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THE ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ OF PAUL THE BISHOP

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 116 (1997) 31–38

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Over the last twenty years, Belgian excavations in Apamea on the Orontes have been contributing dramatically to a better understanding of the culture of Late Antiquity. In particular, excavations under the so-called “cathédrale de l’est” have revealed a rich and complex pagan tradition, thus providing new evidence for Julian’s reaction. On this pagan framework Christians laid the foundations of their own cultural tradition. In 1970 an epigraphical testimonium came to light dating the restoration of the cathedral, badly damaged by earthquakes in 526, to exactly 533 AD. In addition, something even more exciting has been discovered: we now know the identity of the person who stood behind the work, the bishop Paul. Of him Jean Charles Balty has recently given us a learned and sympathetic portrait¹.

Two years later a pair of metrical inscriptions was found, which enriched our information about the Bishop’s activity. In the cathedral’s southeastern corner, at the center of a huge mosaic with theriomorphic figures, animals and vessels, Paul wrote down two iambic trimeters², in which he meant to describe his cultural program. At the same time, these verses invite the reader to understand the correct meaning of the surrounding mosaics³:

Τὴν ποικίλην ψηφίδα Παῦλος εἰσάγει
ὁ ποικιλόφρων τῶν ἄνωθεν δογμάτων
«It is Paul who is introducing this variegated mosaic,
since he has variegated knowledge of the doctrines from on high.»

Balty has been able to establish the connection between what the verses suggest to the reader and the mosaic’s figures. There can be no doubt that the pictures have a symbolic value⁴. These two trimeters, however, deserve some further comment, especially from the stylistic point of view.

First of all, the language of the couplet is not so exceptional as might seem at first glance. Some aspects of the poetic diction can be clarified by similar expressions found in Christian iambic poetry. For the meaning of τὰ ἄνωθεν δόγματα in l. 2, close parallels can be found in Gregory of Nazianzus, *De virtute* (1.2.10.164-6, PG 37.709 = p. 126 Crimi), where the poet speaks of his theological knowledge and says that he has been talking with θεοπνεύστων⁵ τε δογμάτων λόγοις / πηγῆ γλυκεία

* This article was originally conceived as part of a general project on literary aesthetics in Late Antiquity at the Center for Hellenic Studies (Washington DC), where I was appointed Fellow for the year 1995-96. Kathryn Morgan and Christian Wildberg helped me in improving my puzzling English; the final version was revised by John Lundon. Christopher Jones and Enrico Livrea read an earlier draft and made useful suggestions.

¹ *L’ évêque Paul et le programme architectural et décoratif de la cathédrale d’ Apamée*, in *Mélanges d’ histoire ancienne et d’ archéologie offerts à Paul Collart*, Lausanne 1976, 31-46 [= Balty 1976]. For the buildings see also Th. Ubert, *Bischof und Kathedrale (4.-7. Jh.): Archäologische Zeugnisse in Syrien*, in *Actes du XI^e Congrès International d’ Archéologie Chrétienne*, Rome 1984, 437-441; for the historical background to Paul’s activity see D. Feissel, *L’ évêque, titre et fonctions d’ après les inscriptions grecques jusqu’ au VII^e siècle*, *ibidem* 801-826. On clerical patronage in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine world see E. Kitzinger, *Artistic Patronage in Early Byzantium*, in *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell’ alto Medioevo occidentale. XXXIX Settimana di Studio*, Spoleto 1992, 46-48.

² It seems to me quite probable that Paul was the author of the epigram and the person who selected the motifs: for the same view see also H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*, University Park-London 1987 [= Maguire 1987], 14.

³ Edition of the text: Balty 1976, 33; Janine Balty, *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie*, Bruxelles 1977, 140-142 (with a new and very clear picture by J.Ch. Balty); J.Ch. Balty, *Guide d’ Apamée*, Bruxelles 1981, 112; *SEG* 26 (1976-77) n. 1628, p. 380.

⁴ Balty 1976, 41-43; see also *infra*.

⁵ For θεόπνευστος which conveys exactly the meaning of ἄνωθεν see K. Sundermann, *Gregor von Nazianz. Der Rangstreit zwischen Ehe und Jungfräulichkeit (carmen 1,2,1, 215-732)*, Paderborn 1991, 83 and E. Oberg, *Amphilochii Iconiensis Iambi ad Seleucum*, Berlin 1969, 66.

σώφροσιν τ' ἀρυσίμω, / ὧν καὶ βάθος τι κρυπτόν ἐξηντλήσαμεν. Amphilochius of Iconius, *Iamb. ad Seleuc.* 240-250 Oberg gives a definition of the μάθησιν τῶν παρ' Ἑλλησιν λόγων which sounds very similar to the concept expressed by the Syrian Bishop: see ll. 243-247 [Hellenic knowledge must obey] τῇ τῶν ἀληθῶν δογματῶν παρρησίᾳ / τῇ πανσόφω τε τῶν γραφῶν θεωρίᾳ. / Καὶ γὰρ δίκαιον τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ πνεύματος / ἄνωθεν οὖσαν ἐκ θεοῦ τ' ἀφιγμένην / δέσποιναν εἶναι τῆς κάτω παιδεύσεως. George of Pisidia in the proem to his *Hexaemeron* addresses Sergius the patriarch, who guides weak-minded human beings in the right direction⁶: ὑπερφυῶς γὰρ ψηλαφᾷς τὰ τοῦ βάθους / ζητῶν τὰ κρυπτὰ ταῖς ἀφαῖς τῶν δογματῶν (29-30 Hercher). And the poet also defines theological knowledge as follows: στερρόν τὸ βάθρον πῆξιμεν τῶν δογματῶν (*Hex.* 1694 H.)⁷. In particular, for the use of ἄνωθεν we can provide some further examples: Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.10.60-61, p. 118 Crimi θεία τις μεταρροῇ / ἄνωθεν ἡμῖν ἐρχομένη; *Carm.* 2.1.12.233, PG 37. 1183 οἱ τοῖς λόγοις ἄνωθεν τεθραμμένοι; George of Pisidia, *Hex.* 1864 H. (the patriarch) τοὺς λογισμοὺς πάντας ἐκτείνας ἄνω⁸. The Biblical text always referred was of course James 3.15 and 17 ἡ ἄνωθεν σοφία⁹)

