

REVIEW

JUVENCUS AND THE DEATH OF THE MESSIAH:
A NEW COMMENTARY

Michael Müller, *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu Christi bei Iuvenus (IV 570–812). Untersuchungen zu Dichtkunst, Theologie und Zweck der ‘Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor’*. Palinogenesis 105. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 413. Paperback, €68.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11340-3.

Monty Python’s ‘Life of Brian’ finds an ancient analogue in Juvenus’ *Evangeliorum libri IV*, which likewise appealed to contemporary taste, this time by turning the Gospel-tale into soberly Virgilianesque hexameters. This sempervirent story culminates in the Messiah’s death and resurrection, which as the meat-and-potatoes of the Christian message form the subject of M(üller)’s study: his book is in effect a commentary on Juvenus 4.570–812. M’s ‘Introduction’ (14) promises us a ‘philological’ commentary which is both ‘umfassend’ and ‘solide’. This commentary is divided into thirteen pericopes.

The first pericope is the denial of St. Peter. The very first scholium in this first pericope’s first section (Peter’s first denial) bodes ill for this ‘philological’ commentary by starting off with two philological foul-ups (22): while M’s *quis posset fallere amantem* (*Aen.* 4.296: instead read *fallere possit*) impairs Virgil’s sense and scansion, *Martha talis vox* (Juvenus. 4.375: instead read *Marthae*) reduces this Juvenian phrase to scansional and syntactic mumbo-jumbo. In the second section of this first pericope (Peter’s second denial) the apparatus to M’s text (574: *limine*) fails to record the variant *lumine*, which is however discussed in the ensuing commentary, where M’s odd *in limina solis* (27) is a mistake for Virgilian *sub limina s.* Moreover, M’s rendering of the Juvenian text at issue here (*primo sub limine*) in his tome-closing translation (381) as ‘an der äussersten Schwelle’ would seem unwarranted, since *primo* here is merely ‘abundanter additum’ (cf. *TLL* s.v. *prior* 1351.73–4). In the third and last section of this first pericope (Peter’s third denial) M’s note on l. 581 (*nescire adfirmat* (sc. Peter), *quisquis foret ille, negando*) consists merely of the not specially Solomonic ‘foret: Foret steht statt des zu erwartenden, hier metrisch aber nicht passenden *esset*’ (32). In view of the slight syntactic salebrosity of *quisquis ... ille*, it might have been more helpful to refer here to Ovid *Met.* 1.32 (*quisquis fuit ille*), where virtually the same syntagm occurs in exactly the same post-caesural *sedes* at the very start of a work that Juvenus knows very well.

While the classical parallels which M does adduce can (like his treatment of the biblical sources) be useful, on the very next page (33) his citation of Silius 14.21–2 as *latratus fama est ... / ... tramittere* passeth all understanding, since M misses out the *spatium* (20) that is the sense-bringing subject-accusative of this A. c. I. On the next page but one (35) it is Ermoldus Nigellus' turn to be misquoted: instead of M's *et contra Mauros fletus habet miseros* read *e contra ...* Here M's mis-citation is particularly serious, since it leads him to think *fletus* is acc. pl. with shortened 'u', which could therefore have an intertextual bearing on Juvencus' own text at 585. When however Ermoldus is cited correctly, his *fletus* turns out to be a perfectly unexceptionable nom. sing. With the Müllerian scholium at issue here we come to the end of M's 'solidly philological' commentary on the first pericope.

This first pericope on the denial of St. Peter is then followed by an excursus on Juvencus' depiction of Peter, where the philology is (*miserabile dictu*) no more (Petrinely) 'rock-solid'. Here M starts (41) with the same pun on 'petrous' Peter in Juvencus' *praesolidus* (1.422), which is seen as illustrating the Juvencan taste for prefixal *prae-*. In M's view a further illustration of this same tendency is supplied by 'adverbial' *praesaepe*. Such an adverb is however a mere figment of M's imagination: *praesaepe* is just the diphthongal spelling of nounal *praesepe*. On the next page (42) Juvencus' (3.111–13) *si tua nos vere dignatur visere virtus, / me pariter permitte ... / fluctibus in liquidis immersos figere gressus* is misrendered as 'Wenn wirklich deine Kraft es zulässt, dass wir [dich] sehen, gestatte auch mir, ... meine Schritte, die in die fliessenden Wellen tauchen, darauf zu setzen' (rather: 'If your virtue really deigns to visit us, let me too ... set on the liquid waves my un-sunk steps'). Here *immersos* means *non mersos* (so two codd.; cf. further *TLL* s.v. *immersus* 457.69–71): the rock-apostle does *not* sink 'like a rock'. This excursus then comes to the not particularly foudroyant conclusion that St. Peter, like Aeneas, is peccable but relatable.

