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The Role and Function of Ekphrasis in Latin North African Poetry (5th–6th Century)*

Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön,
Wie noch kein Auge je geseh'n!
Ich fühl' es, wie dies Götterbild
Mein Herz mit neuer Regung füllt.
Dies etwas kann ich zwar nicht nennen,
Doch fühl' ich's hier wie Feuer brennen.
Soll die Empfindung Liebe sein?
Ja, ja, die Liebe ist's allein …

As a musical homage to Vienna, where the conference took place, I would like to start the present article by recalling Mozart's 'Aria del ritratto' in The Magic Flute (Act one, scene 4). This aria is a perfect example of the mighty effects of ekphrasis and states, once again, the ambiguous relationship between word and image. As is well known, at the beginning of the Zauberflöte the young prince Tamino, holding in his hands a portrait received from the Queen's maids, falls suddenly in love with Pamina through the very image of the young girl.[1]

The feelings he expresses entail some commonplaces of ekphrastic passages, for example the idea that a portrait is life-like or that art can idealize beauty.[2] Tamino's words and situation come very close to a brief epigram in

* This paper enjoyed insightful hints and comments by Domitilla Campanile, whom I wish to thank very much. I am also grateful to Pauline Tucker for revising my English.

1 See M. Mila, Lettura del Flauto Magico, Torino 1989, 85–90, with further references.

2 This concern seems somewhat a stereotype and has been thoroughly investigated by art historians; cf., e. g., the considerations put forward by H. Maguire, Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art, DOP 28 (1974), 111–140, where he observes that a particular problem for modern commentators is that Byzantine authors seem to be convinced that their art is realistic, even though it falls far short of the pictorialism now expected of 'realistic' art. Therefore, they insist on claiming that painted figures appear to move, breathe and speak. See also the perceptive introduction by P. Hadot, in: Philostrate, La galerie de tableaux, traduit par A. Bougot, révisé et annoté par

the Latin Anthology (23 Riese = 10 Shackleton Bailey), which can be paralleled to Mozart's aria. By varying on an Anacreontic theme,[3] a lover is asking a painter not only to depict his ideal of beauty, but to express, by means of art, his own loving sighs as well in order to celebrate its magic charm:

Pinge, precor, pictor, tali candore puellam
qualem finxit Amor, qualem meus ignis anhelat.
Nil pingendo neges; tegat omnia Serica vestis,
quae totum prodat tenui velamine corpus.
5 *Te quoque pulset amor, crucient pigmenta medullas;*
si bonus es pictor, miseri suspiria pinge.

This short poem is perhaps a curiosity in so heterogeneous a collection, which, besides, offers a considerable number of compositions labelled by modern scholarship as 'ekphrastic epigrams' – a useful definition that nonetheless needs to be qualified in some respects, for example following the cautious observations put forward by Graham Zanker, who is also the author of a perceptive inquiry about modes of viewing in Hellenistic poetry and art.[4]

The present paper will investigate two different examples of the connection between literature and visual arts in Late Antiquity, in particular by taking into account the trope of ekphrasis – that is description in a broader sense, according to the definition found in ancient rhetorical manuals, or 'description of art

F. Lissarague, Paris 1991, vii–xxii. Starting from a philosophical perspective, Hadot deals with the theme of Nature as archetypal painter and with the feelings of Philostratus' readers, who experience a sort of suspension between reality and imagination, forgetting that they are contemplating pictures and believing these to be living beings. Hadot not only refers to Goethe and to Lessing's famous aesthetic theory developed in the 1766 essay "Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie" (published by Christian Friedrich Voss in Berlin), but he also quotes a less known theorist, Su Dong Po, who lived in China during the eleventh century and likewise investigated the relationship between word and image. See also J. H. Francis, Living Icons: Tracing a Motif in Verbal and Visual Representation from the Second to Fourth Centuries C. E., AJPh 124 (2003), 575–600.

[3] Anacreont. 16 W. – The Latin poem is quoted according to Shackleton Bailey's edition with exception of the last line, where I prefer the reading *miseri* instead of *miser in*.

[4] See G. Zanker, New Light on the Ekphrastic Epigram, ZPE 143 (2003), 59–62, who stresses the fact that this modern term might be misleading; id., Modes of Viewing in Hellenistic Poetry and Art, Madison 2003. A different perspective is provided by S. Goldhill - R. Osborne (edd.), Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture, Cambridge 1994. Cf. also P. Laurens, L'abeille dans l'ambre: celebration de l'epigramme de l'époque alexandrine à la fin de la Renaissance, Paris 1989; M. A. Harder - R. F. Regtuit - G. C. Wakker (edd.), Hellenistic Epigrams, Leuven 2002; V. Platt, Evasive Epiphanies in Ekphrastic Epigram, Ramus 31 (2002), 33–50.

objects' ("Kunstbeschreibung" in Friedländer's words), as it is currently understood by modern theorists, at least from Leo Spitzer onwards.[5] Recently, ekphrasis, otherwise "once skimmed over as superfluous, or derided as rhetorical showmanship", has become one of the most attractive and alluring subjects among scholars of classical antiquity, not to mention research in comparative literature or art history.[6] In a broader sense it is perceived as offering a

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5 L. Spitzer, The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', or Content vs. Metagrammar, CompLit 7 (1955), 203–225. G. Downey, Art. Ekphrasis, in: RAC 4 (1959), 921–944, records ancient terms all pertaining to descriptions, among which τόποι, χρόνοι, πρόσωπα, πανηγύρεις, πράγματα, ἀγάλματα, εἰκόνες, σύγκρισις, ἠθοποιία, ἔκφρασις. A thorough investigation of ancient manuals or rhetorical texts dealing with descriptions is now provided by R. Webb, Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice, Farnham 2009; R. Nicolai, L'ἔκφρασις, una tipologia compositiva dimenticata dalla critica antica e da quella moderna, AION (filol) 31 (2009), 29–45. See also G. Ravenna, Per l'identità di ekphrasis, ITrFCl 4 (2004/2005), 21–30 (available at http://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/bitstream/10077/931/1/3.pdf; Feb 15 2010).

6 The quotation in the text is derived from J. Elsner and S. Bartsch, Eight Ways of Looking at an Ekphrasis, CPh 102 (2007), i–vi (i). As the two scholars record in their presentation, ekphrasis has been considered either a mirror of the text, or a mirror in the text, a mode of specular inversion, a further voice disrupting or extending the message of the narrative, a prefiguration for that narrative. Generally speaking, ekphrasis, undoubtedly one of the oldest and longest-lasting rhetorical devices, consists of "words about an image, itself often embedded in a larger text" (ibid.). – Generally on ekphrasis (apart from the mentioned special issue of CPh 102 [2007] by Elsner and Bartsch) see, e. g., M. Krieger, Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign, Baltimore-London 1992; J. A. W. Heffernan, Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery, Chicago 1993; A. S. Becker, The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis, Lanham MD 1995; J. Hollander, The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art, Chicago 1995 (an evocative anthology of modern ekphrastic poems); G. Boehm - H. Pfotenhauer (edd.), Beschreibungskunst – Kunstbeschreibung, Ekphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, München 1995; D. Chateau, Le bouclier d'Achille. Théorie de l'iconicité, Paris 1997; V. Robillard - E. Jongeneel (edd.), Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis, Amsterdam 1998; J. Elsner (ed.), The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity, special issue of Ramus 31 (2002); Webb, Ekphrasis, Imagination (above n. 5). – Single articles deserving a special mention are: M. Krieger, Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry, or: Laokoon Revisited, in: F. P. W. MacDowell (ed.), The Poet as Critic, Evanston IL 1967, 3–26; D. P. Fowler, Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis, JRS 81 (1991), 25–35; M. Riffaterre, L'Illusion d'ekphrasis, in: G. Mathieu-Castellani (ed.), La pensée de l'image: Signification et figuration dans le texte et dans la peinture, Paris 1994, 211–229; G. Kurman, Ecphrasis in Epic Poetry, CompLit 26 (1974), 1–13; M. Shapiro, Ecphrasis in Virgil and Dante, CompLit 42 (1990), 97–115; J. A. Francis, Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of "Ekphrasis", AJPh 130 (2009), 1–23. Among Italian scholars concerned with antique uses of ekphrasis cf. G. Ravenna, L'ekphrasis poetica di opere di arte in latino: temi e problemi, QIFLatPad 3 (1974), 1–52; A. Perutelli, L'inversione speculare: per una retorica dell'ekphrasis, MD 1 (1978), 87–98. –

metatextual reflection on the written text as a whole. However, like many literary devices, description, namely "the representation of the visual through the medium of the word", conveys a deeper truth and raises many questions. It calls into question the ability to represent a material object and the whole visual experience (colour, space, depth, texture, light and shade) in an immaterial,

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Many reasons are subjected to the scholarly revival of ekphrasis, most of all the blurring or sibling rivalry of visual art and written text, which allows for an interdisciplinary approach: see, e. g., P. Wagner (ed.), Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality, Berlin-New York 1996; J. Morrison - F. Krobb (edd.), Text into Image: Image into Text, Amsterdam-Atlanta 1997. Therefore some critics underscored its intertextual or intermedial character, in its overlapping of word and image, which, in some respects, leads to a sort of synaesthetic miscegenation. At the same time, others (following some seminal suggestions by W. Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie, Frankfurt/Main 1963) underline its role as a figure that addresses the crucial questions of representation and of mimesis. For this issue see D. Freedberg, The Power of Images, Chicago 1989, 527. The majority of scholarly literature agrees, however, in considering ekphrasis a pause in the discourse. No wonder that it has been labelled as "the frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature's turning world to 'still' it" (M. Krieger, The Play and Place of Criticism, Baltimore 1967, 107; see also Krieger, Ekphrasis: The Illusion, 256f.). In this sense it expresses the tension between that stillness and narrative, which, as we shall see, is crucial in epic. The tension between description and narration has been investigated, among others, by H. F. Mosher jr., Toward a Poetics of "Descriptized" Narration, PoetTod 12 (1991), 425–445. At the same time, this fixing character can be linked to the persuasive and transcendental power of art celebrating the wonder or the aura of an artwork. The same Krieger (Ekphrasis: The Illusion, xvi) speaks of both miracle and mirage implicit in ekphrastic descriptions, whereas V. Cunningham, Why Ekphrasis?, CPh 102 (2007), 57–71, underlines the basically paradoxal nature of ekphrasis, suggesting that thereness is what is in question, since "writing is always tormented by the question of real presence, by challenges to knowability, by the problematics of truth and validity, the difficulty of being sure about what it might be pointing to outside of itself, by its deictic claims and desires, by what its grammar of pointing, its this and that and there might be indicating, by what if anything is actually made present to the reader … the ekphrastic encounter seeks, I think, to resolve this ancient and continuing doubting by pointing at an allegedly touchable, fingerable, thisness" (61). After an attempt (not really convincing, however) at etymologising the word as "speaking-out", made out of the silence of the past, he then concludes (65) that "the voice of the ekphrastic is, often, morally weighed, admonitory, instructive … ekphrasis generally announces the proleptic force of the gazed object". As often happens for so broad a subject, there are, however, some excessive interpretations, with which I cannot agree: for example those who insisted on the gendered character of the ekphrastic project, the way in which the object viewed may be categorized as feminine, as a passive silent thing waiting to be made to speak, while the ekphrasis itself and its narrator are perceived as masculine, insofar as they interpret and enliven inert material (see, e. g., W. J. T. Mitchell, Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation, Chicago-London 1994).

