


Article

Classical Echoes in Gregory of Nyssa's *Εἰς Πουλχερίαν*: Literary Parallels and Rhetorical Strategies [†]

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the reception and rephrasing of illustrious Classical literary quotes and five references in Gregory of Nyssa's *παραμυθητικὸς λόγος* for the Princess Pulcheria (*Pulch.* 461.3–472.18). Composed specifically for the firstborn daughter of the Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great, this speech represents a significant case study, as it offers the opportunity to investigate how the Cappadocian bishop, in the rhetorical construction of this *oratio consolatoria*, incorporated nine passages from Classical literature to enhance both his theological content and political message. Since this is the first study of this kind on Gregory's *Εἰς Πουλχερίαν*, it will go through a philological analysis and a careful examination of intertextual references, casting light upon literary allusions and rhetorical strategies within the text, which reveal Gregory's familiarity with Classical authors, both Latin (e.g., Catullus, Ovid, Seneca) and Greek (e.g., Herodotus, Thucydides).

Keywords: Gregory of Nyssa; Pulcheria; epideictic oratory; intertextuality; Christian reception of classics; Late Antiquity



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1. Introduction

Οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως τῷ λόγῳ χρῆσομαι, “I do not know how to approach this speech”:¹ in these exact words, following the conventions of a carefully cultivated rhetorical tradition, Gregory of Nyssa commenced his consolatory speech for Pulcheria, performed at the imperial mausoleum of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, most presumably on 25 August 385, on the thirtieth day after the princess' death.² The bishop of Nyssa, official court orator, composed an address for the occasion (May 1966)—combining rhetorical ability and Classical education—one of his most dramatic and touching *pièces*.³

This eloquent composition was dedicated to the firstborn daughter of the Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great (r. 379–395) and his first wife, Aelia Flavia Flaccilla (married 376), whose brief existence left little trace beyond the solemnity of her commemoration. Regrettably, historical records yield scant information about this young girl beyond the approximate date of her premature death (in the summer of 385 or 386), at which time she was no more than seven to nine years old (born 377 or 378; Chiriatti 2023, pp. 87–89). Her passing coincided with a pivotal moment in her father's career: already elevated to the rank of co-emperor by Gratian (19 January 379), Theodosius had departed from his native

Spain and was making his way eastward to assume his imperial responsibilities (Holum 1982, pp. 7–16).

As is characteristic of such orations—texts bound by precise rhetorical structures, literary conventions, and ideological functions (Gantz 1998, pp. 21–24)—Pulcheria is depicted as having already embodied, even within the brevity of her years, the essential virtues befitting a ruler entrusted with the preservation of Orthodoxy and the governance of empire (Holum 1977, p. 22; Busch 2015, pp. 26, 30). These qualities, Gregory intimates, were inherited from her pious mother, Aelia Flaccilla, a notion reinforced by both this consolatory speech and the funeral oration delivered shortly thereafter in her honor (Chiriatti and Marin 2021, pp. 46–63).⁴ The impact of the premature loss of such a promising young figure, as Gregory remarks in his speech, not only elicited profound grief within the imperial household but also stirred widespread mourning throughout Constantinople and their subjects.⁵ It means that his work hovers between Gregory's depiction of the city's collective sorrow and the intensity comparable to the aftermath of a natural catastrophe—evoking the imagery of a recent earthquake—to illustrate the magnitude of the people's lamentation and share a deep sense of *πάθος* among the audience.⁶

Considering these premises, this study undertakes a critical analysis of the reception and reformulation of distinguished Greek and Latin literary quotations and allusions within Gregory's funeral oration, an address that reflects his dual role as a court orator and a theologian.⁷ His rhetorical strategy was twofold: to align his discourse with the imperatives of official imperial propaganda and to fulfil the sovereigns' objective of strengthening the bond between the ruling family and their subjects, a feature that could make the work swing between a funeral lamentation and a political speech (Cameron 1991, p. 123). This initiative formed part of a broader strategy of dynastic affirmation, one that wove personal narratives seamlessly into the fabric of military affairs, political agendas, and religious interests.

Indeed, within the evolving ideological landscape of the Theodosian court, the public expression of intimate emotions and the deliberate cultivation of communal sympathy emerged as potent instruments for fostering collective identity and social memory, a true *σὺμπάθεια*, which made private grief a common disaster. Furthermore, the empire stood at a defining juncture, having only recently embraced Christianity as its sole legally sanctioned religion (Holum 1982, pp. 16–18). In this context, natural disasters were not merely recorded as chronological markers in Byzantine liturgical books; they assumed a deeper significance as moments of collective remembrance, particularly for key societal groups. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Gregory invokes such imagery at the very outset of his oration. By framing Pulcheria's death within this symbolic register, he subtly reinforces the dynastic narrative, strengthening the perception of familial bonds between the emperors and their devoted subjects.

A closer examination of the oration reveals that it deviates from the expectations of a conventional imperial funeral address. Though one might anticipate a formal encomium, even in the case of a eulogy for a child and a woman, the speech instead adopts the tone of an *oratio consolatoria*. This shift in genre is evident not only in the absence of the customary *συγκρίσεις* typically found in such rhetorical compositions but also in the profoundly personal nature of the question Gregory poses at the outset. The interplay of monodic lamentation and consolatory reflection further underscores the oration's distinctive character.

Within this nuanced framework, our analysis will focus on the specific passages Gregory incorporated to reinforce both his theological message and his political rhetoric (Kennedy 1983, pp. 240–41). Notably, his intertextual engagement extends beyond the standard repertoire of Greek Christian literature—and sometimes even quotes from the Classics, such as Homer, Hesiod, and Herodotus, as well as from Plato, Thucydides,

Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Plutarch. In addition to drawing upon biblical and patristic sources, he exhibits a familiarity with Latin literary traditions, integrating allusions to authors, such as Catullus, Ovid, and Seneca. This phenomenon constitutes a remarkable case study within the corpus of the Cappadocian Fathers, shedding light on the rhetorical strategies employed by Gregory in crafting this *oratio consolatoria*.