The second pericope is Christ's trial by Pilate. Here the first section deals with the lines (588–9) which narrate how the Messiah was brought before the Roman governor. In these lines M detects an 'äusserst pointierte Kontrastimitation' (64), since Christ is described in the language which Virgil applies to Sinon (*Aen.* 2.57–8), but this same Christ is 'inhatlich' (*sic*: typo for 'inhaltlich') equated with the 'positiv besetzten Troianern'. The point may however be made that here Virgil's treatment of the Trojans is not in fact 'positiv', since a newly discovered pair of acrostics shows Virgil's attitude towards them to be on the contrary 'negativ'.¹ On the other hand, M's concluding reflections on Juvencus' picture of Pilate are definitely *lesenswert*.

¹ Cf. the present writer, "'Read the Edge": Acrostics in Virgil's Sinon Episode', *ACD* 50 (2014): 45–72.

The third pericope is Judas' felo-de-se. Here M's discussion (pp. 104–5; cf. 360, 376) of *distraheretur* (l. 634) is rather *distrarit*. M translates (383) *cum sanguis distraheretur* as 'als das Blut(geld) entnommen wurde' (in the very next line 'zu zu zahlen' is a typo). M compares 3.515–16 (*omnia ... / distrahe*), where he thinks the meaning is 'bezahlen'. However neither 'entnehmen' nor 'bezahlen' is given as a possible sense of *distrahere* in *TLL* s.v. 1540.70–1543.43. The meaning of *distrahe* in the second passage is shown to be 'sell' by OL Mt. 19.21 (*vende omnia*; cf. *TLL* s.v. *distraho* 1542.82–1543.32). Such is also the meaning in the first passage, which is particularly significant as one of the few elucidatory additions that Juvencus himself makes to the biblical text. In connection with this Judasian self-murder M himself murders, not just the Latin, but also the Aramaic: 'Aceldama' starts with *heth*, not *he*.

In the fourth pericope the soldiers make a mock of Christ (M himself starts by making a mockery of Arevalo's Latin, which he misquotes (130) as chimeric 'ad crucificiendum' (*sic*; read 'crucifigendum')). The fifth pericope deals with *Via Crucis* and Crucifixion (here M ends with an interesting excursus on 'irony', where however (171) he is wrong to think Cyprian the author of *De montibus Sina et Sion*, which is a substandard pseudepigraph). The sixth pericope is Jesus' death. Here (183) M erroneously puts *de* for *ne* (l. 698). His commentary (187) on this passage (*ne forte*) then affirms: 'Die Fragepartikel *ne* kann im Spätlatein auch lang gemessen werden'. Here however *nē* has nothing to do with *nē*: in Late Latin such use of conjunctival *nē* 'im Sinne von *si* ... besonders bei *forte*' (as here) is not uncommon.²

This same sixth pericope ends with an excursus on 'Body and Soul in Juvencus'. Here (210) M oddly cites Mt. 6.25 as *nonne anima plus est quam esca et corpus* (carry on after *corpus* with *plus est quam vestimentum*). The first half of this *parallelismus membrorum* (*anima plus est quam esca*) is treated by Juvencus in 1.632 (*nonne animam pluris facimus quam corporis escas*). M concludes: 'Der Eingriff des Dichters ist dabei minimal'. Such is not however the case. Since in the biblical source-text *corpus* has nothing to do with *esca*, Juvencus has introduced his own antithesis between *anima* and *corpus* (here the 'dichotomische Anthropologie' is not biblical, but Juvencan). The biblical *corpus*, which instead belongs to the second half of the parallelism (*corpus plus est quam vestimentum*), is then treated in Juvencus' next line (633: *corpus ... praepone vesti*): Juvencus thereby achieves an elegant (non-biblical) *gradatio* (*animam ... corporis escas ... corpus ... vesti*),³ which M fails to point out.

The seventh pericope is Jesus' burial. Here (ll. 717–18: *et procerum solus* (sc. Joseph of Arimathaea) *cum iustior audet / corpus ... deposcere Christi*) M (221–2)

² Cf. E. Löfstedt, *Philologischer Kommentar zur Peregrinatio Aetheriae* (Uppsala, 1911) 268–9.

