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Late Antique Portraits: Reading Choricus of Gaza's Encomiastic Orations (I – VIII F. - R.)

Summary – The encomiastic orations in Choricus' corpus (orr. I – VIII F. - R.) represent a vivid witness of 6th century Gaza in Palestine. My work aims to describe some aspects of culture and ideology through the portraits of some outstanding members of the local leading class, who tend to be offered as exemplar figures: the bishop (I/II), two city leaders (III/IV), some students (V/VI), an aging aristocratic woman (VII), a professor of rhetoric (VIII). That is why it is possible to discover, by the analysis of the *topoi* of the encomium in its different patterns and behind them, the values the author shared with his late antique audience and their cultural common expectations.

The critical efforts by several scholars in different countries are now bringing some new light on 6th century Gaza in Palestine and its fascinating environment, after almost one century of silence. In this Gazan revival, a main focus is on the work of Choricus, who directed the famous school of rhetoric after his teacher Procopius. The corpus of Choricus' writings includes orations written for some members of the city leading class at different events, and a group of school exercises, that are the declamations. Here, I would like to introduce the portraits of some late antique men, women and young people as they are represented in his encomiastic orations (orr. I – VIII in Foerster's edition¹).

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¹ R. Foerster - E. Richtsteig, *Choricii Gazaei Opera, Stutgardiae 1929* (repr. 1972). This is the list of the abbreviations I will use:

LaudMarcI = Ἐγκώμιον εἰς Μαρκιανόν ... λόγος α' (I), 2–26

LaudMarc II = Ἐγκώμιον εἰς Μαρκιανόν ... λόγος β' (II), 26–47

LaudAratSteph = Εἰς Ἀράτιον δοῦκα καὶ Στέφανον ἄρχοντα (III), 49–69

LaudSumm = Ἐγκώμιον ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου εἰς Σοῦμμον (IV), 69–81

OrNuptZach = Ἐπιθαλάμιος εἰς Ζαχαρίαν (V), 81–87

OrNuptProc = Ἐπιθαλάμιος εἰς Προκόπιον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἥλιαν (VI), 87–99

OrFunMar = Ἐπιτάφιος ἐπὶ Μαρίας μητρὶ Μαρκιανοῦ (VII), 99–109

OrFunProc = Ἐπιτάφιος ἐπὶ Προκοπίῳ (VIII), 109–128

ApolMim = Ὁ λόγος ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν Διονύσου τὸν βίον εἰκονιζόντων (XXXII), 344–380

Actually, after the nineteenth century German studies that led to the edition by R. Foerster in 1929, only few papers were devoted to Choricus' production, until the translation and commentary by Fotios Litsas in 1980.² Unless he provided the first English translation, he had a mainly historical interest and didn't make a significant change in the use of this text: a source for historians and art historians, because of the long descriptions of churches and buildings now lost (e. g. in the famous *LaudMarc I/II*), and the prosopographical and historical references to this area and age (e. g. in *LaudAratSteph* and *Laud-Summ*).³ Finally, in the last years scholars have noticed that Choricus should be studied as a writer, and that his very personal and precious style deserves more detailed work: in spite of his purest attic language, Choricus is not just a talented imitator of the past, but a late antique man, who is aware of the potential meaning of the classical tradition and wisely adapts it to the values of his time and audience. Consequently, it is in the public performance that we have to look for the deep sense of this kind of speech: school, church and power are the three institutional dimensions that Choricus, as a teacher of rhetoric and an official declaimer, keeps as unavoidable references. In this sense, if we want to understand his ideological and cultural world, we must keep in mind that he uses literary convention as a medium and a code that his fellow citizens are able to decipher. According to such criteria, I have tried to define the portraits of some people he celebrates, members of the school and city leaders: as we will see, two categories that, in a small community, often mingle together.

Being a teacher, at any public event Choricus' didactic attitude is highlighted by his attention to the education of the people he praises: his remarks on their studies exceed the rhetorical prescription of including education as a part of the encomium.⁴ Weddings, funerals, city festivals are always the right moments to present the traditional *παιδεία* as a basic element for human and spiritual growth, also in the life out of the school. As we can see, while in *OrNuptZach* 8–9 and *OrNuptProc* 26, written for his students' bridegrooms, culture and married

The declamations are now translated into English: R.J. Penella (ed.), *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: a Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations*, Cambridge 2009. For a new edition of *OrFunMar* and *OrFunProc*, see C. Greco, *Coricio di Gaza. Due orazioni funebri (VII/VIII F.-R.)*. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento, Alessandria 2010.

² F. K. Litsas, *Choricus of Gaza: an Approach to his work*, Diss. University of Chicago, 1980. All the translated passages I will quote are from this work.

³ E. g. R. W. Hamilton, *Two Churches of Gaza, as described by Choricus of Gaza*, *PalEQ* 62 (1930), 178–191, H. Maguire, *The "Half-Cone" Vault of St. Stephen at Gaza*, *DOP* 32 (1978), 319–325, J. Gascou, *Ducs, praesides, poètes et rhéteurs au bas empire*, *AntTard* 6 (1998), 61–64 (on *LaudAratSteph*).

⁴ *Men. Rh.* II 371, 17–372, 2.

love are in a playful competition, in *LaudMarI* and *II* and in *OrFunProc*, the studies of Marcian bishop of Gaza and Procopius, his former teacher of rhetoric, have a special interest: being addressed to representative figures, they offer to the whole community the authoritative model of a Christian intellectual. In a different way, *OrFunMar*, written for the bishop's mother, represents an original synthesis of holiness, philosophy and social success. I will add a few words about *LaudAratSteph* (or. III) and *LaudSumm* (or. IV).

Defining the Identity of a Christian Intellectual: Marcian and Procopius

(a) Marcian (orr. I/II F.-R.)

The first good example in this sense, is the figure of bishop Marcian. His historical existence is confirmed by his subscription to the Council of Jerusalem in 536 (cf. *Mansi VIII*, 1174). He succeeded to Cyril, dated at 518 (cf. *Mansi VIII*, 1074). In 540, the bishop of Gaza was Aurelianus.⁵ It is worthwhile to underline that our rhetor never mentions people by name, but by pronouns or rhetorical apostrophes,⁶ so the titles in the manuscript tradition are our only reference or even a source: in *OrFunMar*, the title says that Maria was the mother of Marcian bishop of Gaza and Anastasius bishop of Eleutheropolis, and it is the only source, as far as I know, informing that Marcian and Anastasius were brothers. But the problem of titles is one of the many concerning the manuscript tradition, and it should be solved in that context.

Choricus delivers two speeches in honour of Marcian and mentions him several times in others, more or less directly. First, of course, in the two *Laudationes* (orr. I/II), pronounced at official events: the first, for the repair or the building of the church of St. Sergios, and the second for the inauguration of the church of St. Stephanos. It is not the case of discussing here the famous long ἐκφράσεις of the two buildings: as Catherine Saliou has already outlined in her contribution to the meeting on late antique Gaza (Poitiers, May 2004),⁷ such descriptions refer to the rhetorical chapter of the praise of cities, which is a kind of encomium, and have a model in Libanius' *Antiochikos*, where the description

⁵ The list of the bishops of Gaza is in Aubert, in: A. Baudrillart (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et Géographie Ecclésiastiques*, Paris 1930, XX, coll. 171–176 s. v. Gaza.

⁶ Compare the absence of vocatives in Libanios and in other encomiastic texts, replaced by demonstrative pronouns (οὗτος, αὐτός): A. Guida, *Un anonimo panegirico per l'imperatore Giuliano* (Anon. Paneg. Iul. Imp.). *Introduzione, testo critico, commento*, Firenze 1990, 76.

⁷ C. Saliou, *L'orateur et la ville: réflexions sur l'apport de Choricus à la connaissance de l'histoire de l'espace urbain à Gaza*, in: Ead. (ed.), *Gaza dans l'Antiquité tardive: archéologie, rhétorique et histoire. Actes du Colloque international de Poitiers (6/7 mai 2004)*, Salerno 2005, 171–195.

of the city overcomes the description of the celebration itself, as Saliou has elsewhere noticed.⁸ In *LaudMarcI*, the consequence is that the praise of a city, the *πάτριος λόγος*, becomes an expansion of the deeds (*ἔργα*) which depend on the virtues (*ἀρεταί*) in the praise of the bishop, which gives the title to the oration. Then, the whole is framed by the celebration of the festival, which is generally the subject of a *πανηγυρικός λόγος* according to Menander Rhetor.⁹ This passage is clearly visible in chs. 9/10: after having summarized his activities to repair the city walls, he praises his devotion, and the construction of holy spaces becomes the concrete demonstration of his religious nature. As a parallelism, chs. 77–82 are a second praise of the bishop, his virtues and deeds, and introduce the description of the festival of St. Sergios. *LaudMarcII* has a more regular structure: the praise of the bishop is introduced by that of his native city, Gaza (chs. 5–9), and then it closes the speech. The descriptions of the church and the festival are, in this case too, a development of the *ἔργα*, that are the bishop's good deeds for the city.