However, the most interesting point in Paul's inscription is the rare compound ποικιλόφρων. The first editor made the reasonable assumption that Paul had borrowed the adjective from Euripides, *Hecuba* 131, where it is used of Odysseus¹⁰. But we know of at least one other occurrence in a fragment of Alcaeus, 69.6-7 Voigt ὁ δ' ὡς ἀλώπα / ποικ[ι]λόφρων. As is often the case with many ἄπαξ λεγόμενα or rare words in the poetry of the Imperial period, where much has been lost, the real diachronic diffusion of ποικιλόφρων escapes us. In addition it must be remembered that the habit of using anthologies and collections of passages and rare words was quite widespread¹¹. When we are dealing with an isolated word it is hard to speak of plain borrowing, or imitation, unless the context provides further evidence. It is not a mere question of sources, or at least not only of sources. If we can discover the origin of the adjective, we shall be in a better position to understand the verses Paul wrote down as an emblem of his munificent efforts.

In both of the passages quoted above the context is a negative one: the adjective denotes a shrewd ability to persuade by rhetorical devices, which often leads to harmful results. In the Alcaeus fragment the "cunning fox" is probably Pittacus¹² or, in any case, an enemy of the poet; in the Euripides passage the chorus, sympathetic to Hecuba, is explaining how Odysseus was able to persuade the hesitating and

⁶ *Hex.* 23 Hercher ψυχαγωγεῖς ἀσθενοῦντας τοὺς λόγους.

⁷ For the metrical position see also Amphiloch. Icon. *Seleuc.* 214, 293 Oberg; *AP* 1.107.5 (where the interesting idea is expressed that a mosaic could strengthen Christ's τοὺς λόγους τῶν δογματῶν); *APApp* III 289.17 Cougny ἔλεγχον εὐρε (Nestorius) τῶν ἑαυτῶν δογματῶν. Henceforth this clause became common in Byzantine dodecasyllabic poetry, as Fabrizio Gonnelli kindly pointed out to me.

⁸ Aug. *Enarr. in Pss.* 103.18 *alta praecepta Dei* (already quoted by Balty 1976 43 n. 67) is also very close.

⁹ See also Jc. 1.17 πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δώρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστὶν καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων; Jo. 3.31 ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν; 8.23 ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω εἰμί. The meaningful employment of ἄνωθεν as an adjective was also not unknown to pagan thinkers: see, for example, Procl. *In Crat.*, with F. Romano, *Proclo. Lezioni sul "Cratilo" di Platone*, Rome 1989, XVII-XVIII.

¹⁰ Balty 1976, 40: Paul «se compare implicitement à l'Ulysse de la tragédie classique», and below, n. 55 «le mot ... paraît un *hapax* et a donc bien ici, me semble-t-il, valeur de citation».

¹¹ A striking example is the *onomasticon poeticum* found in PHibeh 172 = *SH* 991 (III^a). At least thirty compounds are new; among them being also ποικιλόπρυμνος. Even deeply learned authors, like Nonnus of Panopolis, derived some Alexandrian themes from anthological collections (see I. Cazzaniga, *Temi poetici alessandrini in Nonno Panopolitano: tradizione diretta e indiretta*, in *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in onore di A. Rostagni*, Torino 1963, 626-646). In any case, however we conceive of imitation in the literature of Late Antiquity, we must always contextualize sources and take care to distinguish between *langue* and *parole*.

¹² See G. Tarditi, *Alceo e la volpe astuta*, in *Lirica greca arcaica da Archiloco a Elitis. Studi in onore di F.M. Pontani*, Padova 1984, 81-92.

divided Achaean assembly to sacrifice Polyxena¹³. If Paul had had the Odysseus of the *Hecuba* in mind and wanted to make a recognizable quotation, it would have been difficult for any reader to grasp the relationship between rhetorical shrewdness and variegated knowledge of heavenly doctrines¹⁴.

On the contrary, it seems clear enough to me that the bishop, with the best intentions, had something totally different in mind. Ποικιλόφρων has undergone, in my view, complete resemantization. Balty is right when he points out that Paul could perfectly well read the tragedies of Euripides and we should also perhaps bear in mind here the mosaics with scenes from the *Hippolytus* found in Madaba and in Sheikh Zouwēd. Moreover, if the *Christus Patiens* proved a work belonging to Late Antiquity, this would be another piece of evidence in support of his contention¹⁵. But (and it cannot be stressed enough) the original context makes all the difference¹⁶. This is not particularly surprising, since the practice of giving a new meaning to a Pagan word (resemantization) is one of the most characteristic features of Christian poetic language. If this is also the case here, where did Paul get his adjective from?

