάνειν θέλων; Ὥσπερ οὖν βλέποντες ἀλλήλους, οὐκ ἂν πορνεύσαιμεν, οὕτως, ἐὰν ὡς ἀπαγγέλλοντες ἀλλήλοις τοὺς λογισμοὺς γράφωμεν, μᾶλλον τηρήσομεν ἑαυτοὺς ἀπὸ λογισμῶν ῥυπαρῶν, αἰσχυνόμενοι γνωσθῆναι. Ἔστω οὖν ἡμῖν τὸ γράμμα ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμῶν τῶν συνασκητῶν· ἵνα, ἐρυθριῶντες γράφειν ὡς τὸ βλέπεσθαι, μήθ' ὅλως

"surveillance" and "observation", but also "taking note" and "taking notice" and even "observance". It is, to speak plainly, an exercise, a praxis to conform to (an "observance"), consisting of "surveillance" and "observation" of oneself, aimed, through the practical act of "taking notes", at "noticing" our shortcomings. As such, it is perfectly ascribed in the category of the traditional spiritual exercises, whose aim—as explained by Hadot—was raising one's own awareness (προσοχή) of his inner phenomena[188]. In a similar way, Gregory's resolve to write in metre is aimed at limiting the extension of his output to enhance its quality: the difficulty of metre should raise his awareness in choosing every single word, so that he avoids rashness and unsophistication of expression, thus mastering his words as the monk masters his passions[189]. In the interpreting of poetry as a spiritual exercise, another important element is the traditional use of rhetoric to move the imagination and to meditate, which is all the more important given the rhetorical character of Gregory's poetry. This use, like the use of writing in general, is nothing new, being attested in pagan philosophy[190]. Dating not much after Gregory, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* there is transmitted an evocative description of the *novissima* by Evagrius, explicitly meant to be long meditated upon and to enhance a moral response[191]. Therefore, in employing what in his time amounted to a rhetorical means—poetry—Gregory is subscribing to (and perhaps even influencing) a habitual practice in pagan philosophical contexts, but a rather recent addition to Christian ascesis. However, for all these parallels with contemporary Christian practice and historically attested pagan traditions, one must reckon with the novelty of Gregory's claim. Actually, in the Greek tradition there are no precedents for such an overt use of poetry as a spiritual exercise, and, in particular, the idea that the metre qua metre could have a moral effect on the poet is unparalleled[192]. Hence, the first motive Gregory adduces

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ἐνθυμηθῶμεν τὰ φαῦλα· οὕτω δὲ τυποῦντες ἑαυτούς, δυνησόμεθα δουλαγωγεῖν τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἀρέσκειν μὲν τῷ Κυρίῳ, πατεῖν δὲ τὰς τοῦ ἐχθροῦ μεθοδείας (Athan. *vit. Anton.* 55).

188 Hadot 2005, 74–75.

189 On mastery of the passions and spiritual exercise: Hadot 2005, 81–84.

190 Hadot 2005, 78.

191 *Apophth. patr.* 31, PG 65, 173.

192 The case of Gregory cannot be linked to the abundant descriptions of the moral effects of poetry on its hearers, nor to the widespread idea in Antiquity that the life of a poet mirrored the genre or the work for which he was most renowned. For in the first case, we are talking of effects on others, and not of the idea of poetry as care of the *self*, while in the second case, even though the ancient biographer shaped the *Vita* on the works, the perceived causation was the opposite: *because* he has lived such a life, he wrote such works. A third idea akin but not identical with Gregory's is that of the influence of music on morality, the so-called doctrine of *ethos*. A Christian example of the doctrine is in Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellinus:* Τῆς δὲ τοιαύτης τῶν λογισμῶν ἀταραξίας καὶ ἀκύμονος καταστάσεως εἰκὼν καὶ τύπος ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν Ψαλμῶν ἐμμελὴς ἀνάγνωσις. Ὥσπερ γὰρ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς νοήματα γνωρίζομεν καὶ σημαίνομεν δι' ὧν προφέρομεν λόγων, οὕτως, τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐν ψυχῇ ἁρμονίας τὴν ἐκ τῶν λόγων μελῳδίαν σύμβολον εἶναι θέλων ὁ Κύριος, τετύπωκεν ἐμμελῶς τὰς ᾠδὰς ψάλλεσθαι, καὶ τοὺς ψαλμοὺς μετ' ᾠδῆς ἀναγινώσκεσθαι (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 28, PG 27, 40); and on rhythm in particular: Οὕτως γὰρ καὶ καλῶς ψάλλων ῥυθμίζει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀνισότητος εἰς ἰσότητα ἄγει (29, PG 27,

for writing poetry must have sounded unusual to his audience. This is not a problem, because Gregory was not concerned about the novelty of his ascetic claims, as his vow of silence demonstrates, and also because the idea is made understandable by the larger context of puns on the ambivalence of "measure"/"metre"[193].

Gregory's fourth aim in writing poetry is like the first, because both are a form of self-care, whereas the second and third are more focused on the audience. It is not at random that Gregory at line 56 describes poetry as "speaking to myself" (λαλεῖν ἐμαυτῷ). As the fourth motivation, Gregory adduces the comfort (παρηγόρημα) that poetry brings in his illness. He compares himself to a swan because the comfort of poetry comes in the last part of his life, when, after much disappointment, he has had to withdraw from church politics: this is shown by his use of the adjective ἐξιτήριος to describe his poetry[194]. Poetry is a swan song, a farewell to life in general and to ecclesiastical life in particular. In this sombre context, however, Gregory sees poetry as a hymn (ὕμνος), a thankful expression, which brings relief[195]. As we will see, the idea of poetry as a relief has a long tradition in Greek culture; however, through this idea Gregory is latching on to the contemporary "psalmodic movement" in Christianity. As noted by scholars, Christian writers and advocates of the monastic life in the fourth century strongly recommend the singing of the biblical Psalms, often as a kind of "care of the self"[196]. In time, this movement led to the canonisation of the Liturgy of the Hours. The standard work in defence of psalm singing in the fourth century is Athanasius's *Letter to Marcellinus.* Among other themes in this work, there is a long treatment of the effect of psalm singing on human passions and how, as Athanasius says, one can correct oneself (ἑαυτὸν διορθοῦσθαι) by reciting the psalm corresponding to one's passion[197]. In

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41). The difference with Gregory is that the doctrine of *ethos* concerns music, which is poetry but also melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structures, musical instruments, singing and dance, whereas Gregory speaks only of metre, which is just a component in the traditional doctrine of *ethos*. Moreover, the focus in the traditional doctrine is on the differences between genres of music, while for Gregory it is metre *as such* that exerts a moral effect.

193 On the novelty of the vow of silence: Storin 2011, 246–251.

194 This attribute, and his equivalents, appear in other places of Gregory's poetic oeuvre: the acrostich of I, 2, 31 describes the poem as χάρις ἐξοδίη; II, 1, 12, 812 introducing his last speech to the other bishops (see §5).

195 Τέταρτον εὗρον τῇ νόσῳ πονούμενος / Παρηγόρημα τοῦτο, κύκνος ὡς γέρων, / Λαλεῖν ἐμαυτῷ τὰ πτερῶν συρίγματα, / Οὐ θρῆνον, ἀλλ' ὕμνον τιν' ἐξιτήριον (II, 1, 39, 54–57). For the image of the swan and the refusal to sing a dirge (οὐ θρῆνον) in favour of a hymn, Prudhomme 2006, 219–220: common lore wanted the swan to sing a dirge before dying, as witnessed by Aeschyl. *Ag.* 1444–1446; however, in Eur. *Herc.* 691–695, the chorus compares themselves to an old swan singing a hymn to Heracles; Plato employed the image in the *Phaedo* and criticised the traditional view of the swan singing in sadness for its death.

196 Dunkle 2016, 21–24; Prudhomme 2006, 221–223 on Christian and pagan precedents of the idea of poetry as consolation.

197 Τοιαύτης οὖν τῆς διατάξεως οὔσης τῶν Ψαλμῶν, ἔστι λοιπὸν δυνατὸν τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας εὑρεῖν ἐν ἑκάστῳ, καθὰ προεῖπον, τὰ κινήματα καὶ τὴν κατάστασιν τῆς ἰδίας ψυχῆς, οὕτως τε περὶ ἑκάστου

fact, Athanasius combines the traditional practice of singing the Psalms with the philosophical tradition of spiritual exercises. There are some similarities between Athanasius's treatment and Gregory's aims. First, even though Athanasius rules out pleasure as a legitimate cause for singing psalms, he nevertheless admits that music and poetry are in fact pleasurable, an attitude which Gregory shared (§1.3.1). Second, among the passions healed by the Psalms, Athanasius mentions grief, in keeping with Gregory's fourth aim and with other declarations[198]. But perhaps the most striking resemblance is their use of the biblical episode of Saul's healing by way of David's music. Athanasius uses it to demonstrate that singing the Psalms correctly benefits other people as well as the singer; Gregory, similarly, employs the example to defend his choice of poetry as useful[199]. The example as such is nothing extraordinary; the striking thing is that Gregory employs the stock scriptural argument in defence of psalm singing to defend his own poetry: here the similarities between Athanasius and Gregory end, and the differences begin. For Gregory is indeed latching on to the psalmodic movement, but only to defend his choice of writing poetry in classicising metre, an endeavour much more problematic than psalm singing in church. When Gregory brings the example of David, he is putting his poetry in the tradition of biblical and hence inspired poetry[200].

   Another major difference between Gregory's and Athanasius's views on poetry and its therapeutic effects is in the way this effect is accomplished. For Athanasius, singing

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τὸν τύπον καὶ τὴν διδασκαλίαν· καὶ τίνα μὲν λέγων ἀρέσκειν δύναται τῷ Κυρίῳ, διὰ ποίων δὲ ῥημάτων ἑαυτὸν διορθοῦσθαι δύναται, καὶ εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ εἰς ἀσέβειαν ἐκπίπτειν τὸν παρὰ τοιαῦτα λέγοντα (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 15, PG 27, 28). After this passage, there is a long list of passions and situations of human life, with the numbers of the psalms corresponding to them. Then, at paragraphs 27–29 there is a long and detailed treatment of the correspondence between inner harmony of the soul and outer harmony of the music.

198 Οὕτως τὸ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ ταραχῶδες καὶ τραχὺ καὶ ἄτακτον ἐξομαλίζεται· τὸ δὲ λυποῦν θεραπεύεται, ψαλλόντων ἡμῶν (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 28, PG 27, 40).

199 ψάλλοντες δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῒ, οὐ μόνον ἑαυτοὺς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς θέλοντας ἀκούειν αὐτῶν μεγάλως ὠφελοῦσιν. Ὁ γοῦν μακάριος Δαβὶδ, οὕτως καταψάλλων τοῦ Σαοὺλ, αὐτὸς εὐηρέστει τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ τὸν τάραχον καὶ τὸ μανικὸν πάθος τοῦ Σαοὺλ ἀπήλαυνε, καὶ γαληνιᾶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ παρεσκεύαζεν (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 29, PG 27, 41); Σαούλ σε τοῦτο πεισάτω, καὶ πνεύματος / ἐλευθερωθεὶς τοῖς τρόποις τῆς κινύρας (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 39, 88–89) with reference to 1Sam. 16:14–23.

200 This is confirmed by the first lines of II, 1, 39, where Gregory sets high standards for new works, requiring them to be on the same level as inspired Scripture. His adversaries would do well, if they stopped writing and gave themselves to reading Scripture. Yet Gregory himself feels authorised to write: Πάντων μὲν ἂν ἥδιστα καὶ γνώμην μίαν / Ταύτην ἔδωκα, πάντα ῥίψαντας λόγον, / Αὐτῶν ἔχεσθαι τῶν θεοπνεύστων μόνον, / Ὡς τοὺς ζάλην φεύγοντας ὅρμων εὐδίων. / Εἰ γὰρ τοσαύται αἱ Γραφαὶ δεδώκασι / Λαβὰς, τὸ, Πνεῦμα, τουτί σοι σοφώτερον, / Ὡς καὶ τόδ' εἶναι παντὸς ὁρμητήριον / Λόγου ματαίου τοῖς κακῶς ὁρμωμένοις. / Πότ' ἂν γράφων σὺ, τοῖς κάτω νοήμασιν / Ἀναμφιλέκτους, ὦ 'τὰν, ἐκτείναις λόγους; / Ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο παντελῶς ἀμήχανον, / Κόσμου ῥαγέντος εἰς τόσας διαστάσεις, / Πάντων τ' ἔρεισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐκτροπῇ ς/ Τούτους ἐχόντων τοὺς λόγους συμπροστάτας· / Ἄλλην μετῆλθον τῶν λόγων ταύτην ὁδὸν, / Εἰ μὲν καλήν γε, εἰ δὲ μή γ', ἐμοὶ φίλην· / Μέτροις τι δοῦναι τῶν ἐμῶν πονημάτων (II, 1, 39, 8–24). On Gregory as inspired poet and in the same line of David: McGuckin 2006, 206–207; Prudhomme 2006, 246–247.

heals the passion, because the outer harmony of music restores the inner harmony of the soul's faculties[201]. Athanasius's defence is in line with the Greek philosophical tradition, both because it is based on the doctrine of musical ἦθος and because it sees music as a way of mastering, or outright eradicating, passions. Gregory, on the contrary, sees poetry as a means of venting passions, in order to gain relief from them. This isn't apparent from II, 1, 39, but it can be read in other poems, and specifically in the poems examined in the present work[202]. Introducing his long autobiography, Gregory echoes some of the aims exposed in II, 1, 39: "The metre plays, a medicine for the grief [τῆς ἀνίης φάρμακον], / education and pleasure, too, for the youth, / a pleasant relief [τερπνὸν παρηγόρημα]"[203]. The long iambic poem against the bishops explains more clearly why poetry should be a relief, when, responding to a fictive critic of his bitter tone against bishops, Gregory justifies himself: "It's usual for those who suffer to throw up [ἐξερεύγεσθαι] their misery / to God, to friends, to parents, to neighbours, to guests, / or to the time and life of posterity"[204]. But the most explicit treatment of the theme can be found in II, 1, 13:

> Ἀλλ' ἔμπης τά με θυμὸς ἐποτρύνει καὶ ἀνώγει,
> Φθέγξομαι, οὐκ ἐθέλων μὲν, ἀτὰρ λόγον ἔκτοθε ῥήξω
> Ψυχῆς, ὡς ὅτε κῦμα βιώμενον ἔνδοθι λάβρῳ   20
> Πνεύματι, καὶ σήραγγας ὑποτρέχον, οὐκ ἐπίοπτα
> Καγχλάζει, καί πού τι διεκπίπτει δαπέδοιο,
> Ῥηγνυμένης ὠδῖνος ἀνὰ στόμα. Τοῖα πέπονθα.
> Οὐ δύναμαι χαδέειν ἐντὸς χόλον· ἀλλὰ δέχεσθε,
> Εἴ τινα καὶ δακέθυμον ἐρῶ λόγον, υἱὸν ἀνίης.   25
> Φάρμακον ἄλγεός ἐστι καὶ ἠέρι μῦθον ἐνισπεῖν.
> (II, 1, 13, 18–26)

> however, what my heart stirs and urges,
> I will say, yet not willfully, but I'll burst forth speech
> from my soul, as when a swell, forced from within
> by a mighty wind and running under a rock, invisibly

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201 For example: Τὸ ἄρα μετὰ μέλους λέγεσθαι τοὺς ψαλμοὺς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐφωνίας σπουδὴ, ἀλλὰ τεκμήριον τῆς ἁρμονίας τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ λογισμῶν. Καὶ ἡ ἐμμελὴς δὲ ἀνάγνωσις σύμβολόν ἐστι τῆς εὐρύθμου καὶ ἀχειμάστου καταστάσεως τῆς διανοίας ... τῇ γὰρ τῶν ῥημάτων μελῳδίᾳ συνδιατιθεμένη ἐπιλανθάνεται τῶν παθῶν, καὶ χαίρουσα βλέπει πρὸς τὸν νοῦν τὸν ἐν Χριστῷ, λογιζομένη τὰ βέλτιστα (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 29, PG 27, 41); see the passage in n. 192.
202 Something similar, though not explicitly linked with poetry, can be read in the famous *On human nature*: καὶ γάρ πως φιλέω τόδε φάρμακον ἐν παθέεσσιν / αὐτὸς ἐμῶι θυμῷ προσλαλέειν ἀκέων (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 14, 3–4). On this poem and its employ of the elegiac tradition, Nicastri 1981.
203 Παίζει δὲ μέτρον τῆς ἀνίας φάρμακον / παίδευμα καὶ γλύκασμα τοῖς νέοις ἅμα / τερπνὸν παρηγόρημα (II, 1, 11, 6–8).
204 Πῶς ταῦτα; καὶ τί ταῦτα; πῶς λόγους ἀεί / Κινῶν ἀμείνους οὐχὶ καὶ νῦν εὐστομεῖς; / Ἀλγοῦντός ἐστιν ἐξερεύγεσθαι πάθος / Θεῷ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὕστερον (II, 1, 12, 43–47).

bellows, and then blasts out of the ground,
from the rim of the crack in throes.
I cannot hold my gall within, so bear it,
if I should say some heart-biting word, too, born of grief.
Talking is a remedy for sorrow, if only to the wind

In this theme, we can detect two main problems: on one side, the idea that venting a passion through words can bring relief is problematic; on the other, Gregory's indulgence towards rage (here χόλος, "gall") is in contrast with contemporary society and its widespread moral notions.