It is from this last text that we can start defining Marcian's cultural profile. Choricus traces the steps of his career in chs. 7–9: he studied the poets in Gaza, his home city, at the same school Choricus attended. Then (ch. 8) he studied the Scripture and theology under the direction of his mother's brother, the city bishop at that time:

(7.) τεκοῦσα τοῖνυν ἡ πόλις οὐ περιεῖδεν ἀλλοτρίαις ἀγκάλαις ὑποτρεφόμενον, ἀλλὰ βρέφος ἀνελομένη καὶ πρὸς ἡλικίαν ἤδη παιδεύεσθαι δυναμένην ἀνενεγκοῦσα παρὰ θύρας ἤγε ποιητικὰς καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖθεν ἐμφορηθέντα σε Μούσης τῷ κορυφαίῳ παρεδίδου τῶν Ἑρμοῦ χορευτῶν πλήθει τε λόγων καὶ τρόπῳ καθεστηκότι τὰ πρῶτα φέροντι τῶν ὁμοτέχων. Ἐδρεψάμην κἀγὼ τῶν τοῦδε λειμῶνων, ὅσα χωρεῖν ἠδυνάμην. (8.) ἀπὸ τοιούτων οὖν πηγῶν ἀρυσάμενος πολλὴν ναμάτων φορὰν ἤδη πρὸς ἀκρόασιν θείων ὠδινες ἀκουσμάτων καὶ φοιτήσας ἐς διδασκάλου γέμοντος μὲν εἰκότως παιδείας τοιαύτης – ἱερωσύνης γὰρ εἶχεν ἡγεμονίαν –, στέργοντος δέ σε δικαίως ἴσα καὶ παῖδα – μητρὸς γὰρ ἐτύγγανεν ἀδελφός –, εἶχες αἰεὶ σου σπεύροντα τὴν ψυχὴν ραδίως τε δεχομένην καὶ βεβαίως φυλάττουσαν τοὺς καρποὺς εἰς πλῆθος ἅμα καὶ τάχος. (9.) ἔδει δὲ ἑκατέρας παιδείσεως, τῆς μὲν εὐγλωττίαν χαριζομένης, τῆς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ὠφελούσης, ὅπως ἐπιστήμων τε γένοιο τῶν ἱερῶν συγγραμμάτων καὶ δυνήσῃ τοῖς ἄλλοις εὐμαθέστερον ἐρμηνεύειν.

⁸ C. Saliou, *Antioche décrite par Libanios. La rhétorique de l'espace urbain et ses enjeux au milieu du quatrième siècle*, in: E. Amato - A. Roduit - M. Steinrück (eds.), *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique: hommages à Jacques Schamp*, Bruxelles 2006, 273–285 (274/275).

⁹ Men. Rh. I 365,30 – 367.

“(7.) Having given you birth, this city did not allow you to be brought up in strange arms, but having taken you up as a new-born baby and having raised you to the age when you were able to be educated, she brought you to the “poetic gates” and from there, when you had been filled with the Muses, she handed you over to the leader of the worshippers of Hermes; there, among those practicing the same art, you took first place for a number of speeches and for your way of life. Insofar as I could, I too have harvested from the same field. (8.) Having been imbued with such an education from such great sources, you worked hard at hearing the instruction concerning religious matters, going to (the school of) a teacher who was suitably full of this sort of education – for he was the leader (a bishop) of the clergy – and who also rightly loved you as his own child – for he happened to be your mother’s brother – you had him always sowing your soul which readily received and guarded securely the fruits (which came) quickly and in great numbers. (9.) It was necessary for you to receive both disciplines: the one offering eloquence, and the other one benefitting the soul, so that you might become versed in the holy writings, and also be further able to interpret them to others in a way conducive to learning (...).”

A first remark about the education system in Gaza is that literature and theology were taught in different schools.¹⁰ Theological education is provided to the young Marcian by his uncle, a bishop, probably as a private teaching, as it was quite usual in late antiquity and Byzantium.¹¹ And Choricus’ statement “I too have harvested from the same field” doesn’t imply that they had been school mates, but that they had received the same kind of education.¹²

In the complicated and long *LaudMarci*, our interest is attracted by some remarks about the bishop’s culture, in chs. 6/7:

¹⁰ I disagree with Y. Ashkenazi, *Sophists and Priests in Late Antique Gaza* according to Choricus the Rhetor, in: B. Bitton-Ashkelony - A. Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 2004, 195 – 208 (200): “It seems that Christian education was part of the program of Gaza’s academy”, based on *OrFunProc* 21, about Procopius’ skill in interpreting the Scripture. On this passage, see C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, comm. ad loc.

¹¹ On the didactic responsibilities of the uncle toward his nephews, see e. g. Bas. Adol. I 3 τῆ τε παρὰ τῆς φύσεως οἰκειότητι εὐθὺς μετὰ τοὺς γονέας ὑμῖν τυγχάνω, ὥστε μήτ’ αὐτοὺς ἔλαττόν τι πατέρων εὐνοίας νέμειν ὑμῖν, ὑμᾶς δὲ νομίζω, εἰ μή τι ὑμῶν διαμαρτάνω τῆς γνώμης, μὴ ποθεῖν τοὺς τεκόντας, πρὸς ἐμὲ βλέποντας. On the identity of the addressees as Basilus’ nephews, see M. Naldini, *Basilio di Cesarea. Discorso ai giovani*, Firenze 1984, 15–17. In Choricus, see *OrFunProc* 31 λογίσεσθε τὰς ἐλπίδας ἅς ἐπὶ τούτοις εἶχετε τοῖς παιδίοις, ὡς τὴν μὲν τῶν ἀρρένων ξυνωρίδα παιδεύσει, about his sister’s sons. The bishop’s nephew is a well known figure in Byzantium: V. von Falkenhausen, *Il vescovo*, in G. Cavallo (ed.), *L’uomo bizantino*, Roma-Bari 1992, 255 – 290 (276/277), while the family tradition in ecclesiastical careers is often criticized, also in councils, e.g. the council in Trullo, 692, as it is discussed by C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley 2005, 195 – 199.

¹² A commentary and Italian translation of the following passages is in C. Greco, “*Ἀκαρπα δένδρα*. Retorica, eredità culturale e descrizioni di giardini in Coricio Gazeo”, *MEG* 7 (2007), 97 – 117.

(6.) Νέος μὲν ὢν ἐκ ποιητικῆς ἐδρέψω τὰ κάλλιστα συλλέγων μὲν ὅ τι χρήσιμον ἔφω, προσμειδιῶν δὲ τοῖς μύθοις εἰς ἀνόνητον εὐφροσύνην ὑπολαβὼν πεποιῆσθαι τοῖς Ὀμηρίδαίς, ὡσπερ ἐν ἄλσει ποικίλῳ καὶ τὰς ὄψεις κηλοῦντι τῶν εἰσιόντων ἔστι μὲν τὰ συντελοῦντα τὴν χρεῖαν, εἰσὶ δὲ κυπάριττοι κύκλῳ καὶ πλάτανοι καλὸν ὑπηχοῦσαι καὶ ἄκαρπον εὐθυμίαν εἰσάγουσαι τῷ κεκτημένῳ τὸν χῶρον. (7.) εἶτα τὴν ἐκάστης ἡλικίας συνέριθον παιδευσιν προσλαβὼν καὶ συγγράμμασι τοῖς ὁσίοις πρὸ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐγγυμασάμενος ἀνέβης ἐνταῦθα τῆς εὐσεβείας (...).

(6. “While still a young man you culled the most beautiful things from the poetic (Muse), gathering on the one hand whatever was useful, and smiling on the other hand at the stories, believing that they had been made by the Homerids for profitless merriment: just as in a rich grove which charms the vision of those entering it there are things which are useful, there are also cypress trees in a circle and plane trees which whisper beautifully and bring a profitless delight to the one who owns the grove. (7.) After receiving the appropriate education in each stage of life, and being trained in Scripture for the priesthood, you then have ascended to such piety (...).”

The fact that Marcian studied rhetoric and acquired the usual παιδεία is quite common among Christians, as their school career followed the traditional stages. Nor is it surprising that pagan culture helped Marcian to improve his eloquence which in turn prepared him for his ecclesiastical duties: to be eloquent is a main point for a preacher, especially in an age of theological controversies.¹³ Apart from such commonplaces, in the Gazan environment we notice too many attempts to demonstrate the inoffensive charm of mythology as well as the importance of philosophy,¹⁴ and to justify the love for ancient παιδεία: as if new meanings and new contents were necessary to keep them alive.