The bishop may have run into the adjective in an anthology. Or more likely still he may have come across it in interpretations of the proem of the *Odyssey*, which he will certainly have been exposed to during his school-days. We know of the connection between πολυτροπία and ποικιλία from a Homeric ζήτημα in Porphyry (*Schol. ad Od.* α 1 Schrader = Antisth. fr. 187.30 ff. Giannantoni): λόγου δὲ πολυτροπία καὶ χρήσις ποικίλη λόγου εἰς ποικίλας ἀκοὰς μονοτροπία γίνεται¹⁷. Eustathius too, who fills several pages in commenting on the meaning of πολύτροπος, provides the following explanation (*In Od.* I, p. 4.39-40 Stallbaum): πολύτροπος οὖν, ὁ διὰ πολλὴν ἐμπειρίαν πολύφρων ὡς ὁ ποιητῆς μετ' ὀλίγα ἐρεῖ, καὶ ὡς Εὐριπίδης ἄν εἴποι, ποικιλόφρων¹⁸. Eustathius is surely summarizing ancient material¹⁹, and it is significant that he uses ποικιλόφρων in a positive sense. Since the Euripidean quotation comes after dismissing negative depictions of Odysseus, it is evident that Eustathius' sources had already decontextualized the epithet, while keeping Euripidean authorship.

If during his Homeric training Paul had learned that ποικιλόφρων was merely an equivalent of πολύτροπος, we can infer that he wanted to allude to Odysseus' proverbial πολυτροπία. In doing so, he naturally did not have the classical image of a shifty-minded man in mind, and certainly not that of an orator who cynically leads an assembly to vote for a young maiden's sacrifice. A century earlier Cyrus of Panopolis writing a panegyric in hexameters to Theodosius II was careful to make a similar

¹³ P. Collard, *Euripides. Hecuba*, Warminster 1991, 138 translates «shifty-minded wrangler» and quotes for the meaning of ποικιλο- R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1982, 172; cf. also *API* 300.5 where Odysseus is called ποικιλόβουλος (Hermes' epithet in *HO* 28.5); see also Collard ad *Eur. Suppl.* 187-8 and Headlam ad *Herod.* 3.89. For a late instance of ποικίλος in this pejorative sense see Agath. *AP* 11.3503-4 = 12 Viansino (against a jurist) ῥήτρην πιστεύεις πυκινόφρονι σὴ τε μενοιῆ / ποικίλον ἀδῆσαι μῦθον ἐπισταμένη.

¹⁴ Things would not change, even if we read ποικίλοφρον in *Sapph.* fr. 1.1 Voigt (probably an ancient variant, see G.A. Privitera, *QUCC* 13, 1972, 132-133), since it is a ποικιλία bearing a love-δῶλος. For a summary of contemporary views on Sappho's text see D.E. Gerber, *Lustrum* 35, 1993, 81-83. A verb ποικιλοφρονέω is known from *Σ* ad *Aristoph. Thesm.* 441.

¹⁵ For the Madaba mosaic see M. Piccirillo, *Madaba: le chiese e i mosaici*, Milano 1989, 50-60; H. Buschhausen, in M. Piccirillo (ed.), *I mosaici di Giordania*, Roma 1986, 117-127 has pointed out that for some details the source seems to be the *Ekphrasis Eikonou* by Procopius of Gaza. On Sheikh Zouwēd see F. Zayadine, *Peinture murale et mosaïques à sujets mythologiques en Jordanie*, *BCHSuppl.* XIV, 1986, 407-432, esp. 423-424. For the dating of the *Christus Patiens* to Late Antiquity see A. Garzya, *Sileno* 10, 1984, 237-241 and *BZ* 82, 1989, 110-113 (*contra*, Enrica Follieri, *BZ* 84-85, 1991-92, 343-346).

¹⁶ Even for the centos; on literary problems concerning these poems see the clear statements by K. Smolak, *Beobachtungen zur Darstellungsweise in den Homerzentonen*, *JÖB* 28, 1979, 29-49).

¹⁷ On this passage see F. Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*, Paris 1956, 367-368; Simonetta Nannini, *Omero e il suo pubblico*, Roma 1986, 29-31. On ποικιλία as a term of literary criticism in the Homeric scholia see now J. London, *Studi sugli scoli omerici*, Diss. Pavia 1993-94, 12-15 (and 225-237).

¹⁸ The epithet is also applied to Odysseus, without any indication of source at p. 308.5 *St.* τῷ ποικιλόφρονι . . . Ὀδυσσεῖ.

¹⁹ See M. van der Valk, *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes*, I, Leiden 1971, XLVII.

distinguo (AP 9.36.5-6): ἐς πινυτήν δ' Ὀδυσσῆι δαΐφρονι πᾶν σε εἴσκω / ἀλλὰ κακῶν ἀπάνευθε δόλων²⁰.

And what is more likely still is that Paul would have thought of an Odysseus endowed with πολυτροπία, interpreted by the Neoplatonists as a spiritual quality²¹. Christian writers accepted this interpretation and especially in pedagogical contexts held Odysseus out as a moral *exemplum*: in his iambic poem *On virtue* Gregory of Nazianzus introduces Homer himself defining Odysseus as προδήλως τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐγκώμιον (1.2.10.406, PG 37.709 = p. 144 Crimi)²². But such exegesis went even further: Ulysses represented the Saviour, according to an interpretation current in Christian art and literature. The hero chained to the mast of his ship was a *figura* of *Christus dominus religatus in cruce*, as Maximus of Torino tells us²³.