intelligible medium such as language, or static three-dimensional objects in a medium that unfolds in time.[7]

As for the Greco-Roman world in particular, the fortune enjoyed by the Second Sophistic cultural movement, whose theorizer Philostratus was also the author of the first consistent collection of art images in antiquity, invited scholars to a deeper reflection on the function and role of ekphrasis in classical works.[8] Jás Elsner is the indefatigable promoter of such studies, as his own monographs and his activity as editor of miscellaneous volumes testify.[9]

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7 M. Beaujour, Some Paradoxes of Description, YaleFStud 61 (1981), 27–59, which I derive from R. Webb, The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor and Motion in Ekphraseis of Church Buildings, DOP 53 (1999), 59–74 (59).

8 In particular see the miscellaneous volume recently edited by J. Elsner and E. Bowie, Philostratus, Cambridge 2009, with further references. As it has been written, Philostratus' Imagines transform the literary heritage of Greek culture into a series of described pictures, therefore facing the problem of mimesis using the motif of naturalistic representation in painting. At the same time it functions as a self-reflexive means of examining Philostratus' own strategy of the textual imitation of pictures through ekphrasis. In this respect these ekphrases simultaneously disrupt and reconstitute the narrative flow: This represents one of the major and most original characteristics of the work. As stated by J. Elsner, Image and Ritual: Reflections on the Religious Appreciation of Classical Art, CQ 46 (1996), 515–531 (515f.), "while the Second Sophistic produced some of the most impressive aesthetic celebrations of images ever composed in the ancient world, it is also true that it simultaneously generated a remarkable literature which testifies to the ritual, prophetic and magical importance of art in the Graeco-Roman imagination". For Lucian's treatment of ekphrasis cf. Luciano di Samosata, Descrizioni di opere d'arte, traduzione, commento e introduzione di S. Maffei, Torino 1994. The same scholar dealt also with Philostratus: La sophia del pittore e del poeta nel proemio delle Imagines di Filostrato Maggiore, ASNP 21 (1991), 591–621. In a massively increasing scholarly production it is worth citing S. Beall, Word Painting in the *Imagines* of the Elder Philostratus, Hermes 121 (1993), 350–363; K. Thein, Gods and Painters: Philostratus the Elder, Stoic *Phantasia* and the Strategy of Describing, Ramus 31 (2002), 136–145; Z. Newby, Testing the Boundaries of Ekphrasis: Lucian on the Hall, Ramus 31 (2002), 126–135; J. Goeken, Éloge et description: l'esprit du banquet dans La Salle (περὶ τοῦ οἴκου) de Lucien, in: G. Abbamonte - L. Miletti - L. Spina (edd.), Discorsi alla prova. Atti del Quinto Colloquio italo-francese. Discorsi pronunciati, discorsi ascoltati: contesti di eloquenza tra Grecia, Roma ed Europa, Napoli, S. Maria di Castellabate (Sa), 21–23 settembre 2006, Napoli 2009, 189–223. Ekphrases in ancient novels have been thoroughly investigated by S. Bartsch, Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, Princeton 1989.

9 Besides the special issues of Ramus 31 (2002) and of Classical Philology 102 (2007), which I have already hinted at (above n. 6), see also, e. g., Elsner's books Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity, Cambridge 1995; Art and Text in Roman Culture, Cambridge 1996; Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text, Princeton 2007, and the essay Philostratus Visualises the Tragic: Some Ekphrastic and Pictorial Receptions of Greek Tragedy in the Roman

I decided to focus my discussion on Latin authors of the sixth century AD, who seem, strangely enough, have passed unnoticed in the scholarly revival of ekphrasis, with the invaluable exception of Susan Stevens, who in 1983 defended her (unfortunately unpublished) dissertation about the ekphrastic epigrams in the Latin Anthology.[10] This seems even stranger if one considers Greek-speaking authors of about the same period, such as Procopius and, most of all, Paulus the Silentiary, whose long Ekphrasis of the Basilica of Santa Sophia was carefully investigated by Paul Friedländer about a century ago in a book which now is unanimously considered a classic.[11] It would be likewise ungenerous to ignore the name of Glanville Downey, whose studies on the city of Antioch on the Orontes and Libanios' descriptions are still quite helpful for a deeper understanding of the relationship between art and literature in later periods.[12] Finally, one should credit Michael Roberts for having stressed the blurring of visual arts and poetry in late authors and having linked this phenomenon to educational process, to the role of rhetorical exercises, and to what he calls, with a felicitous label, the "jewelled style" of Late Antiquity.[13] The connections between scholarly praxis and literary examples of ekphrasis, particularly in the Byzantine period, have also been outlined in recent times by Ruth Webb: Moving from the definition given in the collections of progymnasmata, she outlined how ekphrasis was used in Byzantine literature not only for the sake of aesthetic, but for moral and liturgical purposes as well.[14]

Era, in: C. Kraus - H. Foley - S. Goldhill - J. Elsner (edd.), Visualising the Tragic. Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature. Essays in Honour of F. Zeitlin, Oxford 2007, 309–337.

[10] S. T. Stevens, Image and Insight. Ecphrastic Epigrams in the Latin Anthology, PhD Thesis Madison 1983.

[11] P. Friedländer, Johannes von Gaza, Paulus Silentiarius und Prokopius von Gaza: Kunstbeschreibungen justinianischer Zeit, Leipzig-Berlin 1912 (repr. Hildesheim 1969). This seminal study must now be supplemented with M. Whitby, The Occasion of Paul the Silentiary's Ekphrasis of S. Sophia, CQ 35 (1985), 215–228; R. Macrides - P. Magdalino, The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary's Poem on Hagia Sophia, ByzMGStud 12 (1988), 47–82.

[12] G. Downey, Personifications of Abstract Ideas in the Antioch Mosaics, TAPhA 69 (1938), 349–363; id., Ethical Themes in the Antioch Mosaics, ChHist 4 (1941), 367–376. On the same subject cf. also the exhaustive inquiry by I. Laving, The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and Their Sources. A Study of Compositional Principles in the Development of Early Mediaeval Style, DOP 17 (1963), 179–286.

[13] M. Roberts, The Jewelled Style. Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity, Ithaca-London 1989. See, however, D. Shanzer, Rhetoric and Art, Art and Ceremony, Martyrs and History, Martyrs and Myth: Some Interdisciplinary Explorations of Late Antiquity, Envoi 2/2 (1990), 231–268.

[14] Webb, Aesthetics (above n. 7); R. Webb - L. James, To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium, ArtH 14 (1991), 1–17.

The present paper will, therefore, take into account some cases from the Latin Anthology and from the poems of Corippus, who is currently acknowledged as the last Latin poet acting as a bridge between classical culture and the Greek and Latin Middle Ages. In the following considerations I am going to use the term ekphrasis in the modern sense, though in some cases the ancient meaning will be adopted, insofar as it is more suitable for the general discussion.

Rather than a genre, ekphrasis was considered a technique at the disposal of historians, poets and orators. Indeed it was currently defined in handbooks as a speech that brought its subject matter vividly before the eyes of the audience;[15] besides, the technical term is not usually found outside handbooks and scholia.[16] Among descriptions, one can mention not only landscapes or architectural complexes,[17] but also battles and the way an object was made. It entailed an almost persuasive function and in some respects it was not disjoined from a sort of hedonistic purpose. Therefore it comes very close to figures such as αὔξησις.[18]

In addition, ekphrasis was directly linked to ἐνάργεια, that is, to vividness, and therefore its aims of clarifying and rendering manifest the object described

[15] According to Aphtonius' classical definition (Prog. p. 36, ed. Rabe [1926]: Ἔκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιηγηματικός, ὥς φασιν, ἐναργὴς καὶ ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον), "ekphrasis is a descriptive speech that brings the thing shown, as it is said, vividly before eyes". Among ancient theorists see also Quintilian, who deals (inst. 6, 2, 29) with the word φαντασία and insists that by employing ἐνάργεια in descriptive prose the orator can reach the innermost mind and the deepest emotions of his audience. Similarly Longinus (subl. 15, 9) speaks of an 'enslavement' of the listener and states that this is the dangerous might inherent in rhetoric. I derive this information from Ruth Webb's numerous studies (mentioned in nn. 5, 7, 16 and 19) on the subject. See also A. Manieri, L'immagine poetica nella teoria degli antichi: phantasia ed enargeia, Pisa-Roma 1998, 123–154; S. Bartsch, Wait a Moment, Phantasia: Ekphrastic Interference in Seneca and Epictetus, CPh 102 (2007), 83–95; and the works cited infra, n. 19.

[16] R. Webb, Ekphrasis, Amplification and Persuasion in Prokopios' Buildings, AntTard 8 (2000), 67–71 (68).

[17] Webb, Exphrasis, Amplification (above n. 16), deals with the intermingling of ekphrasis and laudatory speech in so particular a form of literature as the encomia of cities so widespread in Late Antiquity (Aristides and his imitators; Libanios, Himerius). V. Sarapik, Landscape: The Problem of Representation, in: V. Sarapik - K. Tüür - M. Laanemets (edd.), Koht ja Paik / Place and Location II, Tallinn 2002, 183–199 (retrieved on Feb 04 2010 from http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/KP2_12sarapik.pdf), is an original article discussing actual examples of modern landscape paintings and theoretical perspectives on ekphrasis.