¹³ On the bases of St. Paul, I Cor 1,17; 2,1/2, the Christian orator should privilege the efficacy of a speech rather than its stylistic beauty. E. g. Jo. Chrys. De Sacerd. 4,3 – 9; 5, 2 – 8 (ed. A. M. Malingrey, Paris 1980, SC 272); Gr. Naz. Or. 43, 12. See V. Paronetto, La funzione del pastor in Gregorio Magno. Ascendenze agostiniane, in: Aa.Vv., Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma 15 – 20 Settembre 1986. Atti, Roma 1987, 125 – 132. However, beauty can help spiritual growth, as it is the case of Psalms: see T. Graumann, St. Ambrose on the Art of Preaching, in: Aa. Vv., Vescovi e pastori in età teodosiana. In occasione del XVI centenario della consacrazione episcopale di S. Agostino, 396 – 1996, XXV incontro di studiosi dell’antichità Cristiana. Roma 8 – 11 maggio 1996, Roma 1997, II, 587 – 600 (597) on Bas. Hom. in Ps. I 1 (PG 29,212A) τὸ ἐκ πάντων ὠφέλιμον on the Psalms’ beauty, followed by Choricus LaudMarcII 9 τῆς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ὠφελούσης. For a survey, M. B. Cunningham-P. Allen (eds.), Preacher and Audience. Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics, Leiden 1998.

¹⁴ The many and deeply studied late antique mosaics of Gaza representing mythological subjects demonstrate the presence and diffusion of pagan topics in this Christian environment: e. g., M. Piccirillo-E. Alliata (eds.), The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897–1997.

Some more significant examples can be found in Aeneas, “le grand et savant sophiste chrétien de la ville de Gaza”, as he is called by Zacharias Scholasticus in his *Life of Severus*:¹⁵ in his letters to his former school mates who had chosen the ecclesiastical career, he frequently compares the religious life to that of a rhetor. Let’s show a few passages: the opposition is between the playful rhetorical training on mythological matters and the more serious use of words for religious growth and apostolic mission in Ep. XV Massa Positano (to presbyteros Stephen) ἦν δὲ ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος παρὰ τῷ Νείλῳ οὐ παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τότε ταῖς Μούσαις συνέπαιζον. ἐκεκόμψευτο δὲ καὶ γελᾶν ἐδόκει σπουδάζων ὁ λόγος (...) τὰ μὲν οὖν τότε συνέπαιζες τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς, νῦν δὲ σε σπουδάζειν ἀκούω κἀν τοῖς ἱεροῖς τὸ καλὸν δόγμα κηρύττειν καὶ λόγῳ μεταρρυθμίζειν τῶν πολιτῶν τὸν τρόπον. The love for rhetoric is dangerous, and must have some limits in Ep. XVI (to Sarapion) Ἐγὼ τῆς ῥητορικῆς ἐρᾶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὡμολόγουν, ἐλπίσας παρ’ ὑμῶν εὐρίσκειν τὸ φάρμακον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑναντίον γέγονεν· ἠϋξήσατε γὰρ μᾶλλον ἢ διελύσατε τὸν ἔρωτα, θέατρον τῇ ἐπιστολῇ συλλέγοντες καὶ κρότον διεγείροντες. Πῶς οὖν ἂν τις ἀτιμάσει τὸ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἐπαινούμενον; Philosophy is the natural introduction to priesthood in Ep. XXI (to presbyter Dorotheos) Σὺ δὲ ἐξ ἱεροῦ διαβαίνεις εἰς ἱερόν, ἐκ φιλοσοφίας εἰς ἱεροσύνην. Here Aeneas presents the two sides of rhetoric: on the one hand he limits the rhetor’s activity to an intellectual enjoyment, on a lower stage than Christian preaching, on the other hand he reminds his correspondents of the importance those studies have had for their present positions. Choricus’ opinion seems quite similar: he praises the bishop’s eloquence according to a well defined encomiastic pattern, but he adds to it the human and cultural progress that the *Λόγοι* allow.¹⁶ What we have read in *LaudMarci* 6 about the bishop’s love for poetry when he was young, can be interpreted as a metaphor of the role of poetry: literary beauty, although

Travelling through the Byzantine Ummayyad Period. Proceedings of the International Conference held in Hammam, 7–9 April 1997, Jerusalem 1999; A. Ovadiah, *Art and Archaeology in Israel and Neighbouring Countries. Antiquity and Late Antiquity*, London 2002. An overview in G. W. Bowersock, *Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines*, in: Id., *Selected Papers on Late Antiquity*, Bari 2000, 135–147, and *The Rich Harvest of Near Eastern Mosaics*, *ibid.*, pp. 149–158. For the use of mythology in Christian literature, compare also M. Roberts, *The Use of Myth in Late Latin Epithalamia from Statius to Venantius Fortunatus*, *TAPhA* 119 (1989), 321–348 (335/336, 341).

¹⁵ Zach. Schol. *Vita Severi* 90, ed. M. A. Kugener, *Zacharie le Scholastique. Vie de Sévère*, PO 2 (1–3), Turnhout 1907. Now an English translation is also available: L. Ambjörn, *The Life of Severus by Zacharias of Mytilene*, Piscataway, NJ, 2008.

¹⁶ The intellectual and spiritual components of the personality are associated in an encomiastic context also in Diosc. fr. 17, 12 Fournet [...] ὁ εὐσεβῆς Θεοδοσίου πάνσοφον ἄσθμα (“le souffle tout de sagesse pénétré du pieux Théodose”, transl. J.-L. Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l’Égypte du VI^e siècle. La bibliothèque et l’œuvre de Dioscore d’Aphrodité*, Le Caire 1999, and *ibid.*, ad loc., II, 572.)

fruitless, is a therapy of the soul and, moreover, a defence against the pain of life. The same is in OrFunProc 36: after a long discussion on the consoling power of philosophy and poetry, he concludes:

Ἦ τί πλέον ἡμῖν οἱ λόγοι δωρήσονται; Τοῦ δὲ χάριν πονοῦμεν τὰς τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκμανθάνοντες τύχας; Οὐ γὰρ ἵνα τὸν χρόνον ἀνόνητα δαπανῶμεν, ἀλλ' ὅπως, οἶμαι, τὴν τεῆλλην ἐκείθεν ὠφέλειαν δρεψώμεθα καὶ τοιοῦτου συμ βάντος καιρῶ πρὸς ἄνδρας ἴσα πεπονθότας ἡμῖν ἢ πικρότερα πάθη τὸν νοῦν ἀναφέροντες οὕτως οἴσομεν ῥᾶον.

“What more shall education (λόγοι) offer to us? For the sake of what do we struggle to learn the history of the ancients? Not, of course, in order to spend out time without any profit, but I think, because our objective is to cull all possible usefulness from these events, and, if something similar shall happen to us, to refer our minds to men who had suffered equal or worse disasters in order more easily to manage ourselves.”

It seems that we can feel here a sort of melancholy: the memory of the past is a “garden” that protects us from an hostile world. It is possible to add, in this sense, several passages from ApolMim: the mimes’ shows are only jokes, and the smile they raise is a medicine against the pains of daily life.¹⁷ Such must have been Choricus’ feeling about his times, when society seemed to have nothing in common with his school and his deeply rooted cultural dimension.

In his position as a public speaker and as a teacher, Choricus does not always direct his works to the Atticizing audience of scholars, but to the whole community: that’s why, many times he has to complain about the lack of interest or even the violent refusal of mythical tales by his students.¹⁸ Libanius too, far before, criticized young people’s desire of pursuing professional careers instead of a complete cultural training.¹⁹ Although the presence of this subject in declamations might be topical, Choricus seems to do more: he insists on the role of profane culture in the education of the bishop himself and on the harmless nature of mythology. As we have noticed in Aeneas’ letters, there must have been a sort of conflict between the two “souls”, therefore often coexisting in the same individuals: according to Legier, who wrote an “Essai de biographie” of

¹⁷ ApolMim 36–40, 65, 102, 113. The idea of poetry as a comfort for those who suffer is topical: compare also, e.g., Gr. Naz. In suos versus II 1, 39, 54–56 (PG 37, 1332A) τέταρτον εὔρον τῇ νόσφ πονούμενος / παρηγόρημα τοῦτο, κύκνος ὡς γέρων, / λαλεῖν ἑμαυτῷ τὰ περῶν συρίγματα, / οὐ θρήνον, ἀλλ' ὕμνον τιν' ἐξιτήριον.

¹⁸ E.g. ApolMim 109, about the importance of being educated; Rhetor (XLII=decl. 12) 116, where he complains that young people follow a military career instead of continuing their studies; Dial. XVIII (=10), when he is worried of his student’s reactions to his too long and untimely mythological digressions, and other passages quoted by F.K. Litsas, Choricus of Gaza, cit., 18 and 23: students appear impatient and uninterested.

¹⁹ J. Martin-P. Petit, Libanios. Autobiographie (Discours I), Paris 1979, XX–XXVIII.