Paul's claim to variegated knowledge of celestial doctrines and his implicit comparison of himself to Odysseus therefore suggest that figures of the sensible world (here the mosaics) point to the supra-sensible world, to a hidden superior meaning.

We encounter the same approach in the interpretation of the *Odyssey* as the story of the soul's wanderings before returning to its heavenly fatherland²⁴. This interpretation was so widespread that by chance it has also been found in the Pagan mosaics under the Cathedral's floor. These well preserved mosaics depict, together with other scenes, Ulysses' return to Ithaca, his recognition by Penelope and the wet-nurse, and the maidservants' (θεραπεινίδες) dance. The entire scene is very probably an allegory of the *iter in philosophiam*²⁵.

We must only ask why exactly Paul chose ποικιλόφρων to express his ideas. The new proliferation of ποικιλο- compounds in Late Antiquity, especially in patristic Greek²⁶ shows that Paul had this linguistic tool available, but does not explain *why* he adopted it.

We need however to go a step further. Paul's choice is clearly dictated by protobyzantine aesthetic theories. About a century earlier, Nonnus of Panopolis had built his tantalizing Dionysiac and Christian epic poetry on the aesthetic foundations of ποικιλία, which should be understood not only as stylistic

²⁰ On this poem see Al. Cameron, *The Empress and the Poet*, YCS 27, 1982, 229.

²¹ See especially Porphyry's *De antro Nympharum* (edited with a good commentary by Laura Simonini, *Porfirio. L'antro delle Ninfe*, Milano 1986). Buffière, *Les mythes* (quoted in n. 17), R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, Berkeley 1986, are reference books; see also Kiessling-Heinze on Horace, *Epist.* 1.2.17.

²² See C. Crimi-M. Kertsch, *Gregorio Nazianzeno. Sulla virtù carme giambico [I, 2, 10]*, Pisa 1995, 33, 270. Basil., *In adulesc.* 5.7-10 is very similar. For a further example of the resemantization of a Homeric expression applied to Odysseus in Gregory of Nazianzus see F.E. Zehles, *Kommentar zu den "Mahnungen an die Jungfrauen"* (*carmen* 1, 2, 2) *Gregors von Nazianz, V. 1-354*, Münster 1987, 102-103 on *Carm.* 1.2.2.138 ἄχθος ἀρούρης.

²³ In addition to the classic work of H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries*, Engl. Transl. London 1963, chap. III, see at least P. Courcelle, *Quelques symboles funéraires du néo-platonisme latine*, REA 46, 1944, 73-91; Th. Klauser, *Das Syrenenabenteuer des Odysseus - ein Motiv der christlichen Grabkunst?*, JbAC 6, 1963, 71-100; E. Kaiser, *Odyssee-Szenen als Topoi*, MH 21, 1964, 109-136 and 197-224; J. Pépin, *The Platonic and Christian Ulysses*, in D. O'Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, New York 1982, 3-18 (from where I took Maximus' quotation); W.E. Helleman, *Penelope as Lady Philosophy*, Phoenix 49, 1995, 283-302; D.R. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer*, Oxford 1994, 3-34 (with further bibliography). For an example in poetry see Nonnus, *Paraphrase of St. John's Gospel*, 19.28, 92 sgg., where the crucifixion is described using Homeric words coming from μ 178-9 (Odysseus at the mast), see D. Accorinti – E. Livrea, SIFC 81, 1988, 265-266.

²⁴ See Lamberton, *Homer* (quoted in n. 24) 90-107; M.J. Edwards, *Scenes from the Later Wanderings of Odysseus*, CQ 38, 1988, 509-521

²⁵ See especially Janine Balty, *La mosaïque en Syrie*, in J.-M. Dentzer – W. Orthmann (eds.), *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie*, II, Saarbrücken 1989, 493-495; Ead., *Les "Thérapiéides" d'Apamée*, DHA 18, 1992, 281-292 (and also P. Bouffartigue, *L'Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps*, Paris 1992, 508-509). On the stylistic links between Paul's mosaics and the previous pagan mosaics in Apamea see Balty 1976, 41-42 and 46. Balty had already noted the implicit comparison between Paul and Odysseus. He suggested that the Bishop might even want to allude to the pagan mosaics; I am not altogether persuaded by this suggestion, which implies either that the mosaics were still visible or that people clearly remembered them. If the mosaics are a product of Julian's reaction, both ideas are rather implausible.

²⁶ Balty 1976, 40 n. 55. Further examples in Lampe, *Patr. Gk. Lex.*

varietas, but above all as a code intended to characterize reality²⁷. The proem of his longest poem, the *Dionysiaks*, calls on Proteus, the ποικίλος *par excellence*, to participate in the Muses' chorus:

ἀλλὰ χοροῦ ψαύοντα, Φάρω παρὰ γείτοσι νήσω,
στήσατέ μοι Πρωτῆα πολύτροπον, ὄφρα φανείη
ποικίλον εἶδος ἔχων, ὅτι ποικίλον ὕμνον ἀράσσω²⁸.