2. Structure and Themes of the *Oratio*

As is characteristic of Gregory of Nyssa's rhetorical style, the *Εἰς Πουλχερίαν* commences *in medias res*, a technique that immediately immerses the audience in the discourse. However, this abrupt opening is tempered by the inclusion of a succinct yet purposeful prologue (*προοίμιον*). It serves to establish the overarching theme, progressing from the particular to the universal by drawing upon the commemoration of the Nicomedia earthquake as an illustrative example.⁸ Entirely anchored in the immediacy of the present moment, this introduction engages the audience directly, invoking their shared grief over the untimely loss of a young and unblemished soul. Gregory confidently asserts the legitimacy of his lamentation, framing it as a response so deeply warranted by the circumstances that it stands beyond the reach of reproach or censure.⁹

Upon the conclusion of the prologue—marked by a series of reflections offering consolation for contemporary sorrows—the text shifts its gaze from the present to the past, meticulously recounting and extolling the defining moments of Pulcheria's brief but virtuous life (*ἐγκώμιον*). This approach notably curtails any prolonged lamentation over the unfulfilled potential of the future of such a dove and pure flower, consigned to the realm of speculation and unrealized possibility, but taken away by a widespread envy. Instead, the narrative concentrates on the profound admiration she inspired, the envy her virtues provoked, and the aspirations she instilled in those who sought to emulate her exemplary conduct. The profound anguish of her bereaved parents—whose high social standing could neither avert nor mitigate their suffering—resonates through the description of Pulcheria's funeral, an event that profoundly unsettled the entire city.¹⁰ The monody reaches its most poignant and sorrow-laden climax with an evocative meditation on death's relentless nature, which spares not even the purest and most exquisite of earthly beings. In the wake of such devastation, the text turns to the sole refuge available to humanity in the face of suffering: the pursuit of consolation (*παράμυθία*).¹¹

The ultimate and most fundamental source of solace, Gregory asserts, lies in the unshakable certainty that Pulcheria has been received among the blessed, wholly removed from the corruption of sin (also aided by her young age at the moment of death). Furthermore, he systematically offers remedies for every conceivable sorrow or weakness, drawing upon an extensive array of scriptural references to fortify his argument (*σύγκρισις*).¹² Among the most notable are the tribulations of Job, the plight of Sarah, and the episode of Isaac, each serving to reaffirm the incorruptibility and supreme justice of God's divine majesty.

The composition culminates in a fervent prayer (*εὐχή*), imploring God to restore Pulcheria's soul to the pristine position of divine perfection in which it was first created so that she can reach a well-deserved state of beatitude (*μακαρισμός*).¹³

3. The Re-Adoption of Classical Literary *Topoi*

3.1. *The Intertwined Plants*

Following the prescriptions of rhetorical treatises, the author introduces a celebratory excursus on the imperial couple at the heart of the encomium.¹⁴ The description begins with Theodosius, portrayed as an illustrious offspring—a towering palm tree with a lofty, leafy crown, evoking an epic-tragic aura—enveloped by his consort in the shape of a vine.

GNO IX, 463.2–10 (Spira)	
<p>Εἶδον ἐγὼ καὶ τὸ ὑψηλὸν ἔρνος, τὸν ὑψικόμον φοίνικα (τὸ βασιλικὸν φημι κράτος) τὸν ταῖς βασιλικαῖς ἀρεταῖς οἶόν τισι κλάδοις πάσης ὑπερανεστῶτα τῆς οἰκουμένης καὶ πάντα διαλαμβάνοντα· εἶδον αὐτὸν τῶν μὲν ἄλλων κρατοῦντα, τῇ δὲ φύσει καμπτόμενον καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀποβολὴν τοῦ ἄνθους ἐπικλινόμενον. Εἶδον καὶ τὴν εὐγενῆ κληματίδα τὴν περιειλημμένην τῷ φοίνικι τὴν τὸ ἄνθος ἡμῖν τοῦτο ὠδίναςαν, οἷας ὑπέστη ἐκ δευτέρου πάλιν ὠδίνας ἐν ψυχῇ, οὐκ ἐν σώματι, ὅτε αὐτῆς οὗτος ὁ βλαστὸς ἀπετίλλετο.</p>	<p>I saw the illustrious offspring, the palm tree with the leafy crown (I make reference to the imperial power) which, with the royal virtues as branches, extended across the whole ecumene and encompassed everything; I saw him, who rules towering above the others, though bent by nature and forlorn by the loss of its blossom. I saw also the noble vine clinging to the trunk of the palm tree, the one that brought this flower into the world with pain, that suffered again the labours of childbirth for the second time in its soul, not in its body, when this bud was torn from it.¹⁵</p>

This majestic palm symbolizes royal authority, offering protection to his subjects, while its evergreen nature signifies resilience in the face of adversity and opposition. As discussed in the introduction, Gregory employs the imagery of intertwined plants to underscore the concepts of unity, mutual support, and shared grief—an idea reinforced by their symbiotic nature. This motif had a well-established Classical and elevated tradition, as attested in *Iliad* 14.398–399 (οὐτ’ ἄνεμος τόσσόν γε περι δρυσὶν ὑψικόμοισι/ἠπύει, ὅς τε μάλιστα μέγα βρέμεται χαλεπαίνων, “not even the wind so much indeed around the **high-leafed oaks**/roars, when it especially crashes loudly in its rage”) and *Odyssey* 9.184–186 (περὶ δ’ αὐλῆ/ὑψηλῆ δέδμητο κατωρυχέεσσι λίθοισι/μακροῦσιν τε πίτυσιν ἰδὲ δρυσὶν ὑψικόμοισιν; “and around it a **elevated** courtyard had been built with quarried stones and long pine trees and **lofty-crowned oaks**”), in Hesiod’s *Shield of Heracles* 376–378 (πολλὰ δὲ δρυὶς ὑψικόμοι, πολλὰ δὲ τε πεῦκαι/αἴγειροί τε τανύρριζοι ῥήγνυνται ὑπ’ αὐτέων/ρίμφα κυλινδομένων; “many **lofty-crowned oaks**, and many pines/and tall-rooted black poplars are torn up by them/as they swiftly roll along”), as well as Euripides’ *Alcestis* 584–587 (Φοῖβε, ποικιλόθριξ/νεβρός ὑψικόμων πέραν/βαίνουσ’ ἐλατᾶν σφυρῶι κούφωι,/χαίρουσ’ εὐφροني μολπαῖ; “Phoebus, she of variegated hair,/like a fawn beyond the **high-crested** woods,/stepping with light ankle through the pines,/rejoicing in the gracious dance”). Notably, the imagery of the φοῖνιξ and the ἔρνος, used by Gregory, appear also in a distinguished Homeric passage in *Odyssey* 6.162–164: Δῆλω δὴ ποτε τοῖον Ἀπόλλωνος παρὰ βωμῶ/φοίνικος νέον ἔρνος ἀνερχόμενον ἐνόησα./ἦλθον γὰρ καὶ κεῖσε, πολὺς δὲ μοι ἔσπετο λαός,/τὴν ὁδὸν ἧ δὴ μέλλεν ἐμοὶ κακὰ κήδε’ ἔσεσθαι, “of a truth, in Delos once, springing up beside the altar of Apollo,/I saw such a thing, a young **shoot of a palm**;/for thither, too, I went, and much people followed with me,/on that journey on which evil woes were to be my portion”.