Aeneas,²⁰ he was an admired sophist and philosopher, and a pious Christian at the same time. Also Zacharias Scholasticus attended both the schools of philosophy and the monks of the desert.²¹ The identities of Aeneas and Zacharias would deserve further study and more exact definition. That is why it seems that here the figure of the bishop Marcian is offered by the sophist to legitimate his teaching in front of the community. It is true that the debate on the relationship between faith and classical culture has a much longer history, and that the nuances in different times and authors are many: however, we should take into account the feelings of a sophist in the face of events like the closing of the school of Athens in 529, or the conditions of the pagan intellectual élite during the reign of Justinian. This doesn't mean that Choricus had pagan feelings, but it might explain his efforts in representing the ancient *παιδεία* once deprived of its original contents, as a precious ornament, precisely what human beings need for a happy life, in agreement with Christian faith and Justinian's definitions of antiquity as *inculpabilis antiquitas* (Nov. 8 *Iusiurandum latinum*, praef.) and *veneranda vetustatis auctoritas* (Nov. 23, c. 3 pr. and 24, c. 1, in.).²² It is maybe possible to associate such attempts to the progressive turning to Christianity that occurred at the school of Alexandria, where Aeneas, Zacharias, Procopius and probably Choricus too were educated.²³ A systematic comparative study could say much more about their individual positions in contemporary cultural debates.

(b) Procopius (or. VIII F.-R.)

According to this program, another definition of the figure of a Christian scholar is represented by Procopius' funeral speech (OrFunProc, or. VIII F.-R.): his personality is the perfect synthesis of classical scholarship and Christian virtues. In spite of the fact that, along with Procopius' letters, this speech is the main source about his life, we cannot add many details to his biography in comparison with the usual life and career of any rhetor of his times. Here

²⁰ E. Legier, *Essai de Biographie de Enée de Gaza*, *Oriens Christianus* 7 (1907), 350–369. See also M. Wacht, *Aeneas von Gaza als Apologet. Seine Kosmologie im Verhältnis zum Platonismus*, Bonn 1969.

²¹ M. J. Blázquez, *La vida estudiantil en Beyruth y Alejandría a final del siglo V según la Vida de Severo de Zacarías Escolástico. Paganos y cristianos*, I, *Gerión* 16 (1998), 415–436; II, 17 (1999), 519–530; L. Jones Hall, *Roman Berytus. Beirut in Late Antiquity*, London 2004, 195–220.

²² Passages quoted and discussed by A. Pertusi, *Giustiniano e la cultura del suo tempo*, in: G. G. Archi, *L'imperatore Giustiniano. Storia e mito. Giornate di studio a Ravenna*, 14–16 Ottobre 1976, Milano 1978, 181–199 (183–185).

²³ H.-D. Saffrey, *Le chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l'école d'Alexandrie au VI^e siècle*, *REG* 67 (1954), 396–410.

Choricus just informs us that Procopius lost his parents prematurely (ch. 4), that he reached excellence as a student and later as a teacher (chs. 5–9): after his studies in Alexandria and a stay in Caesarea, he preferred to continue his career in his native city. As it seems, he was not married, had no children, but had a great affection for his sister's children. While this sister is completely unknown, the problem of his brothers' identity is still unsolved: in his letters, three of them are mentioned, namely Zacharias, Philip and Victor. The question is whether the first one, Zacharias, is to be identified with Zacharias Scholasticus, bishop of Mytilene, one of the outstanding figures of the school of Gaza. For this discussion, I just refer to specific studies.²⁴ What is important here, is to notice that they must have been present at this speech, as Choricus addresses them (ch. 38).

Unfortunately, too many and too long mythological and philosophical digressions make this oration a too heavy display of erudition, that obscures a presumably sincere affection. But that is what we have to expect from school productions. Apart from these, the praise of the teacher follows the patterns that are traditional for the subject: Aristeides' epitaph for Alexander of Cotiaeus,²⁵ Themistius' one for his father Eugenios²⁶ who was a philosopher, the anonymous fragmentary praise for a teacher (fr. XXX Heitsch) and, in the West, Ausonius' epigrams for the teachers of Bordeaux,²⁷ to quote just late antique examples. As it is equally traditional, the biographical elements follow the description of virtues as their necessary consequences: Choricus summarizes his teacher's childhood, his education and his early career. Having been a student and then a colleague, he emphasizes Procopius' didactic skills, a guide to the comprehension of ancient authors. It will be worthwhile to notice that he spends quite a few words to describe the contents of his teaching, in chs. 7–9: in ch. 7, he praises his exegetical activity, which was a part of the teaching; in ch. 8, he refers to his purest attic language, and to his sense of style and rhythm; in ch. 9, his public rhetorical displays enchanted his audience, as the Sirens' songs do, and so the rhetor was a *γόνις*, an enchanter. The comparisons with Pericles, Isocrates, Demosthenes are thus topical. It is likely that the audience of scholars didn't need to know more, and that the others didn't care. On the other hand, the

²⁴ M. Minniti Colonna, *Zacharia Scolastico. Ammonio. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commentario*, Napoli 1973, 15–26; P. Allen, *Zacharias Scholasticus and the Historia Ecclesiastica of Evagrius Scholasticus*, *JThS* 31 (1980), 471–488 (471); G. Matino, *Procopio di Gaza. Panegirico per l'imperatore Anastasio*, Napoli 2005, 13–15.

²⁵ E. Berardi, *Elio Aristide. Epicedio per Eteoneo. Epitafio per Alessandro*, Alessandria 2006.

²⁶ Or. 20 Downey; see R.J. Penella, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, Berkeley 2000, 51–60.

²⁷ Ausonius, *Commemoratio professorum Burdigalensium*, see R. P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, Oxford 1991, 41–59, and commentary, 328–363.

section concerning his moral qualities extends from ch. 16 to ch. 26, which is the formal conclusion. These are, in my opinion, the most interesting chapters. Here, Procopius is represented as the *θεῖος ἀνὴρ* in the full sense, and classical, pythagorean, neoplatonic and Christian elements build up his noble profile. Among the many intertextual references we can find in this section, that make him similar to Basilios, to John Chrysostomus' ideal bishop, to Gregory the Wonderworker,²⁸ I would like to focus on chs. 22/23, which describe his positive influence on people around him: we will notice how monastic culture could affect also such Attic-fashioned texts. And it should be expected, as Choricius says, in ch. 21, that "he was in all respects similar to a priest".

(22.) (...) πολλοῖς ὀρφανίας οὐ γέγονεν αἴσθησις, πολλαῖς ἢ χηρεία κοῦφον ἐφάνη ψυχαγωγῶντος ἐκείνου τὰ πάθη. οὐδεμίαν δὲ μάχην ἠττήθη πρὸς αἰσχροῦ ἀγωνιζόμενος ἡδονὴν· πολλοὺς μὲν οὖν ἀτόποις προσκειμένους ἐπιθυμίαις ἀνέπεισε σωφρονεῖν. (23.) ἔτι τοίνυν αὐτῷ δίαίτα ἦν οὐ πολυτελής, οὐ παρατρέχουσα Λάκωνος τράπεζαν, ἀλλ' εἴ ποῦ τινὰς ἐορτῆς ἀγομένης εἰστίασεν, ἀβροτέραν μὲν τῆς συνήθους ἐτέλει τὴν εὐωχίαν, ἦσθιε δὲ πλεον τῶν εἰωθότων οὐδέν, ἐσχηματίζετο δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν τοὺς παρόντας προτρέπων. καὶ τὸν τῶν σιτίων καιρὸν οὐ πρὸς τρυφὴν ἀπλῶς καὶ γαστρὸς ἡδονὴν ἐδαπάνᾳ, διηγῆμασι δὲ σοφοῖς ὁμοῦ καὶ τερπινοῖς ἡδίω τὴν θοίνην τοῖς ἐσπιωμένοις ἐποίει. ἐγενόμην κἀγὼ τῶν δαιτυμόνων πολλακίς καὶ πείραν, οὐκ ἀκοὴν ὑμῖν διηγοῦμαι.

(22.) "(...) For with his assistance to the various calamities of many people, orphanhood became unimportant for many orphans, and widowhood proved to be tolerable to many widows. He did not lose the fight against any obscene desire. On the contrary, he persuaded many people with improper tendencies to become chaste. (23.) Moreover, his diet was neither luxurious nor exceeding the Spartan table; if he dined somewhere on the occasion of a feast, he had a more comfortable dinner than usual, but he did not eat anything more than the customary food, while pretending to do so, in order to encourage those who were present. And he did not spend the dinnertime only in pleasure and (the) satisfaction of the stomach, but made it more enjoyable for his companions with wise and pleasant stories. I have been myself among his table companions many times and I am speaking not from stories, but through experience."

The praise of his *φιλανθρωπία* toward widows and orphans has a parallel in OrFunMar 18.²⁹

His good deeds are accomplished by the practice of persuasion, so that he puts his skills of rhetor-enchanter at the service of Christian charity. Although

²⁸ See C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., for a commentary to specific passages.