In these texts, Gregory presents his poetic utterances as unwilling acts: in the passage of II, 1, 12 quoted above, he uses the verb ἐξερεύγεσθαι, whose etymological meaning is "throwing up". It is true that the verb came to be used of a generic utterance and even in a positive sense, notably in the Septuagint version of Psalm 44[205]. However, as Kuhn demonstrated, the verb is used in Gregory's poetry to refer to language with a negative connotation, and there its medical meaning is preserved: the "throwing up" of words is a symptom of the lack of control over one's own tongue, a veritable moral illness described with medical terms[206]. The simile of the swell in II, 1, 13 has a comparable value, in that it compares Gregory's yielding to anger to a mechanical process, thus highlighting its necessary character, as explicitly stated at line 19. This treatment of passion is totally at odds with ancient philosophical notions. Furthermore, Gregory describes the almost unwilling outburst of passion in words as a remedy for those same passions. As obvious as it may seem to our post-Freudian sensibilities, the notion that emotions must in one way or another express themselves and that, therefore, venting them is a legitimate remedy, whereas repressing them can cause suffering and problems, was foreign to ancient philosophy, particularly late antique morals. In fact, Gregory's remedy against sorrow and anger, as described in II, 1, 12 and 13 and hinted at at II, 1, 11 and 39, is the opposite of contemporary philosophical remedies to passions: as shown by Hadot, moral philosophy in the Imperial Age aimed at mastery or repression of passions, and no ancient school advised venting as a remedy[207]. If we want to make

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205 Ἐξηρεύξατο ἡ καρδία μου λόγον ἀγαθόν, / λέγω ἐγὼ τὰ ἔργα μου τῷ βασιλεῖ, / ἡ γλῶσσά μου κάλαμος γραμματέως ὀξυγράφου (Ps. 44:2).

206 Kuhn 2014, 49–51. For the Callimachean background of these recurring expressions in Gregory's poetic corpus: Nicastri 1981, 452–453.

207 Hadot 2005, 32, 50–52, 80–84. Schwab 2009, 26–27 interprets Gregory's first and fourth motives in relation to the spiritual exercises. in fact, many poems can be linked to the spiritual exercise as described by Hadot, in particular the many poems titled *To His Soul*. II, 1, 78 is taken by Schwab as an example of the language and themes of these poems: the similarities with the practice of spiritual exercises as described by Hadot are so striking that we can assume these poems were veritable spiritual exercises like Marcus Aurelius' meditations. Cf. Ἔργον ἔχεις, ψυχὴ, καὶ μέγα (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 78, 1; 5; 9; 13; 17) with the definition of "spiritual exercise" as work on oneself; Ἐρεύνα σαυτὴν ἥτις ᾖ, καὶ πῇ στρέφῃ, / Ὅθεν προῆλθες, καὶ ὅπη στῆναι σὲ δεῖ· / Εἰ ζῆν ὅπερ ζῇς τοῦτο, ἤ τι καὶ πλέον (2–4) with the theme of "Know thyself" and the meditation upon death; Θεὸν νόει μοι καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια. / Τί ἦν πρὸ παντὸς, καὶ τί

sense of Gregory's stance, we should not look to philosophy, but to Greek poetic tradition. Here, the idea of poetry as giving relief is widespread and takes on different forms in the different authors. However, as explained by Cozzoli in an article, it is not until the Hellenistic period that poetry consciously expressed the cathartic value of poetry for the poet: the theme, explicitly stated by Theocritus and then imitated by Callimachus and Bion among others, has many implicit precedents, which Cozzoli thoroughly examined[208]. In her view, the efficiency of poetry—in particular, erotic poetry—as a remedy relies on its "confessional" character: referring to Pettazzoni's works, she underlines the therapeutic effect of confessions against suffering determined by emotions[209]. This tradition is traced in the genre of elegy by Nicastri thanks to Gregory's use of it[210]. It is possible that Gregory's poetry played a role in his personal elaboration of the grief and anger resulting from his resignation. Yet we cannot fathom whether this proceeding had any actual therapeutical effect. It is more interesting to ask why Gregory chose this poetic therapy and not a philosophical one, and why he published his therapy: in other words, what image of himself was Gregory choosing to project through his defence of his poetic activity?

This presentation of his poetry enhances two components of his literary character. The first component is asceticism: Gregory's insistence on suffering and disillusion, together with the manifested need to cure them, is always linked to features of his public experience. In this way, the public experience is always given a negative connotation, while resignation and withdrawal monopolise the positive side of the poems. A clear example of this dynamic is II, 1, 10, where the public side of Gregory's life is depicted in terms of labour, hardship, and pain: his mission in Constantinople is "struggling" (ἀθλεύσας, 9), "toil and throes" (μόχθος καὶ δεῖμα, 11 and 13), "a loathsome bane" (νόσος στυγερή, 16), "envy" (φθόνος, 8 and 31), and "a violent storm" (μέγα χεῖμα, 31–32), while the strife between bishops is called "gloomy contest" (δῆρις στονόεσσα, 17); on the con-

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σοι τὸ πᾶν τόδε· / Ὅθεν προῆλθε, καὶ ὅποι προβήσεται. / Ἔργον ἔχεις, ψυχὴ, τοῖσδε κάθαιρε βίον. / Πῶς οἰακίζει καὶ στρέφει τὸ πᾶν Θεός· / Ἢ πῶς τὰ μὲν πέπηγε, τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐκρέει (6–11) and the effectiveness of the "perspective from above" in restraining passions; Τί μοι κλέος τὸ πρόσθε, τίς δ' ἡ νῦν ὕβρις· / Τί μου τὸ πλέγμα, καὶ τί μοι βίου τέλος. / Ταῦτ' ἐννόει μοι, καὶ νοὸς στήσεις πλάνην (14–16), on the examination of conscience and the curbing of passions. Our poems, however, go in the opposite direction.

208 Cozzoli 1994; οὐδὲν πὸτ τὸν ἔρωτα πεφύκει φάρμακον ἄλλο / Νικία οὔτ' ἔγχριστον, ἐμὶν δοκεῖ, οὔτ' ἐπίπαστον, / ἢ ταὶ Πιερίδες· κοῦφον δέ τι τοῦτο καὶ ἁδὺ / γίνετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώποις, εὑρεῖν δ' οὐ ῥάδιόν ἐστι ... οὕτω τοι Πολύφαμος ἐποίμαινεν τὸν ἔρωτα / μουσίσδων, ῥᾶον δὲ διᾶγ' ἢ εἰ χρυσὸν ἔδωκεν. (Theocr. *id.* 11, 1–4.80–81); ὡς ἀγαθὰν Πολύφαμος ἀνεύρετο τὰν ἐπαοιδάν / τὠραμένῳ· ναὶ Γᾶν, οὐκ ἀμαθὴς ὁ Κύκλωψ· / αἱ Μοῦσαι τὸν ἔρωτα κατισχαίνοντι Φίλιππε· / ἢ πανακὲς πάντων φάρμακον ἁ σοφία. (Call. *epigr.* 46); κουφοτέρως τότε φῶτα διαθλίβουσιν ἀνῖαι, / ἐκ δὲ τριηκόντων μοῖραν ἀφεῖλε μίαν, / ἢ φίλον ἢ ὅτ' ἐς ἄνδρα συνέμπορον ἢ ὅτε κωφαῖς / ἄλγεα μαψαύραις ἔσχατον ἐξερύγῃ (*frg.* 741); Μοίσας Ἔρως καλέοι, Μοῖσαι τὸν Ἔρωτα φέροιεν. / μολπὰν ταὶ Μοῖσαί μοι ἀεὶ ποθέοντι διδοῖεν, / τὰν γλυκερὰν μολπάν, τᾶς φάρμακον ἅδιον οὐδέν (Bion of Smyrna *frg.* 14). See also Hawkins 2014, 53–54.

209 Cozzoli 1994, 104.

210 Nicastri 1981 (esp. 451–456).

trary, withdrawal and an ascetic life are described as a "steady haven" (σταθερός λιμήν, 32). Similar terms are employed in the brief description of Gregory's career at II, 1, 17, 41–58, where contemporary church politics is "godless behaviours and troublesome mischief" (αἴσυλα ἔργα, κακορραφίη ἀλεγεινή, 43), and Gregory's activity only "toiling" (μογεῖν, 45). The connotation is even clearer in the long *Priamel* of lines 59–96, with its contrast between the humble but healthy withdrawal and the unpleasant routine of a bishop's life. The connotations of public life in II, 1, 12 are similar to those of II, 1, 10 and 17. When Gregory narrates the beginning of his adventure in Constantinople, he highlights his unwillingness to take on the task and presents it as a kind of atonement[211]. Obviously, the situation he found in the city was utterly disastrous and his work a veritable toil[212]. Furthermore, at the end of the poem (792–810), when Gregory is resigning, he employs the simile of the storm (ζάλη) in the same way as in II, 1, 10: public life is a raging storm, while withdrawal is "a good end" (καλὸν τέλος, 796). Such a dynamic is even clearer in the address to Christ of II, 1, 13, 139–148, where the disgraces of the public behaviour of bishops seem to affect directly Gregory's physical well-being. He is "wearied", he lost heart, his limbs are crooked, and he has difficulty breathing[213]. Negative remarks on church politics are interspersed through the rest of the poem. Here we find a deep motivation in the choice of poetry. As we will examine in detail at §5.1.2, one of Gregory's rhetorical points was his refusal of office, a key argument in the defence of his tenure and of his authoritative image as an ascetic. In order to make this point convincing, he builds this system of connotations, in which public life is always negative and withdrawal positive. The literary environment in which such polar opposition can be developed and sustained is poetry, because it is the tradition of poetry—and not that of, say, philosophy or Christian genres—that allowed for open complaining about one's own misfortunes. It is through poetry that one can vent and heal one's passions—thereby, however, demonstrating one's philosophical stance: What can upset the balance even of an ascetic philosopher? Public life, answers Gregory; and this is the most powerful demonstration of the spiritual authority of that philosopher, because only a true philosopher knows and loathes the perils public life entails for his

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211 Παρ' ἐλπίδας τις τῶν καλῶν ἀποσπάσας / Ἔκδημον ἤγαγ'. ὅστις, οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν. / Εἶτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ' ἀμαρτάδες, / Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως· … Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἐπῆλθον εὐσεβὴς ξένος, / Ὅρκοις τε καμφθεὶς καὶ λιταῖς πολυτρόποις, / Αἷς ἀντιβῆναι τῶν λίαν κακοφρόνων (II, 1, 12, 77–80.90–92). More on this at §5.1.2.1.

212 Μικρόν τ' ἀναπνεύσωσι τῶν κύκλῳ κακῶν, / Λαλῶν τε γλωσσῶν καὶ πολυσχιδοῦς πλάνης, / Ὑφ' ὧν ἔκαμνον οὐκ ἔχοντές τι σκέπης, / Οἷόν τι τερπνὸν ἐν μέσῳ βάτων ῥόδον / Ἤ τις μέλαινα ῥὰξ ἐν ἀώρῳ βότρυϊ, … Ὑμεῖς γάρ ἐστε μάρτυρες μόχθων ἐμῶν (II, 1, 12, 85–89.99). More on this at §5.1.2.2–3.

213 Χριστὲ ἄναξ, μή μοί τις ἀπαντήσειεν ἀνίη / Χαζομένῳ. Κέκμηκα λύκοις δηλήμοσι ποίμνης, / Ποιμέσι μαρνάμενος δηρὸν χρόνον. Ἐκ μελέων δὲ / Ῥικνῶν ἔπτατο θυμός, ἀναπνείω δ' ὀλίγον τι/ Τειρόμενος καμάτοισι, καὶ αἴσχεσιν ἡμετέροισιν. Ὧν, οἱ μὲν θώκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες, / Ἀντία κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσυτέροισι κακοῖσι / Βαλλόμενοι, βάλλοντες, ἀτειρέες εἰσὶ μαχηταί, Εἰρήνην βοόωντες, ἐφ' αἵμασι κυδιόωντες (II, 1, 13, 139–148).

spiritual progress. Hence, Gregory chose poetry as a genre through which his authoritative image could be convincingly restored.

Statements of unbearable grief, justified with the therapeutic value of poetry, not only say something on public life but contribute to outlining an image of the poet. Gregory's portrait, as given by his poetry, is that of a "suffering self". The expression, coined by Judith Perkins, describes the ideology of suffering promoted by early Christian literature—above all, martyrological literature—but whose presuppositions were already developing independently from Christianity[214]. Christians defined themselves as a community of suffering people, and their role models were accordingly subjected to every manner of torture and misfortune. The emphasis on suffering, remarks Perkin, amounted to a frontal attack against dominant values and institutions of the Graeco-Roman world, while at the same time it founded and reinforced the power of the church[215]. As noted by Perkins, there is a continuity between the martyrological literature of the second and third centuries and later hagiography: in both genres, suffering takes centre stage, and the protagonist is defined by his suffering[216]. Both genres aimed explicitly at influencing their audiences' worldview and at creating in their addressees that same "suffering self" that the literary portraits represented[217]. As Kelley has shown, hagiographies and martyrological texts shared many features of the spiritual exercises, being forms of "technologies of the self"[218]. Since, then, the fashioning of this "suffering self" was still ongoing at Gregory's time, his frequent description of his pain and misery can be understood in this wider context. After all, in ideologically oriented texts, repetitions are an important clue to the implied message of the text[219]. Gregory's rehearsal of his pain and misery aims at portraying him as a suffering hero in the moulds of the martyrs of old and of contemporary ascetics. To use a word coined by B. Storin, Gregory's autobiographical writings are an "autohagiobiography".