[18] L. Pernot, La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain, Paris 1993, 670–680, outlines the persuasive aims implied in both these figures.

become patent.[19] It is perhaps worth adding that clarity was pursued as a stylistic achievement and that many writers such as Dio Chrysostomus were highly appreciated for their σαφήνεια.[20]

Indeed, ancient ekphrasis appeals to the audience's imagination rather than providing an accurate or actual transcription of the described object: This sometimes results in the use of generalized, though vivid, images that were more likely to evoke the effect of perception in the listeners, in order that they feel 'as if' in the presence of the scene. At the same time, since ekphrasis is embodied in a time progression (and not detached from it, as is sometimes argued by modern theorists), there is often an emphasis on the use of language to represent not merely the sensible appearance, but its more general, spiritual characteristic.

Certainly, the massive amount of descriptions of places, buildings, and pieces of craftsmanship is common in late antique poetry, as it was part of the rhetorical stock of a skilled author. Furthermore, late works offer a privileged perspective by outlining, to different degrees, how ekphrasis functions and acts as 'visual art'. It also produces a sense of wonder due to the immediacy of the description and, at the same time, it strives for an emotive reaction or a sense of empathy.

Alluring descriptions obviously beguiled the audience and aimed to delight the readers, while poetry was meant to rival plastic art (according to the old saw *ut pictura poesis*, which dates back to Simonides).[21] The relationship

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[19] G. Zanker, Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry, RhM 124 (1981), 297–311, and, most of all, R. Webb, Mémoire et imagination: Les limites de l'enargeia dans la théorie rhétorique grecque, in: C. Lévy - L. Pernot (edd.), Dire l'évidence, Paris 1997, 229–248. For a different perspective see J. Elsner, Viewing Ariadne: From Ekphrasis to Wall Painting in the Roman World, CPh 102 (2007), 20–44: On page 21 he suggests that ekphrasis itself, insofar as it provides a pedagogic model for the gaze, may be seen as both enabler of the gaze (in helping the viewers it is training to see) and occluder (in the veil of words with which it screens and obscures the purported visual object). Therefore, since it displays a clear self-awareness of both these qualities (enabling and occluding), one might say that its true subject is not the verbal depiction of a visual object, but rather the verbal enactment of the gaze that tries to relate with and penetrate the object.

[20] A. Brancacci, Rhetorike philosophousa. Dione Crisostomo nella cultura antica e bizantina, Napoli 1985, 229–244; L. Pernot, Demostene allievo di Platone? SemRom 1 (1998), 313–343.

[21] Employed in its canonical formulation by Horace, Ars poetica 361 (cf. C. O. Brink, Horace on Poetry. 2. The Ars Poetica, Cambridge 1971, 368–371, with further references). A similar statement is attributed to Simonides of Ceos by Plut. De gloria Ath. 347a. For the sake of brevity I cannot deal here with its fortune in antiquity and, most of all, in modern times. The majority of modern aesthetic theories are grounded upon this issue.

between art and literature becomes closer and produces a sort of overlapping. Many scholars have already demonstrated that the distinctive patterns of late antique literature find precise parallels in contemporary art, from the tension between grandeur, on one hand, and fondness for detail, on the other.[22] One might compare other features, such as the splitting of scenes, their juxtaposition, or the miniaturization of even the smallest detail, and, for the present purpose, it is perhaps not without significance to remember that the very name of 'Late Antiquity' was first used by an art historian.[23]

The Latin Anthology, a collection put together by an anonymous rhetorician during the third decade of the sixth century and standing as a 'manifesto' of secular poetry of Roman Africa under Vandal rule,[24] contains several brief ekphrastic epigrams. Light can be shed on this literary form (if not properly a genre) by scrutinizing them with the criteria that have been put forward in the last decennia for the same kind of epigrammatic poetry in the Greek Anthology, following the path already opened by Susan Stevens. A similar comparison could be made by taking into account the late Latin epigrammatic tradition of Damasus, Ausonius, Claudian, the Epigrammata Bobiensia, and Ennodius, as well as the Greek epigrams from Justinian's age.

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22 R. Bianchi Bandinelli, La fine dell'arte antica, Milano 1991; S. G. MacCormack, Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity, Berkeley 1981. Literary aesthetic has been carefully investigated by J. Fontaine: see, e. g., Le style d'Ammien Marcellin et l'esthétique théodosienne, in: J. Den Boeft - D. Den Hengst - H. C. Teitler (edd.), Cognitio gestorum: The Historiographic Art of Ammianus Marcellinus, Amsterdam 1992, 27–37. See also V. Zarini, Poésie officielle et arts figurés au siècle de Justinien: Images du pouvoir dans la Johannide de Corippe, REL 75 (1997), 219–240. A complex inquiry is provided by M. Boeder, Visa est vox: Sprache und Bild in der spätantiken Literatur, Frankfurt/Main-New York 1996. Compare, on the other hand, some older judgements such as those referred to by Ravenna, L'ekphrasis poetica (above n. 6), 120.

23 A. Riegl, Spätrömische Kunstindustrie, Wien 1901, with the discussion by J. Elsner, The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901, ArtH 25 (2002), 358–379.

24 For further bibliography see C. O. Tommasi, La rhétorique face aux nouveaux maîtres: Manifestes littéraires et idéologie en Afrique vandale, in: P. Galand Hallyn - V. Zarini (edd.), Manifestes littéraires dans la latinité tardive: Poétique et Rhétorique. Actes du Colloque de Paris, 23–24 mars 2007, Paris 2009, 145–161. As far as art is concerned, K. M. D. Dunbabin, The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage, Oxford 1978, 15, likewise notes that the picture of African decay in 5th and 6th century has been exaggerated. Indeed there are still some remarkable examples of mosaics dating back to the sixth century, which come from private houses or baths. They are also a witness to the peculiarity of African style, which becomes more and more original during Late Antiquity and develops mainly thanks to the rich patrons who commissioned these artworks. Thus they illustrate both the artistic changes in the 'Kunstindustrie' of the later Empire and the social and religious ambience of the cities and country from which they come.

Some recent interpretative trends offer a better underscoring of ekphrastic epigrams. For example, Murray Krieger, when he argues that ekphrasis can be construed as representing an intermediate position between epigram and emblem, the former being originally a text totally subordinated to an art work, the latter being text constituting the work of visual art, concludes that thanks to ekphrasis two forms, text and art, constantly vie with each other for discursive control.[25]

This kind of poetry, which fits the so-called form of 'self standing ekphrasis', includes pieces commenting on statues (among which a variation on the famous Hellenistic theme of the spinario),[26] pictures (from Roman history or mythology), minor artworks such as plates, medallions, fountains, sarcophagi, and even gardens, rooms, or buildings such as thermal baths. Nor is description of mechanical objects, clearly perceived as wonders, lacking. As happens in Hellenistic poetry, authors aim at captivating their audience by displaying all the artifices of creation that tend to unnatural excess. It will suffice to mention here the description of a dredge built by order of Huniric: Such an extraordinary machine is hyperbolically paralleled to the Biblical episode of the parting of the Red Sea.[27] Precious materials, like marble and ivory, are the objects of detailed descriptions, even though the most important poems concern buildings.

My primary purpose is to demonstrate that these epigrams share close ties with contemporary art, in particular mosaics, so largely distinctive of the African region in Late Antiquity, from the Severan age onwards, yet allowing for literary embellishments or licence. In any event, this kind of literature stood in a truly physical association with the described object, depicting it with the utmost immediacy. In some respects, however, description is more allusive than detailed, the works of art providing ideal occasion for literary display. Moreover, according to some scholars, ekphrasis is designed to produce a viewing subject. Thus, poems are written to educate and direct viewing as a social and

[25] C. Chinn, Statius Silv. 4.6 and the Epigrammatic Origins of Ekphrasis, CJ 100 (2005), 247–263 (249), where he refers to M. Krieger, Ekphrasis: The Illusion (above n. 6).

[26] Zanker, Modes of Viewing (above n. 4), 133–135. V. Tandoi, Per l'iconografia della cavaspina di Lussorio, AFMPalermo 1 (1968), 301–308, deals with the reprise of this image in Luxorius.

[27] M. Chalou - G. Devallet - P. Force - M. Griffe - J. M. Lassère - J. N. Michaud, Memorabile factum: une célébration de l'évergétisme des rois Vandales dans l'Anthologie Latine, AntAfr 21 (1985), 207–262; E. Malaspina, L'idrovora di Unirico: un epigramma (A. L. 387 R. 2 = 382 Sh. B.) e il suo contesto storico-culturale, RomBarb 13 (1994/1995), 43–56. For amechania as wonder in Late Antiquity see M. Whitby, Pride and Prejudice in Procopius' Buildings: Imperial Images in Constantinople, AntTard 8 (2000), 59–66.

intellectual process.[28] Gregory Hays rightly argued that Greco-Roman myths are well represented both in poems and North African art and that therefore "for the poets of the anthology, a myth was not merely a verbal narrative, but had a visual dimension as well".[29] Other epigrams, namely those dedicated to gardens (e. g. 369 R. = 364 S. B.), fall within the province of the locus amoenus-topos, even though one cannot deny the existence of luxuriant gardens in the wealthy country villas and estates.[30] Indeed, the Latin Anthology has often been regarded as a reliable source by archaeologists and art historians. This collection provides an indirect confirmation of the persisting prosperity of Africa during the fifth century, notwithstanding Vandal rule. It testifies to the gradual integration between the Latin elite and the newcomers, who appreciated and enjoyed the Roman lifestyle.[31] Thus, there is no reason to suspect or question the verisimilitude of many of its descriptions, even though some tones can be perceived as exaggerated and grotesque – indeed, this seems to be a stereotype of the epigrammatic genre.[32]

The bulk of the Latin Anthology is represented by ekphrases of statues or pictures, which are indeed rather conventional;[33] but a conspicuous number is dedicated to buildings or landscapes. The latter group counts many poems dedicated to spas, which demonstrate, at the same time, the fondness for variations on the theme (the same taste that is recognizable, for example, in Myron's famous heifer cycle). It has been convincingly argued that some poems describing baths were to be inscribed on the baths themselves to celebrate the munificence of the Vandal king Thrasamundus, who rebuilt the complex. Such laudatory purpose is achieved through a skilled use of hyperbolic imagery and rhetorical devices, and these texts represent one of the most revealing documents for our knowledge of the Vandal age. They demonstrate the importance of spas in North Africa, which is testified to by many archaeological remains

28 S. Goldhill, What is Ekphrasis for?, CPh 102 (2007), 1–19.

29 G. Hays, Romuleis Libicisque litteris: Fulgentius and the 'Vandal Renaissance', in: A. Merrills (ed.), Vandals, Romans and Berbers. New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa, Aldershot 2004, 101–132 (117).

30 See Stevens, Image and Insight (above n. 10), 226–246. She records and discusses Anth. Lat. 202, 272, 332, 369 R. = 193, 266, 327, 364 S. B.