On this metaphor (invoking the palm tree), it is worth noting that a similar use appears in a similar funerary context, in Ambrose’s epitaph for the emperor Valentinian I, who passed away in 375. The phrase *procera sicut palma*, “tall as a palm tree”, possesses a similar symbolic meaning.¹⁶

Of particular interest here, however, is the case of empress Flaccilla, who is associated with a vine—more precisely, a winding vine shoot that coils around and embraces the trunk of a nearby palm tree. This imagery appears to echo a well-known passage from Catullus (61.106–109), a wedding poem composed for the marriage of Manlius Torquatus and Vinia Aurunculeia, whose name the poet cleverly modifies in a witty pun.¹⁷

*lenta sed velut adsitas
vitis implicat arbores,
implicabitur in tuum
complexum.*

Sinuous as it is,
the vine embraces the trees,
and thus [the husband] becomes
entangled in your
embrace.

By employing this image—highly significant given its enduring presence in nuptial poetry as a symbol of the perfect union of the bridal couple—Gregory seeks to emphasize the most human and intimate aspects of the imperial pair, highlighting the deep marital bond between them. Moreover, he seems to adapt also a common metaphor used in Christian literature, according to which the vine symbolizes the single believer, originating and always referring to the Church as a plant.

In this light, when considering this imagery more widely, we note that Flaccilla emerges not only to be the lawful and devout spouse of Theodosius but also the closest of the Christians to the majesty of the emperor, making her the perfect representative of the orthodox faith at the court and is, above all, an anticipation of her sainthood.

3.2. The Funeral Procession

Using a highly effective *ἔκφρασις*, Gregory vividly describes, although in reverse, the scenario in contemporary Constantinople, when he illustrates the path taken by the procession from the Imperial Palace to the church of the Holy Apostles. It moved all along the *μέση* and passed most likely across the new forum, the so-called *Forum tauri*, which Theodosius had built to host several monuments propagandizing himself and his house. The solemn gait of the mourning people is articulated by the succession of several *πλάγια*, the arterial roads crossing the main boulevard:

GNO IX 463.17–21 (Spira)

πλήρης ὁ ναός, πλήρες τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ
προαύλιον, ἡ ἐκδεχομένη πλατεῖα, οἱ
στενωποί, τὰ ἄμφοδα, ἡ μέση, τὰ
πλάγια, ἡ ἐπὶ τῶν δωμαίων εὐρυχωρία·
πᾶν τὸ ὁρώμενον ἀνθρώπων πλήρωμα
ἦν, ὥσπερ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης εἰς
ταύτῳ συνδραμούσης ἐπὶ τῷ πάθει.

Full was the church, full [was] the
vestibule of the church, the adjoining
square, the alleys, the streets, the *mésē*, the
cross streets, the rooftops of the houses;
everything visible was a human throng, as
if the whole ecumene had assembled in
that place for mourning.¹⁸

Upon closer examination, this passage parallels not only his own description of empress Flaccilla's funeral or Gregory of Nazianzus' depiction of Basil's funeral procession but also Jerome's *Epistle* 77.11.3, which is, in our opinion, almost identical to Gregory's *ekphrasis*.¹⁹ In all these texts, there is a pronounced emphasis on the multitude of people attending the rite, achieved through the repetition of a specific semantic group:²⁰

*praecedentium turmas et catervatim exequias
eius multitudinem fluctuantem non plateae,
non porticus, non imminentia desuper tecta
capere poterant prospectantes*

The advancing crowds and the thronging
multitude following his funeral procession
could not be contained by the streets, the
colonnades, or even the overhanging roofs
above, as they looked on.

3.3. The Consolation via the Soul's Immortality

The contemplation of physical beauty—τὸ τοῦ σώματος κάλλος (“the beauty of the body”)—which originates from Menander’s concept of τὸ τοῦ σώματος εἶδος (“the appearance of the body”), serves as an introduction to the core of the paramythetical part. In this context, setting aside such human attributes, which are subject to the passage of time and, consequently, to inevitable death, Gregory of Nyssa adopts a Christian perspective, emphasizing the paramount importance of τὸ ἀληθινὸν τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλος (“the true beauty of the soul”). Transcending material qualities, he underscores the immortality of the soul and the eternal life of the innocent child:

GNO IX 464.19–465.2 (Spira)	
<p>Πῶς γάρ ἐστι δυνατόν ὑπεραρθῆναι τοῦ πάθους τὸν ἐν τῇ φύσει ζῶντα καὶ μὴ κρατηθῆναι τῇ λύπῃ ἐπὶ τοιούτῳ θεάματι, ὅταν μὴ καθ’ ὥραν ἐν γήρᾳ συμπέσῃ ὁ θάνατος, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡλικίᾳ κατασβεσθῇ μὲν τῷ θανάτῳ ἡ ὥρα, καλυφθῇ δὲ τοῖς βλεφάροις ἡ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἀκτίς, μεταπέσῃ δὲ εἰς ὠχρότητα τῆς παρειᾶς τὸ ἐρύθημα, κρατηθῇ δὲ τῇ σιωπῇ τὸ στόμα, μελαίνηται δὲ τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ χείλους ἄνθος, χαλεπὸν δὲ μὴ μόνον τοῖς γεννησαμένοις τοῦτο δοκῆ, ἀλλὰ καὶ παντὶ τῷ πρὸς τὸ πάθος βλέποντι· Τί οὖν πρὸς τούτοις ἡμεῖς· Οὐχ ἡμέτερον ἐροῦμεν, ἀδελφοί, λόγον, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀναγνωσθεῖσαν ἡμῖν ἐκ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ῥῆσιν παραθησόμεθα.</p>	<p>How is it possible, in fact, for someone living within the parameters of the human condition to overcome suffering and not be overcome by sorrow at such a sight, when death did not come at the right time, in old age, but when the springtime of life was cut short by death in the very first age and the light of their eyes covered by their eyelids, and the colouring of their cheeks turned pallor, and their mouth sealed by silence, and the flower on their lips blackened, and all seems hard to bear not only to their parents, but to anyone who gives their consideration to that sorrow? What, then, can we object against these considerations? We shall not be able, brethren, to find an answer of our own, but we shall need the text of the Gospel that has just been read to us.²¹</p>

Gregory’s reflections may find, in our opinion, a close parallel with a later passage from a sermon by Augustine composed probably around 418, in which the Latin Church Father cites and comments on a similar consideration by Paul, thereby conveying the same fundamental idea (*Serm.* 173.3). Despite the time gap, the similarities between both sources are clear, and so we may argue that Gregory and Augustine could have resorted to a common source:²²