How does poetry factor in this portrayal? Traditionally, martyrs were celebrated through panegyrics or *Vitae* and *Passiones* or remembered in *Acta*. Hagiography was at its beginnings during Gregory's life, so much so that both Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*, two of the earliest specimens of the genre, were still, formally, long letters. The lives of ascetics recorded by Jerome a little later were letters, too. The life of Origen was narrated by Eusebius of Caesarea in the context of his *Ecclesiastical History*. All these genres entailed a third-person narration. Therefore, in order to present a first-person narration of the life of a martyr, Gregory attempted a synthesis with Greek culture, drawing on the poetic tradition of lamenting one's own misfortunes. Thus he presented the narration of his toils as springing forth from an

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214 Perkins 1995.

215 Perkins 1995, 115 and 123.

216 Perkins 1995, 202.

217 Perkins 1995, 201.

218 Kelley 2006.

219 Perkins 1995, 125–126.

inner need from consolation, eschewing traditional Christian motivations, such as giving glory to God or remembering the sacrifice of the martyr and the life of the ascetic in order to draw people to the faith: these motivations were aptly used in third-person narrations, but in a first-person account they would have contradicted the ascetic image of the character and narrator, since humility was considered one of the chief ascetic virtues. In fact, authors of hagiography always display humility, exalting God and their subject rather than themselves[220]. With remarkable originality in the Christian literary landscape, Gregory adopted the image of the martyr and ascetic, through suffering and divestment from the public; but to adopt this image for his own person and not for another, he chose genres of classical poetry such as elegy or iamb, which allowed him to express things that genres peculiar to Christianity didn't allow.

There is a passage that clearly demonstrates Gregory's adoption of a suffering persona in the tradition of martyrs. Obviously, every martyrological work had its proto-type in the passion narrations of the Gospels, and the model of every martyr was Jesus. Gregory's autobiographical poetry shares this feature with martyrological literature, since, as Hofer demonstrated, Gregory consistently portrays himself through the model of Jesus Christ[221]. This is particularly evident in his frequent mentioning of his stoning in Constantinople: the episode has an emblematic value, because it is the most similar to real occasions in the life of Jesus[222]. Yet the sufferings caused by the bishops at the council are used to draw a parallel between Gregory and Christ, too. The parallel is explicitly stated at the beginning of II, 1, 12:

> Ἴσως μὲν ἐχρῆν, ὡς κακούμενον φέρειν
> Ταῖς τοῦ παθόντος ἐντολαῖς τυπούμενον,
> Οὕτω παθόντα καρτερεῖν καὶ τὸν λόγον,
> Ὡς, ἂν τελείως ὦμεν ἠγωνισμένοι
> Καὶ μισθὸν ἐλπίζωμεν ἐντελέστερον.   5
> Ὢν γὰρ τέλειος μόχθος, ἐντελέστερος·
> Ὢν δ' οὐ τέλειος, καὶ τὸ ἆθλον ἐλλιπές.
> (II, 1, 12, 1–7)

> Maybe, as I bore slander on the model
> of the One who suffered and commanded thus,
> so, once I had suffered, I should have curbed my words too,
> and thereby, by way of a full contest,
> hoped for a fuller reward.
> Yea, to full toil, fuller reward,
> but to the wanting, also the prize is lacking.

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220 Krueger 2004, 104.

221 Hofer 2013, 178, 209.

222 An eloquent example: Πλὴν ἕν γε τοῦτο, τῶν κακῶν ἐφεισάμην, / Ὑφ' ὧν λιθασθεὶς εἰσόδου προοίμιον / Ἐκαρτέρησα. Καὶ γὰρ εὐσεβέστερον / Παθόντα τὰ Χριστοῦ με οὕτω καὶ φέρειν (II, 1, 12, 102–106).

Here, what Gregory and the One on whom Gregory is modeled (τυπούμενος, 2) share is suffering; they are both παθών. Nonetheless Gregory is not wholly similar to his model, for Christ was known to have borne his passion (πάθος) in silence, fulfilling Old Testament oracles, whereas Gregory is going to retort against his persecutors with words[223]. The question is, How can Gregory justify his departure from his chief model. He employs two lines of argument: the second has already been examined—that is, the idea of venting his sufferings through words in order to appease them; the first one has to do with the emotion of rage.

In the lines of II, 1, 13 quoted above, Gregory described the words of his poem as an outburst almost mechanically induced by rage. If we compare this stance with contemporary sources, it seems even more problematic than the idea of venting grief to heal it. Both pagan philosophy and Christian doctrine prescribed utter repression of rage: among the pagans, Stoics condemned rage the most severely, and among Christian Scriptures, the Gospel of Matthew condemns anger the most clearly[224]. Gregory himself subscribed to both traditions, writing a long poem *Against Anger* (I, 2, 25), where he depicts this emotion as the worst vice and proposes "remedies" (φάρμακον, 166) to restrain the emotion. These remedies are meditations in the style of philosophical spiritual exercises: short sentences and visual examples designed to curb anger or to spur shame before this emotion. Among the sentences, there is Jesus's hardest saying on anger[225]. Gregory calls such sentences from Scripture "enchantments" (ἐπῳδαί, 183 and 410), using a term that originally referred to spells and to the magical formulas that ancient physicians joined to other treatments. Plato was the first to apply the word to philosophy as a spiritual exercise[226]. These religious and philosophical stances responded to a real concern: as demonstrated by Peter Brown, in late antiquity anger was seen as the most socially disruptive emotion and was therefore repressed by the educational institutions of the time, the *paideia*. This was due to the ubiquitous violence in late antique life, a violence perpetrated by those in power on their subjects without clear restraints. The subordinate was always liable to suffer violence, and nothing restrained those in charge besides *paideia*. Therefore, rage was socially disrup-

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223 Jesus' silence during the passion: Mt. 26:62–63; 27:13–14; Mc. 14:60–61; 15:4–5; Lc. 23:9; Joh. 19:9; 1Petr. 2:23. The classical passage fulfilled by Jesus' silence is Jes. 53:7, as in Act. 8:32. Another passage is Jer. 11:19.

224 The Stoics forbade anger: Cic. *Tusc.* 3, 18–19; Lact. *ira* 17; Sen. *ira* 3, 42; rage is also strictly forbidden in the Gospel of Matthew: Mt. 5:21–22.

225 "Οὐ γὰρ φονεύσεις", τοῖς πάλαι τεταγμένον· / Σοὶ μηδὲ χολοῦσθαί ἐστιν ἐντεταγμένον (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 25, 307–308).

226 Lain-Entralgo 1958; Cozzoli 1994, 104 on the precedent of Gorgias. The same dynamic is at work in Greg. Naz. I, 1, 6, 107–109: after a series of single-line maxims and a paraphrasis of Hebr. 12:5–8, Gregory advises the reader to repeat the preceding lines as an enchantment (ἐπῳδή) and as a consolation (παρηγόρημα) amidst misfortunes. Here, as in I, 2, 25, Gregory is giving a Christian clothing to the spiritual exercise of *meditatio*: Ἔπαδε σαυτῷ ταῦτα, καὶ ῥάων ἔσῃ, / Παρηγόρημα τοῦ πονεῖν ποιούμενος, / Τῷ δ' εὐχαρίστῳ κτώμενος τὴν ἐλπίδα.

tive and carefully avoided[227]. Hence, presenting his final harangue as an outburst of rage might not seem a smart move by Gregory. There is, however, another side of anger. First, not all ancient philosophical schools were as strict as the Stoics on it, and even Christian Scriptures showed some leniency towards this emotion. Epicureans believed rage to be a natural emotion and justified it in some cases[228]. St. Paul, writing to the church of Ephesus, allowed for anger to arise but forbade his readers to act on it: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph. 4:26). Gregory recognises both these allowances in his *Against anger*: right after quoting Jesus's strong words against anger, he adds Paul's statement; later on in the same poem, he introduces an objection against his argument—namely, that anger is part of human nature. His answer to the objection is that yes, anger is natural and, as part of nature, a gift of God, but one must employ it in the correct way, according to its proper aim. The aim of anger is to be "a weapon of zeal" (ὅπλον ζήλου, 363). Furthermore, he reads biblical stories from this perspective, mentioning some characters as exemplars for their angry zeal. For example, at II, 1, 15, 19–26, Gregory, lamenting his removal from the important see of Constantinople, mentions Phineas and Moses as examples of zeal for their actions against harlots and Egyptians[229].

The question is then how to present anger as inevitable and therefore justifying expression, and expression as measured and therefore justifying anger. In the Greek system of literary genres, the genre allowed to give expression to rage was iambus. In his accountof the long iambic tradition of antiquity, Hawkins has noted that whenever a later author latched himself on to the iambic tradition represented chiefly by Archilochus and Hipponax, he also wanted to resurrect the basic script of these poets' lives: the poet is attacked unjustly and without provocation and responds with his iambs, and in consequence of his fierce attack, his enemy is punished or, even better, punishes himself[230]. Gregory is no exception: in II, 1, 12, he is the one unjustly offended, and his retort is, therefore, justified. And there is more than this in his iambic mask: in Greek tradition, the old comedy poets and Socrates wore the same iambic mask, giving it new connotations. Thus, the iambist became also the outsider, one who spurns societal norms in his pursuit of sincerity. Furthermore, this pursuit was presented as something beneficial for the community: the comic poet and then Socrates and the philosophers became the watchdogs of society. All these connotations of the iambic persona are consciously present in Gregory's poetic character[231]. The repeated theme of envy

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227 Brown 1992, 48–58.

228 Epicureans on anger: Procopé 1998; Philodemus on anger: Asmis 2011.

229 Ἡ δ' ἄρ' ἐμὴ Τριὰς αὖθις ἀπὸ στομάτων ἀθεμίστων / Τέμνεται, ἔν τ' ἀγοραῖς, ἔν τε χοροστασίαις, / Καὶ πόρνοι κραταίουσι λόγοι. Τὸ δὲ φάσγανον, αἲ αἲ! / Τίς πήξει Φινεὲς πορνοφόνῳ παλάμῃ / Ζηλήμων ψυχήν τε καὶ οὔνομα, ἢ τίς ἀρήξει / Δόγμασιν Ἑβραίοις πλησσομένοις ἀδίκως / Μωσῆς, ἐκ δ' ὀλέσας Αἰγύπτιον αὐτίκα μῦθον, / Λαῷ πὰρ μεγάλῳ κῦδος ἔχησι μέγα (II, 1, 15, 19–26); Prudhomme 2006, 418–419.

230 Hawkins 2014, 2.

231 Hawkins 2014, 169–170, 175, 179. See §5.1.2.1.

(φθόνος) provides the unprovoked offense that spurs the iambic response[232]. Over and over again, Gregory remarks his unfamiliarity with politics, his ascetic background, and his exclusively spiritual priorities, contrasting these features with the worldliness and ambition of the other bishops in order to cut for himself the niche of the outsider[233]. Finally, he believes his words to be beneficial to the church as a whole, like a comic poet who castigates his polis only to see it improve[234]. All these iambic themes are summarised and Christianised in the justification for writing provided at the beginning of II, 1, 12:

> Ὡς ἂν δὲ μὴ δόξαιεν οἱ κακοὶ κρατεῖν
> Τὰ πάντα, μηδ' ᾖ λεῖος αὐτοῖς ὁ δρόμος,
> Ἀντιστατοῦντος οὐδενὸς, τὸ μὲν πέρας   (10)
> Τούτων παρήσω τῷ τελευταίῳ πυρὶ,
> Ὅ πάντ' ἐλέγχει καὶ καθαίρει σὺν δίκῃ,
> Κἂν λανθάνωμεν ἐνθάδε πλοκαῖς τισιν.
> Αὐτὸς δὲ μικρῷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς πλήξω λόγῳ
> Φονεῖς· φονεῖς γὰρ οἱ κρίνοντες ἔκτοπα   (15)
> Ψυχῶν τ' ἀθώων ἐκχέοντες αἵματα,
> Πάντων, ὅσους ἔπληττον, οἷς ᾠκονόμουν.
> Ἐρῶ δ' ἃ λέξω, μηδὲν εὐλαβούμενος
> Τὸ λοιδορεῖσθαι, πρᾶγμ' ἀπηγορευμένον
> Πᾶσιν μὲν, ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ πλέον μισούμενον·   (20)
> Οὐ γὰρ ὀνομαστὶ τοὺς λόγους ποιήσομαι,
> Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν ἃ κρύπτειν χρεών.
> Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ πάντων ἐξ ἴσης μεμνήσομαι,
> – Μή μοι τοσοῦτον εὐδρομήσειε στόμα –,
> Πολλοὺς γὰρ οἶδα καὶ λόγου τοῦ κρείσσονος·   (25)
> Ἀλλ' ὅστις ἐν κακοῖς τε καὶ κακῶν πέρα,
> Οὗτος κρατείσθω, καὶ δαμαζέσθω τὰ νῦν.
> Τεμεῖ τὸ χεῖρον ἡ μάχαιρα τοῦ λόγου.

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232 See, for example: II, 1, 10, 7–8.31; II, 1, 12, 97.136–137.836; II, 1, 17, 51. Beside the four poems against the bishops, the theme is explored in the many poems *Against the Envious* (εἰς τοὺς φθονοῦντας).

233 The comparison is developed at II, 1, 12, 54–69. Gregory's ascetic self-portrait at 70–75. Gregory contrasts again the ascetic and the worldly bishop at 575–633 (see §3.2.2). Lines 709–791 of the same poem are devoted to the worldliness of church politics. Gregory's ascetic self-portrait features briefly at II, 1, 13, 107–111, while the other bishops are scornfully addressed at 1–17 and then again criticised at 139–163 and pinned against Gregory's sufferings. Then, at the end of the poem, Gregory explicitly cuts himself off of the college of bishops, escaping in ascetic contemplation. This moral chasm between Gregory and the other bishops is the subject of II, 1, 17 as a whole. More on Gregory's asceticism at §3.2.2; on his self-portrait and his alienation from politics at §5.1.2. In his autobiography, he reverses the criticisms about the Maximus-affair, attributing his failure in recognising Maximus' true nature to his own moral naïveté and his inexperience of political matters (II, 1, 11, 784–806.954–968).

234 Ταῦτα πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοὺς κακοὺς ὑπὲρ καλῶν, / Οἷς εἴ τις ἄχθεθ', εὗρεν ὃν ζητεῖ λόγος. / Τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐκεῖθεν, ὦ φίλοι, λελέξεται· / Πλὴν ἐξιτήριόν τιν', εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον / Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρήσιμον, δέξασθέ μου (II, 1, 12, 809–813); Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνησόμεθ' (II, 1, 13, 198).

Τί τοῦτο; δείξεις· ἂν μάχῃ πρὸς τὸν λόγον,
σαυτοῦ προδήλως ἐκφανῇ κατήγορος.   (30)
Τὸ δ' οὖν ἐμὸν τοιοῦτο· βαλλέτω με πᾶς·
Πόρρωθέν εἰμι τοῖς λίθοις ἡρμοσμένος.
(II, 1, 12, 8–32)

Yet, that the evil may not suppose themselves to prevail
totally, nor have an easy ride,
as no one resists them, while I'm leaving   (10)
their end to the Last Fire,
to the All-Questioning and the justly purging,
even what by some plot goes unnoticed here,
I myself will smite with a brief speech
my murderers; because they are murderers, who pervert judgement   (15)
and shed the blood of all those innocent souls
that they smote with their dispensations.
I'll speak what I'll say, without being wary
of slander, which is forbidden
to anyone, but to me even very hateful.   (20)
Therefore, I won't name names in my speech,
that I may not seem to be shaming what ought to be hidden;
nor shall I mention everyone regardless,
—may not my mouth exceed so much!—
because I know also many deserving a better speech.   (25)
But whoever is among the evil and beyond them,
be conquered and be tamed now:
the sword of speech will cut the worse.
So what? If you should oppose the speech,
you'll prove clearly and plainly your own accuser.   (30)
Such, then, is my stance, and let anyone smite me:
for a long time I have been suited to the stones.