³ On the figure of *gradatio* cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* (Stuttgart, 2008⁴) 315–17.

rejects the *cum* of Huemer's oldest MSS in favour of the *tum* of all later ones. This *tum* has recently been rejected as 'unusually placed' by Green,⁴ who instead proposes *qui*, which in turn is rightly rejected on palaeographical grounds by M, who at the same time objects to *cum* as 'mit dem Konnektor *et* ... kaum vereinbar und so nicht verständlich'. It would seem, however, that *cum* is not in fact to be taken with *et*, but with immediately following *iustior*. The meaning of *et procerum solus cum iustior audet* is accordingly: 'and of the chiefs he alone, since he is juster, dares ...' (cf. the OL variant of Lk. 23.50: *Ioseph ... , cum esset ... iustus, ...*);⁵ for such ellipse of *esse* after such a causal conjunction cf. (e.g.) Ovid *Met.* 13.497 (*quia femina*).⁶ When understood in the manner just suggested, Juvencus' supposedly problematical wording in fact evinces an elegant concision.

The eighth pericope is the watch at the sepulchre. With the interpretation of the last line of this pericope (742: *et limen signis et saxum milite servant*) M makes heavy weather (240: 'Entweder ... oder'), while completely failing to notice the elegant *adiunctio*⁷ and the equally elegant epiphonema.⁸ M's purblindness in these matters is particularly unfortunate, since such rhetorical finesse is precisely what caught (e.g.) Jerome's eye.⁹ The ninth pericope is the announcement of the resurrection: the first section (247) mis-cites Ovidian *idem ego* as the hexametrically no-no proceleusmatic *ideo ego*, while the second (249) turns Juvencan *tectis splendore sepulchris* ('whited sepulchres') into its unmetrical opposite by leaving out *splendore*. The tenth pericope is the first confab with the risen Christ. The first line of the first section (767) contains the phrase *se ostendit* (sc. Jesus), which M (266) deems 'selten' in poetry: his first and last instances of such 'poetic' usage (Catull. 64.207 (read instead 211) and Luc. 6 (read 7).697) in fact have nothing whatever to do with reflexive *se ostendit*, since in both cases the *se* is instead the subject-accusative of a dependent A. c. I.

The eleventh pericope is the High-Priests' hanky-panky. In the first section it is this time the English that is icky: for 'differently' (278) read antonymic 'indifferently'. The twelfth and second-last pericope is Christ's commission to missionize. Here the second-last page (300) of the second and last section again exhibits M's metrical myopia, since *re* the prosody of *deerit* he affirms: 'Zwischen Daktylus und Spondeus [ist] nicht sicher zu unterscheiden'. *Deerit* is

⁴ R. P. H. Green, 'Problems in the Text of Juvencus', *VChr* 65 (2011): 199–213, on 213.

⁵ P. Sabatier, *Bibliorum Sacrorum Latinae Versiones Antiquae*, vol. 3 (Reims, 1743) 372.

⁶ On ellipse of the substantive verb cf. further J. B. Hofmann and A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik* (Munich, 1965) 419–23, esp. 421 ('In Nebensätzen').

⁷ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 9.3.62 (*in qua unum ad verbum plures sententiae referuntur*). M's lemma leaves the verb out altogether.

⁸ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 8.5.11 (*est ... epiphonema rei narratae ... summa adclamatio*).

⁹ Cf. his comment at In Mt. 2.11: *pulcherrime ... Iuvenus ... uno versiculo*.

however ‘sicher’ a spondee, since *-ee-* is long by synizesis (cf. *OLD*² s.v. *desum*) and *-i-* is long by position (on this same page M then has the cheek to decry the metrical mote in the eye of A. Longpré).¹⁰ The thirteenth and last pericope is the poet’s epilogue. Here the second-last page (317) gives us in two adjacent sentences two last winceworthy unmetricalities to crown this commentary on a metrical meisterwerk: for *aeternam dabant* read *aeternamque dabant* and for *quo dedit vitam* read *quo vitam dedit*. To wrap up, the foregoing would seem to show that the ‘philological’ foundation on which M’s commentary on this ‘Life of Christ’ claims to be built is in no small measure—to quote the wrap-up of Christ’s own Sermon on the Mount—not a foundation of rock, but sand.

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¹⁰ ‘Aspects de Métrique et de Prosodie chez Juvencus’, *Phoenix* 29 (1975): 128–38.