<p><i>Necesse est enim ut contristemini: sed ubi contristaris, consoletur te spes. Quomodo enim non contristaris, ubi corpus quod vivit ex anima, fit exanime, discedente anima? Qui ambulabat iacet, qui loquebatur tacet, clausi oculi lucem non capiunt, aures nulli voci patescunt: omnia membrorum officia conquieverunt; non est qui moveat gressus ad ambulandum, manus ad operandum, sensus ad percipiendum. Nonne ista est domus, quam nescio quis invisibilis habitator ornat? Discessit qui non videbatur, remansit quod cum dolore videatur. Ista est causa tristitiae. Si haec est causa tristitiae, sit huius tristitiae consolatio. Quae consolatio? Quia ipse Dominus in iussu et in voce archangeli, et in novissima tuba descendet de caelo, et mortui in Christo resurgent primi: deinde non viventes, qui reliqui sumus, simul cum illis rapiemur in nubibus obviam Christo in aera. Numquid et hoc ad tempus? Non; sed quid est? Et ita semper cum Domino erimus. Pereat contristatio, ubi tant est consolatio; detergatur luctus ex animo, fides expellat dolorem.</i></p>	<p>It is necessary that you grieve; but when you grieve, let hope console you. For how can you not grieve when the body, which lives by the soul, becomes lifeless once the soul departs? The one who walked now lies still, the one who spoke is silent, closed eyes no longer perceive light, ears are open to no voice; all the functions of the body have ceased. There is no one to move the feet for walking, the hands for working, or the senses for perceiving. Is this not the house, which some unseen inhabitant once adorned? The one who was unseen has departed, and what remains is what is now seen with sorrow. This is the cause of grief. If this is the cause of grief, then let there also be consolation for this grief. And what is that consolation? “That the Lord Himself, at His command, with the voice of an archangel, and at the sound of the last trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ in the air” (1Tes. 4.17). Will this be only for a time? No; but what does it say? “And so we shall always be with the Lord”. Let sorrow perish where there is such great consolation; let mourning be wiped away from the soul, and let faith drive out grief.</p>
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3.4. The Metaphor of the Garment

Consistently seeking to console the parents, Gregory relied on the profound symbolism associated with the imperial insignia, whose strict codification allowed for the conveyance of unequivocal messages to observers. In particular, the act of removing one’s customary robe to don a new, pristine garment—an allegorical representation of liberation from sin and the impurities of worldly concerns—constitutes a striking image:

GNO IX 465.9–16 (Spira)	
Ἐκ βασιλείας εἰς βασιλείαν μετέστη. Ἐξεδύσατο τὸ τῆς πορφύρας ἄνθος, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἄνω βασιλείας τὴν περιβολὴν ἐνεδύσατο. Εἶπω σοι τὴν ὕλην τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνδύματος· οὐ λίνον ἐστὶν οὐδὲ ἔριον οὐδὲ τὰ ἐκ σηρῶν νήματα. ἄκουσον τοῦ Δαβὶδ, ὅθεν ἐξυφαίνεσθαι λέγει τῷ θεῷ τὰ ἐνδύματα· Ἐξομολόγησιν καὶ μεγαλοπρέπειαν ἐνεδύσω, ἀναβαλλόμενος φῶς ὡς ἱμάτιον. ὁρᾷς οἷα ἀνθ' οἷων ἠλλάξατο;	She transmigrated from this realm to the other. She has put off the bloom of the purple, but has put on the garment of the kingdom above. Should I, perhaps, describe to you the material of the divine garment? It is not made of linen, wool or silken threads. Listen to David, of what are the garments woven by God. He says: “Thou hast clothed thyself with confession and magnificence, wrapping thyself in light as in a robe”. Do you see what garments she changed instead of others? ²³

The significance of such imagery, particularly its incorporation into an ἐπιτάφιος, appears to be influenced by Ambrose, who employed similar motifs in his funeral orations for Emperor Theodosius (2):

<i>Et ille quidem abiit sibi regnumque non deposuit, sed mutavit.</i>	And indeed, he departed, yet he did not lay down his kingdom, but rather changed it.
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And for Emperor Valentinianus (69):

<i>Ornatus capitis gloriosus, quod non regalia diademata, sed domini sanguinis insignia coronarent.</i>	Glorious is the adornment of the head, for it was crowned not with royal diadems, but with the emblems of the Lord's blood.
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Towards the conclusion of the consolatory section, Gregory enumerates several examples to reinforce the central message of his work. In doing so, he adheres to a traditional prescription of the consolatory genre, as Seneca explicitly states at the beginning of his *Consolatio ad Marciam* (2.1): *scio a praeceptis incipere omnes qui monere aliquem volunt, in exemplis desinere*, “I know that all who wish to advise someone begin with precepts and end with examples”. The three figures chosen by Gregory are Abraham and Sarah—closely linked through the episode of Isaac's sacrifice and frequently referenced elsewhere in his writings, directly from the Book of *Genesis*—and Job, from the eponymous biblical book.

3.5. The Story of Job: A κοινὸς τύπος?

Among the various episodes of Job's life (*Pulch.* 467.18–21 and 470.30–471.4), Gregory selects and indulges in describing the moments when the patriarch loses his ten children during a banquet, in order to intensify, as much as possible, the πάθος. This choice allows the author to direct his audience's attention toward a convivial and joyful familial gathering, and to bend the context to a typical Greek *symposium*. In so doing, he presents some reminiscences from Xenophon's *Symposium* but prefers to amplify the πάθος with a tragic and unsettling outcome.²⁴ The contrast is striking, indeed, even macabre.²⁵ A particularly evocative comparison arises with the banquet scene in Seneca's *Thyestes* (58–67):

<p><i>nondum Thyestes liberos deflet suos? et quando tollet? ignibus iam subditis spument aena, membra per partes eant discerpta, patrios polluat sanguis focos, epulae instruantur—non novi sceleris tibi conviva venies. Liberum dedimus diem tuamque ad istas solvimus mensas famem; ieiunia exple, mixtus in Bacchum cruor spectante te potetur; inveni dapes quas ipse fugeres—Siste, quo praeceps ruis?</i></p>	<p>Has Thyestes not yet mourned for his children? And when will he cease? Already, with the fires lit, the cauldron foams, the limbs are scattered in parts, the blood defiles the father's heart, and the feast is prepared—not of new wickedness, will you come as a guest? We have given you this day and have freed your hunger for those tables; fill your fast, the blood mixed with Bacchus' wine will be drunk while you watch; I have found the feast which you yourself would flee—Halt, where are you rushing?</p>
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This continued further with additional gruesome details (*ibidem*, 916–918):

<p><i>Hoc, hoc mensa claudatur scypho. Mixtum suorum sanguinem genitor bibat: meum bibisset.</i></p>	<p>This, this let the table be closed with the cup. Let the father drink the mixed blood of his own, he would have drunk mine.</p>
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To intensify the imagery of the afterlife and imbue the scene with macabre tones, Gregory draws upon Classical traditions. For instance, in his depiction of the devastation following the banquet's collapse and the subsequent deaths of the young guests—whose blood mingles with the spilled wine and whose remains defile the prepared feast—one can discern echoes of Homer's *Odyssey*, concerning Antinous's banquet (22.19–21): $\theta\omicron\omega\varsigma$ δ' $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron$ $\epsilon\iota\omicron$ $\tau\rho\acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\zeta\alpha\nu$ / $\omega\sigma\epsilon$ $\pi\omicron\delta\iota$ $\pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\xi\alpha\varsigma$, $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron$ δ' $\epsilon\iota\delta\alpha\tau\alpha$ $\chi\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\nu$ $\xi\rho\alpha\zeta\epsilon$./ $\sigma\acute{\iota}\tau\omicron\varsigma$ $\tau\epsilon$ $\kappa\rho\acute{\epsilon}\alpha$ τ' $\acute{\omicron}\pi\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\phi\omicron\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$, “swiftly he pushed away from himself the table,/striking it with his foot, and he poured the drink onto the ground;/both bread and roasted meat were scattered”. Even more relevant to the present study, however, is the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which of the same Homeric reference gave the bishop of Nyssa his own interpretation (12.238–240):