In this passage, the unprovoked attack is Gregory's "murder" (φόνος; here φονεῖς, "murderers", 15)—that is, his removal from the congregation in Constantinople, which, without its pastor, could lose salvation, yielding again to the Arian heresy (or so Gregory wants us to believe). His poem is clearly the iambic answer to the attack and seems to exact punishment from his enemies, because it is always presented through military metaphors ("I will smite", πλήξω at line 14, responding to the ἔπληττον of his enemies at line 17; "be conquered and tamed", κρατείσθω καὶ δαμαζέσθω, 27; "the sword of speech will cut", τεμεῖ ἡ μάχαιρα τοῦ λόγου, 28). Gregory's position of outsider from societal trends is expressed by his readiness to accept stoning, showcasing his superior spirituality. Finally, his beneficial role is highlighted at the beginning, when he presents his speech as a due resistance against evil people: in a way, he is sacrificing his spiritual benefit for the community, for he chose to speak to hinder evil people, whereas if he had been silent, he would have been more similar to Christ, and his sufferings would have

been more valuable[235]. However, he gives these classical themes a Christian turn. First, in order to preserve the consistency of his ascetic profile with his characterisation as an iambic outsider, Gregory tempers the abusiveness of iambic speech by omitting names (18–20). This, says Gregory, conforms not only to a legal limitation on libel but also to his own Christian sensibility. A second element of Christianisation is the mention of the last judgement. Gregory leaves the actual punishment of his offenders to God. Thus, he trades the traditional ability of iambic poets to exact punishment on their enemies in exchange for the connotation of his speech as a sort of preview of the last judgement. Even if once, referring to Maximus, Gregory alludes to the suicide the ancient iambists induced in their enemies[236], normally he is consistent in his refusal to exact punishment through his words. In fact, some of his poems against the bishops end on a conciliatory note: the last two lines of II, 1, 12 explicitly call for a reconciliation with some of the other bishops, while the last lines of II, 1, 17 are a wish for bad bishop to be converted[237]. In II, 1, 13 Gregory clearly replaces the traditional iambic revenge with the last judgement and completely opts out of the college of bishops[238]. In sum, the rhetoric of anger bursting out in poetry allowed Gregory to conjure on himself the identity of the iambic poet. This mask fitted his aims very well, since the iambic poet, with his refusal to comply with societal norms and his unflinching sincerity, could express in a form legitimised by *paideia* the harsh criticisms of the ascetic, a newer outsider to the norms of society. In his similarity with Socrates, the iambographer had the same function as the philosopher, as described by Brown[239]; however, unlike the philosopher, the iambographer must not restrain his language. Combining philosophical disdain for earthly matters and the authoritative impartiality that follows with carelessness for the conventions of etiquette, the iambographer gave proper poetic voice to the attitude of the go-getting Christian ascetics.

Between the first and fourth motives given by Gregory at II, 1, 39 there is a contradiction. For, while the first motive intends poetry as a mean to restrain speech, the fourth motive hints at a notion of poetry as unrestrained expression. However, if one

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235 This is a short version of one of Gregory's preferred themes, the conflict between being beneficial to others and attend to one's own spiritual life: Otis 1961, 161; McGuckin 2001, Elm 2000a; Elm 2000b; Elm 2012, 147–181.

236 δράσεις δὲ δὴ τί τὴν καλὴν κόμην; πάλιν / θρέψεις φιλεργῶν; ἢ μενεῖς τοῖος γέλως; / ἄμφω γὰρ αἰσχρά, καί τι τοῖν δυοῖν μέσον / οὐκ ἔστιν εὑρεῖν οὐδὲ ἕν – πλὴν ἀγχόνης (II, 1, 11, 929–938); Hawkins 2014, 166.

237 Οὕτω τάχ' ἄν μοι τῶν φίλων σπείσαιτό τις / Πάλης θανούσης, ἣ φθόνος συνέρχεται (II, 1, 12, 835–836); Εὔχομαι, ὥς κεν ἅπαντα Θεῷ φίλα τοῖσδε μεμήλοι, / Εἰ δὲ χερειότερα, τηλόθεν οὔατ' ἔχειν (II, 1, 17, 107–108).

238 Μαρτύρομ' ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ χέρα, καὶ τὸ κελαινὸν / Ἦμαρ, ὃ τὴν κούφην πυρὶ βόσκεται ὕστατον ὕλην, / Οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος, οὐχ ὁμοεργὸς, / Οὐδέ τι συμφράδμων, οὐ σύμπλοος, οὐ συνοδίτης. / Ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν περόψεν ἐὴν ὁδόν· αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε / Ζητῶ Νῶε κιβωτὸν, ὅπως μόρον αἰνὸν ἀλύξω (II, 1, 13, 201–206).

239 Brown 1992, 62–64.

examines the texts, it stands out that the two ideas are never found in the same poem. The first one, poetry as a mean in a wider striving towards measured language, is prominent in the poems on silence, but a similar attitude is also found at the end of II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17. In II, 1, 10 Gregory refuses to deal with the topic "bishops" any longer (25) and declares he will offer God silence instead of speeches, one of the themes typical of the poems on silence[240]. Similarly, at II, 1, 17, 102, Gregory leaves power to his enemies, devoting himself to Christ "in stillness" (ἀτρεμέων). The idea of poetry as a function of emotions and free speech, on the contrary, is found at II, 1, 11, 12, and 13. The poems II, 1, 12 and 13 are, together with parts of II, 1, 11, the ones fictionalising an actual speech that took place in Constantinople, whereas II, 1, 10 and 17 are clearly set some time after Gregory's departure from the city. Given this fictive chronology, it is clear that Gregory frames a progress in his stance: from his role of outsider and watchdog of the bishops, when he was still bishop of Constantinople and in a sense still immature because subject to his emotions, to his withdrawal from public life, with a more mature and ascetic attitude, marked by restraint and measure. Therefore, II, 1, 12 and 13, still features Gregory as politically active, then come II, 1, 10 and 17 with their refusal of public life, and lastly the poems on silence set in the Lent of the year 382, with Gregory in his renewed status of old pillar of the church. In all these transformations, he remains a suffering ascetic and a martyr, reluctant before the duties of public life.

Such an explicit and elaborate posture on the spiritual and psychological peculiarity of poetry cannot be retrieved in Ephrem's works. There are common themes with Gregory, but they are never explicitly linked with the poetic form of Ephrem's works. This is not to say that Ephrem did not develop an articulate point of view on his writing of poetry: however, we cannot read Ephrem's predecessors, so that we are deaf to the possible allusions to them, which would clarify his stance on poetry. All in all, the image of himself he projects in all his poems is more similar to the image of later hagiographers than to Gregory's self-portrait. In the poems on bishops, in particular, this could be due to the third-person language used to talk of the bishops and to the praising tone of the poems. While Gregory presents himself as the only saint in a world of bad bishops, Ephrem portrays all bishops as saintly and himself as a miserable sinner.

An example is *CN* 17, whose first and last stanzas are concerned with the poem itself: here, Ephrem attributes the poem to his "smallness" (*z'ōrūṯā*, 1, 1) and presents himself as "the dregs of the flock" (*šeḥlā d-mar'ītā*, 12, 1). The image structuring the first stanza is that of the old widow from the Gospels: like the widow, Ephrem's smallness (a feminine in Syriac) throws her dime in the treasury. Thus, she gives an offering, which was due, as said in the last stanza[241]. The last two stanzas of *CN* 14 are equally important:

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240 Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν λήθης κεύθοι βυθός (II, 1, 10, 25); Θύσω καὶ σιγὴν, ὡς τοπάροιθε λόγον (II, 1, 10, 34).
241 "Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due [*wālītā*]" (*CN* 17, 12, 1–2).

25 ܐܬܝܠܝܕܘ ܕܩܫܝܫܐ ܕܡܥܠܝ،   ܝܩܘܕܬܐ ܐܬܠܝܕܠܬܐ ܐ
      ܕܗ ܚܣܐ ܠܐܠܝܠܐ   ܘܚܡܐ ܝܕܐ ܪܚܡܬܕ
ܐܬܠܝܕܗ ܝܚܡܕ ܚܠܝ   ܠ ܠܟ ܝܗ ܠܠܡ ܣܝܚܕܗ

26 ܣܚܡܝ ܝܚܡܕ ܣܝܠܐ   ܚܣ ܚܣ، ܘܕܝܘܠ ܠܚܣܐ
ܩܘܕ ܐܠܠܐ ܐܚܢܝ   ܠܣܕ ܐܠܚܣܕܐ ܚܝܠܚܗܐ
ܢܠܡܝܠ ܗܘܗܐ، ܗܝܘܗܘ   ܩܘܗܕܝ ܕܡܚܠܝ ܣܝܐ[242]

(*CN* 14, 25–26)

In these stanzas, Ephrem speaks of himself as a sinner, crawling in paradise only thanks to the interceding bishops, and there reduced to collecting the crumbs under the table (an allusion to Mc. 7:28; Mt. 15:27): it is a picture of deep self-effacing and humility. Such endings are widespread in Ephrem's poems, but the peculiarity of this one is that here he asks the bishops to pray for him, being their "foster child". Normally, Ephrem would pray God directly for himself, or request that the whole community pray for him. The procedures employed by Ephrem in these stanzas anticipate similar procedures employed by later hagiographers and examined by Krueger. First, hagiographers traced parallels between their material and biblical stories, at the same time casting themselves as successors of the authors of Scripture[243]. Ephrem, too, apart from the unending parallels with Scripture in his poems, puts on the mask of the old widow, a character from the Bible. The hagiographers often tell their readers that they travelled to the shrine of their saint or knew him in person or was granted a miracle through his intercession. Almost always, they pray to the saint for assistance in writing and in life: they represent themselves as devotees of the saint. The act of writing a hagiography is thought of as an act of devotion to the saint[244]. Ephrem, too, prays to his bishops for his salvation and seems very devoted to their memory and service. This devotion clearly prompts and shapes his poems. Hagiographers often came from a monastic background, and as such, they tended to describe their literary efforts as ascetic exercises. In particular, they displayed and exercised humility through writing, in that they renounced their agency as authors and conferred all merits on the subject or God[245]. At the same time, they effaced themselves as sinners and weak men. This same attitude is found in many of Ephrem's closing stanzas. All these authorial poses are important rhetorical strategies because they carve a place and a role for Ephrem in the congregation. However, they never connect explicitly with the choice of poetry over prose. Therefore, if Gregory uses poetry as a means to face some passions and conjure those passions, giving a certain

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242 "And for the sinner who laboured, being / the foster child of those three, // when they see that "third", / who closed the door of his chamber, // may those three beseech / that he sets his door a little ajar for me. /// May the sinner push his way through, / when he will be glad and scared at the sight; // may the three teachers call / that one disciple with mercy; // may he collect under the tables /the crumbs full of life."

243 Krueger 2004, 15–32.

244 Krueger 2004, 63–93.

245 Krueger 2004, 94–109, in particular 104.

image of the poet and his motivations, Ephrem doesn't seem to reflect on the medium of poetry as such in this connection. Nonetheless, this lack of concern could be only apparent, due to our insufficient understanding of the Syriac poetic tradition prior to Ephrem.

1.3.3 Heresy and poetry

When Gregory in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 48–50) laments the prominence of "outsiders" (ξένοι) in the field of literature, we are immediately drawn to think that these outsiders are the pagan authors[246]. Yet one could conceive of a less obvious identification: Simelidis, for example, thinks that the label "outsiders" includes not only pagans but also heretics[247]. In this, he echoes Prudhomme's idea that the main targets of the poem are poets and heretics, substantiated by the interpretation of lines 18-21 as referring to heretics using literature to foster their cause and thereby creating schisms and divisions[248]. Indeed, this interpretation presents a closeness between poetry and heresy already attested in ancient sources and directly linked with the poetic activity of both Ephrem and Gregory. Besides the cases of poetic corpora associated with communities whose orthodoxy was called into question[249], ancient heresiologists and church historians witness theological polemics pursued through poetry. The earliest mention is in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1, 15, 6, where the author quotes an iambic invective of some "divine old man and herald of truth" against the gnostic Mark[250]. But this dynamic becomes really prominent in the fourth century. Arius composed a poem, the *Thalia*, which, in the words of his opponents, took advantage of popular melodies to spread his controversial theses[251]. Hilarius's poetic endeavours can be seen as a response to Arius's

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246 Demoen 1993, 239; Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502; Hose 2004, 24; Hose 2006, 87–88; McGuckin 2006, 195; Prudhomme 2006, 123; Simelidis 2009, 27.

247 Simelidis 2009, 27.

248 Ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο παντελῶς ἀμήχανον, / Κόσμου ῥαγέντος εἰς τόσας διαστάσεις, / Πάντων τ' ἔρεισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐκτροπῆς / Τούτους ἐχόντων τοὺς λόγους συμπροστάτας (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 39, 18–21); Prudhomme 2006, 108–109.

249 Examples are: Marcion's *Psalms*, the hymns of the Montanists, the *Odes* by Basilides and the *Psalms* by Valentinus, the extant *Hymn of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas:* see Prudhomme 2006, 6. On the *Odes of Solomon*, see Lattke 2007. On the community of the "Justs" as represented in the *Codex visionum* and the poet "Dorotheus", see Agosti 2017.

250 Διὸ καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἁρμοζόντως τῇ τοιαύτῃ σου τόλμῃ ὁ θεῖος πρεσβύτης καὶ κήρυξ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐμμέτρως ἐπιβεβόηκέ σοι, εἰπὼν οὕτως· Εἰδωλοποιὲ, Μάρκε, καὶ τερατοσκόπε, κτλ. (Iren. *haer.* 1, 15, 6). The invective is said to be ἐμμέτρως, and the same term is used by Gregory to define his poetry in II, 1, 39.

251 Ὅτι τὸν Ἄρειον ἀποπηδήσαντα τῆς ἐκκλησίας φησὶ ᾄσματά τε ναυτικὰ καὶ ἐπιμύλια καὶ ὁδοιπορικὰ γράψαι, καὶ τοιαῦθ' ἕτερα 8συντιθέντα, εἰς μελῳδίας ἐντεῖναι ἃς ἐνόμιζεν ἑκάστοις ἁρμόζειν, διὰ τῆς ἐν ταῖς μελῳδίαις ἡδονῆς ἐκκλέπτων πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀσέβειαν τοὺς ἀμαθεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων. (Philostorg. *h. e.* 2, 2); Ἀντὶ γὰρ Χριστοῦ παρ' αὐτοῖς Ἄρειος, ὡς παρὰ Μανιχαίοις Μανιχαῖος, ἀντὶ δὲ Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁγίων Σωτάδης τις ἐξεύρηται παρ' αὐτοῖς ὁ καὶ παρ' Ἕλλησι γελώμενος, καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ

Thalia[252]. Again, in the Latin West, one could mention Ambrose's *Hymns*, which were clearly used as anti-Arian propaganda, and Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*[253]. In all these cases, poetic activity is directly linked to a situation of theological conflict in the urban community, so that poetry must have a direct impact on the Christian congregation and a clear target. These poems were written to be sung by the many and thus to define the boundaries of the community, excluding those seen as heretics and reinforcing group spirit[254].