31 This problem has been carefully outlined by F. M. Clover in many articles (collected in: The Late Roman West and the Vandals, Aldershot 1993).

32 Scholars have suggested that epigram (from the third century BC onwards) is one of the prime examples of ekphrastic writing, insofar as originally epigrams denote inscriptions on graves and other monuments; although this genre became more and more baroque sophisticated. In some respects it has been read as a sort of parody of the contemporary artistic discourse: see the various contributions by Zanker, New Light (above n. 4).

33 Stevens, Image and Insight (above n. 10), 33–88 and 89–131 respectively.

as well and, at the same time, provide interesting insights about their relation with epigraphical poetry.[34]

Conversely, North African mosaic art offers many examples of inscribed texts commenting on the portrayed scene, the relationship between written text and image therefore being reversed. Besides examples like the fully decorated baptistery of St. Cyprian in the Bardo Museum, or the curious trough in Bulla Regia which shows a peculiar antonomastic employment of the word Baiae (*venatorum Baiae*), or many cases of grave-stones, it is worth mentioning here apotropaic mosaics against envy and the evil eye, and, most of all, the great mosaic in Lambiridi representing a scene from the legend of Perdicca. This mosaic was extensively studied by Jérôme Carcopino almost a century ago and we should credit him and, later, Françoise Chamoux, with identifying the scene and the Greek inscription, which is a famous sentence of Epicurean flavour, "I was not, I was, I am not, I care not" (οὐκ ἤμην, ἐγενόμην, οὐκ εἰμί, οὐ μέλει μοι). This latter example is important because it offers a further confirmation of the fortune enjoyed in an African milieu by the story of Perdicca's malady, which is testified to by the poem erroneously attributed to Dracontius and by a short piece in the Latin Anthology (202 R. = 211 S. B.), not to mention the allegorical explanation by Fulgentius (myth. 3, 2). The link with Epicurus is still worth deeper investigation, albeit the same sentence is attested to elsewhere, not only in Africa, as a stereotype of sepulchral epigraphs.[35]

Other poems are suitable for comparison with mosaics, though they are not properly ekphraseis. Leaving aside the mythological ones, there are some descriptions of the months or of the seasons which resemble a favourite motif in visual art.[36] Particularly meaningful is the brief epigram (158 R. = 147 S. B.) commenting on a picture of Virgil and adding considerations about the immor-

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[34] Stevens, Image and Insight (above n. 10), 172–226; Chalou - Devallet - Force - Griffe - Lassère - Michaud (above n. 27); S. Busch, Versus balnearum: Die antike Dichtung über Bäder und Baden im römischen Reich, Stuttgart 1999, 218–265; Y. Thébert, Thermes romains d'Afrique du Nord et leur contexte méditerranéen, Roma 2003.

[35] J. Carcopino, Le tombeau de Lambiridi et l'hermétisme africain, RA 1 (1922), 211–301, reprinted in: Aspects mystiques de la Rome païenne, Paris 1942, 207–314; F. Chamoux, Perdiccas, in: M. Renard (ed.), Hommages à A. Grénier, Bruxelles 1962, 386–396. Literary connections are examined by Hays (above n. 29), 118. For the poem falsely attributed to Dracontius see E. Wolff, L'Aegritudo Perdicae: un poème de Dracontius?, RPh 62 (1988), 79–89; L. Zurli, L'Aegritudo Perdicae non è di Draconzio, in: Ars Narrandi. Studi di narrativa antica in memoria di L. Pepe, Napoli 1996, 233–261. See also the challenging paper by M. Malamud, Vandalising Epic, Ramus 22 (1993), 155–173.

[36] 117 R. = 106 S. B., on which cf. E. Courtney, The Roman Months in Art and Literature, MH 45 (1988), 33–57. For pictorial representations see Dunbabin (above n. 24), 109–123.

tality of art and poetry:[37] It comes astonishingly close to the famous mosaic from Sousse, now in the Bardo museum, which is one of the rare examples of literary subjects, reminding us that not every single landowner in Africa was exclusively fond of hunting and races.[38]

Conversely, this topic appears in other epigrams (for example 334, 335 R. = 329, 330 S. B.) and most of all in a long epigram of Luxorius (304 R. = 299 S. B.), which is therefore particularly suited to the present theme. It describes a picture depicting a landowner hunting on his estates. In addition, there is a sort of mise en abîme, for the image had been painted by the landowner himself and had been located in his own villa. The name Fridamal, Luxorius' wealthy and cultured patron, whom he celebrates elsewhere, clearly points to a Vandal squire:[39]

De turre in viridario posita, ubi se Fridamal aprum pinxit occidere

Extollit celsas nemoralis Aricia sedes
sternit ubi famulas casta Diana feras,
frondosis Tempe cinguntur Thessala silvis
pinguia Nemeae lustra Molorchus habet.
5 *Haec vero aetherias exit quae turris in auras,*
consessum domino deliciosa parans,
omnibus in medium luc⟨r⟩is ornata refulget
obtinuitque uno praemia cuncta loco.
Hinc nemus, hinc fontes extructa cubilia cingunt
10 *statque velut propriis ipsa Diana iugis.*
Clausa sed in tanto cum sit splendore voluptas
artibus ac variis atria pulchra micent,
admiranda tuae tamen est virtutis imago,
Fridamal, et stratae gloria magna ferae,
15 *qui solitae accendens mentem virtutis amore*
⟨c⟩aptasti digno pingere facta loco.
Hic spumantis apri iaculo post terga retorto
frontem et cum geminis naribus ora feris.

[37] *De imagine Vergilii: Subduxit morti vivax pictura Maronem / et quem Parca tulit reddit imago virum. / Lucis damna nihil tanto valuere poetae / quem praesentat honos carminis et plutei.*

[38] Dunbabin (above n. 24), 136.

[39] See Stevens, Image and Insight (above n. 10), 103–109; F. Bertini, Lussorio e l'epigramma latino tardoantico, in: A. M. Morelli (ed.), Epigramma longum. Da Marziale alla tarda antichità / From Martial to Late Antiquity. Atti del Convegno internazionale, Cassino, 29–31 maggio 2006, Cassino 2008, 495–508.

Ante ictum subita prostrata est belua morte,
20 *cui prius extingui quam cecidisse fuit.*
Iussit fata manus telo, nec vulnera sensit
exerrans anima iam pereunte cruor.

The mention of a *turris* finds close resemblance with late antique mosaics in Africa depicting villas, often in the peculiar structure of the *castellum* (also mentioned by Augustine), to which Noël Duval has recently brought attention.[40] Hunting scenes are to be counted among the commonest subjects of the North African mosaics and represent one of the most typical manifestations of the genre. In some areas (particularly in and around Carthage), a series of such scenes proceeds steadily into at least the fifth century. Obviously, the main drive for the increasing popularity of such scenes came from the patrons, who wanted to see representations on their floors of one of their beloved occupations. Incidentally it must be said that the realistic hunt scene in mosaic art was gradually substituted by a more 'fantastic' style with the juxtaposition of different elements (for example animals whose habitat is incompatible), though realism did not disappear completely and is recognizable also in very late works.[41] Thus, literary description plays the same role and has the same functions as a laudatory device to celebrate a powerful man. It is, I suppose, possible to argue that the classicizing style and the overabundance of mythological references reinforce this idea, for they are conceived to be understood by educated patrons. Generally speaking, classicism characterizes many authors of the Latin Anthology and most of all encomiastic poems.

As far as the relationship between art and literature is concerned, a special place is held by an anonymous epigram dedicated to the circus-races (197 R. = 188 S. B.).[42] This rather long and complex poem displays an allegorical interpretation of the circus, according to a symbolism which was usual in Late Antiquity and which finds its first attestation in some fragments of the Perga-

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[40] N. Duval, Deux mythes de l'iconographie tardive: la villa fortifiée et le "chasseur" vandale, in: J. M. Carrié - R. Lizzi Testa (edd.), Humana sapit: études d'antiquité tardive offerts à L. Cracco Ruggini, Paris 2002, 333–340; E. Coppolino, Castellum etiam villam potuisse appellari (Aug. cons. evang. 3, 25, 71): riflessioni su alcuni aspetti socio-economici dell'Africa Proconsularis, in: J. González - P. Ruggeri - C. Vismara - R. Zucca (edd.), L'Africa Romana. Le ricchezze dell'Africa, risorse, produzioni, scambi, Atti del XVII Convegno di studio, Sevilla 14–17 dicembre 2006, Roma 2008, 733–745.

[41] Dunbabin (above n. 24), 53.

[42] S. T. Stevens, The Circus Poems in the Latin Anthology, in: J. Humphrey (ed.), The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage, 1, Ann Arbor 1988, 153–178. For Roman hunting technique see the classical essay by J. Aymard, Essai sur les chasses romaines des origines à la fin du siècle des Antonins (Cynegetica), Paris 1951.

mene writer Claudius Charax and in Tertullian (who, in turn, probably drew it from Suetonius). A fuller treatment is to be found in Cassiodorus, John the Lydian, Isidore of Seville, and also Joannes Malalas.[43] According to this interpretation, perfectly suited to the transcendental trend of the late empire, the number of circus gates mirrors that of the months and the zodiacal signs, whereas the four horses correspond to the seasons and to the elements, whose distinctive colours are likewise reflected in the colours of the four factions and in their alliances or rivalries:

De circensibus

Circus imago poli, formam cui docta vetustas
condidit et numeros limitis aetherii.
Nam duodena anni ostendunt ostia menses
quaeque meat cursim aureus a⟨s⟩tra iubar.
5 *Tempora cornipedes referent, elementa colores;*
auriga, ut Phoebus, quattuor urget equos.
Cardinibus propriis includunt saepta quadrigas,
Ianus vexillum quas iubet ire levans.
Ast ubi panduntur funduntque repagula currus
10 *unus et ante omnes cogitur ire prius,*
metarum tendunt circumdare cursibus orbes;
namque axes gemini ortum obitumque docent.
Iamque his Euripus quasi magnum interiacet aequor,
et medius centrum summus obliscus obit.
15 *Septem etiam gyris claudunt certamina palmae,*
quot caelum stringunt cingula sorte pari.
Lunae biga datur semper Solique quadriga,
Castoribus simpli rite dicantur equi.
Divinis constant nostra spectacula rebus,
20 *gratia magna quibus crevit honore deum.*