<p><i>sanguinis ille globos pariter cerebrumque merumque vulnere et ore vomens madida resupinus harena calcitrat.</i></p>	<p>That blood in globes and parts of the brain, and wine vomiting from the wound and mouth, he, fell backwards on the wet sand, and kicks.</p>
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See also Statius' *Thebaid*, which is close to Gregory's $\xi\kappa\phi\rho\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ especially for the Baroque allure (5.255–257):

<p><i>crateras pronos epulasque in caede natantis cernere erat, iugulisque modo torrentis apertis sanguine permixto redeuntem in pocula Bacchum.</i></p>	<p>Beholding the craters slanting and the feasts in the floating blood, one could see, and the jugulars now opened as rivers, wine mixed with blood returned into the cups.</p>
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Alongside a subtle reference to the same Job episode in his brother Basil’s oration *De gratiarum actione* (where the scene is described with very few details), Gregory’s use of Senecan elements serves as a literary archetype, creating a *stoische Kontrapost*, an oxymoronic juxtaposition that heightens the dramatic contrast between serenity and extreme πάθος, which was a recurring feature of Senecan tragedies. This technique, building toward the paroxysm of the most tragic moments, enhances the emotional intensity of the narrative.

3.6. The Parallelism of the Athlete

The semantic motif of the athlete emerges in the same biblical reference.²⁶ Nevertheless, in Job’s case, he evolves from a mere competitor into a seasoned trainer (παιδοτριβής) and, ultimately, a paradigmatic figure (*exemplum*). Gregory reinterprets the Pauline metaphor of the athletic contest, applying it to Job and integrating fundamental Stoic principles into the framework of the Christian ideal.

GNO IX 470.14–31 (Spira)	
<p>Τοιαύτης συμφορᾶς τῷ Ἰὼβ ἀγγελθείσης (θέασαί μοι τῷ λόγῳ τὸν ἀθλητήν, οὐχ ἵνα θαυμάσης μόνον τὸν νικητήν, μικρὸν γὰρ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θαύματος κέρδος, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ζηλώσης ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ σοι γένηται παιδοτριβῆς ὁ ἀθλητής, τῷ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ὑποδείγματι πρὸς ὑπομονὴν καὶ ἀνδρείαν τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλείφων ἐν καιρῷ τῆς τῶν πειρασμῶν συμπλοκῆς), τί οὖν ἐποίησεν ὁ ἀνὴρ· Ἄρά τι δυσγενὲς καὶ μικρόψυχον ἢ εἶπε τῷ ῥήματι ἢ διὰ σχήματος ἐνεδείξατο ἢ παρειᾶν ἀμύξας τοῖς ὄνυξιν ἢ τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀποτίλας ἢ κόνιν καταπασάμενος ἢ τὰ στήθη ταῖς χερσὶ μαστιγώσας ἢ ἐπὶ γῆν ἑαυτὸν ῥίψας ἢ θρηνηδοὺς ἑαυτῷ περιστήσας ἢ ἀνακαλῶν τὰ τῶν κατοικομένων ὀνόματα καὶ ἐποιμώζων τῇ μνήμῃ· Οὐκ ἔστι τούτων οὐδέν. Ἄλλ’ ὁ μὲν τῶν κακῶν μηνυτὴς τὴν κατὰ τοὺς παῖδας συμφορὰν διηγῆσατο, ὁ δὲ ὁμοῦ τε ἤκουσε καὶ εὐθύς περὶ τῆς τῶν ὄντων ἐφιλοσόφει φύσεως, πόθεν τὰ ὄντα λέγων καὶ παρὰ τίνος εἰς γένεσιν ἄγεται καὶ τίνα εἰκὸς τῶν ὄντων ἐπιστατεῖν· Ὁ κύριος ἔδωκεν, ὁ κύριος ἀφείλετο.</p>	<p>Having announced such an adverse fate to Job (display with my speech the athlete, not only in order to admire him as a victor, for in fact the benefit derived from mere admiration is minimal, but to emulate the man in the same circumstances and have the athlete act as instructor, anointing your soul by his example of endurance and courage in the moment of combat against temptation). What then did the man do? Perhaps something ignoble or mean, or saying it out loud or showing it with gestures? Did he scratch his face with his nails, or pull out the hair from his head, or throw ashes on his face, or beat his chest with his hands, or roll on the ground, or surround himself with mourners, or invoke the names of the dead and lament the memory of them? None of these things. On the contrary, when the teller of misfortunes told him of the calamity that befell his children, he, as soon as he heard it, immediately philosophized about the nature of beings, wondering whence they came and by whom they were brought into the world and who has to watch over them: “The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away”.²⁷</p>

In this sense Gregory seems to have made a *summa* of Stoic philosophy within Christian thought, in the same way that Marcus Aurelius claimed in his *Ad se ipsum* 3.4:

ἀθλητὴν ἄθλου τοῦ μεγίστου, τοῦ ὑπὸ
μηδενὸς πάθους καταβληθῆναι.

An athlete of the greatest contest, to be
overcome by no passion whatsoever.

4. Conclusions

The present study has shown that Gregory of Nyssa's *Oratio in Pulcheriam* is far more than a conventional consolatory speech; it is a deliberate and nuanced synthesis of Christian theology, imperial propaganda, and a richly woven fabric of Classical literary reminiscences. From the very opening—with its earthquake imagery echoing Ammianus Marcellinus and Thucydides—to the closing prayer that reframes Pauline eschatology in Senecan terms, Gregory repurposes pagan motifs to serve distinctly Christian consolatory and dynastic ends. His invocation of the intertwined palm and vine, drawn from Homer and Catullus, not only celebrates Theodosius and Flaccilla's conjugal unity but also subtly recasts the vine imagery of *John* 15:5 (ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα, "I am the vine, you are the branches") in a political and theological register, binding the imperial family to the Church and the Empire in a single organic metaphor.

Gregory's engagement with banquet scene ἐκφράσεις—from Ovid's bloody feast in the *Metamorphoses* to Seneca's *Thyestes*—reveals an authorial boldness in transposing graphic Classical brutality into the context of a young princess's demise. By doing so, he intensifies the audience's emotional connection, turning a communal feast into a locus of mourning and theological reflection on sin, suffering, and redemption. This re-adaptation of tragic spectacle is not mere imitation: Gregory selectively appropriates the macabre details of pagan tragedy and reframes them within a Christian moral economy, transforming horror into hope through scriptural exempla (Job, Isaac. . .) and the promise of resurrection.