²⁹ OrFunMar 18 πόσους ἔθρεψε νέους ἐν ὀρφανία καταλειφθέντας; πόσαι γυναῖκες χηρεύουσαι τὰς ἐκείνης ὑμνοῦσι φιλοτιμίας; ("How many youth deserted in orphanhood she has reared? How many widows praise her charities?").

formal references come from Xenophon,³⁰ here the fight against passions is described as a dialectic fight, ἀγών, as it is the prototype of this kind, that are the Evangelic temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt. 4, 1 – 11, Mc. 1, 12/13, Lc. 4. 1 – 13). From now on, Procopius is represented more or less as a monk: in this context, the fight against passions has a great diffusion, and becomes very hard and physical in Palestinian monasticism.³¹ Moreover, the correction of brothers through a dialogue is a duty for a monk,³² while Procopius' example of chastity and moderation in eating recalls the connection between gluttony and luxury, which is very frequent in the monastic lists of vices: there, γαστριμαργία and πορνεία have often the first two places, since a body that is not hungry is more incline to other needs.³³

The use of food is a subject debated both in philosophical and monastic environments, and Choricus seems to be in agreement with Basilus, *Regulae fusius tractatae* 19 Τί τὸ μέτρον τῆς ἐγκρατείας (PG 31, 968A) ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν βρωμάτων, ὡσπερ αἱ χρεῖαι ἄλλαι ἄλλων εἰσὶ ... οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὸ μέτρον τῆς χρήσεως διάφορον, καὶ ὁ τρόπος; according to Paul, I Tim. 5, 23, each one must eat and drink depending on his health necessities. The example of moderation Procopius displays to others in banquets is a sort of Atticizing re-writing of Bas. *Regulae fusius tractatae* 20 Τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς ἐν βρώμασι δεξιώσεως (PG

³⁰ X. Ages. 5, 1 Ἄλλὰ μὴν καὶ ὅσαι γε ἡδοναὶ πολλῶν κρατοῦσιν ἀνθρώπων, ποίας οἰδέ τις Ἄγησίλαον ἠττηθέντα;

³¹ Chr. Gnllka, *Studien zur Psychomachie des Prudentius*, Wiesbaden 1963, 19–22; L. Regnault, Dom J. de Préville, Dorothee de Gaza. *Œuvres spirituelles*. Introduction, texte grec, traduction et notes, Paris 1963 (SC 92), 55–58.

³² Bas. *Constitutiones monasticae* 11 Περὶ εὐκαιρίας λόγων (PG 31, 1373D–1376A) χρήσιμον δ' ἂν εἴη ἢ τὸ περὶ ἀρετῆς ἐν καιρῷ διαλέγεσθαι, ἢ τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν καὶ κατεπίγουσαν χρεῖαν τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, ἢ καὶ ὄλως πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀκούοντων οἰκοδομὴν· τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς ὡς περιττοὺς καὶ ἀνωφελεῖς παραιτεῖσθαι.

³³ Among the many examples, let's quote Evagr. *Pont. De VIII vitiosis cogitationibus* 2 (PG 40, 1272A/B) φέρει δὲ αὐτοὺς πολλὰκις καὶ εἰς μνήμην ἀδελφῶν τινων, τούτοις περιπεσόντων τοῖς πάθεσιν. Ἔστι δὲ ὅτε καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐκείνους τοὺς πεπονθότας παραβάλλειν ἀναπέθει τοῖς ἐγκρατευομένοις, Nil. *Ancyr. De VIII spiritibus malitiae* 3 Περὶ γαστριμαργίας (PG 79, 1148B/C) καὶ ἡδονῆς σβεσθεῖσα ἀναζωπυροῦται ἐν κόρῳ βρωμάτων. Μὴ ἐλεήσης σῶμα ἀτονίαν ἀποδυρόμενον, μηδὲ πιάνης αὐτὸ πολυτελεῖα βρωμάτων· ἐὰν γὰρ ἰσχύση, ἐπαναστήσεται σοι, καὶ πόλεμον ἄσπονδον κινήσει κατὰ σοῦ, ἕως ἂν αἰχμαλωτεύσῃ σὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ δοῦλον παραδώσει σε τῷ τῆς πορνείας πάθει, 4 Περὶ πορνείας (1148C/D) σωφροσύνην τίκτει ἐγκράτεια, γαστριμαργία δὲ, μήτηρ ἀκολασίας, Id. *Instit. ad monachos*, PG 79, 1236A ἀκρασίαν βρωμάτων περικόπτει νηστεία, ἀκολασίαν δὲ πορνείας περιαιρεῖ ἐγκράτεια μετὰ προσευχῆς, gluttony and luxury are the first two vices also in Ps. Athan. *Ep. II ad Castorem, de VIII malitiae cogitationibus* 1–2 (PG 28, 873C–876A). On the association of the two passions see Y.-M. Duval, *Diététique et médecine chez Jérôme*, in V. Boudon-Millot-B. Pouderon (eds.), *Les Pères de l'Église face à la science médicale de leur temps*, Paris 2005, 121–139.

31, 969C–976A), namely 972C–973A ἄλλος ἐλήλυθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἔξωθεν βίου; Μαθέτω διὰ τῶν ἔργων, ὅσα ὁ λόγος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔπεισε, καὶ λαβέτω τύπον καὶ ὑπογραμμὸν τῆς ἐν τροφαίς αὐταρκείας [...]. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο αἰσχρὸν, πολλῶ αἰσχρότερον διὰ τοὺς τρυφῶντας τὴν τράπεζαν ἡμῶν μετασκευάζεσθαι. Μονότροπός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ βίος, ἓνα σκοπὸν ἔχων, τὴν δόξαν τοῦ Θεοῦ: not even in receiving guests must the monk exceed his usual moderation, so that he will be an example for those who don't belong to the community. Finally, with his pleasant teaching, Procopius fulfilled the ancient pedagogical, rhetorical and poetical ideal of *miscere utile dulci*.³⁴ What follows is a philosophical discussion about human nature and fate, supported by a plethora of mythological examples. The praise of the city and the bishop, with a last apostrophe to Procopius, closes the speech: the rhetor and the bishop are two complementary figures, and the latter receives the city as an heritage.³⁵ A huge bibliography on the social duties of late antique bishops has made clear that such a mix of roles is not unusual in the eastern tradition: Moses is the biblical model of authority, having been a general, a legislator and a benefactor.³⁶

³⁴ OrFunProc 23 διηγῆμασι δὲ σοφοῖς ὁμοῦ καὶ τερπνοῖς ἠδίω τὴν θοῖνῃ τοῖς ἐστιωμένοις ἐποίει. See C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., ad loc.; a survey of this poetical ideal in C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry*, Cambridge 1971. The importance of the didactic aspect of the *delectatio* in the context of imaginary declamation is outlined by D. Van Mal-Maeder, *La fiction des declamations*, Leiden 2007, 30–39; 42–46. A parallel in Gr. Naz. In suos versus II 1, 39. 37–41 (PG 37, 1332) δεῦτερον 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.

³⁵ The commonly accepted translation of OrFunProc 50 τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν, that Marcian received the school (and not the city) as an heritage and directed it after Procopius' death, is linguistically wrong, and it has produced the idea that the Christian influence on the teaching and the connection to the local Church were closer than they really should have been. So in F. K. Litsas, *Choricus of Gaza*, cit., 68. I think that ἡ ἐνεγκοῦσα should be interpreted as “homeland”, as it is quite common in late prose: see LSJ, s. v. φέρω, V: “bring forth, produce ... also of living beings ... ἡ ἐνεγκοῦσα ‘one's country’”, *Hld.* 2, 29, *Lib. Or.* 2, 66 al., *Chor.* p. 81 B. (= *LaudMarci* 7, where it is surely the city), *Lyd. Mag.* 3, 26 etc.” The correct interpretation is already in the Latin translation by J. Chr. Wolf, ap. J. A. Fabricius, *Bibliotheca Graeca*, Hamburgi 1717, VIII, 841–863, who translates τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν as *patriam*. The passage is debated also by R. J. Penella, Introduction, in Id. (ed.), *Rhetorical Exercises*, cit., 6: “The passage in question probably means only that the bishop's good general leadership provided an ideal environment for the transfer of the school from Procopius to Choricus.” It is likely that Marcian was interested in cultural activities, being a member of the city elite, but his direct influence in the school leadership cannot be deduced from these lines.

³⁶ E. g. C. Rapp, *Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography*, in: M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power. The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 1998, 277–298.

Although in Choricus' encomia we find some well diffused ideals, typical of a late antique society, his original attempt is to portray these personalities as an harmonic fusion of a still living classical culture and Christian values, in order to offer to his audience the paradigm of a Christian scholar. A bishop and a venerated professor: what is better to legitimate the ancient παιδεία? Here, the speech of praise aims to be a teaching to the fellow citizens, and to highlight the role of the school as a connection between the institutions and the whole community.