It is perhaps not by chance that many African authors discuss circus symbolism or use it metaphorically, since the popularity of circus races is strongly attested in that region during Late Antiquity. Apart from literary witnesses, remains of stone-built circuses may still be seen in Carthage, Utica, Cherchel, Sousse, Lepcis Magna, not to mention how widespread this theme was on mosaics. It is true that some recent interpretations question the symbolic purport of many mosaics depicting circus scenes and that an actual allegory can be

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[43] Tert. spect. 9; Cassiod. var. 3, 51; Lyd. mens. 4, 25; Isid. orig. 18, 34; Jo. Mal. chron. 175B.

considered certain only in the great scene of Piazza Armerina (a mosaic which is clearly African in style). Nonetheless, mosaics with circus races recur quite frequently, and sometimes they are connected to seasonal attributes, such as corn, millet, olive, roses, grapes, and even to Aion.[44]

Among literary sources recalling this theme, apart from the long aetiological and polemic account found in Tertullian, it is worth quoting Martianus Capella,[45] Dracontius,[46] and Corippus. The little poem *De circensibus* provides a good case of the quite different treatment of ekphrasis in the poems of Corippus, the cantor of the Byzantine reconquest of Africa. In particular it is worth considering his second work, the Panegyric he delivered at the imperial court in Constantinople to celebrate the accession of Justin II (November 565), a work which displays a huge number of ekphraseis or descriptive sections.[47] Vice versa, surprisingly enough, there are very few descriptions in his other work, the Iohannis, a classicizing epos in eight books written about twenty years before, when Corippus was still in Carthage.[48]

The passage dealing with the symbolic meaning of the circus races is inserted into a wider context, in some respects overcharged with allegory. Indeed, it introduces the elaborate conclusion of book one (314–344) and therefore the celebration of Justin's accession.[49]

Solis honore novi grati spectacula circi
315 *antiqui sanxere patres, qui quattuor esse*
solis equos quadam rerum ratione putabant,
tempora continui signantes quattuor anni,
in quorum speciem signis numerisque modisque
aurigas totidem, totidem posuere colores,
320 *et fecere duas studia in contraria partes,*

44 Dunbabin (above n. 24), 88–108, challenges the symbolic interpretation, put forward by A. Merlin - L. Poinssot, Deux mosaïques de Tunisie à sujets prophylactiques, MMAI 34 (1934), 129–176; iid., Factions du cirque et saisons sur les mosaïques de Tunisie, RA 31/32 (1949 [= Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à Ch. Picard]), 732–745.

45 Mart. Cap. 2, 87.

46 Drac. laud. dei 2, 7–27.

47 Seminal hints are offered by Av. Cameron, Corippus' Poem on Justin II: A Terminus of Antique Art, ASNP 5 (1975/1976), 129–165; ead., The Artistic Patronage of Justin II, Byzantion 50 (1980), 62–84. C. Schindler, Per carmina laudes. Untersuchungen zur spätantiken Verspanegyrik von Claudian bis Coripp, Berlin-New York 2009, provides an up-to-date detailed inquiry into this poem dealing with ekphrasis as well.

48 See, however, Zarini, Poésie officielle (above n. 22).

49 See Averil Cameron's notes in: Flavius Cresconius Corippus, In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris libri IV, edited with Translation and Commentary by A. Cameron, London 1976, 143–149.

ut sunt aestivis brumalia frigora flammis.
Nam viridis veris campus ceu concolor herbis,
pinguis oliva comis, luxu nemus omne virescit;
russeus aestatis rubra sic veste refulgens
325 *ut nonnulla rubent ardenti poma colore;*
autumni venetus ferrugine dives et ostro
maturas uvas, maturas signat olivas;
aequiperans candore nives hiemisque pruinam
albicolor veneto socius coniungitur una.
330 *Ipse ingens circus, plenus ceu circulus anni,*
clauditur in teretem longis anfractibus orbem,
amplectens geminas aequo discrimine metas
et spatium mediae, qua se via pandit, harenae.
⟨Quid⟩ referam ⟨Oenomaum⟩ primas iunxisse quadrigas
335 *et currus armasse novos, Pelopemque secundum*
in soceri venisse necem? Praestantior arte
inventus gener est, plus sponsae instinctus amore.
Hunc veterum primi ritum non rite colebant,
esse deum solem recta non mente putantes.
340 *Sed factor solis postquam sub sole videri*
se voluit formamque deus de virgine sumpsit
humani generis, tunc munere solis adempto
principibus delatus honor munusque Latinis
et iucunda novae circensia gaudia Romae.

In all probability Corippus is influenced here not only by the artistic heritage of his motherland, but also by the long account found in the antiquarian collection of John the Lydian (see n. 43). People gathering in the Hippodrome (where they used to attend chariot races) are paralleled with birds acclaiming the resurrection of their king, the phoenix, and the name of Justin is explained through the symbolism of its initial letter, the 'holy iota'. The poet explains the symbolism of seasons, linking their distinctive colours and attributes to the factions, which are in turn allied together – it is worth noticing the textual problem at line 329, where *veneto* is a normalizing correction by Alan Cameron, instead of the reading *viridi* transmitted by the codex Matritensis, the sole manuscript of our poem. Conversely, I prefer reading Rivinus' *russeus aestatis* (324), instead of Foggini's transposition *aestatis roseus*, adopted by Averil Cameron. What is more important is the clear anti-pagan polemic, hinted at by the reference to God, the true sun, and to the Incarnation. Contrarily, the anonymous

epigram of the Latin Anthology (above p. 269) seems to be written by a nostalgic admirer of the old gods, as is patent from the concluding line.[50]

Yet in Corippus, the long passage about the circus and the symbolism it entails, though very interesting as far as the relationship between visual and narration is concerned, is not strictly speaking an ekphrasis. Instances of ekphrasis occur at greater length throughout the poem, however. I will choose the most striking examples. According to the predilection of late antique authors in general for minor arts and miniaturized craftworks already outlined by many scholars, descriptions of such objects also occur. In particular, the Laus Iustini records the emperor's funeral mantel, the garments and silver tableware. In addition, there is a section dedicated to the *sella curulis* and two major ekphraseis describe the central room of the court, the throne-hall, and the palace of Sophianae facing the harbour.[51]

A section of particular interest is the passage dedicated to the long poetic paraphrase of the Credal formula that occurs in book four. At first glance, in fact, this is presented in the form of a description of the mosaics adorning the basilica of St. Sophia, which had been praised in the previous lines as more imposing and marvellous than the temple built by Solomon. If so, this passage would be very close to Paulinus Nolanus' Carmen 27, which describes the Basilica in Nola and its frescoes, not to mention other Greek descriptions of churches and sacred buildings (generally speaking, when describing interiors of sacred buildings, poets treat them as microcosms in which ordinary time or ordinary modes of perception are surpassed, the past becoming eternally present through images and through tangible signs of empire).[52] However, despite some attempts at identifying the scenes depicted on the mosaics, it is safer to conclude that Corippus is not actually describing the mosaics, but that he chooses to pay homage to the emperor recalling his decree of 566/567 which prescribed the Creed of Chalcedon to be recited in every church.[53]

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50 N. M. Kay, Epigrams from the Anthologia Latina, Text, Translation and Commentary, London 2007, 364–375.

51 Av. Cameron, Notes on the Sophiae, the Sophianae, and the Harbour of Sophia, Byzantion 37 (1968), 11–20.

52 Webb, Aesthetics (above n. 7).

53 For further hints see C. O. Tommasi, Aspetti cletici e aretalogici nelle preghiere corippee, in: U. Criscuolo (ed.), Forme della cultura nella Tarda Antichità, I. Atti del VI Convegno dell'Associazione di Studi Tardoantichi, Napoli e S. Maria Capua Vetere, 29 settembre – 2 ottobre 2003 (= Koinonia 28/29 [2004/2005]), 217–244. Webb and James (above n. 14) deal with comparable examples such as church descriptions in Eusebius of Caesarea (early fourth century) or Nicholas Mesarites (early thirteenth century) and observe that these authors provide a simultaneous narrative and emotionalisation. Thanks to the fact that in some respects they describe things invisible to the physical eye, they

These passages as a whole offer a tangible demonstration of the sometimes ambiguous relationship between description and narration sketched out in all the literary theorizations of ekphrasis. Furthermore, reading the poem as a whole makes clear that descriptions are almost omnipresent, sometimes as such, sometimes intermingled with similes, and, finally, sometimes merging into the narrative passages. Though meant as a continuous narration, the poetic matter itself offers the opportunity to show some details in slow motion, thanks to a clever use of ekphrastic passages, often linked to similar devices like catalogues, enumerations, and similes. This kind of ekphrasis inserted in a larger context has often been understood by modern scholars as interventive, for it disrupts the narrative structure of the text, pauses or varies the pace, or provides a self-reflexive and metatextual reflection on the entire work.

Some interpreters viewed the link between simile and ekphrasis as being not syncretic but rather complementary, because both produce a break in the narrative by evoking a figure beyond it. Maurice Bowra has stated that similes create a special effect since they are taken from a context not closely related to that in which the action takes place. Therefore it makes us temporarily forget the main action in thinking of something else.[54]

I am now going to approach some ekphrastic sections in a proper sense. Descriptions of textiles are not unfamiliar to Latin poetry, from Catullus' celebrated coverlet in Carmen 64 depicting the story of Ariadne and Theseus, to late antique authors like Claudian and Sidonius, whose epithalamium for Polemius and Araneola echoes in different respects Ovid's description of the rivalry between Athena and Arachne as far as weaving technique is concerned.[55] Claudian, on the other hand, describes many precious textiles, which,

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are able to reach a realm of spirituality, stating explicitly what was implicit in the image of Byzantine viewer. Mesarites, in particular, appeals to sensible (αἰσθητοί) or intelligent (νοεροί) eyes (12, 1).

54 M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry, London 1952, 257. I derive the information from Kurman, Ecphrasis (above n. 6), 5; see also Kurman, 13: "Or, to put the matter in a slightly different way, ecphrases are dramas which, although conveyed by the written (or spoken) word, are *acted* (cf. Dante's *visibile parlare*) by the figures represented. Ecphrases can be regarded as scripts for drama, as scenarios; their radical of presentation – to borrow Northrop Frye's term – is the acted rather than the spoken or written or 'felt' word. Thus we can regard ecphrases in epic poetry as outcroppings of the dramatic impulse, as miniature dramas (whether historical, pastoral, lyrical, or scriptural) given scope within the larger frame of the epic poem and the smaller frame of the object on which they are enacted."