The church historians of the fifth century ascribed analogous motives to Ephrem. Sozomen relates the origin of poetry among the Syrians and how Ephrem came to write "three million verses"[255]. Harmonius, the son of the heretic Bardaisan, would have profited from his Greek education by learning to give measure and melody to the Syriac language, thereby creating its first pieces of poetry. The endeavour met with success, as the Syrians "were charmed by the beauty of the words and the rhythm of the melodies"; however, Harmonius, influenced by his father, inserted heretical doctrines into his compositions. And here comes Ephrem, who, concerned for the orthodoxy of his fellow countrymen, gave himself to the composition of perfectly Catholic words for Harmonius's melodies[256]. A similar account can be read in Theodoret's *Church History*,

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Ἡρωδιάδος. Τοῦ μὲν γὰρ τὸ κεκλασμένον καὶ θηλυκὸν ἦθος μεμίμηται γράφων Ἄρειος καὶ αὐτὸς Θαλίας· τῆς δὲ τὴν ὄρχησιν ἐζήλωσεν ἐξορχούμενος καὶ παίζων ἐν ταῖς κατὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος δυσφημίαις, ὥστε τοὺς ἐμπίπτοντας εἰς τὴν αἵρεσιν διαστρέφεσθαι μὲν τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἀφρονεῖν,... (Athan. *or. adv. Arian.* 1, PG 26, 16); Ἄρειος παρὰ τῶν περὶ Εὐσέβιον συνέθηκεν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν αἵρεσιν ἐν χάρτῃ καὶ ὡς ἐν 'Θαλίᾳ' ζηλώσας οὐδένα τῶν φρονίμων, ἀλλὰ τὸν Αἰγύπτιον Σωσάτην ἐν τῷ ἤθει καὶ τῇ ἐκλύσει τοῦ μέλους γράφει μὲν πολλά, ἀπὸ μέρους δέ ἐστιν αὐτοῦ ταῦτα... (Athan. *synod.* 15, 2). See also Stead 1978; Palumbo-Stracca 1990; Williams 2001, 98–116.

252 Hieron. *vir. ill.* 100; Fontaine 1985; Prudhomme 2006, 23; Dunkle 2016, 32–36.

253 On Ambrose's hymns: *Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum populum ferunt. Plane nec hoc abnuo. Grande carmen istud est, quo nihil potentius. Quid enim potentius quam confessio Trinitatis, quae quotidie totius populi ore celebratur? Certatim omnes student fidem fateri, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum norunt versibus praedicare. Facti sunt igitur omnes magistri, qui vix poterant esse discipuli* (Ambr. *c. Aux.* 34); Aug. *conf.* 9, 7, 15; Paulin. Med. *vit. Ambr.* 3, 13; Simonetti 1952; Dunkle 2016, especially 44–51; on Augustine's *Psalmus*: *Volens etiam causam Donatistarum ad ipsius humillimi vulgi et omnino imperitorum atque idiotarum notitiam pervenire, et eorum quantum fieri per nos posset inhaerere memoriae, Psalmum qui eis cantaretur per Latinas litteras feci, sed usque ad V litteram. Tales autem abecedarios appellant. Tres vero ultimas omisi; sed pro eis novissimum quasi epilogum adiunxi, tamquam eos mater alloqueretur Ecclesia. Hypopsalma etiam, quod respondetur, et prooemium causae, quod nihilominus cantaretur, non sunt in ordine litterarum; earum quippe ordo incipit post prooemium. Ideo autem non aliquo carminis genere id fieri volui, ne me necessitas metrica ad aliqua verba quae vulgo minus sunt usitata compelleret. Iste Psalmus sic incipit:* Omnes qui gaudetis de pace, modo verum iudicate, *quod eius hypopsalma est* (Aug. *retract.* 1, 20 (19)); Dunkle 2016, 36–39 with bibliography.

254 Shepardson 2008, especially 35–46, 56–62, 111–117, for Ephrem.

255 Λέγεται δὲ τὰς πάσας ἀμφὶ τὰς τριακοσίας μυριάδας ἐπῶν συγγράψαι (Soz. 3, 16, 4).

256 Οὐκ ἀγνοῶ δὲ ὡς καὶ πάλαι ἐλλογιμώτατοι τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον παρὰ Ὀσρηνοῖς ἐγένοντο Βαρδησάνης τε, ὃς τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καλουμένην αἵρεσιν συνεστήσατο, καὶ Ἁρμόνιος ὁ Βαρδησάνου παῖς, ὅν φασι διὰ τῶν παρ᾽Ἕλλησι λόγων ἀχθέντα πρῶτον μέτροις καὶ νόμοις μουσικοῖς τὴν πάτριον φωνὴν ὑπαγαγεῖν

undoubtedly derived from Sozomen[257]. As has been rightly pointed out, both accounts are tainted by some bias: Sozomen's story stresses that Syriac religious poetry derives from the Greek education of its most prominent author, to the point that he invents the fictional Harmonius, with his meaningful name[258]; Theodoret, on the contrary, even if forced to rely on Sozomen's version, tries to separate Ephrem from Greek learning as much as possible[259]. Yet, apart from these different distortions, the two accounts share the notion that Ephrem started to write poetry lest a heretic have the monopoly of that medium. Without the mention of Bardaisan and his mythical son Harmonius, the same antiheretical purpose is ascribed to Ephrem by Jacob of Serugh, who must not have been unaware of the existence of Aramaic poetry before Bardaisan and its independence from Greek culture[260]: in fact, what is emphasised of Ephrem's activity is not the writing of poetry per se, but rather his use of a choir of women to deliver this poetry[261]. In his *Homily on Saint Ephrem*, Jacob highlights mostly two functions of Ephrem's poetry: worship and polemics. In this respect, Jacob describes Ephrem's literary endeavours

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καὶ χοροῖς παραδοῦναι, καθάπερ καὶ νῦν πολλάκις οἱ Σύροι ψάλλουσιν, οὐ τοῖς Ἁρμονίου συγγράμμασιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς μέλεσι χρώμενοι. ἐπεὶ γὰρ οὐ παντάπασιν ἐκτὸς ἦν τῆς πατρῴας αἱρέσεως καὶ ὧν περὶ ψυχῆς, γενέσεώς τε καὶ φθορᾶς σώματος καὶ παλιγγενεσίας οἱ παρ' Ἕλλησι φιλοσοφοῦντες δοξάζουσιν, οἷά γε ὑπὸ λύραν ἃ συνεγράψατο συνθεὶς ταυτασὶ τὰς δόξας τοῖς οἰκείοις προσέμιξε συγγράμμασιν. ἰδὼν δὲ Ἐφραὶμ κηλουμένους τοὺς Σύρους τῷ κάλλει τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ τῷ ῥυθμῷ τῆς μελῳδίας, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο προσεθιζομένους ὁμοίως αὐτῷ δοξάζειν, καίπερ Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας ἄμοιρος, ἐπέστη τῇ καταλήψει τῶν Ἁρμονίου μέτρων· καὶ πρὸς τὰ μέλη τῶν ἐκείνου γραμμάτων ἑτέρας γραφὰς συναδούσας τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς δόγμασι συνέθηκεν, ὁποῖα αὐτῷ πεπόνηται ἐν θείοις ὕμνοις καὶ ἐγκωμίοις ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν. ἐξ ἐκείνου τε Σύροι κατὰ τὸν νόμον τῆς Ἁρμονίου ᾠδῆς τὰ τοῦ Ἐφραὶμ ψάλλουσιν (Soz. 3, 16, 5–7).

257 Κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἐν Ἐδέσσῃ μὲν Ἐφραὶμ ὁ θαυμάσιος, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ δὲ διέπρεπε Δίδυμος, κατὰ τῶν ἀντιπάλων τῆς ἀληθείας δογμάτων συγγράφοντες. καὶ οὗτος μὲν τῇ Σύρων κεχρημένος φωνῇ τῆς πνευματικῆς χάριτος τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἠφίει· παιδείας γὰρ οὐ γεγευμένος Ἑλληνικῆς, τούς τε πολυσχιδεῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων διήλεγξε πλάνους καὶ πάσης αἱρετικῆς κακοτεχνίας ἐγύμνωσε τὴν ἀσθένειαν. καὶ ἐπειδὴ Ἀρμόνιος ὁ Βαρδησάνου ᾠδάς τινας συνετεθείκει πάλαι καὶ τῇ τοῦ μέλους ἡδονῇ τὴν ἀσέβειαν κεράσας κατεκήλει τοὺς ἀκούοντας καὶ πρὸς ὄλεθρον ἤγρευε, τὴν ἁρμονίαν τοῦ μέλους ἐκεῖθεν λαβὼν ἀνέμιξε τὴν εὐσέβειαν καὶ προσενήνοχε τοῖς ἀκούουσιν ἥδιστον ὁμοῦ καὶ ὀνησιφόρον φάρμακον. ταῦτα καὶ νῦν τὰ ᾄσματα φαιδροτέρας τῶν νικηφόρων μαρτύρων τὰς πανηγύρεις ποιεῖ (Theodrt. *h. e.* 4, 29). On Theodoret's derivation from Sozomen, see Brock 1985, 80. The trope reaches even into the sixth century, where the Nestorian author Barhadbshabba Arbaya attributes Narsai's poetic activity to the menace brought about by the poems of the heretic (Miaphysite) Jacob of Serugh (Nau 1913, 612).

258 Brock 1985, 80.

259 McVey 2007, 245.

260 That Aramaic poetry should have had a long history before Ephrem and Bardaisan is suggested by the relative complexity of the forms adopted by Ephrem and by scarce but significant witnesses: Brock 1985, 79.

261 "Your instruction opened the closed mouths of the daughters of Eve; / and behold, the gatherings of the glorious (church) resound with their melodies." (Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Saint Ephrem* 41; transl. Amar 1995, 35); "This discerning man composed hymns (*madrāšē*), and gave them to the virgins (*la-btūlātā*) … (Words) such as these were spoken by Ephrem/ to the pure (*dakyātā*) as he taught them a new song of praise: // 'O daughters of the nations (*bnāt ʿammē*), approach and learn to praise / the One who delivered you from the error of your fathers'" (102–103; transl. Amar 1995, 49, 51). On this subject, McVey 2007.

in terms of forging weapons and striking or throwing darts, explicitly identifying the targets by name as renowned heretics[262]. He also praises Ephrem's adherence to "truth", which can be safely interpreted as orthodoxy as opposed to heresy[263].

A polemical purpose is apparent from Ephrem's poetry itself, and not only implicitly—with whole groups of poems, single pieces, and widespread allusions aimed at prominent heresies of the day—but also explicitly. In the *hymn. haer.*, Ephrem repeatedly addresses the writings of his enemies, calling them *madrāšē*, the same name he uses for his own poems[264]. As noted by McVey, Bardaisan is strongly linked with music, whereas other heretics, such as Mani and Marcion, are said to have written poetry, but they don't seem to have employed music[265]. Moreover, Ephrem witnesses the effectiveness of Bardaisan's musical poetry when he says that the heretic has successfully concealed the bitterness of his doctrines with the sweetness of his poetry[266]. In the last hymn of the collection, the poet presents his works as protecting the church against heresies[267]. The fact that heretical poetry was circulating at Ephrem's time and that he conceived of his work as a protection against heresy partially confirms the account of the church historians and lends credibility to Jacob's image of Ephrem.

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262 "Valiant one who humbled all heresies with your courage" (Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Saint Ephrem* 7a; transl. Amar 1995, 27); "This man introduced women to doctrinal disputes [*darrā*]; / with (their) soft tones he was victorious in the battle [*ba-qrābā*] against all heresies. // This man's mouth was a bow [*qušt-ēh*], and his words were arrows [*gērē*]; / he forged [*ḥšal*] songs like spearheads [*lōlyātā*] for the weapon [*zaynā*] which he fashioned. // This man hurled wonderful melodies against the evil; / with his instruction, he eliminated stumbling blocks which had multiplied. // ... This man overcame the apostasy of the Marcionites [*zkā l-kāpōrutā d-bēt Marqyōn*] ... This man humbled with the straightforwardness of his teaching / the logic of the cunning followers of Bardaisan [*d-guddā ṣnīʿtā d-bēt Bardayṣān*]." (152–154.160a.161; transl. Amar 1995, 65, 67). Interestingly, the word for "troop" [*guddā*] can also mean "choir": this could be a reference to the use of poetic songs in the Bardesanite community.

263 For example: "Advocate of truth [*snēgārā d-quštā*], that was a mouth for faith [*l-haymānutā*], through which plain truth [*šrārā gālyā*] spoke with loud voice". The three terms for "truth" and "faith" (*quštā, haymānutā, šrārā*) have overlapping meanings, all three oscillating between "truth", "sincerity" and "faith" or "trust". *Šrārā* and *haymānutā* are used for the Christian faith and doctrine, sometimes even as antonomasia (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 238, 3773, 4304, *s.vv.* ܩܫܝ ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܫܪܪܐ).
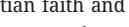
264 "Mani in his poems[(*madrāšā-w*]" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 16, 9–10); "I heard his poems (*madrāšā-w*)" (54, 1, 1); "I came across a book of Bardaisan" (51, 2, 1).

265 "In the dens of Bardaisan / tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 17, 1–6); "For he [Bardaisan] fashioned poems [*madrāšē*] / and mixed them with melodies // and he composed psalms/ and added metres // with weights and measures / he ordered words ... for David did not sing // the song of apostates/ whose lyre is deceit" (53, 5, 1–6.6, 8–10; for an analysis of these lines see Beck 1983); McVey 2007.

266 "In the dens of Bardaisan/ tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness [*ḥalyutā*] // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 17, 1–6) "He distributed to the innocent bitterness with sweetness [*mrārā b-ḥalyutā*], // the sick, who did not choose/ the healthy provision." (53, 5, 7–10).

267 See *hymn. haer.* 56, 10.

If in the traditional view Ephrem began to write poetry as a reaction against Bardaisan, Gregory wrote in reaction to Julian or, maybe, in reaction to Apollinaris's reaction to Julian. Fifth-century church historians Socrates and Sozomen, echoed by Zonaras in the twelfth century, relate that Apollinaris of Laodicaea wrote a paraphrase of the Bible as a response to Julian's famous edict forbidding Christians to teach the traditional *paideia.* As the prohibition was motivated by the pagan imprinting of the mandatory authors of this *paideia*, the work of Apollinaris sought—according to the historians—to preserve the technical and formal aspects of Greek tradition and to join it with Scripture, so that Christian teachers could in fact elude the ban. Sozomen's account is very favourable to Apollinaris, and it underlines his poetic prowess[268]. Socrates's version is considerably expanded, as it uses the Apollinaris's incident as an introduction to a longer discussion on the relationship between Christianity and classical culture. What is striking in Socrates's account is the doubling of Apollinaris: Socrates uses Apollinaris's father, of the same name, to duplicate the enterprise. According to Socrates, then, there were two Apollinarises, father and son, working jointly on the biblical paraphrases. Strangely, this piece of information is not frequently doubted by scholars, even though there is good evidence in favour of ruling out the double translation (and perhaps the whole story) as an invention[269]: the father, says Socrates, was a γραμματικός, an elementary teacher, and the son a σοφιστής, an advanced teacher; the father cast the Old Testament into Homeric and dramatic poetry, in such a way that no Greek metre was left unexplored; the son cast the New Testament as Platonic dialogues[270]. Now, the first

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268 ἡνίκα δὴ Ἀπολινάριος οὗτος εἰς καιρὸν τῇ πολυμαθείᾳ καὶ τῇ φύσει χρησάμενος, ἀντὶ μὲν τῆς Ὁμήρου ποιήσεως ἐν ἔπεσιν ἡρῴοις τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συνεγράψατο μέχρι τῆς Σαοὺλ βασιλείας καὶ εἰς εἰκοσιτέσσαρα μέρη τὴν πᾶσαν πραγματείαν διεῖλεν, ἑκάστῳ τόμῳ προσηγορίαν θέμενος ὁμώνυμον τοῖς παρ' Ἕλλησι στοιχείοις κατὰ τὸν τούτων ἀριθμὸν καὶ τάξιν. ἐπραγματεύσατο δὲ καὶ τοῖς Μενάνδρου δράμασιν εἰκασμένας κωμῳδίας, καὶ τὴν Εὐριπίδου τραγῳδίαν καὶ τὴν Πινδάρου λύραν ἐμιμήσατο. καὶ ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἐκ τῶν θείων γραφῶν τὰς ὑποθέσεις λαβὼν τῶν ἐγκυκλίων καλουμένων μαθημάτων, ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ ἐπόνεσεν ἰσαρίθμους καὶ ἰσοδυνάμους πραγματείας ἤθει τε καὶ φράσει καὶ χαρακτῆρι καὶ οἰκονομίᾳ ὁμοίας τοῖς παρ'Ἕλλησιν ἐν τούτοις εὐδοκιμήσασιν· ὥστε εἰ μὴ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα ἐτίμων οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ τὰ συνήθη φίλα ἐνόμιζον, ἐπίσης, οἶμαι, τοῖς παλαιοῖς τὴν Ἀπολιναρίου σπουδὴν ἐπῄνουν καὶ ἐδιδάσκοντο, ταύτῃ πλέον αὐτοῦ τὴν εὐφυΐαν θαυμάζοντες, ὅσῳ γε τῶν μὲν ἀρχαίων ἕκαστος περὶ ἓν μόνον ἐσπούδασεν, ὁ δὲ τὰ πάντων ἐπιτηδεύσας ἐν κατεπειγούσῃ χρείᾳ τὴν ἑκάστου ἀρετὴν ἀπεμάξατο. (Soz. 5, 18).