In parallel, Gregory's use of the "athlete" motif demonstrates his profound immersion in Stoic—and through Stoicism, Hellenistic—ethical discourse. While Paul's Corinthian metaphor was widely known, Gregory reframes the Christian competitor as a trained *paidotribes* of the soul, whose discipline under trial exemplifies perfect trust in divine providence.²⁸ This subtle fusion of Stoic self-mastery and Christian piety underscores the complexity of Late antique intellectual thought, in which the eastern bishop of Nyssa could read Seneca and Marcus Aurelius not as pagan adversaries but as sources of rhetorical and moral enrichment.

The originality of this research lies, therefore, in its systematic philological mapping of these intertextual and rhetorical strategies—an endeavor hitherto unexplored in Gregory's oeuvre. Previous scholarship has noted occasional allusions to Classical authors, but this paper aimed to provide the first comprehensive catalogue of Gregory's borrowings from Latin (Catullus, Ovid, Seneca) and Greek (Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Thucydides) sources within the *Oratio in Pulcheriam*, alongside his use of Christian models (Ambrose, Basil, and most probably Augustine, as we have argued on p. 6). In doing so, it reconsiders the long-held idea that the Cappadocian Fathers were insularly Greek in their cultural references, revealing instead a trans-Mediterranean curriculum in which Latin literary heritage was both known and valorized.

Furthermore, by tracing the philological fingerprints of Gregory's Classical education—his seamless blending of Greek and Latin texts—invites a re-evaluation of pedagogical practices in Late Antique Cappadocia. Did Gregory consult bilingual florilegia that juxtaposed Ovid with Gregory Nazianzen, or anthologies designed for imperial court rhetors? And to what extent did the educational milieu of Nyssa and Caesarea foster such cross-cultural literacy? These questions point toward a broader investigation into the role of

rhetorical handbooks, school florilegia, and imperial libraries as conduits for intellectual exchange between east and west.

At the level of ideological function, Gregory's Classical echoes serve a dual purpose. Theologically, they leverage the rhetorical prestige of pagan literature to ennoble Christian doctrine—an argument for continuity rather than rupture between the Classical past and the Christian present. Politically, they reinforce Theodosius's dynastic legitimacy by embedding imperial virtues within the respected literary canon of antiquity. In doing so, Gregory participates in a larger Late Antique trend of "Christianizing" Classical culture: poets became homilists, philosophers became theologians, and themes of empire and virtue persisted under new doctrinal auspices.

This conclusion points toward several promising avenues for further scholarship. First, a detailed paleographical study of manuscript witnesses of *Eiς Πουλχερίαν* may uncover marginal annotations or scholia indicating which florilegia or anthologies supplied Gregory's texts. Second, comparative analyses with other Cappadocian Fathers—particularly Gregory Nazianzen's orations and Basil's panegyrics—could elucidate shared or divergent Classical repertoires. Third, explorations into Syriac and Coptic translations of Gregory's works might reveal how these Classical echoes were received and re-contextualized in other linguistic communities. Finally, an interdisciplinary approach, combining digital humanities methods (intertextual mapping software) with traditional philology, could chart the broader web of literary transmission between Greek Christian authors and their pagan predecessors.

In sum, this study not only enriches our understanding of Gregory of Nyssa's rhetorical ability but also lays the groundwork for a more expansive reassessment of how Classical heritage persisted and was reimagined in Greek Christian literature of the Late Antique period. By illuminating the channels—educational, textual, and ideological—through which Greco-Roman culture permeated Christian discourse in Greek, it invites scholars to reconsider the Cappadocian circle not as passive inheritors but as active mediators in a dynamic, cross-cultural exchange.

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Notes

- ¹ Gregory of Nyssa's sentence οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως τῷ λόγῳ slavishly follows the Classical norms regarding the composition of a βασιλικὸς λόγος, as Menander of Laodicea warns in his rhetorical treatise (respectively, Menand., *Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν* 368.11, 369.17, and 419.16): οὐ ῥᾴδιον κατορθωθῆναι λόγῳ, "it is not easy to be accomplished in speech"; ὡς διαποροῦντος τοῦ λέγοντος ὅθεν χρῆ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν ἐγκωμίων ποιήσασθαι, "as the speaker was at a loss as to where he ought to begin the encomia"; and ὡς τὴν ἐπιβολὴν τοῦ θρήνου πόθεν ποιήσομαι, "how shall I bring about the onset of the lament, from where?". In the *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam* (461.3–9), Gregory of Nyssa closely follows Classical rhetorical conventions, particularly

those outlined by Apsines of Gadara in his *Ars Rhetorica* (328.14–18): this latter prescribes the use of διαπορήσεις (“expressions of perplexity”) especially at the beginning of pathos-laden sections of a speech, to enhance the emotional appeal and engage the audience, stating that: ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ αἱ διαπορήσεις χρήσιμοι εὐθὺς ἐν ἀρχῇ· ‘τί πρῶτον ἢ τελευταῖον εἶπω;’ ἢ οὕτως· ‘ἀπορῶ τί χρὴ δρᾶσαι; πότερον μεθεῖναι ἀμνημόνευντα; ἀλλ’ ἄλυσιτελες τοῦτο γε· ἀλλὰ διεξελεθῆν δεῖ; ἀλλ’ οὐ ῥᾴδιον ἀδακρυτὶ τοῦτο δρᾶν’. πάθος δὲ κινέσομεν οὐ μόνον ἐφ’ οἷς προπεπόνθαμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐφ’ οἷς δέος ἐστὶ μὴ πάθωμεν, “in situations of grief, expressions of perplexity are useful right from the beginning: ‘What should I recount first, or last?’ or in this way: ‘I am at a loss as to what should be done. Should I omit what has already faded from memory? But that would be of no benefit. Yet should I go through it all? But it is not easy to do so without tears’. We shall evoke emotion not only for what we have already suffered, but also for what we fear we may yet suffer”. Phrases such as τί πρῶτον ἢ τελευταῖον εἶπω; (“what should I recount first or last?”) and ἀπορῶ τί χρὴ δρᾶσαι (“I am at a loss as to what should be done”) are typical examples of this rhetorical move. They create an emotional atmosphere, lend legitimacy to lamentation, and predispose the audience to compassion, which turns out to be a key objective in consolatory discourse. Often called ἀπορία or *dubitatio*, this tool also serves to gain the audience’s goodwill and thereby capture their attention. Quintilian affirms this purpose (9.2.19; p. 148): *adfert aliquam fidem veritatis et dubitatio, cum simulamus quaerere nos, unde incipiendum, ubi desinendum, quid potissimum dicendum, an omnino dicendum sit*, “even doubt brings some credibility to the truth, when we pretend to be inquiring where we should begin, where we should end, what ought especially to be said, or whether anything should be said at all”. The bishop of Nyssa could also have read and have known similar passages on this rhetorical instrument of the Latin rhetorical tradition, as Aquila Romanus (*De figur.* 10 [p. 25]: διαπόρησις, *addubitatio: hac utimur, cum propter aliqua volumus videri addubitare et quasi ab ipsis iudicibus consilium capere, quo potissimum genere orationis utamur*, “even doubt brings some credibility to the truth, when we pretend to be inquiring where we should begin, where we should end, what ought especially to be said, or whether anything should be said at all”), Rufinianus (*De figur.* 9 [p. 40]: ἀπορία, *eadem est et διαπόρησις, addubitatio quaedam, cum simulamos quaerere nos, unde incipiendum, ubi desinendum, quid potissimum dicendum an omnino dicendum, cumque artificialiter simulamos nos ibi res invenire, non paratos venisse*, “ἀπορία, which is the same as διαπόρησις, is a kind of doubt, when we pretend to inquire where we should begin, where we should end, what should especially be said or whether anything should be said at all, and when we artfully pretend that we discover things there, not having come prepared”), Martianus Capella (*De rhetor.* 38 [p. 478]: διαπόρησις *est addubitatio, qua figura utimur, cum veluti dubitantes ab ipsis iudicibus inchoamenti consilium postulamos*, “διαπόρησις is a kind of doubt, a figure which we use when, as if uncertain, we request from the very judges themselves advice about how to begin”), or Rutilius Lupus (*Schem.* 1.10 [p. 18]: *hoc schema efficitur, cum quaerimus, quid aut quem ad modum pro rei dignitate dicamus, nec reperire nos ostendimus*, “this outline is produced when we inquire what or in what way we should speak in accordance with the dignity of the matter, and we show that we cannot find it”). This specific rhetorical canon was so widespread that is still attested in posterior rhetorical works and authors such as Isidore of Seville (*De rhetor.* 21.27 [p. 520]: *sunt et aporia, dubitatio simulantis nescire se quae scit, aut quomodo dicatur*, “there are also aporia: a doubt on the part of someone pretending not to know what he knows, or how it is to be said”).