55 See the detailed edition by G. Ravenna, Le nozze di Polemio e Araneola. Sidonio Apollinare, Carmina XIV–XV, Bologna 1990, and, recently, G. Rosati, La strategia del ragno, ovvero la rivincita di Aracne. Fortuna tardo-antica (Sidonio Apollinare, Claudiano) di un mito ovidiano, Dictynna 1 (2004), 63–82 (retrieved on Feb 15 2010 from

as Christine Ratkowitsch has recently demonstrated, serve as model for the same kind of descriptions in medieval literature.[56] For the sake of brevity I will totally omit the descriptions of garments and warriors' armour in epic poems, which are also a fixed stock of the epic technique from Homer onwards, and which also recur in the Iohannis, notably in the catalogues of the two facing armies in book four. On the contrary, I think it is more fruitful to offer a closer examination of the two passages that present ekphraseis of clothes in the Laus Iustini and which, according to Cameron in her commentary (140), are sections of major iconographic interest.

The first one we are going to discuss is placed in book two, lines 100–127. The poet shows the robing and crowning of Justin – an account which is, as usual in this poem, not only merely documentary or narrative, but is endowed with a strong symbolic interpretation: the final raising of Justin on a shield – a ceremony known as 'lever du roi' that has its roots in ancient military customs and that would have lasted for many centuries – is compared with the rising of the sun disk.[57] Corippus offers a detailed description of the different kinds of clothes worn in succession by the new emperor:[58]

100 *Egreditur, tunicaque pios inducitur artus,*
aurata se veste tegens, qua candidus omnis
enituit lumenque dedit, fuscasque removit
aetherea nondum prolata luce tenebras.
Purpureo surae resonant fulgente cothurno,
105 *cruraque puniceis induxit regia vinclis,*
Parthica Campano dederant quae tergora fuco,
quis solet edomitos victor calcare tyrannos
Romanus princeps et barbara colla domare.
Sanguineis praelata rosis, laudata rubore,
110 *lectaque pro sacris, tactu mollissima, plantis.*
Augustis solis hoc cultu conpetit uti,
sub quorum est pedibus regum cruor: omne profecto

http://dictynna.revue.univ-lille3.fr/1Articles/1Articlespdf/rosati.pdf; cf. also http://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/bitstream/10077/904/1/11 rosati.pdf).

[56] C. Ratkowitsch, Die Gewebe in Claudians Epos De raptu Proserpinae – ein Bindeglied zwischen Antike und Mittelalter, in: C. Ratkowitsch (ed.), Die poetische Ekphrasis von Kunstwerken. Eine literarische Tradition der Großdichtung in Antike, Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit, Wien 2006, 17–42.

[57] E. H. Kantorowicz, Oriens Augusti – Lever du Roi, DOP 17 (1963), 117–177.

[58] As for lines 104–108 I am adopting S. Antès' reading (Corippe, Éloge de l'Empereur Justin II, texte établi et traduit par S. Antès, Paris 1981). Unless otherwise stated I quote Cameron's text and translation (above n. 49).

mysterium certa rerum ratione probatur.
Nobilibus gemmis et cocto lucidus auro
115 *balteus effulgens lumbos praecinxit eriles.*
Substrictoque sinu vestis divina pependit
poplite fusa tenus, pretioso candida limbo.
Caesareos umeros ardenti murice texit
circumfusa chlamys, rutilo quae ornata metallo
120 *principis exerta vincebat lumina dextra.*
Aurea iuncturas morsu praestrinxit obunco
fibula, et a summis gemmae nituere catenis,
gemmae, quas Getici felix victoria belli
praebuit atque favens dominis Ravenna revexit,
125 *quasque a Vandalica Belisarius attulit aula.*
Signa triumphorum, pie Iustiniane, tuorum
sospite Iustino mundumque regente manebunt.

This description perfectly matches the most celebrated iconographic representation of imperial clothes in the sixth century, the two mosaics representing Justinian, Theodora and a long series of male and female courtesans in the basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna.[59] As Averil Cameron observes, this is the official "Dienstkostüm" in which the emperor appears as the highest official of the empire. Justin is covered with the tunic, then with a robe adorned with jewels (which were reserved for the emperor only); he wears purple shoes, then he wears the *chlamys* and fastens it on the shoulder with a precious clasp. Besides the re-proposition of the theme of the imperial victory, which is a leitmotiv of the entire poem and is particularly fitting for an eulogy, the most striking feature in this account is the vivid contrast between two colours: Gold and purple are declined in minimal nuances (for example in repeating and varying words such as *auratus*, *candidus*, *effulgens*, *purpureus*, *puniceus*, *rubor*, *cruor*, *rutilus*), according to a predilection for synonyms, which is often attested to in Latin poetry and which was prescribed as rhetorical exercise. Corippus' ultimate goal is to stress the idea of light and brightness, which acts as a prelude to the simile of the rising sun. The imperial garments convey the suggestion that the emperor is like the sun and function as anticipation of the final, hyperbolic, simile.[60]

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[59] Parallels between these mosaics and Procopius have been underlined by I. Andreescu-Treadgold - W. Treadgold, Procopius and the Imperial Panels of S. Vitale, ABull 79 (1997), 708–723.

[60] Brightness as a topical motif in ekphrases is already underlined by Ravenna, L'ekphrasis poetica (above n. 6). Here, however, it assumes a deeper significance due to the strong

A similar description occurs in book one, lines 272 to 293, when Corippus describes the *sudarium* in which Justinian is enveloped before burial:

Nec minus imperii gratum patrem inclita consors
flebat, et humanam sortem pietate dolebat.
Exequiis adicit solito plus dona paternis,
275 *ireque contractas denso iubet agmine turbas.*
Attulit intextam pretioso murice vestem,
Iustinianorum series ubi tota laborum
neto auro insignita fuit gemmisque corusca.
Illic barbaricas flexa cervice phalanges,
280 *occisos reges subiectasque ordine gentes*
pictor acu tenui multa formaverat arte.
Fecerat et fulvum distare coloribus aurum,
omnis ut aspiciens ea corpora vera putaret.
Effigies auro, sanguis depingitur ostro.
285 *Ipsum autem in media victorem pinxerat aula*
effera Vandalici calcantem colla tyranni,
plaudentem Libyam fruges laurumque ferentem.
Addidit antiquam tendentem brachia Romam,
exerto et nudam gestantem pectore mammam,
290 *altricem imperii libertatisque parentem.*
Haec ideo fieri vivax Sapientia iussit,
ornatum ut propriis funus regale triumphis
Augustum in tumulum fatalis duceret hora.

Ekphrasis is encapsulated, as usual, in a narrative frame that outlines the strong personality of the new empress Sophia, who is characterized by the rare adjective *vivax* (291) as both energetic and imperious, for she orders a precious cloth to be spread on the corpse. As is clear from the final sentence of that passage, description serves once again as a means to pay homage to the deeds of the late emperor. In fact, the vestment depicts scenes of the imperial triumph over the Vandals, “so that” – Corippus concludes (292f.) – “the time of death might take to the imperial tomb a royal funeral procession adorned with his own triumph”. The portentous and impressive triumph of 534 is unanimously acknowledged as the last great Roman triumph, and we know from other sources, namely Procopius, that the roof of the Chalche depicted scenes from

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insistence on light and solar themes to create a sort of imperial theology: H. P. L’Orange, Studies on the Iconography of the Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World, Oslo 1953.

that triumphal procession, in order to celebrate Justinian's overthrow of the barbarians; John the Lydian also records the robe worn by the emperor for that occasion. As I suggested elsewhere, it is likely that Corippus emphasizes this victory not only because it had been the most durable success of Justinian's wars, but also for a sort of African pride, which emerges in many passages of this second poem.[61] Both Procopius and Corippus share descriptive details, which lead to suppose that there was probably a standard triumphal pose of the emperor treading on his enemies, the same one we also find in the famous Barberini ivory.[62] The scenes depicted on the vestment do not lack realism, according to a stereotype in ekphrastic literature: Justinian himself is represented at the court in the act of the *calcatio*, and a pathetic note is added by mentioning the blood of the dead enemies. This central scene is surrounded by the personifications of Africa and Rome, meaningfully addressed as the "old" Rome (288) and designated as "ancient parent of empire and liberty" (290; translation by Av. Cameron), perhaps with an echoing of Rutilius Namatianus' 'jeu de mots', *altricemque suam fertilis orbis alat*.[63] These figures are endowed with some standard attributes in the ethopoiiai of the Roman provinces, such as laurel branches or fruit bearers. It is worth remembering that Rome and Constantinople and the conquered barbarian tribes also appear on the base of Arcadius' column. In Corippus, the description of the provinces adds a high symbolic value and partly contrasts with the parallel scene of Justinian and the Vandals, which is, as we said, clearly intended as more realistic.

A final comment concerns the historical likelihood of the mantle described by Corippus: Averil Cameron had not found any reason to deny its existence, for example comparing this passage with the one about St. Sophia's altar cloth described by Paul the Silentiary. In addition, recent inquiries seem to offer further hints pointing in the same direction (even if it dates about two centuries and a half later, one can mention here the example of the lavishly embroidered funerary cloth of Charlemagne, which was of Byzantine manufacture).[64] Cases like Coptic figural textiles from late antique Egypt are, of course, well known, but it is worth remembering that the silk industry in the Byzantine empire received impetus under the reign of Justinian. Closer and thorough investigations into silk production in Byzantium like those by Anne Muthesius show not only

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[61] See my L'Africa tra Bizantini e Arabi. La prospettiva storico-letteraria, in: L. A. García Moreno - M.ª J. Viguera Molins (edd.), Del Nilo al Ebro. Estudios sobre las fuentes de la conquista islamica, Alcalá de Henares 2009, 93–115.

[62] On late antique ivory diptychs see now M. David (ed.), Eburnea Diptycha. I dittici d'avorio tra Antichità e Medioevo, Bari 2007.

[63] Rut. Nam. 1, 146.