The sea-god represents reality with its endless processes of transformation. Here the poet clearly shows that πολύτροπος and ποικίλος are interchangeable, and in this he is surely following Homeric exegesis²⁹. Since Nonnus attributes the same trait to Dionysus in his proem, we can infer that Dionysus, who is a polymorphous principle, has to be sung of in a comparable style. Stylistic variation therefore assumes the task of representing the multiplicity of the universe behind which a superior unity is hidden³⁰. The concept of ποικιλία goes far beyond mere rhetorical or stylistic boundaries and becomes a peculiar way of viewing reality. It will be no surprise therefore to see Nonnus also applying it in his Christian poem, the *Paraphrase of St. John's Gospel*. Here his rather personal view of Christ's πολυμορφία is apparent in a characteristically adjectival style containing such compounds as ποικιλόμυθος (*Par.* 3.9; 7.193)³¹, ποικιλόδωρος ἄναξ (12.68), ποικιλόνωτος (19.25): Jesus' signs are ποικίλα θαύματα (7.19), and His words are depicted as νοημάτων ποικίλα μύθων (18.103)³². The arduous depths of Johannine theology are translated by Nonnus into a florid style, the most accomplished expression of baroque in Late Antiquity. His complex style reflects the multiplicity of reality and at the same time tries to express the impossibility of understanding the mystery of Christ's descent to Earth³³. Stylistic ποικιλία mirrors the subject's complexity.

This concept is based on the same relationship presupposed by Paul's trimeters. The bishop invites his readers to recognize a higher meaning in the ποικίλην ψηφίδα, a meaning revealed to him by his own variegated knowledge of heavenly doctrines. Balty has shown that the mosaics throughout do indeed convey a quite widespread symbolic meaning³⁴. The deer biting a snake and the contrarampant

²⁷ See F. Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome I: Chants I-II*, Paris 1976, 9; W. Fauth, *Eidos Poikilon. Zur Thematik der Metamorphose und zum Prinzip der Wandlung aus dem Gegensatz in den Dionysiaka des Nonnos von Panopolis*, Göttingen 1981, 180-196; Daria Gigli Piccardi, *GGA* 236, 1984, 50-61. For the rhetorical concept of ποικιλία see L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde Gréco-romain*, I, Paris 1993, 337.

²⁸ *Dion.* 1.13-15: «but bring me a partner dancing in the neighbouring island of Pharos, Proteus of many turns, that he may appear in all his diversity of shapes, since I twang my harp to a diversity of songs» (translation, slightly modified, by W.H.D. Rouse, Cambridge-London 1984², 3).

²⁹ On the relationship between Homeric πολύτροπος and Nonnian ποικιλία see N. Hopkinson, *Nonnus and Homer*, in Id. (ed.), *Studies in the Dionysiaka of Nonnus*, Cambridge 1994, 10-11.

³⁰ See Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno, Proteo e l'isola di Faro*, *Prometheus* 19, 1993, 230-234; G. Agosti, *Ancora su Proteo in Nonno, Dionisiache 1.13 sgg.*, *Prometheus* 22, 1996, 169-172.

³¹ Ποικιλόμυθος is used by Nonnus with a 'religious' sense also in *D.* 3.423 (Hermes), 12.68 (the ἀρχέγονος Φρήν), see F. Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Chants XI-XIII*, Paris 1995, 188.

³² On the metaphor of ποικιλόνωτος Christ (19.25) see the commentary by D. Accorinti, *Nonno di Panopoli. Parafraresi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XX*, Pisa 1996, 34. On 18.103 see E. Livrea, *Nonno di Panopoli. Parafraresi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XVIII*, Napoli 1989, 160: the passage was later imitated by Christod. *AP* 2.51 νοήματα ποικίλα βουλήs. Needless to say, Nonnus has an entire series of new compounds in ποικιλο-, for which see W. Peek, *Lexikon zu den Dionysiaka des Nonnos*, I-IV, Hildesheim-Berlin 1968-1975 s.v.

³³ Cf. Nonnus' translation of *Jo.* 21.25 ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ' ἓν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία, ~ *Par.* Φ 139-143 ἄλλα δὲ θαύματα πολλὰ σοφῆ σφρηγίσσατο σιγῆ / μάρτυς ἐτητυμῆς, τάπερ ἦνυσεν αὐτὸς Ἰησοῦς, / ὅσσα καθ' ἓν στοιχηδὸν ἀνὴρ βροτὸς αἴκε χαράξῃ, / βίβλους τοσσατίας νεοτευχέας οὐδὲ καὶ αὐτὸν / ἔλπομαι ἀγλαόμορφον ἀτέρμονα κόσμον ἀεῖραι. This is the only passage in the poem that could be interpreted as a statement of poetics, as I hope to demonstrate in a forthcoming paper.

³⁴ On the general attitude of Christians towards images drawn from animals and the natural world see now H. Maguire, *Christians, Pagans, and the Representation of Nature*, *Riggisberger Berichte* 1, 1993, 131-160; M.-T. Olszewski, *L'image et sa fonction dans la mosaïque byzantine des premières basiliques en Orient*, *CA* 43, 1995, 9-34. It is a kind of imagery which becomes widespread from the second half of the fifth century on (Janine Balty, *Byzantion* 54, 1984, 459-466).

panther and gazelle represent the victory of orthodoxy and a new period of peace³⁵.