269 Wilson 1983, 10; Prudhomme 2006, 21; Simelidis 2009, 25–26 don't doubt the information. Hose 2004, 22 doubts that Apollinaris had even written any poetry; Speck 2003, 166–169 doubts the whole story of the Apollinarii, and so does Agosti 2001a, 70–71; Kaster 1988, 243–244 doubts the participation of Apollinaris the Elder to the enterprise.

270 Ὁ μέντοι τοῦ βασιλέως νόμος, ὃς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας μετέχειν ἐκώλυε, τοὺς Ἀπολιναρίους, ὧν καὶ πρότερον ἐμνημονεύσαμεν, φανερωτέρους ἀπέδειξεν. Ὡς γὰρ ἄμφω ἤστην ἐπιστήμονες λόγων, ὁ μὲν πατὴρ γραμματικῶν, σοφιστικῶν δὲ ὁ υἱός, χρειώδεις ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἀπεδείκνυον. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ εὐθὺς γραμματικὸς ἅτε, τὴν τέχνην γραμματικὴν Χριστιανικῷ τύπῳ συνέταττε· τά τε Μωϋσέως βιβλία διὰ τοῦ ἡρωϊκοῦ λεγομένου μέτρου μετέβαλε, καὶ ὅσα κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰν διαθήκην ἐν ἱστορίας τύπῳ συγγέγραπται. Καὶ τοῦτο μὲν τῷ δακτυλικῷ μέτρῳ συνέταττε, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τῷ τῆς τραγῳδίας τύπῳ δραματικῶς ἐξειργάζετο· καὶ παντὶ

levels of *paideia*, imparted by the γραμματικός, consisted precisely in extensive reading of Homer, complemented with the great tragediographers and a few lyric and elegiac poems; Plato, on the other side, was studied with the ῥήτωρ in the more advanced courses, because his style was seen as the epitome of Atticism. Plato's dialogues, moreover, were the summit of philosophical education, which in turn was the summit of education as such[271]. However, neither Sozomen nor Zonaras mentions paraphrases from the New Testament, nor any prose paraphrase. Socrates himself admits later on that the works of the Apollinaris "are considered as if never written"[272], which raises the doubt on how he knows them so well. Hence, there is more than a reasonable suspicion that in fact this is all a scheme to adapt the endeavour of one Apollinaris, who paraphrased Old Testament material in various classical Greek poetic genres, to the layout of contemporary *paideia*, with its division between γραμματικός and ῥήτωρ, the study of poetry (mostly Homer) in the first courses and of prose (mostly Plato) in the following. This scheme provided also for a very convenient parallelism between the relationship of Old and New Testament in Christian thought and the role of poetry (viz., Homer) and rhetoric or philosophy (viz., Plato) in classical tradition. Such a parallelism contributes to the overall thesis of the chapter, that classical culture is useful to the Christians and not completely alien to Christian truth. Finally, we have the witness of Zonaras, who tries to harmonise previous historical accounts with the Christian poetic texts he can read. He connects Gregory's poetry, renowned in Byzantine times, and the *Metaphrasis of the Psalms*, a Homeric rewriting of the Psalms, to Julian's edict, attributing the *Metaphrasis* to Apollinaris[273]. Zonaras's account is the only one mentioning Gregory's poetry, but, given the fact that he mentions only the paraphrase of the Psalter by Apollinaris and nothing more, as did the other historians, it is likely that he is simply projecting the contemporary textual situation onto the historical incident. However, an earlier source, Gregory the Presbyter's *Life of Gregory* (sixth to seventh century), draws a connection between Gregory and Apollinaris. The biographer attributes to Gregory's poetry a double aim: on one side, it served to counter Julian's pretensions that Greek culture had to be necessarily linked with pagan religion, and on the other, Gregory's poetry defied Apollinaris's monopoly of the medium. The heretic managed to win over

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μέτρῳ ῥυθμικῷ ἐχρῆτο, ὅπως ἂν μηδεὶς τρόπος τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώττης τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἀνήκοος ᾖ. Ὁ δὲ νεώτερος Ἀπολινάριος, εὖ πρὸς τὸ λέγειν παρεσκευασμένος, τὰ εὐαγγέλια καὶ τὰ ἀποστολικὰ δόγματα ἐν τύπῳ διαλόγων ἐξέθετο, καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων παρ᾽ Ἕλλησιν. (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16, 1–17).

271 Kaster 1983; Marrou 1964, 161–162, 243–248, 293–307, 309–311.

272 τῶν δὲ οἱ πόνοι ἐν ἴσῳ τοῦ μὴ γραφῆναι λογίζονται (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16, 22–23).

273 οὕτω γὰρ ἐξεμάνη κατὰ χριστιανῶν ὡς καὶ κωλύειν αὐτοὺς μαθημάτων μετέχειν Ἑλληνικῶν, μὴ δεῖν λέγων μύθους αὐτὰ ὀνομάζοντάς τε καὶ διαβάλλοντας τῆς ἐξ αὐτῶν ὠφελείας ἀπολαύειν καὶ δι᾽ αὐτῶν ὁπλίζεσθαι κατ᾽ αὐτῶν. ὅθεν τῶν παίδων τῶν χριστωνύμων εἰργομένων μετιέναι τοὺς ποιητὰς ὁ Ἀπολινάριος λέγεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ Ψαλτηρίου ὁρμηθῆναι παράφρασιν καὶ ὁ μέγας ἐν θεολογίᾳ Γρηγόριος εἰς τὴν ποίησιν τῶν ἐπῶν, ἵν᾽ ἀντὶ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μαθημάτων ταῦτα οἱ νέοι μανθάνοντες τήν τε γλῶσσαν ἐξελληνίζωνται καὶ τὰ μέτρα διδάσκωνται (Zonar. *hist.* p. 61, 13–62, 4). The attribution of the *Metaphrasis* to Apollinaris was ruled out by Golega 1960.

people to his doctrine by way of his masterful poetry; therefore, Gregory, even though he was enjoying an ascetic retirement, wrote and published his own poetry[274]. The story is very similar to that of Ephrem: a retired ascetic writing poetry only to contrast a successful and skilful heretic.

We could dismiss the story of Gregory the Presbyter as a free invention if we did not have firsthand evidence that Gregory wrote to counter Apollinaris's poetry. He did so in the last part of his life, when he probably wrote the greater part of his poetry and when the relationship with Apollinaris was already embittered[275]. At the end of an letter devoted to Apollinaris's christological errors, Gregory says:

> Εἰ δὲ οἱ μακροὶ λόγοι καὶ τὰ νέα ψαλτήρια καὶ ἀντίφθογγα τῷ Δαϋὶδ καὶ ἡ τῶν μέτρων χάρις ἡ τρίτη Διαθήκη νομίζεται, καὶ ἡμεῖς ψαλμολογήσομεν καὶ πολλὰ γράψομεν καὶ μετρήσομεν. Ἐπειδὴ δοκοῦμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν· εἴπερ Πνεύματος χάρις τοῦτό ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνθρωπίνη καινοτομία (Greg. Naz. *ep.* 101, 73)[276].

These lines can be read as an announcement by Gregory that he is going to write poetry to counter Apollinaris's works. Against this view, Hose believes that these lines can't be linked with Apollinaris's poetry, because the comparison with David that they contain could only point to poetry in the genre of the Psalms, but since we know the *Metaphrasis* to be of a different author, and since ancient historians (excluding Zonaras, for obvious reasons) do not attribute paraphrases of the Psalms to Apollinaris, the idea of Gregory responding to Apollinaris's poetry with poetry loses its central point. This is a misrepresentation of these lines. First of all, Gregory mentions three elements of Apollinaris's communication—namely, "long discussions" (μακροὶ λόγοι), "psalm-imitation" (νέα ψαλτήρια), and "the elegance of metre" (ἡ τῶν μέτρων χάρις): this means that, even granted that νέα ψαλτήρια cannot refer to poetry, we still have the unambiguous "elegance of metre" to deal with. This expression must refer to poetry in traditional Greek forms. Second, Hose's view is forced to read the comparison with David only in connection with a paraphrase of the Psalms. As shown by Gregory's *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 88–89)[277], our author sees David as the paradigm of every Christian poet; hence, ref-

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274 περὶ δὲ τῶν ἐμμέτρων, ὧν ἐμνήσθην καὶ πρώην, διττὸς αὐτῷ γέγονεν ὁ σκοπός· πρῶτος μέν, ὅπως τὴν ἄθεσμον Ἰουλιανοῦ τοῦ τυράννου νομοθεσίαν μειρακιώδη καὶ ἀνίσχυρον ἀπελέγξῃ, κελεύουσαν μὴ μετεῖναι Χριστιανοῖς τῆς Ἑλλήνων παιδείας· δεύτερος δέ, ἐπεὶ ἑώρα Ἀπολλινάριον ῥάψαντα πολυστίχους βίβλους ἐκ διαφόρων μέτρων, καὶ τούτοις κλέψαντα τοὺς πολλοὺς εἰς τὴν αἵρεσιν, ὡς ἐλλόγιμον δῆθεν, ἀναγκαῖον ᾠήθη, ἐν Ἀριανζοῖς ἡσυχάζων μετὰ τὴν ὑποστροφὴν καὶ σχολὴν ἄγων, οἷα πραγμάτων ἀπηλλαγμένος, τηνικαῦτα γράψαι τὰ ἔμμετρα, ὅθεν μοι εὕρηται ἡ πλείστη ὕλη τῆσδε τῆς ὑποθέσεως (Gregory the Presbyter, *Life of Gregory* PG 35, 304 A-C).
275 McGuckin 2001a, 384–396.
276 "If, however, long discussions and new psalters, dissonant from David, and the elegance of metre are held as the Third Testament, we too will speak through psalms and write long and in metre. Because we too believe to have the Spirit of God, if only these things are a gift of the Spirit, and not human innovations".
277 Σαοὺλ σε τοῦτο πεισάτω, καὶ πνεύματος / ἐλευθερωθεὶς τοῖς τρόποις τῆς κινύρας (II, 1, 39, 88–89) with reference to 1Sam. 16:14–23.

erences to David can be interpreted also as general references to poetry and not always and only as referring to the biblical book of Psalms. Moreover, Apollinaris's psalter is described as "dissonant" (ἀντίφθογγα) to David's. Such a description isn't apt for a paraphrastic psalter, which should be consonant to its original. Since the issue here is not style, but content, the word ἀντίφθογγα must mean that Apollinaris's poems contradict David's teachings, and, given Gregory's main concern with Apollinaris's Christology, they must have contradicted David's messianic prophecies specifically and all those passages in the Psalms where Gregory saw christological statements. Finally, allowing for the sake of argument that Gregory refers to a paraphrase of the Psalms, why would have he found fault with it? Among the many oeuvres by Apollinaris, Gregory had no reason to attack specifically the biblical paraphrase, a genre that he himself practiced. If then *ep.* 101 doesn't refer to a paraphrase of the Psalms in the first place, the fact that our *Metaphrasis* is not by Apollinaris or that the historians don't mention a paraphrase of the Psalms is of no relevance in excluding that Apollinaris did in fact write poetry and Gregory reacted to it. After all, there is another passage in Sozomen that seems to point in the same direction as these lines by Gregory. Sozomen, at *h. e.* 6, 25, 5, writes that the Apollinarist communities used different rites and sang (ψάλλοντες) "some metrical ditties composed by Apollinaris himself". These works are linked to Apollinaris's poetic prowess, which allowed him, thanks to his education, to employ every metre of the Greek tradition, a detail that Sozomen had already mentioned when speaking of Apollinaris's biblical paraphrases. Apollinaris's poems were a hit, and they spread also outside of liturgy, with pieces composed for every situation of day-to-day life[278]. It is likely that Gregory's remarks in *ep.* 101 are aimed at these poems and not at the biblical paraphrases: while the latter would date back to Julian's reign, when Apollinaris was still a prominent figure of the Nicene ranks, and their aim was antipagan, the poems mentioned by Sozomen fall under the category of heretical propaganda, as seen in the cases of Arius or Bardaisan, with the typical remark that everyone in his daily life sang the works of the heretic. It is conceivable, then, that Gregory wrote poetry in reaction to Apollinaris's works. Some of Gregory's poems can be traced back to the Apollinarist controversy (for example, I, 1, 10), and maybe others, even though they are not directly discussing Apollinaris's theories, were in fact conceived and composed to compete with analogous ones by Apollinaris.