[64] See Cameron (above n. 49), 140f.

that figural textiles were current among rich men or court dignitaries, but that the application of skilled moriculture and sericulture practices which allowed the production of high-quality silk yarn began only in the sixth century (even though some kind of silk is already attested to in classical Greece).[65] Information about silk production and trade as well as the original imperial monopoly, which subsequently developed into trade guilds, is largely provided by later documents, dating from the tenth and the eleventh centuries, but some details can also be supplied by earlier sources. The accounts by Procopius and, later on, Theophanes the Chronicler, though in many respects legendary and obscure – concerned as they are with monks who stole some silkworm eggs from the mysterious land of Serindia (probably to be located in the Sogdian or Oxus regions) – cast light on the process which led the Byzantine empire to domestic production of this material, thus no longer being dependent on importation. It had been probably an economic crisis which caused a fall in the supply of imported silk textiles in the fifties of the sixth century. A lesser known Chinese source, a chronicle written at the end of the sixth century and embracing the period from 386 to 556 AD, records a 'western' country, which has been identified as Syria, where the mulberry tree was cultivated and where "the inhabitants busy themselves with silkworms and fields":[66] This testimony can be easily compared with Procopius' account of domestic silk production in Beirut and Tyre, and can be furthermore confirmed from the earliest extant seal of a κομμερκιάριος (the imperial silk official), which belonged to Magnos the Syrian, who was administrator of the imperial estates at Antioch and whom in all likelihood Corippus praises at the beginning of book one. Furthermore, it was during the crucial second half of the sixth century that imperial legislation concerning the monopoly on dying and producing purple cloth or embroidering it with spun gold became more severe, not to mention the still in-force prohibitions against wearing purple clothes. Members of the imperial guilds (δημόσια σώματα) constituted a sort of 'aristocracy of labour': They lived and worked in

65 A. Muthesius, From Seed to Samite: Aspects of Byzantine Silk Production, TextileH 20 (1989), 135–149. Cf. also her fundamental monographs: Studies in Byzantine and Islamic Silk Weaving, London 1995; Studies in Silk in Byzantium, London 2004; Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving, London 2008.

66 O. Franke (ed.), Keng Tschi Tu. Ackerbau und Seidengewinnung in China, Hamburg 1913. I derive this information from Muthesius (above n. 65), 137 and 148. Cf. also ead., Essential Processes, Looms, and Technical Aspects of the Production of Silk Textiles, in: A. E. Laiou (ed.), The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, Washington 2002, 153–168 (retrieved on Feb 15 2010 from http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/EconHist/EHB11.pdf).

a building very close to the imperial palace and were even allowed to take part in formal court procession, where a special place was reserved to them.[67]

Historical verisimilitude and laudatory function blend together in another ekphrasis which, likewise, takes into account minor arts – namely that of the silver dinner-set described on the occasion of the banquet in book three, 111–129. Here the poet explicitly states the life-likeness of the figures engraved on plates and dishes, with scenes depicting, once again, the overthrow of the Vandal kingdom:

Aurea purpureis adponunt fercula mensis
pondere gemmarum gravia plus. Pictus ubique
Iustinianus erat. Dominis pictura placebat,
gaudebantque sui genitoris imagine visa
115 *felices geniti. Veras ibi credere posses*
sacras effigies, vivasque adstare putares.
Ars et materies animas simul addere possent,
addendi vitam nisi ius, natura, negares.
Ingeniis hominum post mortem vivere fama
120 *concessum est: clarum servat sua gloria nomen.*
Ipse triumphorum per singula vasa suorum
barbarico historiam fieri mandaverat auro,
tempore quo captis iniecit vincla tyrannis
Iustinianus ovans, quarto cum consule princeps
125 *alta triumphali tereret Capitolia pompa.*
Sacris principibus iucundae fabula mensae
de divo genitore fuit: tum nomen honorum
inter delicias et dulcia pocula summis
laudibus adtollunt, vivumque per ora fatentur.

After having praised the talented artist who reproduced figures as if they were real and alive, Corippus asserts that “the skill and the medium could add

[67] After R. S. Lopez, Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire, Speculum 20 (1945), 1–42, see the detailed inquiry of N. Oikonomidès, Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi, DOP 40 (1986), 33–53. General questions about Greek and Latin textiles are investigated in the miscellaneous volume by P. Walton Rogers - L. Bender Jorgensen - A. Rast-Eicher (edd.), The Roman Textile Industry and Its Influence. A Birthday tribute to John Peter Wild, Exeter 2001. See also: M. Rheinold, History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity, Bruxelles 1970; J. Napoli, Art purpuraire et législation à l’époque romaine, in: C. Alfaro - J. P. Wild - B. Costa (edd.), Purpureae vestes. Actas del I Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterranéo en época romana, Valencia 2004, 123–136.

souls, if you, nature, did not deny the right to add life" (117f.) – a standard motif in almost every ekphrastic piece (with the address to nature resembling a passage in Alcimus Avitus: carm. 1, 193). This description offers a pause in the narrative account of the banquet that follows Justin's crowning and Justinian's funeral. Since the description of the tableware closely follows a long list of wines served during the dinner, one might suppose that Corippus inserts such digressions in order to reproduce the relaxed atmosphere and the somewhat joyful slowness of the banquet. In fact, the section ends with a remark about the pleasant art of conversation at the court, where past and present seem to overlap by means of the dishes reproducing Justinian's triumph. This ekphrasis is therefore important insofar as it outlines a cliché of Byzantine art, nowadays much debated among scholars, namely the idea of 'realism' in art.

The closest parallel to this description is a series of nine silver plates representing episodes from the life of King David. These plates were found in Cyprus at the beginning of the twentieth century and date back to Heraclius' time.[68] The actual purpose of this set is disputed, since it has been suggested that they were either intended for the emperor's own use, or they are considered to be a commemorative gift to a high-ranking court official as a sort of bestowal, like the Missorium of Theodosius and related fourth-century vessels. In any case, scholars agree that these plates are meant to evoke some victories of Heraclius' reign, perhaps the overthrowing of the usurper Phocas or the victory against the Persians.

The metaphoric purport is evident, for the king and his deeds are associated with David. In some respects the plates can be paralleled to the metaphorical techniques of seventh-century Byzantine court poetry, especially that of George of Pisidia. Both the poet and the silversmith combine Christian and Classical traditions to celebrate Heraclius' victories over the Persians and the Avars. These vessels are meaningful, since they function as luxury items in a secular context, albeit they depict Biblical scenes. Some recent attempts at comparing the David Plates and the luxury illustrated manuscripts of Late Antiquity contributed to offering some important insights into the transformation of imperial iconography of the ceremonial scenes. Of course it is mere supposition that the plates described by Corippus (who does not put forward any consideration about the style) show the same intermingling of sacred and secular iconography. At first glance, I would be inclined to give a negative answer. However, his testimony is interesting insofar as it documents the same

[68] See R. E. Leader, The David Plates Revisited: Transforming the Secular in Early Byzantium, ABull 82 (2000), 407–427, to whom we are indebted for the following considerations.

kind of craftwork and states how the reign of Justin II was a crucial moment of transition for artistic tastes.

One of the most important ekphrases makes an appearance in the key scene of the Avar embassy in book three. It comes after a similarly long description of the court officers and guards falling into line and thus bears witness to the might of the empire. The whole scene is intended to express how powerful a place Byzantium holds in the world. All this is symbolized by the central role of the throne hall (194–207):[69]

Nobilitat medios sedes Augusta penates,
195 *quattuor eximiis circumvallata columnis,*
quas super ex solido praefulgens cymbius auro
in medio, simulans convexi climata caeli,
immortale caput soliumque sedentis obumbrat
ornatum gemmis, auroque ostroque superbum.
200 *Quattuor in sese nexos curvaverat arcus.*
Par laevam dextramque tenens Victoria partem
altius erectis pendebat in aëra pinnis,
laurigeram gestans dextra fulgente coronam.
Mira pavimentis stratisque tapetibus apta
205 *planities, longoque sedilia compta tenore*
clara superpositis ornabant atria velis.
Vela tegunt postes.

No wonder, then, that the description of the throne is openly compared to heaven, through the golden canopy that covers it and is represented on some ivory diptychs, which can probably be dated to the same period despite some chronological uncertainty. The idea that the earthly court imitates the heavenly one has a parallel in the opening section of Ovid's Metamorphoses, when the poet, before describing the council of the gods, explicitly compares Olympus to the Augustan palace – an akin laudatory passage which, strangely enough, has not yet been taken into account by modern interpreters of Corippus. Unlike his model, gifted with a slight touch of politeness and humour, Corippus is much more concerned with the solemn gravity and with his role of court poet, for he emphasizes the sacral aura emanating from the richly adorned hall and from the throne itself, whose *ciborium* is supported by four columns and winged Victories and whose closed curtains are meant to increase marvel and wonder.

[69] The deep ideological meaning of this passage has been outlined by A. Carile, The Holy Palace in Constantinople New Rome, Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage 2 (2008), retrieved from http://conservation-science.cib.unibo.it/article/view/504/488.

The theme of Victory was current during the reign of Justin II, and, for example, the same image appears on coins bearing on the obverse a globe surmounted by a Victory in the act of presenting a wreath. Once again the brightness of gold, purple and jewels is sketched out at greater length in order to anticipate the arrival of the emperor, a coming clearly depicted as an epiphany. Since the emperor is the earthly vicar of God, the celestial sovereign, his throne must resemble the vault of heaven and, what is more, the court itself is ruled by inscrutable and fixed laws, the same that rule the motion of the stars and the planets. The introductory, involved, simile aims at purporting this tenet and, in my opinion, can be read as a variation on the theme of astronomical ekphraseis attested elsewhere.[70] Furthermore, this is not only the earliest testimony of this kind of throne, but it is also the sole literary source at our disposal, whereas contrarily there is a rich harvest of artistic representations testifying also to some kind of stylistic evolution. Thus, there is no reason to suspect that the passage is fictitious, even though its symbolic significance is predominant. Indeed the way Corippus deals with the throne hall offers a confirmation of Ruth Webb's considerations, namely that for many Byzantine authors, ekphraseis were attempts to convey the spiritual truth residing in art.

A final observation concerns the intermingling of classical elements, properly derived from Roman and Christian customs and ceremonies. As Averil Cameron observed in a perceptive and fine paper thirty years ago, Corippus witnesses the liminal and transitional moment represented by the reign of Justin II, where the same tensions can be observed in visual arts as well.[71] In this period, though patently Christian and deeply rooted in Christian symbolism, it is possible to notice an attempt at revitalizing some Roman customs, not only the triumph, but the remarkable consular *adventus* and all its apparatus.

The last ekphrasis we are going to examine is the description of the *sella curulis* that is set in book four, 105–131. This comes after an equally long enumerative section in which the epic commonplace of cutting down a forest to get wood[72] is revived with a laudatory nuance – indeed wood is needed to timber the platform where Justin as consul will stand in the Hippodrome and bestow money and precious objects liberally on bystanders. Whereas the very donatives of the consul's largesse are hinted at quite vaguely, Corippus deals at length with the gestatorial chair, as he will do later with the members of the

[70] R. Hannah, Imaging the Cosmos: Astronomical Ekphraseis in Euripides, Ramus 31 (2002), 19–32.

[71] Cameron, Corippus' Poem (above n. 47).