The practice of pointing out the meaning of a figure to the observer by an interpretative epigram was rather common. We have some epigraphical³⁶ and also some literary evidence, as, for example, the four Homeric verses written down by the Bishop Dometios to explain the meaning of the floor mosaic in the Church at Nikopolis³⁷ and, in the Western world, the *tituli* of Venantius Fortunatus for the church of St. Martin in Tours³⁸. Paulinus of Nola *Carm.* 27.531-2 reports that the scene of Ruth and Orpah in a mosaic of St. Felix in Nola contains hidden meaning³⁹.

Paul explicitly calls the mosaics' ὑπόνοια (Παῦλος . . . εἰσάγει⁴⁰) to the attention of the readers: such advice finds a striking parallel⁴¹ in the poetry of Nonnus. In book 25 of the *Dionysiaca* the poet emulates the Homeric model with a long description of Dionysus' shield. Made by Hephaestus it is a real masterpiece (ποικίλα . . . θαύματα τέχνης 385; πολύτροπα δαίδαλα τέχνης 562, here once again ποικίλος and πολύτροπος are equated)⁴². The divine artisan engraved the shield with a series of scenes, all referring to its future owner. The poet tries to point out the relationship between the carved figures and Dionysus: and once he explicitly suggests how a scene should be understood. The relief of the abduction of Ganymedes is said to be a δαίδαλον ἄρμενον, an «apt carving» to be set among the stars, because it is a *figura* of Dionysus' apotheosis⁴³. This use of *ekphrasis* as a way of pointing out

³⁵ See Balty 1976, 42-44, who relies on H.-Ch. Puech, *Le cerf et le serpent*, CA 4, 1949, 17-60. See also J. Russel, *The Mosaic Inscription of Anemurium*, Wien 1987, 70-74; P. Testini, *Il simbolismo degli animali nell' arte figurativa paleocristiana*, in *L' uomo di fronte al mondo animale nell' alto medioevo (XXXI settimana di studio sull' alto Medioevo)*, Spoleto 1985, 1107-1179 (on the deer, 1159 with further bibliography). On the deer eating a snake, represented in one of the panels of the mosaic of the East church at Qasr-el-Lebya, see Margherita Guarducci, *Atti Acc. Lincei*, s. 8, 17.7, 1975, 676 sgg.; E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum-J. Ward-Perkins, *Justinianic Mosaic Pavements in Cyrenaican Churches*, Roma 1980, 54 (a good picture in pl. 61.3); Maguire 1987, 47.

³⁶ Already Balty 1976, 42 n. 64 mentions the illustration of *Is.* 65.25 on the floor of the church of Karlik (Cilicia); see also the floor of the church of Ma'in (Madaba), with a quotation of Isaiah, or the panels in the church of SS. Lot and Procopius in Nebo, with a quotation of *Ps.* 50.21 (see M. Piccirillo, *Mosaici* [quoted in n. 15] 58-60; 69-70). Other examples are collected by Maguire 1987, 9-10 and especially by E. Kitzinger, *DOP* 6, 1951, 101-102.

³⁷ Studied by E. Kitzinger, *Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics, I: Mosaics at Nikopolis*, *DOP* 6, 1951, 83-122, especially 100-103.

³⁸ See H. Kessler, *Pictorial Narrative and Church Mission in Sixth-Century Gaul*, *Stud. Hist. Art* 16, 1985, 75-91 (= *Studies in Pictorial Narrative*, London 1994, 1-33). Other epigraphical examples are collected by F. Grossi Gondi, *Trattato di epigrafia cristiana latina e greca del mondo occidentale*, Roma 1968 (1920), 322-334; G. Cuscito, *Vescovo e cattedrale nella documentazione epigrafica in Occidente*, in *Actes* (quoted in n. 1), 735-778; and mainly, Luce Pietri, *Pagina in parete reserata: épigraphie et architecture religieuse*, in Angela Donati (ed.), *La terza età dell' epigrafia*, Faenza 1988, 137-157.

³⁹ *Brevis ista videtur / historia, at magni signat mysteria belli*; in the right part of the apse of St. Felix in Nola Paulinus wrote: *si quem sancta tenet meditanda in lege voluntas / hic poterit residens sacris intendere libris*. See also Prud. *Perist.* 9. On theological instructions behind iconographical programs in churches see H. Kessler, *Pictures as Scripture in Fifth-Century Churches*, in *Studia Artium Orientalis et Occidentis*, 2, 1985, 17-31 (= *Studies in Pictorial Narrative*, London 1994, 369. Add also [Claud.] *Mir. Christ.* 21 Hall, on which see Daniela Calcagnini, *Tra letteratura e iconografia: l' epigramma Miracula Christi*, *VetChr* 30, 1993, 17-45.

⁴⁰ εἰσάγει refers primarily to the action of putting down the mosaics, but also to the spiritual εἰσαγωγή that Paul wants to offer to faithful readers. For the position at the end of the verse cf., for example, Georg. Pis. *Hex.* 248, 659, 693, 1575. In the meaning of «to introduce, to represent a character» the verb is very common in rhetorical and scholiastic texts, as John Landon kindly reminded me.

⁴¹ We have one other interesting, though different, testimony of that in Apamea itself: in the 'Julianean' mosaics under the Cathedral's floor it is clear that the names of the characters have an explicative function, as in the mosaic with Socrates and the Sages (for a possible Christian interpretation of this iconographical type see G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor 1990, 33; see also P. Zanker, *The Masks of Socrates*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1995, 309) or the θεραπενίδες mosaic quoted above.