The Muses and Love: the Epithalamia (orr. V/VI F.-R.)

In his first hand representation of school life in Gaza, Choricus doesn't forget his students.

Being a professor and, consequently, an intellectual father, he writes two epithalamia: the first, OrNuptZach (or. V F.-R.), for the student Zacharias; the other, OrNuptProc (or. VI F.-R.), for the students Procopius, Iohannes and Elias. As a full commentary is now in course by Chiara Telesca, a Ph.D. Italian student at the Università della Basilicata, I will just resume an already published study by Robert J. Penella,³⁷ and then I will add some remarks. In the two epithalamia, school has a main position in the grooms' lives, even in such a decisive moment of their personal existences: the teacher is a sort of father as Procopius was for his students,³⁸ according to OrFunProc 46. Here, the Muses and Eros are in a funny competition, because the young men are leaving their studies, represented by the Muses, or at least they are going to neglect them for a different kind of life.³⁹ Penella's work provides a detailed analysis of the texts, and suggests the existence of a pattern of epithalamium for a student written by his teacher, as also Himerius' epithalamium for Severus shows.⁴⁰ That is very likely: it is the same subject as Carm. XV by Sidonius Apollinaris who, in the epithalamium for Polemius, an educated young man, and Araneola, gives to Minerva the unusual role of *dea pronuba*.⁴¹ These texts are obviously different, but the situation is

³⁷ R. J. Penella, From the Muses to Eros: Choricus' Epithalamia for Student Bridegrooms, in C. Saliou (ed.), *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive*, cit., 135–148.

³⁸ Some remarks on this metaphor in R. J. Penella, *From the Muses to Eros*, cit., 137, n. 11.

³⁹ The discussion on the topical presence of Muses and Graces in epithalamia, often associated and confused, in: J.-L. Fournet, cit., II, p. 638, ad Diosc. fr. 36, 3–5.

⁴⁰ Or. 9 Colonna: see R. J. Penella, *Man and the Word. The Orations of Himerius*, Berkeley 2007, 141–155.

⁴¹ G. Ravenna, *Le nozze di Polemio e Araneola* (Sidonio Apollinare, Carmina XIV/XV), Bologna 1990; I. Gualandri, *Aspetti dell'ekphrasis in età tardo-antica*, in: *Testo e immagine nell'Alto Medioevo*, XLI Settimana di studio del Centro Italiano di Studio sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 1994, 301–341.

very close. After all, Menander Rhetor himself suggests this possible development when, among the virtues of the groom, he mentions a literary culture: Men. Rh. II 403, 30 (Epithalamios) ἐν μούσαις οὗτος ἀρίζηλος, 31 οὗτος μὲν ἐν λόγοις. The following step, that is the presence in an epithalamium of the passage “from the Muses to Eros” (according to Penella’s title), has to be explained. Perhaps the suffering Muses, representing the school, feel abandoned by the students who get married, in a similar way as the bride is taken away from her family and community, which is a *τύπος* in this literary genre and also in folklore.⁴² In both cases, the bride and the groom leave a closed community, e. g. the *θίασος* in the case of Sappho’s girls,⁴³ the group of young girls in the case of the theocritean Helen,⁴⁴ and so school mates and teachers in the case of students. Such departure may be sometimes elaborated as a lamentation or, as it happens here, as the *ἀφορμή* for a funny comparison between two life-styles: as Penella notices, Choricus’ criticism of his students should not be taken seriously, but considered in the playful context of these happy events. Besides this rhetorical solution, the similarity with other closed communities is highlighted by the fact that Choricus generally uses in his works the common technical definitions for the school: *θίασος*, *ποίησις*, *ἀγέλη*, and a rich vocabulary of mystery-religion origin (*τελούμενος*, *ὄργια*, *ἀμύητος*, etc.) that identifies a group of initiates.⁴⁵ It can be argued that here these are not only conventional words, but that they should be studied in their context and possible philosophical meanings. From this point of view, the choice between love (Eros) and culture (the Muses) might have some philosophical implications too, as the opposition between Laide and the Cynic Diogenes in Sidonius seems to confirm.⁴⁶ Since the holiness of culture has a long tradition, it would be of a great value to describe the elaboration of such traditional idea in this Christian milieu and historical period.⁴⁷

⁴² F. K. Litsas, *The Greek Folk Wedding. Preliminary Studies*, Chicago 1981, 78–81: τὰ παραπονιάρικα τραγούδια, the “farewell songs”, express the painful departure of the bride from her home and family. See also S. Horstmann, *Das Epithalamium in der lateinischen Literatur der Spätantike*, München 2004, for a survey of this literary genre.

⁴³ E. Contiades-Tsitsoni, *Hymenaios und Epithalamion. Das Hochzeitslied in der frühgriechischen Lyrik*, Stuttgart 1990, 124–126 (125, n. 43), for the reference to Sappho fr. 104, 2 Voigt Ἔσπερε πάντα φέρησι ὅσα φαίνολις ἐσκέδασ’ Αὔωσ, / φέρησι ὄν, φέρησι αἶγα, φέρησι ἄπυ μάτερι παῖδα. See also some poems of regret and farewell, e. g. fr. 94 and 96 Voigt, and D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, Oxford 1955, 75–96.

⁴⁴ Theoc. XVIII, 41/42 Gow πολλά τεοῦς, Ἐλένα, μεμναμένα ὡς γαλαθηναί / ἄρνες γειναμένας οἷος μαστὸν ποθέοισα.

⁴⁵ R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1988, 445/446.

⁴⁶ See vv. 181–201, where Laide is depicted while shaving a dirty Diogenes.

⁴⁷ P. Boyancé, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs*, Paris 1937. The holy dimension of the *Λόγοι* is highlighted by U. Criscuolo, *Libanio. Allocuzione a Giuliano per*

Anyway, in Choricus' epithalamia the controversy between the Muses and Eros is solved thanks to a brilliant compromise, suggested by Menander Rhetor himself: marriage has a good influence on young people, and it is a success of Φύσις over fate; besides, it does not exclude the love for culture.⁴⁸ As their teacher, Choricus represents his students as a well balanced mix of intellectual and social values, so that they will be able to carry their duties as future city leaders.

Holiness and Success: Maria (or. VII F.-R.)

A further example of philosophy and leadership is Maria, mother of Marcian bishop of Gaza, of Anastasius bishop of Eleutheropolis, and of many other excellent sons and daughters. Choricus delivers her funeral speech (OrFunMar, or. VII F.-R.), a text that is quite different from those that have celebrated women until his time. In fact, there are not many surviving examples of traditional classical funeral praises of women: Plutarch laments the lack of such speeches in Greek literature, while they are frequent in Latin.⁴⁹ In late antiquity, Julian's praise of Eusebia cannot always be compared, because of different times and social status.⁵⁰ On the contrary, Christian literature had already produced many famous and stylistically elaborated praises of women, that Choricus perfectly knew: the presence of hagiographical influences is here very strong, and it gives to this speech a peculiar place in Choricus' work.⁵¹ In a perfect Attic style and language, Maria is represented like Gregory of Nyssa's

l'arrivo in Antiochia (or. 13), Napoli 1996, 80–83; L. Pernot, "L'empreinte d'Hermes Logios": une citation d'Aelius Aristide chez Julien et chez Damascius, RAAN, n. s. 71 (2002), 191–207; C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., for a commentary to OrFunProc 35.

⁴⁸ Men. Rh. II 401,33–402,20: wedding overcomes death and allows all human activities. See a similar philosophical solution also in Sidonius' epithalamium: love and wedding represent a progress in civilization and, what's more, an improvement of philosophical knowledge.

⁴⁹ Plut. Mul. Virt. 242e–243e ἄριστα δ' ὁ Ῥωμαίων δοκεῖ νόμος ἔχειν, ὥσπερ ἀνδράσι καὶ γυναῖξι δημοσίᾳ μετὰ τὴν τελευταίαν τοῦ προσήκοντος ἀποδιδούς ἐπαίνους: both men and women can reach virtue. In 242f., he says that he had displayed a consoling speech for the mother of the priest Clea. Only monodies were intended for wives by their husbands: Men. Rh. II 26 ῥηθείη δ' ἄν μονῳδία καὶ ἀνδρός ἐπὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ γυναικί.

⁵⁰ Or. II Bidez, Paris 1932.

⁵¹ This aspect has been already noticed by F. K. Litsas, Choricus of Gaza, cit., 291: anyway, I don't believe that, as a general methodology, such stylistic peculiarities can be used as chronological elements to date this speech to the early stage of Choricus' career: it is my understanding that they depend on the specific content, since an Atticizing funeral oration for a Christian woman required different linguistic 'tools'.