[72] I discussed some evidence in: Lucan's Treatment of Celtic Religion: Ethnographic Interests and Ideologic Purposes, in: Ch. M. Ternes - H. Zinser (edd.), Dieux des Celtes, Luxembourg 2002 (Étud. Luxemb. d'hist. et de science des relig.), 181–219.

cortege. The traditional iconography of the consul's procession partly overlaps with that of the triumph:

105 *Convectant rutilum sportisque capacibus aurum*
accumulant, onerantque locos, quibus altior ipsa
sella triumphalis firma statione locata
iam fuerat, nondum claro tunc consule plena.
Huc vetus argentum formas speciesque novatum
110 *in varias, pressum titulis sculptumque figuris*
excelsis portant umeris, magnisque laborant
ponderibus, cistaeque graves funduntur in unum:
utraque materies in magnos surgit acervos.
Aedibus in magnis miro constructa paratu
115 *extabat sedes, auro gemmisque superba,*
lumen habens sine sole suum; illustratque propinquos
gemmarum natura locos, rerumque colores
mutans et Phoebi radios fulgentis obumbrans.
Miscentur teretes quadris, viridantibus albae.
120 *Chrysolithi murraeque micant, flammasque pyropos*
afflans et propria depellens luce tenebras.
Hanc prius in media, quam sol procederet, aula
auratis gradibus sacrisque tapetibus altam
conscendit princeps trabea succinctus avita,
125 *regalem ditans Augusta fronte coronam,*
censuramque pia servans gravitate resedit
Caesareos augens habitus ritusque Gabinos.
Cuius Hydaspeis radiabat purpura gemmis
vincens luce diem, plus maiestate sedentis
130 *lucidior meliorque sui. Primumque senatus*
pronus adoravit 'vincas, Iustine' perorans.

The *sella* is lavishly adorned with gems, jewels and precious stones of all kinds, square and oblong, white or dark: The inestimable worth of such an object is somewhat reflected in the precious literary texture, which incorporates borrowings from many previous authors, such as the almost omnipresent Virgil, or mannerist writers like Ovid and Claudian. In this passage, for example, Corippus owes to his Alexandrian predecessor the antiquarian flosculus concerning the solemn usage of arranging the *trabea* after the fashion of Gabii, that is with the left edge of the toga tucked and thrown over the shoulder, and then brought under the right arm in order to be knotted around the waist. We do not need to stress once again the importance of light imagery in

this context. Not only is brightness generally associated in Christian (but already in classical) ideology with the sun and therefore with heavenly protection which allows darkness and evil to be overwhelmed, but, from a literary-rhetorical perspective, it is almost unanimously present in ekphrastic descriptions as a device to increase their meaningfulness.

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In the previous considerations I took into account different kinds of ekphrastic sketches: Whereas in the brief poems and epigrams of the Latin Anthology ekphraseis can be regarded as simple divertissements or bravuras, Corippus' literary technique, especially in the 'Panegyric for the Emperor Justin II' (Laus Iustini), is much more complex and refined, for it intermingles descriptions with narrative sections, similes, aetiologies, and other rhetorical stock pieces.

Notwithstanding major differences, it is possible to compare the attitude towards ekphrasis displayed by Corippus in the Laus Iustini to that of Virgil, which has been extensively investigated by Alessandro Barchiesi (below n. 74). Barchiesi argues that the central role of ekphrases in Virgil's Aeneid is directly linked to the strong emphasis on the visual put forward by Augustan cultural policy, insofar as architecture and figurative art underwent significant improvement during that period.[73] Thus, "Virgil must have felt a pressure to define his art in competition with the claims of other artistic media" (272) and some of his ekphrastic passages display a high degree of sophisticated artistic self-consciousness. Yet, Virgil stresses the importance of the viewer in the construction of visual meaning and in the description of craftsmanship the poet manipulates words in response to images (this perhaps depends also on his well-known penchant for subjectivity, I suppose). The final result is a partial overlapping of these two semiotic systems – images and words – which reveal their communicative potential as well as their limits at the same time. In this sense the description 'freezes' the progress of the narrative, according to the unwritten rule of epic poems of alternance between static accounts and dynamic progress or, in Barchiesi's words, the tension between achieving closure and pursuing fullness of detail.[74]

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[73] On this subject see the well known essay by P. Zanker, Augustus und die Macht der Bilder, München 1987.

[74] I am referring to Barchiesi's insightful article Virgilian Narrative Ecphrasis, in: C. Martindale (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Virgil, Cambridge 1997, 271–281. As for the famous ekphrasis of the shield of Aeneas in book eight, Barchiesi states that this political function of ekphrasis is accompanied by a sense of reduction, of containment, of marginalisation. The shield of Aeneas functions as a substitute for an alternative epic laudatory poem written in tableaux and arranged in sequential order. In doing so, Virgil

I am suggesting that Corippus and his contemporaries, like Paul the Silentiary, were engaged in the same rivalry against the artistic and architectural renaissance of the city of Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. One has to reckon, however, with the profound socio-cultural differences between the age of Augustus and that of Justinian and with the changes literary aesthetic underwent in Late Antiquity. Nonetheless, it is also true that Corippus inserts ekphrases into his account having in mind the same aim of stilling the narrative progress.

At the same time, because of this new perspective, this poem, together with Greek contemporary production, can be considered as really a proto-Byzantine work, because it displays elements that will be further developed in later centuries. A constant pattern, furthermore, is how art is able to transform and domesticate nature. Both the epigrammatists and Corippus usually remark on the marvellous nature of art and aim at capturing it in words.

It is true that the sometimes naive curiosity of a provincial intellectual moved to the capital of the empire leads Corippus to go into raptures at each detail of the royal palace. Nonetheless, he has a rather interesting strategy, which resembles, while taking into account the different literary genre, the one pursued by Procopius in his work on Buildings. "In presenting detailed accounts of Justinian's building achievements in distant parts of the empire, Procopius was doing much the same as the orator who attempted to evoke the emperor's success in battle in a speech after the event. … Ekphraseis thus serve a dual purpose: they provide illustrations of the subject's qualities and at the same time serve as proof of the speaker's claims."[75] Thanks to ekphrasis

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exploits to the full the potential for figuration offered by ekphrastic descriptions, for the shield foreshadows Roman history and fills the gap between Aeneas' vicissitudes and the triumph of Augustus. The recent contribution by P. Dubois, Reading the Writing on the Wall, CPh 102 (2007), 45–56, deals with the same issue, even though I cannot share her views, for example when she speaks about the 'politics of ekphrasis', that is regarding ekphrases as a means of envision the destiny and the role of the hero in order to enclose the poem itself in a greater political discourse. According to Dubois, this should make possible observations about power and hegemony through the mediating presence of an observer internal to the description, one whose difference from the maker, from the narrator, allows to speak and even reawaken utopian thoughts about equality and justice in a time of empire. In the present case, for example, Aeneas is unaware of the fact that the shield he bears on his shoulders and that represents the future destiny of Rome embodies, ironically enough, the ultimate idea of Augustus receiving the homage of the subjected peoples of the empire.

[75] Webb, Ekphrasis, Amplification (above n. 16), 70. For Procopius' attitude towards ekphrasis see also G. Downey, Justinian as Builder, ABull 32 (1950), 262–266; J. Elsner, The Rhetoric of Buildings in the De Aedificiis of Procopius, in: E. James (ed.), Art and Text in Byzantium, Cambridge 2007, 33–57. As for the more general relation-

the image is 'fleshed' out and, at the same time, contextualized within contemporary society. In other words, ekphrasis generally states the proleptic force of the gazed-on object which is presented to the audience's eyes.

This brings me to the final consideration: As I tried to show, I think that connections with actual examples of plastic arts cannot be denied in any way. Therefore, I am inclined to disagree with scholars who state that real models do not lie behind ancient ekphrasis.[76] Obviously one must reckon with some kind of literary embellishment causing what Heffernan has rightly called "frictions of representation",[77] or with a kind of description varying according to the audience,[78] but I am not convinced that similar descriptions are all made up. Besides, it is in this respect that we can appreciate once more the laudatory function implied in these works: Both the ekphrastic epigrams and the longer passages in Corippus are clearly meant to celebrate the powerful African magnates, the Vandal king, or the emperor himself.[79] They possess a highly symbolical purport and can be considered at the same time as a reflection on the

ship between visual art and literature in Byzantine period see R. Cormack, Writing in Gold. Byzantine Society and its Icons, London 1985; H. Maguire, Art and Eloquence in Byzantium, Princeton 1981; M. Camille, Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy, ArtH 8 (1985), 26–49.

[76] See e. g. Bartsch and Elsner (above n. 6), iv: "… in the modern English corpus, by contrast with antiquity, ekphrasis constantly points to the real works of art … in antiquity … it seems the description need not have a real referent but rather an imagined one, evoked for the rhetorical effects of the moment." In spite of this and similar remarks see however the considerations put forward by F. Ghedini, Le Immagini di Filostrato minore: la prospettiva dello storico dell'arte, Roma 2004, 1, who, from the perspective of an archaeologist, challenges the ingrained idea that Philostratus (in this case Philostratus the younger) invents his descriptions: "attraverso tale attenta analisi è stato possibile verificare che molte delle soluzioni composive attestate nella galleria napoletana trovano riscontro nella tradizione ellenistico-romana che il retore mostra di conoscere a fondo per visione diretta e che cita a memoria con grande disinvoltura."

[77] See Heffernan, Museum of Words (above n. 6), iv.

[78] Webb and James (above n. 14) examine ekphrasis within the context of rhetoric in order to evaluate its own individual features and therefore understand the expectations of the original audience. According to these scholars such texts are to be understood as a living response to works of art and, what's more, one which is perceptual rather than objectively descriptive.

[79] Webb, Ekphrasis, Amplification (above n. 16), discussed the pivotal role played by ekphrasis in a complex work such as Procopius' De aedificiis, noticing how the specifically rhetorical use of ekphrasis, insofar as it is closely linked to panegyric, is the most potentially valuable for understanding Procopius' project. She also outlines the growing interest in Late Antiquity in the description of monuments, because they represent an attempt at fixing these monuments as signs. Therefore ekphrasis shares the same function with inscription, since it associates each building with Justinian's involvement in the mind of the listener.

nature of art and of aesthetic values. Likewise, mosaics or craftworks were intended to delight patrons, to commemorate their power and tastes, to be a reminder of their wealth and to increase their glory.[80]

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[80] It is worth quoting James' and Webb's (above n. 14) own words (pp. 11 and 9): "A painting was as vivid and significant as the story it told. This is what ekphrasis conveys …" and: "Words as well as pictures or statues can be means of perpetuating the memory of a deed."