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The Wine and the Cup: Syncretism and Subversion in the Late Antique Christian Cento

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The Wine and the Cup:
Syncretism and Subversion in the Late Antique Christian Virgilian Cento

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedication

To the middle and high school teachers who inspired my love of Classics:

Mrs. Laura Joyner

Mr. Dr. Patrick Bradley

ad astra per aspera

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My advisors/professors at Bard College who have continued to inspire me:

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David Ungvary

uinum enim continetur, uas continet.

“For the wine is the content, the cup the container.”

–Augustine, *Epistles* 190.5.19

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Introduction

This project will investigate literary, cultural, and religious connections and conflicts between the classical and late antique worlds by means of intertextual analysis. Using the tools of intertextual theory and a study of allusion in late antique Roman literature, I show that they reflect a shift of religious and cultural values, and the ways in which writers seek to either separate or syncretize Classicism and Christianity. Specifically, I will examine a Christian Virgilian cento of Late Antiquity called *De ecclesia*, composed by an unknown author.¹ The author of this 116 line poem,² like the approximately contemporary poet Proba, tells a Christian narrative using lines and fragments from Virgil's corpus. *De ecclesia* covers a number of scenes from the Christian canon, starting with a picture of a church and its congregation, the *ecclesia*. The narrative that follows is a biblically accurate retelling of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, a dark retelling of the Harrowing of Hell and Judgment Day, and ends with the congregation participating in the Eucharist. Biblical narrative aside, this author has a great appreciation for Virgil and the classical tradition according to the numerous allusions and intertextual connections that I will illuminate. In comparison to Proba, who raises the stakes of the Christian cento, and a poet like Ausonius who seems to diminish the importance of a cento, this poet approaches his work in a way that perhaps attempts to alleviate some tension between Christianity and classical tradition. My claim is that this poem represents an effort toward

¹ Scott McGill (2014) notes that some editors have suggested the author was named Mavortius. Due to a textual issue in the prose interjection near the end of the poem, they have replaced *abortio* with *Mavortio*. Although it solves the semantic issue of *abortio*, it is not a conjecture I will accept in my paper. The author will remain anonymous for all of my intents and purposes.

² See Appendix for full translation. All other Latin translations are also my own.

syncretism – the blending of religious and cultural systems – of Christianity with the Classics in Roman Late Antiquity.³

This cento has rarely been discussed among scholars, especially in English, the exception being Scott McGill. His 2014 article is interested only in the implications of what seems to be an interjection from the audience at the end of the poem. Therefore my analysis and interpretation of the complete *De ecclesia* is entirely new. In the Appendix I have included my translation of the cento, the first in any modern language. My argument will rely on an analysis of specific instances of classical repurposing in Late Antiquity, which I find in sifting through the intertext. But before I turn to the poem in detail it is important to talk about intertextuality and the contexts of Late Antiquity to situate my project and to explain how the Christian Virgilian cento becomes the ideal venue for such cultural synthesis.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality – traditionally defined as the occurrence of meaningful connections between two or more texts – predates literature as a cultural phenomenon; intertextual theory as a technique of textual analysis, though, is fairly new. It was only in 1966, in “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” that Julia Kristeva first used the term ‘intertextuality,’ arguing that every text contains traces of a previous one. In other words, she argued that no work is free from previous literary tradition, narrative, or cultural influence.⁴ Over the past half century, her term sparked a new age in textual criticism, popularizing the idea that no text is truly autonomous, that every text has a

³ Though the classical religious tradition is what we call “pagan,” I prefer not to rely completely on the term due to its somewhat slippery definition. Therefore I will primarily use “classicism” as a term for the literary, cultural, and religious systems of Antiquity.

⁴ Kristeva 1966 as quoted in Alfaro, María Jesús Martínez 1996, 268.

relationship with earlier work. These relationships can be phraseological, generic, narratological, or cultural.

However, soon after the academic community popularized the theory of intertextuality, Kristeva realized that the use of her term had expanded far beyond her intended definition. She eventually repudiated the term ‘intertextuality.’⁵ To quote Lauren Curtis,

The study of intertextuality has grown far beyond the bounds of Kristeva’s original definition (to the extent that she repudiated the term as others used it), and has come to refer more often to the diachronic study of literary ‘allusiveness’ rather than the synchronic study of semiotic realms in which Kristeva was engaged.⁶

Regardless of Kristeva’s original intention for the word, I will be using the term intertextuality (as the majority of scholars do) to refer to any meaningful interactions between texts for my study of syncretism and subversion in late antique Roman literature.