Macrina: a saint, a philosopher and, like Macrina, a new Socrates.⁵² The difference is that in this case the rhetor has to draw the portrait of an aristocratic woman who had not openly chosen the religious life, but who married, had children and occupied a socially high position. A quiet and peaceful life, as he says. Consequently, he feels in need of praising Maria and her family in their public dimension, so that she becomes a model of holy and successful life for her fellow citizens. Avoiding the rhetorical categories of the funeral speech, he doesn't say much either about her or about her daughters, but several chapters are dedicated to her sons, who were important members of the leading class. In this context he emphasizes Maria's philanthropy and devotion, and he represents her role in her sons' public activities. The following passage shows the author's rhetorical skills: by a free use of the topical list of virtues, he adopts the word *φιλανθρωπία* in all its possible meanings: the love for her family, her support to the weak, and finally her help to all the citizens (a real late antique *προστασία*):⁵³

(19.) Καὶ πρὸς τοσοῦτους αὐτῇ τῇ φιλανθρωπίας μεριζομένης εἴ τις τὴν μεγίστην ἐκείνης εὐεργεσίαν ἐπιθυμήσας μαθεῖν εἰς ἓν τι χωρίον τοὺς εὐπαθόντας συναγαγὼν ἕκαστον ἔροιτο, τίνα διὰ πλείονος ἤγαγε μᾶλλον εὐνοίας, ἑαυτὸν ἅπας ἐρεῖ, ἕκαστου δὲ τὸ πλεόν ἔχειν δοκοῦντος τὸ τῆς ἰσότητος μέτρον δηλοῦται καὶ τὸ προσφόρως ἀπάντων αὐτῇν προεστάναι.

(19.) "Furthermore, since her philanthropy was distributed to so many, if someone desired to know about her greatest charity, he would gather all those who had received a benefit from her in the same place; and if he would ask them which one she had benefited with the greatest favour, each one would claim (the favour) shown to him; and since each one would believe that he had received the most, the measure of her impartiality would be made clear, and it would suitably be shown (how she was fair) in everything."

The description of her miraculous healing of one of her sons (chs. 21–23) completes the portrait of Maria as a saint. Choricus' attitude is different from the previous models of family saints, for example from the Cappadocian Fathers, as he focuses more on the social aspect than on the passage of holiness from mother to child by a spiritual re-birth: even the miracle on her son, in spite of the fact that it echoes Gregory of Nazianzus,⁵⁴ sounds here as a self-reference. It is

⁵² See Gr. Nyss. *De anima et resurrectione dialogus, qui inscribitur Macrinia*, PG 46, 11–160, where Gregory always defines his sister ἡ διδάσκαλος; M. Pellegrino, *Il platonismo di Gregorio Nisseno nel dialogo «Intorno all'anima e alla resurrezione»*, RFN 30 (1938), 438; E. Giannarelli, *Gregorio di Nissa. La vita di S. Macrina*, Milano 1988, 115, n. 5.

⁵³ See C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., for an Italian translation and a commentary to the whole passage.

⁵⁴ Greg. Naz. Or. 18,31 Moreschini (in the sailor's dream, Nonna saves her son Gregory from a sea tempest), and 30 (the healing of Nonna by her son, in a dream), quoted by E.

likely that Choricus lends his voice to the religious policy of the bishop's family, who tended to impose Maria as a saint, the *patrona* of Gaza, so anticipating the later promotion of the cult of married women by their relatives, attested in the Byzantine age: such are the cases of Theodora of Thessalonike, Theophano wife of Leo VI, Maria the Younger of Bizye and others, in the 9th and 10th centuries.⁵⁵

The Political Administration and the Army: Aratios, Stephanus and Summus (orr. III/IV F.-R.)

Some final remarks concern *Laudatio Aratii et Stephani* (*LaudAratSteph*, or. III F.-R.) and *Laudatio Summi* (*LaudSumm*, or. IV F.-R.).⁵⁶

Being addressed to eminent city leaders, these two speeches are often quoted in historical studies on 6th century Palestine: *LaudAratSteph* because of the riot of the Samaritans, the attacks of the Saracens, for the history of local institutions and prosopographical references. *LaudSumm* praises the deeds of Summus, στρατηλάτης or *magister militum* of Palestina I: his military success against the nomad tribes and the Persians, but also his philanthropy and sense of justice.⁵⁷ From the literary point of view, *LaudAratSteph* 6/7 deserve attention: here, the speech of praise is compared to a painting, where the *dux* Aratios and the ἄρχων Stephanus are represented united with the personifications of Ἀρχή and Ἀρετή:

(6.) καὶ ἔγωγε, εἰ τέχνην τὴν Ζεῦξιδος ἠσκησάμην, καὶ κρᾶσις χρωμάτων ἐμοὶ τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα ἦν, γυναικίως ἂν ἐφιλοτέχνησα δύο καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἀρετὴν, Ἀρχὴν δὲ τὴν ἑτέραν αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψας ἐδημιούργησα ἂν ἀμφοτέροισ ἐν μέσῳ ἔχοντάς τε ἐκ χειρὸς ἑκατέραν καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἄμφω συνάπτοντας χρονίαις διαλλαγαῖς.
(7.) ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν Ζεῦξις εἰργάσατο ἂν ἢ καὶ ἄλλος τις ὅμοια Ζεῦξιδι γράφων· ἐγὼ δέ, λέγειν (γὰρ) οἶδα μᾶλλον ἢ γράφειν, ἐκ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀνατίθημι τέχνης μίαν ἀμφοτέροισ εἰκόνα.

Giannarelli, *Da madre a figlio: eredità genetica e trasmissione di valori in testi biografici di età imperiale*, *FilAntMod* 15 (1998), 27–54.

⁵⁵ E. Patlagean, *L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance*, *Studi Medievali*, ser. 3, 17 (1976), 620–622, and A.M. Talbot, *Family Cults in Byzantium: the Case of St. Theodora of Thessalonike*, in: J.O. Rosenqvist (ed.), *Leimon. Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, Uppsala 1996, 49–69.

⁵⁶ My studies on these texts are still in progress: it is my wish to work on a critical edition and commentary.

⁵⁷ F.-M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d'Alexandre jusqu'à l'invasion arabe*. II. *De la guerre juive à l'invasion arabe*, Paris 1952 (repr. Hildesheim 2004), 355–365; F.K. Litsas, *Choricus of Gaza*, cit., 78–86.

(6.) “And as far as I am concerned, if I practiced the art of Zeuxis (painting) and my business was the blending of colors, I would paint two women, entitling one Virtue and the other Authority. I would depict them both being in the middle (of the painting and) holding each of these two men by the hand and uniting them (Aratius and Stephanus) together with both of them (Virtue and Authority) in everlasting reconciliation. (7.) But Zeuxis would do such a work or even someone else who paints things similar to Zeuxis; however, because I know how to speak rather than to paint, I dedicate to both of you an image (oration) from my own art (rhetoric).”

In his excellent preface to the proceedings of the Fifth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Andreas Spira pointed out the importance of the moral dimension in ancient biography, there referring to a Christian writer.⁵⁸ So, the fact that deeds depend on virtues, far from being a mere rhetorical prescription,⁵⁹ offers the formal ‘tool’ for the moral portrait and, thus, for the praise. Consequently, the idea of written encomium as a portrait is not new in literature, and here we have an excellent late antique example.⁶⁰ Choricus is aware of this tradition and, as he usually does, he plays with an imaginary mix of τέχναι: he shows the use of a different art as something above his skills or forbidden by the rules of rhetoric, while he is consciously adopting some well codified rhetorical patterns.⁶¹ A research on figurative parallels would demonstrate the adhesion to the ideological value of the common feeling that must connect the emperor to those who administer power. In chs. 82/83, another figurative description closes the speech:

(82.) Ἐπεὶ δὲ Εὐαγόρας ἐμοὶ καὶ Κόνων εἰσήλθον, συνεισηλθεν ὁ Ζεὺς, τῶν Ἀθηναίων τὸ φιλοτέχνημα· παρὰ τοῦτον γὰρ εἰστήκεσαν τὸν θεὸν ἄμφω χαλκοί.
(83.) ὡς ἔδει καὶ νῦν τῶν ἐργαζομένων ταῦτα τὸν ἄριστον ἐκείνο ζηλώσαι τὸ σχῆμα καὶ μέσον ὑμῶν ἀμφοτέρων βασιλέα δημιουργῆσαι. Ἐτίμησα ἂν ὑμᾶς τοιῶδε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπιγράμματι· αἱ πόλεις τοὺς ἄρχοντας ἐκατέρωθεν βασιλέως ἀνδραγαθίας ἔνεκα καὶ δικαιοσύνης.

⁵⁸ A. Spira (ed.), *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*, Cambridge 1984.

⁵⁹ L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain*, Paris 1993, I, 165–173.