2 This is *Pulch.* 461.3–472.18; cf. also (Caimi Danelli 1979, pp. 146–48). On the princess, see (Jones et al. 1971–1980, II p. 755; von Seeck 1909, col. 2432; Ensslin 1959; Leppin 2001); on the occasion of the speech, refer to Bernardi (1968, p. 319) and Chiriatti (2021).

3 For Gregory’s role in those years, see Capone (2011).

4 *Flacc.* 475.3–490.2.

5 (Leppin 2000, p. 493); *Pulch.* 463.15–464.4.

6 *Ibidem*, 461.3–19.

7 See also his rhetorical performances for the deaths of Bishop Meletius of Antioch as well as of empress Aelia Flaccilla.

8 In this passage, Gregory is using both Herodotus and Thucydides as historical models. On this aspect, see Chiriatti and Ciolfi (Forthcoming).

9 *Pulch.* 461.1–462.10.

10 *Pulch.* 462.10–464.9.

11 *Pulch.* 464.10–472.10.

12 *Pulch.* 469.20–470.26.

13 *Pulch.* 472.11–472.18.

14 Cf. Menander, *Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν* 436.2–4: συνοδύρου οὖν καὶ πατρὶ καὶ μητρὶ, καὶ αὐξήσεις τὸν οἶκτον· οἷων ἐλπίδων ἐστέρηνται, “so mourn together with both father and mother, and you will increase their pity; of what hopes they have been deprived”.

15 Transl. in Chiriatti (2023, pp. 91–92).

16 See also Ambrose’s *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio*, 70: *pulchra per virtutis decorem, suavis per gratiam, procera sicut palma, quae vincentis est praemium*, “beautiful through the adornment of virtue, graceful through charm, tall like the palm tree, which is the reward of the victor”.

17 For the reception of the image, see Luceri (2014, p. 172, n. 21).

18 Transl. in Chiriatti (2023, p. 92).

19 Among these passages, we believe that Gregory’s own description of Flaccilla’s funerary procession deserves particular attention (Flacc. 481.19–482.15; trans. Chiriatti 2021, p. 60): ὅτε χρυσῶ καὶ πορφυρίδι κεκαλυμμένη ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν ἢ βασιλῆος ἐκομίζετο (κλίνη δὲ ἦν ἡ κομίζουσα) καὶ πᾶσα ἀξία καὶ ἡλικία πᾶσα προχεθεῖσα τοῦ ἄστεος ἅπαν ἐστενοχώρει ἀπὸ πλήθους τὸ ὑπαιθρον πάντων ἐκ ποδῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπερεχόντων τοῖς ἀξιόμασι προπομπευόντων τοῦ πάθους (μέμνησθε πάντως ὅπως ὁ ἥλιος ταῖς νεφέλαις τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἑαυτοῦ συνεκάλυψε, ὡς ἂν μὴ ἴδοι τάχα καθαρῶ τῷ φωτὶ μετὰ τοιοῦτου σχήματος εἰσελαύνουσαν τὴν βασιλῆα τῇ πόλει, οὐκ ἐπὶ ἄρματός τινος ἢ χρυσοδέτου ἀπήνης κατὰ τὸν βασιλείου κόσμον τοῖς δορυφόροις ἀγαλλομένην, ἀλλ’ ἐν σορῶ κεκαλυμμένην, ἐπικρυπτομένην τὸ εἶδος ἐκείνῳ τῷ σκυθρωπῶ προκαλύμματι, θέαμα δεινόν τε καὶ ἐλεεινόν, δακρῶν ἀφορμὴν προκειμένην τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν, ἦν ἅπας τῶν συνειλεγμένων ὁ δῆμος ὁ ἑπηλὺς τε καὶ ὁ ἐγχώριος οὐκ εὐφημαίαις, ἀλλὰ θρήνοις εἰσιοῦσαν ἐδέχετο), τότε καὶ ὁ ἄηρ πενθικῶς ἐσκυθρόπασεν οἷον ἰμάτιόν τι πενθικὸν τὸν ζόφον περιβαλλόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἱ νεφέλαι καθὼς δυνατὸν αὐταῖς ἦν ἐπεδάκρυον ἀπαλὰς ψεκάδας ἀντὶ δακρῶν ἐπαφειῖσαι τῷ πάθει. ἦ ταῦτα μὲν ὄντως λῆρός ἐστι καὶ οὐδὲ λέγειν ἄξιον;; “when the empress, covered in gold and purple, was being brought to the city (and it was a bier that carried her), and every person of rank and every age, having poured forth from the city, filled all the open space to the point of crowding, as everyone moved aside, and those of highest rank went before the event in procession (you surely remember how the sun hid its rays with clouds, so as not to see, perhaps, with its pure light, the queen entering the city in such a manner, not upon some chariot or gilded carriage, in royal splendor, surrounded by bodyguards, but enclosed in a coffin, her form hidden by that grim covering, a sight both dreadful and pitiable, a source of tears laid before all who beheld it, and which the whole assembled crowd—both foreigner and citizen—received not with acclamations, but with laments), then also the very air assumed a mournful gloom, as though putting on the darkness like a mourning garment; and even the clouds, insofar as it was possible for them, wept, letting fall gentle sprinklings in place of tears upon the suffering. Or are these things, in truth, mere folly, and not even worthy of mention?”. The other reference cited in the text is found in Gregory of Nazianzus’ Basil’s funeral procession (Or. 43, 80.3): πλήρεις ἀγοραί, στοαί, διώροφοι, τριώροφοι, τῶν ἐκείνων παραπεμπόντων, προηγούμενων, ἐπομένων, παρεπομένων, ἀλλήλοις ἐπεμβαινόντων, μυριάδες γένους παντὸς καὶ ἡλικίας ἀπάσης, οὐ πρότερον γινωσκόμεναι· ψαλμωδία θρήνοις ὑπερνικώμεναι, καὶ τὸ φιλόσοφον τῷ πάθει καταλυόμενον· ἄγων δὲ τοῖς ἡμετέροις πρὸς τοὺς ἐκτός, Ἕλληνας, Ἰουδαίους, ἐπήλυδας· ἐκείνοις πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὅστις πλέον ἀποκλαυσάμενος πλείονος μετὰσχη τῆς ὠφελείας, “squares, porticoes, and two- or three-storied houses were filled with those escorting, preceding, following, accompanying him, and pressing upon one another: myriads of every race and of every age, never seen before. The chanting of psalms was overpowered by lamentations, and the spirit of philosophical resignation was undone by grief. There was a contest between our own people and the outsiders—Hellenes, Jews, foreigners; and on their part with us, as to who, by a more abundant lamentation, might obtain the greater share of benefit”.