Making it Mean

Intertextual meaning exists independently from both what is generally referred to as the target text, or hypertext, and from the source text, or hypotext. But, its existence is only recognized by virtue of a convincing argument from the intertextual analyst. As Don Fowler has argued, the intertextual analyst must “*make it mean.*”⁷ Intertextuality may come in the form of a general narrative or generic connection, but in some cases may exist between single lines – even

⁵ In *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva offers the term “transposition” as a replacement.

⁶ Curtis 2017, 27. See also, Curtis’ p. 27, note 85: “Immediately after the passage quoted in the note above, Kristeva goes on to dismiss intertextuality in ‘le sens banal de “critique des sources”’ and proposes to replace it with a new term, ‘transposition’ (1974, 60).”

⁷ Fowler 1997, 20.

single words – of text, especially within the centonic poetic tradition. Although fraught as a term of analysis and with multiple claims to its meaning, intertextuality remains a useful and frequently applied concept for thinking about the dynamics of reference and reception in Roman literature. In my project, I use intertextual theory to explore the interaction of late antique texts with classical texts, and argue how the texts may alter the other’s interpretation.

Intertextuality vs. Allusion

Some scholars use “intertextuality” and “allusion” essentially interchangeably,⁸ but for “strict” intertextualists, allusion refers properly to a formal feature of literature added by the author.⁹ In 1997, Fowler expanded the discussion of allusion’s relationship to intertextuality. He describes one difference between allusion and intertextuality as allusion being an “additional extra” and intertextuality an “inescapable element.”¹⁰ Allusion as a formal feature is supposed to be recognized by the educated reader, but requires a system of knowledge for understanding the reference. When it is recognized, the author adds an intentional parallel that enhances the present narrative. Stephen Hinds says this of the author: “Alluding poets exert themselves to draw attention to the fact that they are alluding, and to reflect upon the nature of their allusive activity. Certain allusions are so constructed as to carry a kind of built-in commentary, a kind of reflexive annotation, which underlines or intensifies their demand to be interpreted as allusions.”¹¹ Allusion is, thus, a surface level reference while intertextuality requires digging to uncover.

⁸ See Kaufmann 2017.

⁹ Even this is not entirely settled. Neil Coffee (2013) points out that “modern theoretical studies have debated the ontological status of intertextual phenomena, particularly the extent to which they exist in the mind of the author, the text, or the mind of the reader.”

¹⁰ Fowler 1997, 15.

¹¹ Hinds 1998, 1.

Intertexts, which typically exist independently of the authors, must be untangled from the poem and given meaning by the textual analyst.

The Centonist: Master of Allusion and Intertextuality

While every writer participates to some extent in intertextuality, allusive reference, or both – due to the infinitely influential force of literary tradition –, the centonist is the ultimate intertextual author and master of allusion. Nearly every word of a cento is borrowed from a previous author,¹² and therefore a reference to a past entity. Scott McGill describes the centonist in the following way:

“A centonist is associated with the proliferation of textual meaning that comes with the free manipulation, decomposition, and recomposition of literature. For his authorial task is to re-author his sources, by rearranging the language of those pre existing texts to create his own work. [He is] a creature of intertextuality, his authorial identity is necessarily bound up with that of the predecessor whose work he absorbs and transforms.”¹³

Though the separate lines are (mostly) unoriginal, the centonist’s arrangement of the lines (and partial lines) makes a new narrative, one which both reveals and conceals its origins. While the individual line or fragment of a cento may be recognizable in the context of its original arrangement, when located within the cento’s narrative, the line may take on a completely different meaning, having been separated from its original text and applied in a brand new context. The meaning derived from this relationship can be subversive or harmonious in the new

¹² According to the centonist Ausonius’ definition of a proper cento, every word is borrowed, however this is not always the case as some authors must edit, replace, or add words to clarify their narrative.

¹³ McGill 2014, 16-17.

narrative of the cento. It is up to the analyst to argue where on a spectrum from completely congruent to entirely disruptive the intertext falls. Thus there is some room for subjectivity in the meaning of an intertextual link, making the analyst's task all the more difficult. When the author is no longer around to confirm or deny, an argument for or against a certain interpretation must have demonstrable textual evidence. A key contribution of my project is to show how *De ecclesia* relates to its Virgilian source texts. I seek to make this relationship between the texts meaningful through a close intertextual reading.