⁴² On the "importance for Nonnian poetics" of the ποικίλ- root in this passage see Hopkinson, *Nonnus and Homer*, quoted in n. 29, 23-24, who concludes: "the τέχνη is equally of the artificer poet, who ... contrives to forge a quite different shield with which symbolically to arm his hero".

⁴³ See G. Agosti, *Poemi digressivi tardoantichi (e moderni)*, *Compar(a)ison* 1, 1995, 140-141.

hidden spiritual meanings not only anticipates later Byzantine practice⁴⁴, but it expresses an attitude known through other examples in poetry. In the age of Theodosius II, Nilus Scholasticus wrote of the image of an Archangel: Ὡς θρασὺ μορφῶσαι τὸν ἀσώματον. Ἄλλὰ καὶ εἰκῶν / ἐς νοερὴν ἀνάγει μνήστιν ἐπουρανίων (AP 1.33)⁴⁵. About a similar image Agathias is even more explicit: βροτὸς εἰκόνα λεύσσω / θυμὸν ἀπιθύνει κρέσσονι φαντασίῃ / οὐκέτι δ' ἄλλοπρόσαλλον ἔχει σέβας . . . / ὄμματα δ' ὀτρύνουσι βαθὺν νόον· οἶδε δὲ τέχνη / χρώμασι πορθημεῦσαι τὴν φρενὸς ἰκεσίην (AP 1.34.3-5; 7-8 = 18 Viansino)⁴⁶.

Above I noted some resemblances between Paul and Nonnus. These similarities perhaps require some further explanation. I do not want to suggest, of course, that Paul is in some way directly dependent on the Egyptian poet, though even that is not impossible. In Aphrodisias, for example, in the same sixth century AD, some heroic epigrams show clear signs of being influenced by the *Paraphrase*⁴⁷. But the poetic diction of our iambic couplet does not allow any such conclusion: stylistic devices like the threefold alliteration of labial consonants or the *figura etymologica* ποικίλην – ποικιλόφρων are too easy and common to be significant. In the *ekphrasis* of Staphylus' palace Nonnus describes a floor mosaic (*Dion.* 18.83-4) and employs an expression quite similar to Paul's, πολυσχίδεων δὲ μετᾶλλων / φαιδρὸν ἐψήφιδι πέδον ποικίλλετο τέχνη⁴⁸. But in this case too we probably have a widespread *iunctura*, since it is also found in an inscription of the fourth century AD, at Tremithous (Cyprus)⁴⁹, ψηφίδι γραπτῇ ποικίλη, where it also refers to a mosaic. A very close Latin parallel is found in a hexameter inscription written down on the floor of the cathedral in Grado (579 A.D.) by Helijah the patriarch: *atria quae cernis vario formata decore / (squalida sub picto caelatur marmore tellus)*⁵⁰.

The relationship between Nonnian poetry and Paul's distich are rather interesting because they share certain literary and stylistic principles. The idea that the main characteristic of works of art is ποικιλία is common in other late poets. For example, Pamprepius of Panopolis, one of Nonnus's followers, writes in the iambic prologue to his description of a fall-day (fr. 3.2-4 Livrea):

οἱ λόγοι
τὸν ποικίλον νοῦν τῶν ποιητῶν σωφρόνως
ἔλκουσιν⁵¹,

⁴⁴ See Liz James – Ruth Webb, 'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places': *Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium*, *Art History* 14.1, 1991, 1-17. An example close to Paul's epigram is perhaps the *koukoulion* in the anacreontic *ekphrasis* by Leo Choïrosphaktes on the bath built by Leo the Wise: after the description of a mosaic (?) representing two or more river gods, with metrical encomia, we read (ll. 49-50) δόγματα θεολόγα γράψατε, κούρου / ζαθέων ἐκ στομάτων ὄμβρος ἐπέστη (edition by P. Magdalino, *The Bath of Leo the Wise*, in A. Moffat [ed.], *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for R. Browning*, Canberra 1984, 225-249). But it is not clear what exactly this difficult passage means and I shall be returning to it.

⁴⁵ On this epigram see G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetic*, London 1963, 117, and Al. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes*, Oxford 1993, 154-155.

⁴⁶ On the spiritual background to this meaningful epigram see E. Kitzinger, *DOP* 8, 1954, 138-139; P. Brown, *Engl. Hist. Rev.* 88, 1973, nn. 92, 109 and Av. Cameron, *Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium*, *Past and Present* 84, 1979, 3-35; H.G. Thümmel, *Bilderlehre und Bilderstreit*, Würzburg 1991, 158 ff.

⁴⁷ See the epigrams published by Charlotte Rouché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (with contributions by J.M. Reynolds), London 1989, nn. 38, 73, 74, 100, 156. I shall deal with these epigrams in a forthcoming paper in MD.

⁴⁸ Joëlle Gerbeau (Nonnos de Panopolis, *Les Dionysiaques. Tome VII: Chants XVIII-XIX*, Paris 1991, 137) has drawn attention to *Epigr.* 122c4 Bernand (written for a mosaic, Cheikh Zouwēd, fourth century AD) λεπταλέη ψηφίδι. For the expression of Paul's second iambic couplet, πολυμόρφω συνθέσει cf. the inscription on the floor mosaic of Thyrsos at Tegea (fifth century AD) λίθου / λεπταλέης / εὐσύνθετος κόσμος and see Maguire 1987, 24.