20 Cf. the words πλήρης and πλήρωμα (*turma* and *caterua/cateroatim*).

21 Transl. in Chiriatti (2023, p. 93).

22 Although it is impossible to determine at this stage of research, it remains possible that Augustine had access to this passage from Gregory of Nyssa’s corpus—an element that would open another intriguing perspective on the knowledge and use of Church Fathers’ other writings in processes of reinterpretation and composition.

23 Transl. in Chiriatti (2023, p. 93). This powerful symbolism is also present in the funeral oration for Flaccilla (486.17–487.17): κατέλιπε βασιλείαν γῆϊνην, ἀλλὰ τὴν οὐράνιον κατέλαβεν· ἀπέθετο τὸν ἐκ λίθων στέφανον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς δόξης περιεθήκατο· ἀπεδύσατο τὴν πορφυρίδα, ἀλλὰ Ἐριστὸν ἐνεδύσατο. τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ βασιλικὸν ὄντως καὶ τίμιον ἔνδυμα. τὴν ὄδε πορφύραν ἀκούω αἶματι κόχλου τινὸς θαλασσίας φοινίσσεσθαι, τὴν δὲ ἄνω πορφύραν τὸ τοῦ Ἐριστοῦ αἶμα λάμπειν ποιεῖ· εἶδες ὅσον ἐν τῷ ἐνδύματι τὸ διάφορον. βούλει πεισθῆναι ὅτι ἐν ἐκείνοις ἐστίν· ἀνάγνωθι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον· Δεῦτε οἱ εὐλογημένοι τοῦ πατρὸς μου (φησὶ ταῦτα πρὸς τοὺς δεξιούς ὁ κριτής), κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν· τὴν παρὰ τίνος ἡτοιμασμένην· ἦν ἑαυτοῖς, φησί, διὰ τῶν ἔργων προητοιμάσασθε. πῶς· ἐπεινῶν, ἐδίψων, ξένος ἦμην, γυμνός, ἀσθενής, ἐν φυλακῇ· Ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐποιήσατε ἐνὶ τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων, ἐμοὶ ἐποιήσατε. εἰ οὖν ἡ περὶ ταῦτα σπουδὴ βασιλείας πρόξενος γίνεται, ἀριθμήσατε, εἴπερ δυνατὸν ἐστὶν ἐξαριθμήσασθαι, πόσοι τοῖς ἐνδύμασι τοῖς παρ’ αὐτῆς ἐσκεπάσθησαν, πόσοι τῇ μεγάλῃ ἐκείνῃ δεξιᾷ διετράφησαν, πόσοι τῶν κατακλείστων οὐκ ἐπισκέψεως μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ παντελοῦς ἀφέσεως ἠξιώθησαν, “she left behind an earthly kingdom, but she gained the heavenly one; she laid aside the crown made of stones, but she put on the crown of glory; she took off the purple robe, but she clothed herself with Christ. This is the truly royal and precious garment. I hear that the purple here below is dyed with the blood of a certain sea-shelled creature, but the purple above is made radiant by the blood of Christ. Do you see how great the difference is in the garment? Do you wish to be convinced that it is in those deeds? Read the Gospel: ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father’ (thus speaks the Judge to those on His right), ‘inherit the kingdom prepared for you’. By whom was it prepared? ‘That which you prepared for yourselves’, He says, ‘through your works’. How? ‘I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was a stranger, I was naked, I was sick, I was in prison’. ‘Insofar as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me’. If then care for these things becomes the cause of the kingdom, count up—if indeed it is possible to count—how many were clothed with garments from her, how many

were nourished by that great right hand, how many of the imprisoned were deemed worthy not only of visitation but even of complete release”.

24 See, for example, 2.1–7, 8.11–15, and 9.2–7: it is curious to note that a similar interpretation of such a setting, maybe transmitted by a parallel and independent tradition, figures in an illumination of manuscript Sinaiticus gr. 3 (f. 17v; diktyon: 58378).

25 This scene too survived in an illumination of codex Vat. gr. 749 (f. 20r; diktyon: 67380).

26 For the semantic motif of the athlete, see [Leemans \(2004\)](#) and [Capone \(2014\)](#).

27 Transl. in [Chiriatti \(2023\)](#), pp. 97–98).

28 This is from *1Cor* 9:24–27: οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι οἱ ἐν σταδίῳ τρέχοντες πάντες μὲν τρέχουσιν, εἷς δὲ λαμβάνει τὸ βραβεῖον· οὕτως τρέχετε ἵνα καταλάβητε. πᾶς δὲ ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται, ἐκεῖνοι μὲν οὖν ἵνα φθαρτὸν στέφανον λάβωσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄφθαρτον. ἐγὼ τοίνυν οὕτως τρέχω ὡς οὐκ ἀδήλως, οὕτως πυκτεύω ὡς οὐκ ἀέρα δέρων· ἀλλὰ ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ, μή πως ἄλλοις κηρύξας αὐτὸς ἀδόκιμος γένωμαι, “do you not know that those who run in a stadium all indeed run, but one receives the prize? So run in such a way that you may attain it. However, everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things; those indeed do so in order that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. I therefore so run, as not without aim; I so box, as not beating the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”.

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