⁶⁰ Another example in Diosc. fr. 20, 16–18 Fournet (Encomium for the *adventus* of *dux* John) Ζωγράφον ἀμφιβόητον ἐπίγνωσιν εἰκόνα πῆξαι, / ἀτρεκέως ἐθέλω πολυήρατον εἶδος ὑφαίνειν, / χάσματι λαμπετόντ' ἀ[μ]αργύματα οἷα Σελήνη (transl. J.-L. Fournet, *L'hellénisme*, cit., I, p. 417: “Je souhaite sincèrement qu'un peintre renommé fasse de toi un portrait ressemblant, qu'il rende l'aimable beauté de tes traits, telle la splendeur de la Lune qui irradie de joie.”).

⁶¹ E. g. OrFunMar 35 ποιητής μὲν οὖν τις ἐπὶ τὸν ἐπιγράμματι τὸν τάφον ἐτίμησεν ἂν. ἐγὼ δὲ μέτρον χωρὶς, οὐ γὰρ εἰμι ποιητικός, OrFunProc 11 καὶ ἐγῶγε, εἴ μοι τοσοῦτον ἔξην, ὅσον τοῖς τῶν δραμάτων δημιουργοῖς, καὶ πρόσωπα πλάττειν παρέρχον νόμοι ῥητόρων, and C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., ad loc.

(82.) “Since I have recalled Evagoras and Conon, I also have recalled Zeus, the masterpiece of the Athenians. For (statues) of both of them (Evagoras and Conon), made of bronze, stood by the god (Zeus). (83.) Also in the present case one of the best artists should imitate this model and fashion (an image of) the emperor in the middle of both of you. I would honor you myself with such an epigram: *The cities (present) these leaders on either side of the emperor, because of (their) bravery and justice.*”

As in a Ringkomposition, the author opens the praise with a representation of the two leaders with the personifications of the two abstract ideas of power, and he closes it with the physical person of the emperor, who embodies those very ideas. The quotation of Isoc. Evag. 57 expresses in a stylish Attic prose the virtues required to a Christian emperor: he finds his place between the two rulers in lieu of Zeus, that is the Christian God, and he resumes the essence of authority (ἀρχή) and ethical virtue (ἀρετή) that his local representatives mirror.⁶²

The correspondence of the two descriptions leads to an interpretation of the first ἔκφρασις: I wouldn’t think that, in ch. 6, ἐν μέσῳ means “in the middle (of the painting)”, as Litsas translates, but “between (the two men)”, as the emperor is in ch. 83.

A leader’s human qualities reveal what citizens expected from him, and what kind of relationship a city ruler had with the imperial power. In LaudSumm, philanthropy is the most important virtue, and also Summus’ military accomplishments are motivated by the aim of assuring security, peace and wealth, mainly to the weak categories of society:

(9.) τότε δὴ πάντα πόρον ἀναγκαίου τροφῆς τοῖς ἐν χρεῖα χορηγῶν διετέλεις, τότε σε τὸ μέγεθος τῆς φιλοτιμίας ἀπέζωσε καὶ τῆς ἀξίας τὸ σχῆμα παρῆιδες, ἵνα τὴν ἀξίαν αὐτὴν ἔργῳ σεμνύνης· εἴλου γὰρ εὖ ποιῶν ζώνης ὀφθῆναι μᾶλλον ἢ περ φιλανθρωπίας γυμνὸς καὶ τὸ σῶμα μᾶλλον ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν ἄκοσμον ἔχειν· διὰ τοῦτο σοι πλοῦτος γέγονεν ἀρετῆς ἢ τοιαύτη πενία.

(9.) “So, at that time you attempted to distribute all possible supplies of food to the indigent. It was at this time that you were filled with an all-encompassing eagerness to help, and you

⁶² Isoc. Evag. 57 τὰς εἰκόνας αὐτῶν (that are Conon and Evagoras) ἐστήσαμεν, οὐπερ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἄγαλμα τοῦ σωτήρος, πλησίον ἐκείνου τε καὶ σφῶν αὐτῶν, ἀμφοτέρων ὑπόμνημα, and Ch. Graux, *Éloge du duc Aratios et du gouverneur Stéphanos*, publiée pour la première fois d’après le manuscrit de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, *RevPhil.* 1 (1877), 55–85 (84, n. 5), where he notices: “On remarquera qu’Isocrate ne dit pas si les statues étaient d’airain.” Bronze statues are also those of the Zeuxippos, as described by Christodoros: see F. Tissoni, *Cristodoro. Un’introduzione e un commento*, Alessandria 2000, e. g. vv. 18, 31, 39, etc. It is possible that Choricus referred to a real statuary group, or surely to a well known iconography. For the ethical values of both emperors and governors, see C. Capizzi, *Potere e ideologia imperiale da Zenone a Giustiniano (474–527)*, in: G. G. Archi, *L’imperatore Giustiniano*, cit., 3–35 (18–23), who also underlines the importance of having honest administrators for the emperor’s popularity.

abandoned the trappings of your office, in order to distinguish your position with accomplishments, because while you helped others you preferred to appear without your official insignia rather than (to appear) without charity, and to show your body rather than your soul without ornamentation. That is the reason why such a lack of formality became a wealth of virtues for you.”

It is easy to see that the moral portrait of Summus follows the usual pattern that we have noticed in Choricus’ encomia, where his modest, pious and helpful character has significant parallels. The general prefers actual generosity to the formal symbols of power, in a similar way as Maria preferred to be honest rather than appearing so: OrFunMar 4 ἐβούλετο γὰρ οὐ δοκεῖν, ἀλλ’ εἶναι χρηστή. Furthermore, Procopius considered his moral and financial support to the weak as his real wealth: OrFunProc 25 τοῖς δὲ πενομένοις οἴκοθεν ἐπεκούφιζε τὴν ἀπορίαν· τοῦτο ἐδόκει πλοῦτος ἐκείνῳ, τοῦτο Μίδου χρυσός. Having considered this latter passage, I would suggest that *πενία* in LaudSumm 9 is to be understood as the indigence of the poor he helped, rather than Summus’ “lack of formality”, as Litsas does: as Procopius felt rich by giving his money, the others’ need becomes Summus’ wealth of virtues.⁶³ The generous deeds occur also in chs. 29/30 and, as a conclusion of the section about accomplishments, Choricus introduces another comparison of the encomium with a painting in ch. 31, showing once more his taste for the personification of abstract ideas:

(31.) μέλλων δὲ λήγειν ἤδη τῆς εὐφημίας τὰς ἄλλας ὑμῶν φαντάζομαι πράξεις προσμειδιώσας τῷ λόγῳ, ὅτι παρόμοιον τι πράξας ἀπέρχεται, ὡσπερ ἂν εἰ ζωγράφος πολλῶν εἰκόνα προσώπων ἐπιταχθεὶς ὀλίγα φιλοτεχνήσας τὴν ὅλην οἶοιτο πεπληρωθῆαι γραφήν. ἐγὼ δὲ ταύτας λαβεῖν ἀξιῶ κατὰ νοῦν, ὅπως ἐπέγραψά μου τὸν λόγον. ταύτην τοῖνυν αὐτὰς συγγνώμην αἰτήσας βραχέα προσθεὶς καταβήσομαι.

(31.) “Already planning to conclude my praise, I like to imagine the rest of your accomplishments smiling ironically at the oration, because it ends in the manner of a painter who was requested to paint a picture with many figures, but depicted only a few of them and gave the impression that in this way he had completed the picture. I would want to consider those deeds as well, but I shall keep in mind how I have entitled my oration. Thus, I would request forgiveness from them (the deeds), and after adding a few more points, I shall give up the podium.”

Another interesting aspect is that Choricus recalls Summus’ recommendation of a student from Arabia who wished to attend the school of rhetoric (ch. 25). This is a very common practice in late antique education, and its presence in the praise of a general seems to be an attempt of including him in the life of the

⁶³ For a commentary to OrFunMar 4 and OrFunProc 25, see C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., ad loc.

school, thus to highlight a personal acquaintance, a privileged relationship with the addressee, as he often does: in the praise of Marcian (they had received the same education), in the epithalamia for his students (he remembers that they neglected their studies), in the funeral speeches for Maria (he is well informed about her deeds) and for Procopius (his professor had a special affection for him).⁶⁴ This means that the rhetor, deeply engaged in his teaching position, defines his school of Atticizing rhetoric as a smaller group within the city: from his point of view traditional education, although at the margins of public life and political matters,⁶⁵ remains the heart of an organized and Christian community and consequently of civilization. The moral values that he praises are culturally and philosophically based: peace, harmony and order seem to be the guidelines of Choricus' encomia as they are, after all, the greatest expectations of any troubled society.

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⁶⁴ OrFunMar 14, OrFunProc 1, 22, 55.

⁶⁵ Maria and Procopius are said to be absolutely far from *πράγματα*, that are the practical businesses of daily life: OrFunMar 9, 20, OrFunProc 24, and see C. Greco, *Due orazioni funebri*, cit., ad loc., for a commentary on Maria's and Procopius' *ἀπραγμοσύνη*.