⁴⁹ See *SEG* 42 (1992) n° 1319, with O. Masson, *Bull. Épig.* 1994, no. 614, 588-589. ποικιλία was an essential characteristic of works of art in the early Byzantine period: see P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius*, Leipzig-Berlin 1912, 92 and E. Livrea ad Nonn. *Par.* 18.103, p. 160, who quotes Zach. Schol., *Ammonius* 47-53 Colonna.

⁵⁰ See A. Carlini, *L'epigrafe musiva di Elia nella Basilica di S. Eufemia a Grado*, *CCC* 1, 1980, 259-269. Cf. also *CIL* 1789.1 (Rome, St. Agnese) *Virginis aula micat variis decorata metallis*.

⁵¹ «The words draw the poet's subtle mind discreetly with them» (translation by D.L. Page, *Select Papyri*, III Cam-

in deference to a rhetorical tradition quite widespread in other texts of this period⁵² and probyzantine times. This passage explains the meaning conveyed by Paul's ποικιλόφρων very well: another good parallel is offered again by George of Pisidia, *Hex.* 1712 H. (μαθεῖν θελήσας . . .) τῇ ποικίλῃ γὰρ καὶ σοφῇ θεωρίᾳ / τὸν νοῦν μερίζω – even though in this passage the ποικίλη θεωρία is inadequate to reach the Absolute by itself⁵³.

Even Paul's depiction of himself as ποικιλόφρων is not without parallels and falls within the well-known class of eulogies dedicated to benefactors of towns⁵⁴. In *AP* 9.670 a builder of Smyrna, perhaps a proconsul of Asia in the fourth or fifth century, is compared to the mythical founders of the city and defined a ποικιλόμητις ἀνήρ⁵⁵. This is another typical epithet of Odysseus⁵⁶ and in Christian poetry it could even be referred, on occasion, to Solomon, as in *APApp* III 288.2 Cougny Σολομῶν πολυγνώμων, ποικιλομήτης.

The epigram of our φιλοκτίστης bishop⁵⁷ therefore sheds further light on aesthetics in Late Antiquity⁵⁸. The description of works of art is conceived as a way of representing something else, something beneath the surface, or better something behind it. There is a correspondence between a work of art and reality, between the sensible world and the suprasensible one⁵⁹. But we should be careful in considering these verses only a literary product. They were intended for an audience able to grasp the meanings conveyed by the word-play in ποικίλην ψηφίδα and ποικιλόφρων, and able to see their relationship to the iconographic 'program' it had under its eyes⁶⁰. In the churches of Late Antiquity works of art and literary texts were thought only within a context which made them intelligible⁶¹.

The bishop's verses once again provide striking proof that the Hellenic tradition was still a living source and continued to exert its influence⁶², although in Numenius and Iamblichus' hometown the wind was now blowing from Byzantium. It probably could not have found more open terrain.

Università di Firenze

Gianfranco Agosti

bridge–London 1941, 565); on the interpretation of the entire passage see E. Livrea, *Pampropius. Carmina*, Leipzig 1979, 43-44).

⁵² T. Viljamaa, *Studies in the Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period*, Helsinki 1968, 78-79 lists Paul. Sil. *Amb.* 23 εὐφρονον ἤχους ποικίλης μελωδίας, Agath. *Praef.* I iamb. 5 λόγων . . . πολυτελών καὶ ποικίλων, Choric. *Dialex.* 1, p. 1.8-13 Förster-Richtsteig λόγοι . . . ποικίλην παραθήσοντες εὐωχίαν. Cf. also *Visio Maximi, Epigr.* 168.6 Bernard ὁ σοφὸς τότ' ἐγὼ ποικίλον ἤρμοζον ἀοιδίην.

⁵³ For ποικίλη θεωρία see also *Carm. ined.* 107.13 Sternbach ὕμνοις ποικίλης θεωρίας.

⁵⁴ The magnificent book by L. Robert, *Hellenica IV. Epigrammes du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1964 provides many examples with a thoroughgoing analysis.

⁵⁵ Christopher Jones kindly allowed me to see his notes on this text, which will be published in a forthcoming paper in HSCPh.

⁵⁶ *Il.* 11.487, *Od.* 3.163, *HApoll* 327, *HHerm* 155.

⁵⁷ Like many other colleagues: see for example J.M. Reynolds *apud* Alföldi-Rosenbaum – Ward-Perkins, *Justinianic Mosaic Pavements* (quoted in n. 35), 148; P.R.L. Brown, *Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, in K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality: a Symposium*, New York-Princeton 1980, 17-27.

⁵⁸ Cf. already, though from a slightly different point of view, Balty 1976, 46 «la mosaïque qu'il nous a laissée» is «très significative de son temps» (cf. also above, n. 26).

⁵⁹ For the two worlds see E. Dauterman Maguire – H. Maguire in *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, Urbana Ill. 1989, 2-33.

⁶⁰ Perhaps even with the help of a guide, as happened in Gaul (see Pietri, *Pagina* [quoted in n. 38], 149-150).

⁶¹ Brown, *Art and Society* (quoted in n. 57), who rightly stresses the need to avoid the misconception of abstraction about "otherworld" in Late Antiquity.

⁶² For Syriac Christianity see Bowersock, *Hellenism* (quoted in n. 41), ch. III.