It appears that the two major poets of Eastern Christianity in the fourth century began to write only after heretics had already employed that medium, and only to

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278 ἐκ τούτου δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλαις πόλεσι χωρὶς ἐκκλησίαζον ὑπὸ ἐπισκόποις ἰδίοις, καὶ θεσμοῖς ἐχρῶντο ἀλλοτρίοις τῆς καθόλου ἐκκλησίας, παρὰ τὰς νενομισμένας ἱερὰς ᾠδὰς ἔμμετρά τινα μελύδρια ψάλλοντες παρ' αὐτοῦ Ἀπολιναρίου ηὑρημένα. πρὸς γὰρ τῇ ἄλλῃ παιδεύσει καὶ ποιητικὸς ὢν καὶ παντοδαπῶν μέτρων εἰδήμων καὶ τοῖς ἐντεῦθεν ἡδύσμασι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἔπειθεν αὐτῷ προσέχειν· ἄνδρες τε γὰρ παρὰ τοὺς πότους καὶ ἐν ἔργοις καὶ γυναῖκες παρὰ τοὺς ἱστοὺς τὰ αὐτοῦ μέλη ἔψαλλον. σπουδῆς γὰρ καὶ ἀνέσεως καὶ ἑορτῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πρὸς τὸν ἑκάστου καιρὸν εἰδύλλια αὐτῷ πεπόνητο, πάντα εἰς εὐλογίαν θεοῦ τείνοντα (Soz. 6, 25, 5).

counter the poetic monopoly of those heretics. Yet when one skims the works of these Christian poets, only a part of their poetry can be meaningfully linked with antiheretical polemics. There is much more that must be traced to other aims and occasions. In the case of Gregory, he himself gives his motivations, and countering Apollinaris is only one of the many he mentions. This contrasts with his ancient biographer's explanation, that poetry was essentially a response to Julian and Apollinaris. In the case of Ephrem, there is a stark contrast between his various and huge corpus and the limited purposes that fifth-century sources (Sozomen, Theodoret, Jacob) attribute to it. These same sources seem to reserve poetry as a mean of expression to heretics only, and only exceptionally to orthodox figures. Was poetry really a "heretical" genre? First, we can explain the attention paid by our sources to doctrinal controversies by reference to the situation of the church in fifth century: authors like Sozomen, Theodoret, Socrates, and Jacob of Serugh write in the context of the christological controversies, arguably the most heated debate inside the ancient church. In this context, it is only normal that they would read a continuous struggle of Orthodoxy and heresy also in the past incidents of ecclesiastical history. For example, Jacob's reduction of Ephrem's aims to the rebuttal of heresies and the praise of God is understandable in terms of Jacob's own concerns in writing poetry[279]. But there is more, for we perceive in the sources an ambivalent attitude towards poetry. Jacob, for whom Christian poetry is a given, uses the antiheretical purpose of Ephrem's poetry to justify his use of women choirs[280]. Theodoret receives Sozomen's account on the beginnings of Syriac poetry but, as much as possible, disconnects the authoritative Ephrem from the supposed Greek roots of Syriac poetry, stressing the saint's lack of *paideia*. A similar, albeit more ambiguous, image of poetry is found in Sozomen's accounts. He too denies any link between Ephrem and Greek *paideia*, even if he witnesses to a Syriac *paideia* developed among Ephrem's pupils[281]. However, among these pupils some are praised only for their eloquence, because they were not orthodox. Otherwise, we saw Greek poetry always linked with heretics, Bardaisan (by the proxy of his fictitious son Harmonius) and Apollinaris. Even though Sozomen, in his account of Julian's edict, praises Apollinaris' skill , Sozomen's take on later—and more original—literary efforts of Apollinaris seems less generous, at least judging from his dismissive tone: he calls the "new psalms" composed by Apollinaris "ditties" (μελύδρια). Among the incidents relating to Julian's edict—which, according to Sozomen, would have been

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279 See McVey 2007, 245–246.

280 However, as noted by McVey 2007, 246, Jacob is something of an exception, because his attitude is much more sympathetic towards Ephrem than that of his contemporary and correspondent Philoxenus of Mabbug. The latter drifted apart from Ephrem's legacy in the course of his life, most of all because of the latter's insufficient Christology (Butts 2017).

281 καίπερ Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας ἄμοιρος (Soz. 3, 16, 7); καὶ μαθητὰς ἐσχηκέναι πολλοὺς σπουδῇ τὴν αὐτοῦ παίδευσιν ζηλώσαντας, ἐπισημοτάτους δὲ Ἀββᾶν καὶ Ζηνόβιον, Ἀβραάμ τε καὶ Μαρᾶν καὶ Συμεῶνα, ἐφ᾽ οἷς μεγαλαυχοῦσιν οἱ Σύρων παῖδες καὶ ὅσοι τὴν παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς παιδείαν ἠκρίβωσαν. ἐπίσης δὲ Παυλωνᾶν καὶ Ἀρανὰδ ἐπαινοῦσιν ἐπὶ εὐγλωττίᾳ· φασὶ δὲ τῶν ὑγιῶν δογμάτων διαμαρτεῖν αὐτούς (4).

motivated by envy of the *paideia* acquired by Apollinaris, Basil, and Gregory—nothing is said of Gregory, and Basil is cautiously credited with a witty answer to a jeer by the emperor, showing his educated background and, even more, his courage[282]. Sozomen shows no sign of interest for Gregory's poetry. Socrates has the most favourable presentation of Greek *paideia* we have seen. He frames the account of Apollinaris's paraphrases with his duplication of the character and the parallelisms between γραμματική and ῥητορική on one side and Old and New Testament on the other in order to defend the value of classical culture. However, Socrates's judgement on the paraphrases per se is not as approving as it appears at first. In fact, he praises them as an astounding achievement, but he also says that their later disappearance is providential[283]. If the Apollinarian paraphrases had wholly replaced classical authors in an educational context, argues Socrates, there would have been a cultural divide between Christians and pagans, a divide that would have made dialogue and conversion harder[284]. Therefore, in order to legitimise Greek *paideia*, Socrates must underplay the importance of Christian classicising poetry. Moreover, the fact that he has to defend Greek *paideia* at all means that someone could attack it. These might have been monks: an increasing influence of monasticism and monastic values in fifth-century Greek Christianity might have made our witnesses more wary about Christian poetry. A remark on poetry by a leading figure of monasticism between the fourth and fifth century, Nilus of Ancyra, again connects this genre with Apollinaris and shows a very poor appreciation for it: writing a letter (2, 49) to a grammarian turned monk, Nilus launches into a tirade against pagan culture, especially poetry, "the hexameters and the iambs"[285]. The emphasis on poetry as the summary of vain pagan εὐέπεια and σοφία (eloquence and learning) may be due to the addressee's the profession as a γραμματικός. In fact, when Nilus underlines the absurdity of turning back to pagan learning after having embraced monasticism, he may be

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282 τάδε γὰρ ἐπιτωθάζων ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς τότε διαπρέπουσιν ἐπισκόποις ἐπέστειλεν· «ἀνέγνων, ἔγνων, κατέγνων», τοὺς δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα ἀντιγράψαι· «ἀνέγνως, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἔγνως· εἰ γὰρ ἔγνως, οὐκ ἂν κατέγνως.» εἰσὶ δὲ οἳ Βασιλείῳ τῷ προστάντι τῶν ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ ἐκκλησιῶν ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀνατιθέασι, καὶ οὐκ ἀπεικός· ἀλλ᾽εἴτε αὐτοῦ εἴτε ἄλλου ταῦτά ἐστι, δίκαιον ἀνδρείας καὶ παιδεύσεως ἄγασθαι τὸν γράψαντα (Soz. 5, 18, 8).

283 Ἀλλ᾽ ἡ πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ κρείσσων ἐγένετο καὶ τῆς τούτων σπουδῆς καὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως ὁρμῆς· ὁ μὲν γὰρ νόμος οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπέσβη τῷ βασιλεῖ, ὡς προϊόντες δηλώσομεν, τῶν δὲ οἱ πόνοι ἐν ἴσῳ τοῦ μὴ γραφῆναι λογίζονται (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16).

284 Σφόδρα δὲ καταπολεμοῦνται οἱ πολέμιοι, ὅταν τοῖς αὐτῶν ὅπλοις χρώμεθα κατ᾽ αὐτῶν· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἐνῆν ὑπάρξειν τοῖς Χριστιανίζουσι, δι᾽ ὧν οἱ Ἀπολινάριοι ἔγραψαν (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16).

285 Τῶν ἀτοποτάτων τοίνυν ἂν εἴη, προβάντας ἡμᾶς τῶι ὄρει τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν ὑψηλῆς φιλοσοφίας, μετὰ τὸ διαπτῦσαι τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν τερθρείαν, καὶ ἀτιμάσαι τὴν κομπωιδίαν αὐτῶν, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τῆς κουφοδοξίας καὶ τῆς ματαιοπονίας καταφέρεσθαι σκοτεινοτάτην φάραγγα, καὶ τοὺς τελείους τὴν φρένα πάλιν παιδαριεύεσθαι, καὶ δίκην μειρακίων περὶ πολλοῦ ποιεῖσθαι τὰ ἔπη καὶ τοὺς ἰάμβους, ὧν χρείαν οὐδεὶς ἔσχεν (Nil. Anc. *ep.* 2, 49, PG 79, 220C). The passage is really interesting: beside the obvious themes of regression from the previous conversion to Christ (in keeping with the addressee's renewed profession) and the aggressive anti-Hellenistic polemic, the regression is aptly described as a return to childhood. This hints at the fact that the grammarian's students were adolescents (μειράκια, παιδάρια).

trying to persuade his addressee not to resume his former profession[286]. However, this firm condemnation of poetry by an authoritative figure of the monastic movement had to represent a shared feeling, or at least to influence it. Concerning this influence, it is very interesting that the person brought forward by Nilus as an example of the damages of mixing pagan and Christian culture is Apollinaris of Laodicaea[287].

Hence, in evaluating our fifth-century (and later) sources, we have to take into account two fundamental biases: their tendency to read previous church history as a history of dogmatic disputes and a suspicious attitude towards poetry conveyed by (specifically Egyptian) monasticism. For these reasons, later sources fail to account for the abundant and varied corpora of poetry produced by Ephrem and Gregory, which comprise different genres and contents, and therefore different aims and targets. This is not to say that polemical and specifically antiheretical themes are absent. On the contrary, these are an important part of Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry, but, besides theological polemics, the texts on bishops—to take a relevant example—present us with intraecclesial and, with Ephrem, even intracongregational polemics, which have almost nothing theological and are very political. Therefore, the image of the withdrawn ascetic—Ephrem or the old Gregory—undertaking the childish exercise of poetry unwillingly, only to counter the spread of heretical psalms and songs, is largely a fifth-century invention[288]. Rather, in the fourth century, poetry was seen by every strand of Christianity and pagans alike as a legitimate and effective means to carry out a polemic or create group identity. Besides, polemic and, in a more general way, poetry enjoyed an increasing prestige from the third century until the sixth, above all among the elites, but also in the eyes of the general populace: the flourishing of metrical epigraphy in late antiquity is a witness to this success[289]. The prestige of poetry could recommend it to an author who aimed at gaining or restoring relevance in a communal context.

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286 The boundary between rhetor or grammarian and monk or bishop was often very porous: Brown 1992, 75. Two cases are emblematic: Gregory of Nazianzus exercised the profession of rhetor upon his return from Athens, his protestations of ascetic desires notwithstanding (McLynn 2006). Gregory of Nyssa, though the scion of a family already most influential in contemporary ecclesiastical life, had to be rebuked by Gregory of Nazianzus to leave beside the pagan books and pursue an ecclesiastical career (Greg. Naz. *ep.* 11; McGuckin 2001a, 42–43; see also Socr. *h. e.* 4, 26).

287 Εἰ δὲ θαυμάζεις τοὺς γράφοντας τὰ ἔπη, ὥρα σοι καὶ Ἀπολλινάριον τὸν δυσσεβῆ καὶ καινοτόμον θαυμάζειν, πολλὰ λίαν μετρήσαντα καὶ ἐποποιήσαντα καὶ ματαιοπονήσαντα καὶ παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν λόγοις ἀνοήτοις κατατριβέντα, οἰδήσαντα δὲ τοῖς ἀκερδέσι τῶν ἐπῶν, καὶ φλεγμήναντα καὶ ὑδεριάσαντα τοῖς λογισμοῖς «καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα αὐτοῦ διῆλθεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς», ὡς Δαυῒδ ἔλεγεν (Nil. Anc. *ep.* 2, 49, PG 79, 221B-C)

288 On the creation of a monastic identity for Gregory: Storin 2017a; and for Ephrem: Taylor 1998; Wickes 2018, 26–27, 35–36.

289 On epigraphic poetry and the light it can throw on late antique attitudes towards poetry, especially in larger strata of population: Agosti 2010, especially 163–165, 180

1.3.4 Poetry as education

Gregory's second and third reasons for writing poetry spurred the most interest among the scholars. The second reason, its intricacies notwithstanding, can be summed up as follows[290]: Gregory writes poetry because poetry is part of the educational syllabus of the youth, and he wants to introduce some Christian content in it; moreover, since young people often appreciate poetry and song, a Christian offer of these genres could enhance the youth's moral growth or at least avoid the nasty influence of pagan poetry on their habits[291]. The importance of this aim is witnessed by the genres of poetry listed in the following lines, all of which have an educational bearing[292]. Gregory's fourth motive, already mentioned, is his painful awareness that, at the time, pagan works excel in aesthetic value over Christian ones[293]. In other words, Gregory desires to occupy with Christian content ideal spaces formerly dominated by pagan culture[294].

These two motives have a clear common ground: both involve an opposition to pagan literature. In the second argument, the opposition is played in the didactic field, whilst in the third, aesthetics is the bone of contention. However, this different focus is actually a link between the two motives. For, as Hose has clearly shown, late antique Greek poetry was a genre strongly dependent on schools[295]. Indeed, literary excellence and being part of the school syllabus were synonymous: the syllabus was assembled from works perceived as excellent, and excellence was predicated on the adherence to school models. It was one and the same space Gregory was trying to claim for Christianity from his pagan predecessors. In this ambition, the modern scholar can read the lasting effect of Julian's reign; not because, as some have assumed, Gregory was always responding directly to

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290 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 504–506.

291 Δεύτερον δὲ τοῖς νέοις, / Καὶ τῶν ὅσοι μάλιστα χαίρουσι λόγοις, / Ὥσπερ τι τερπνὸν τοῦτο δοῦναι φάρμακον, / Πειθοῦς ἀγωγὸν εἰς τὰ χρησιμώτερα, / Τέχνη γλυκάζων τὸ πικρὸν τῶν ἐντολῶν. / Φιλεῖ δ' ἀνίεσθαί τε καὶ νευρᾶς τόνος· / Εἴ πως θέλεις καὶ τοῦτο· εἰ μή τι πλέον, / Ἀντ' ἀσμάτων σοι ταῦτα καὶ λυρισμάτων. / Παίζειν δέδωκα, εἴ τι καὶ παίζειν θέλεις, / Μή τις βλάβη σοι πρὸς τὸ καλὸν συλωμένῳ (II, 1, 39, 37–46); Τίς οὖν βλάβη σοι, τοὺς νέους δι' ἡδονῆς / Σεμνῆς ἄγεσθαι πρὸς Θεοῦ κοινωνίαν; / Οὐ γὰρ φέρουσιν ἀθρόαν μετάστασιν. / Νῦν μέν τις ἔστω μίξις εὐγενεστέρα. / Πῆξιν δ' ὅταν τὸ καλὸν ἐν χρόνῳ λάβῃ, / Ὑποσπάσαντες, ὡς ἐρείσματ' ἀφίδων, / Τὸ κομψὸν, αὐτὸ τἀγαθὸν φυλάξομεν. / Τούτου τί ἂν γένοιτο χρησιμώτερον; (90–97). Analysis of this motive can be found in Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 504–506; Prudhomme 2006, 191–193, 21–23; Simelidis 2009, 25–27; Schwab 2012.

292 Χωρεῖτε· μακρὸν δ' οὐδὲν οὐδ' ὑπὲρ κόρον, / Ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἄχρηστον, ὡς ἐγῷμαι παντελῶς. / Αὐτοὶ διδάξουσ' οἱ λόγοι θέλοντά σε. / Τὰ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τῶν ἐμῶν, τὰ δ' ἔκτοθεν. / Ἢ τῶν καλῶν ἔπαινος, ἢ κακῶν ψόγος, / Ἤ δόγματ', ἢ γνώμη τις, ἢ τομαὶ λόγων, / Μνήμην ἔχουσαι τῇ δέσει τοῦ γράμματος (II, 1, 39, 61–67). On the relationship between the genres here listed and Gregory's extant poems: Demoen 1996, 64–65; Prudhomme 2006, 60–65.

293 Τρίτον πεπονθὼς οἶδα· πρᾶγμα μὲν τυχὸν / Μικροπρεπές τι, πλὴν πέπονθ'· οὐδ' ἐν λόγοις / Πλέον δίδωμι τοὺς ξένους ἡμῶν ἔχειν· / Τούτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχρωσμένοις λόγοις / Εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. / Ὑμῖν μὲν οὖν δὴ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἐπαίξαμεν. / Ἔστω τις ἡμῖν καὶ χάρις λεόντιος (II, 1, 39, 47–53).

294 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502–503.

295 Hose 2004.

Julian's edict on Christian teachers, but rather because the whole of Julian's figure, from his appearances to his writings and his imperial acts, posed a challenge to Christianity[296]. There was an ongoing discussion during the fourth century on the relationship between pagan and Christian culture, and Gregory's poetry can be explained, at least partly, by reference to these concerns: other works testifying to this discussion are Eusebius's *Praeparatio* and *Demonstratio evangelica*, Basil's *Address to Young Men on Greek Literature*, and Jerome's *ep.* 22, from the Christian side[297]. Pagans, too, had something to say about Christian appropriation of classicising forms: it is probable that a group of poetic texts formed around Julian and his teacher Maximus of Ephesus with the explicit aim of reasserting pagan ownership of cultural goods such as hexametric poetry[298].

Gregory's ambition to become part of the school curriculum and at the same time to challenge the classics' literary authority is apparent from his literary production. Among the reasons pushing him to publish some of his letters, one was admittedly to help students learn the epistolary style: this amounts to declaring his letter collection a literary model worthy of the ancient writers[299]. Gregory likely edited other parts of his oeuvre similarly. The speeches, for example, were probably edited at least in cycles, with *or*. 27–31 as the prominent example[300]. The biblical poems edited in the Patrologia Graeca among the "Theologica" were clearly crafted for didactic use and formed a self-contained work[301]. The *Poemata arcana*, for example, both thanks to their internal consistency and to their stand in manuscript tradition, were certainly published as a single book, an attempt, according to Keydell, to write a Christian didactic poem modelled on Hesiod and Hellenistic poetry[302]. A recent contribution convincingly proposes to read even the eighth book of the *Palatine Anthology*, Gregory's funeral epigrams, as one consistent book[303]. With it, Gregory could challenge the pagan discourse of death in the workshop of the stonecutters and on tombstones, too[304]. When one queues up these editions, McGuckin's idea that Gregory aimed at producing a complete Christian

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296 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 503; Prudhomme 2006, 193; Simelidis 2009, 25–27; the formative impact of Julian's figure on Gregory's literary and ecclesiastical activity is amply demonstrated by Elm 2012.

297 On Eusebius as responding to Porphyry and being answered by Julian: Elm 2012, 307–312. A comparison between Basil's and Gregory's approaches to classical culture in Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 506; McGuckin 2001a, 96–97; Schwab 2012.

298 The best example among these texts is the *Lithica orphica*; see Livrea 1992; Zito 2012. On the continuation of this polemic in the fifth century, see Agosti 2008.

299 Greg. Naz. *ep.* 52–53.

300 McGuckin 2001a, 376; Gallay 1978, 8–10.

301 Demoen 1996, 61; the biblical poems are Greg. Naz. I, 1, 12–28 in Migne's edition, and they all belong to Werhahn's *Gedichtgruppe* III; see Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 26–27.

302 They are Greg. Naz. I, 1, 1–5; 7–9; see Keydell 1953, 137–138; Demoen 1996, 61; Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 55–57. The *Poemata arcana* form an autonomous *Gedichtgruppe* in the manuscript tradition: Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 28; Moreschini/Sykes 1997, ix.

303 Goldhill/Greensmith 2020.

304 McGuckin 2006, 204–205; Agosti 2016, 132–133, shows that Gregory's poems were frequently engraved, also in provincial contexts, witnessing to a wide circulation of his poetry.

curriculum seems not unwarranted[305]. Anyway, what stands out even to the most sceptical scholar is that Gregory always practiced genres with a long pagan tradition and shunned those habitually practiced by Christians: he wrote letters, orations, and poems, but not one biblical commentary, nor a paschal letter nor an *Apology* of Christianity. While the other Cappadocians were innovative—Gregory of Nyssa wrote one of the first hagiographies (his *Life of St. Macrina*), and Basil an influential monastic rule— Gregory of Nazianzus seems remarkably conservative in his choice of genres. Moreover, as his poems show, he tried to cover the whole range of ancient genres: among his many poems, there is no kind of Greek poetry that Gregory doesn't appropriate and turn to Christian use. Here a pattern that probably reflected a personal predilection of his proved useful: Gregory's passion for Callimachus provided him with a model for hybrid poems, for mixing up genres or reproducing the content of some genres in the metre reserved for other[306].

The four poems on bishops lack any clear indication that they were part of a comprehensive and revised edition. As has been already said, the long poem II, 1, 12 is closely linked with the autobiographical II, 1, 11, and some scholars surmise that they were part of a larger collection sent to Constantinople, whose preface was the poem *On His Verses*, II, 1, 39[307]. This is difficult to prove. Among the poems on bishops, II, 1, 10 and 13, linked by their first line, were likely published together by Gregory, but there is no reason to see them inside a larger collection. The elegiac II, 1, 17 is similar to many other poems of the same genre, whose overall publication state is hardly recognizable. Therefore, these polemical poems cannot be readily ascribed to Gregory's project of building a complete curriculum. This could be due to their occasional character or to lack of time on Gregory's part. Nonetheless, the poems can be linked with Gregory's attitude towards education and classical culture. First of all, because they complete the number of Greek genres represented in his works: II, 1, 12 (together with II, 1, 40 and 41) are the only specimens of iambic invective in the collection; II, 1, 13 is a recasting of the same theme in hexameters, thus latching on to contemporary hexametric invectives, exemplified by Claudian; II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17 belong in the larger group of elegiac and plaintive poems, contaminating it with political invective. In the wider context of his oeuvre, these poems show different ways a Christian could treat invective and the iambic tradition, much in the same sense as the *Poemata arcana* show how a Christian could treat didactic poetry. Moreover, the content of the poems confronts education from a Christian perspective. Through the attacks against his underqualified fellow bishops, Gregory's poems frame not only a moral model for the Christian leader and his community but also an intellectual curriculum. These poems were meant to reach those who taught the Christian people and to enhance those teachers' attention to doctrinal

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305 McGuckin 2001a, 117–118; McGuckin 2006, 195, 211–212.

306 On Gregory's Callimacheanism: Demoen 1993, 243; Prudhomme 2006, 78, 265–266; Faulkner 2010, 81–82; MacDougall 2016; Theris Poulos 2019.

307 McGuckin 2006, 208.

and didactic facets of their ministry. Poetry, with its circulation among elite circles of readers, could influence the leaders, and if it was adopted in a school context, it could influence future elites and church leaders (more on this at §1.2.1.3).

Teaching those who in turn will teach the people: this is what Wickes says Ephrem's *Poems on Faith* were meant to do[308]. That collection shows a deep and ubiquitous concern for correct education, such as is rarely found in other works. Moreover, Ephrem's framing of the Trinitarian debate puts in the spotlight the influence of Greek culture on theology, because, much more than singling out positions and persons, Ephrem condemns the whole approach to theology developed in the fourth century, connecting it with Greek culture[309]. The poems on bishops, however, seem distant from these issues, so that they cannot easily be linked with an educational context. Yet if we broaden our definition of education, then its relevance to these poems will be apparent: recited or sung as part of the liturgy, Ephrem's *madrāšē* reached the whole congregation and connected it with its bishop, so that the poems' praise, blame, and advice influenced their audience. After all, at least one of the meanings of the root **d-r-š*, whence the word *madrāšā* comes, is "to teach". The congregation was presented with models of behaviour and a teaching on the model bishop. The bishop, praised before his community, learned what standards he would be held accountable to. Finally, the female ascetics directly addressed in *CN* 13 received spiritual guidance and were taught their place in the community. Even the instruction they likely received from Ephrem to stage the performances of his poems connects these works in yet another way to an educational context. Nonetheless, all of these educational aims prescind from an established scholastic tradition, thus differing from Gregory's grappling with Greek *paideia*. In Ephrem's context, poetry serves as an educational means because it is part of liturgy, in the same way as Christian homilies have an educational aspect to them.

In the last stanza of *CN* 13, Ephrem urges his audience to imitate the city of Nisibis, putting the living body of Christ into themselves as the city has put the corpse of bishop Jacob within itself, in order to gain the same protection as Nisibis enjoyed during the Persian sieges during their life[310]. This is a common pattern in the first part of the *CN*: historical incidents, the sieges in particular, but also the succession of the bishops, are analysed from a theological and moral point of view, showing either God's providential nature or praiseworthy and blameworthy behaviours for the congregation[311]. Since

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308 Wickes 2018, 42–49; Harvey 2005, 129–130.

309 Wickes 2015a, 41–46; Bruns 1990.

310 "Imitate Nisibis, / O eloquent daughters of Nisibis, // which placed the body inside her, / and it was a wall outside her: // put in yourselves a living body, / which may be a wall for your life." (*CN* 13, 21).

311 See §4.1.2. There is a strong pedagogical strand running through these poems, which is best summed up in this stanza: "Let your anguishes be / books for your remembrance [*seprē l-ʿuhdānay-k*(*y*)]: // for the three sieges / are capable to be for you // books whose histories/ you should meditate every hour. // Since you had despised/ the Two Testaments, // in which you could read your life / therefore He had you written // three grievous books / in which you should read your chastisements." (*CN* 3, 11). In the poems on bishops, as we shall see, the same pedagogical reading of history is employed to justify the different

the poems were written during a period of many years and are clearly divisible into smaller, more consistent cycles, one could guess they were selected and ordered in the *CN* to prove these very points: that history is providentially guided and that Christian communities should comply with certain moral laws, or else bad situations will result. In this theological and pedagogical perspective, the historical matter of these poems finds its justification and its link with the rest of the collection. Therefore, I contend that whoever edited the collection known as *CN*, be it Ephrem himself or one of his pupils, did it so as to create a book on various theological themes, the first being the relationship between God and community throughout history and the providential character of historical events. It is true that the second part of the *CN* is totally unrelated to these historical poems, and yet it has a clear theological character, as opposed to more "liturgical" collections, such as the *Poems on Nativity*, and it is concerned with eschatological themes (death, afterlife, and bodily resurrection). I find it remarkable that, notwithstanding their clear liturgical destination, the historical poems have been coupled with the theological ones. One can surmise that, differently from liturgical cycles such as the *Poems on Nativity* and *Poems on Easter*, and similarly to more scholastic ones such as the *Poems on Faith* or the *Against the Heretics*, the historical poems were collected with a view to teaching. Since such an operation should have been done shortly after Ephrem's death, it is not absurd to think that the poet himself wanted to rise above occasional matters to a more general reflection on history and the church, meant to be theologically educational. In this case, the *CN* would have been used and edited in connection with a more formal educational institution, the community of literate ascetics gathered around Ephrem, especially in Edessa in the last years of his life[312]. Thus, Ephrem's poetry, as well as Gregory's, became a textbook of Christian education, and this could have been not far removed from its author's intentions. In the ancient witness on Ephrem's pupils and in the careful edition of his poems we can glimpse the dawning reality of educational institutions collateral to liturgy. In this perspective, Gregory's and Ephrem's poetry share the same importance in moulding education in an age of change, from the ancient institution of imperial schools and the liturgy for Christians to episcopal or parochial schools and monastic institutions.

characters of the bishops in Nisibis, as different educational approaches (§4.1.1). The poems written in Edessa are less concerned with this theme, which however is present in a few passages (*CN* 26, 5–6; *CN* 27, 6; *CN* 28, 2). However, the vicissitudes of the communities in Edessa and Ḥarran undergo the same process of typology as those of Nisibis, being paralleled with biblical episodes, so that they become the New Testament-reality prefigured by the Old Testament image. A similar view of history emerges from the four *hymn. c. Iulian.* and the poem edited by Beck as [*De ecclesia*] preceding them in the manuscript. This could impair the idea of *CN* as a collection of poems on the meaning of history, because five of the most significant poems on the theme were not comprised in it.

312 Wickes 2018, 44–48.

1.3.5 Conclusion

Ephrem and Gregory approached poetry from very different grounds. For Ephrem, poetry is a language suited to his modes of thought: the rhetorical, symbolic, and musical armoury of poetry fitted perfectly with a theology that refuses to define and to rationalise. It is a language open to biblical words and to natural similes, but impatient of abstractions and technical terms, where reflection, prayer, and praise are hardly distinguishable. For Ephrem, poetry is an expressive choice (see §1.3.1). Gregory is totally different: he wrote the greater part of his poetry late in his life, after an accomplished career as orator. Yet, for all his linguistic skills, he has lost his platform, and in the most traumatic way. In this context, poetry is the form adopted in the service of a complex strategy of self-promotion and apology, comprising also the edition of previous works and the ongoing relationship with prominent characters testified by the letters: invective poems allowed for a quick recantation, avoiding diplomatic accidents; the poet could lament his misfortunes without losing face, thereby presenting himself as a true philosopher, dismayed by public life, and as a true martyr, ready to suffer for the greater good of the church; claiming the mask of the iambographer, Gregory was able to justify his attacks as retaliation for a gratuitous outrage, and his rage as pious zeal aiming at correction, coming from a social outcast, with no conflicting interests (see §1.3.2).

Given these differences, why comparing Gregory and Ephrem? And if the theme is late antique bishops, then why choose only poetic texts among the many sources from the fourth century? The choice of distinguishing between prose and poetry corresponds to the literary consciousness of the authors, since, as we have seen (§1.3.1), they both recognise that poetry has a peculiar value in contrast to that of prose. Because this peculiar value is aesthetic, the scholar should approach poems with the methods peculiar to literature, even when he wants to simply extract historical data from them, but all the more so if he wants to appreciate the texts on their own account.

Furthermore, apart from their different personal approaches to poetry, Ephrem and Gregory operated in comparable contexts, which could commend the use of poetry for similar reasons to both. The major difference in this respect is that Ephrem wrote for the liturgy and Gregory did not. This, however, doesn't negate all the similarities between the two. They both lived in a world where poetry was seen as an authoritative medium and hence was employed to enhance one's message. In this world, poetry was often the medium of polemics, even inside the church, and our poets were no exception. This accounts for the prosaic (at least to our eyes) material treated in verse (see §1.3.3).

Ephrem's and Gregory's poems were similarly amphibious, passing from written to oral form or vice versa: these passages often amounted to shifts of audience, shifts that were probably known to the authors, thereby prompting a versatile approach to the medium. This way, Gregory's poems could pass from the written form directed to the few supporters to the oral form of recitations, which entailed confrontation with a wider and perhaps less favourable public; Ephrem's *madrāšē* were published as oral

performance before the whole congregation, but then (or at the same time) they were treasured in written form by his pupils, a more intimate and proficient audience (§1.2).

This double life of poetry roughly matches its double aim. The oral performance, in churches for Ephrem and in "theatres" for Gregory, projected poems concerning the questions of the day, as the powerful tools for polemics they were. Through poetry, especially in its oral and public form, both Gregory and Ephrem tried to exert an influence on contemporary church life. However, they also shared the ambition to transcend day-to-day questions to make generally valid points. This is apparent not only from the approach to questions inside their poetry but also from their shared concern about education. Poetry in its written (and edited and spread) form could shape the Christians to come: even though concrete scholastic institutions differed, with Gregory appealing to the Greek γραμματικός and Ephrem to the group of literate urban ascetics, the educational value of poetry was similar, so that writing poetry meant also trying to reform education. Hence the strong pedagogical and paraenetic tone in the poems of both authors (§1.3.4).

With these considerations, I hope to have justified and clarified the scope and significance of my analysis of these texts.