Proba's and Ausonius' Centos

Proba and Ausonius, two late antique poets who experimented in the Latin cento, provide two different, yet complementary models for conceptualizing the relationship between cento and source, paganism and Christianity. They were both Christian poets in the fourth century, who borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Georgics*. Faltonia Betitia Proba was born into a Roman aristocratic family and was married to a Roman prefect.¹⁴ She enjoyed status among the pagan elite, having access to money and a classical education. Even though she was a member of the upper class, it was not expected that a girl receive such an in-depth training as Proba had, making her work all the more rare and fascinating. As she studied the Classics as a youth, she apparently took particular pleasure in poetry, although none of her poems from her "pagan" years survive. As an adult, she passionately converted to Christianity. And after her conversion she began writing panegyric Christian poetry, leading to the creation of a Virgilian cento, her *magnum opus*. Proba presents her only surviving composition, *Cento Vergilianus de Laudibus Christi*, in very serious terms, in the proem explaining the immense importance of her work.

¹⁴ The identity of Proba the centonist is still debated as we have so little information on her personal life. For the different theories, see R.P.H. Green 1995.

She begins by addressing God himself: “all-mighty God, I pray, hear my sacred song / ... presently, God, take hold my mind, / I will tell (*loquar*) that Virgil sang (*cecinisse*) of the holy gifts of Christ.”¹⁵ Her vocabulary in these lines is deliberate. Although *loquar* is a very ordinary word generally meaning “speak,” “tell,” “utter,” in the context of a cento, Proba *makes* Virgil sing the Word of God, turning the classical idea of Virgil as poet-prophet (*vates*) to the idea that Virgil can be read as a prophet of Christianity. In fact, Proba uses *vatis* in line 12 of her proem. “Lay open for me secrets so that I Proba may relate all the prophets,”¹⁶ she asks God. *Vates* in this line is used to reference the prophets of Christianity, whose stories she as poet will tell. She does not directly claim the power of a prophet, but appropriates for her own narrative the prophetic-poetic authority that Virgil holds.

Virgil has no say in the rewriting of his work, either, because he is no longer living. Not only does Virgil have no say, but this reverses the normal intertextual reading where the target text’s meaning comes from the source. Her cento becomes both transformative and invisible to the source text. The centonist is able, by creating a different narrative out of the author’s original, to potentially alter the reader’s interpretation of the source text. Context is everything, and when a phrase is transposed from one context to another, its meaning changes to some degree. In the case of a Christian Virgilian cento, the narrative and cultural contexts are much different, sometimes forcing a line to disagree with its original context. For the reader, such disagreement might prompt a different perspective on the source text. One of Proba’s goals in her cento is to encourage a Christian interpretation of Virgil’s work. Virgil being dead gives Proba the liberty to

¹⁵ *deus omnipotens, sacrum, precor, accipe carmen, . . . praesens, deus, erige mentem; / Uergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi.* Proba, *Cento Vergilianus de Laudibus Christi* 9, 22-23.

¹⁶ *resera ... / arcana ut possim vatis Proba cuncta referre.* Proba, *Cento* 11, 12.

manipulate his words however she likes without his comment or objection. This is true of all late antique Virgilian centos.

By Late Antiquity, Virgil was already a relic of the classical world, and having been taught in schools all across the Roman Empire, his poetry was a common target for a late antique poet to emulate or manipulate. Proba further declares: “a greater task arises for me, / if at all antiquity is able to bear belief in such a work.”¹⁷ The first half of this line is taken from *Aeneid* 7.44, where Virgil is speaking in the first person, introducing his seventh book. The second is taken from *Aeneid* 10.792, another interjection made by Virgil himself during battle between the Trojans and Teucrians. In this new combined line, Proba directly assumes the voice and role of Virgil the poet by employing these two moments of authorial interjection. In her proem she intends to demand for herself the poetic as well as mantic authority given to Virgil, through his own words. Late antique centonists take advantage of the familiarity and command that classical literature has in the mind of their readers. Familiarity with the Classics was considered a status symbol and a mark of wealth. And an education in the Classics in Late Antiquity was not universal, so those without that intellectual access were frequently excluded from the literary tradition, therefore generally excluded from the cento.

The writer and poet Ausonius, who lived around the same time as Proba and also converted to Christianity as an adult (although not very excitedly, some infer¹⁸), experimented with the Virgilian cento, as well. In his preamble to his *Cento Nuptialis*, Ausonius takes a much different stance than Proba concerning the creation and purpose of a cento poem. He seems to say that he takes no great pride in the work, beginning, “Read through also, if it is worth it, this

¹⁷ *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / si qua fidem tanto est operi latura uetustas*. Proba, *Cento* 45-46.

¹⁸ *OCD*⁴ s.v. “Ausonius, Decimus Magnus.”

frivolous and worthless little work, which neither labor fashioned nor care refined, without a lick of cleverness and ripeness of pause, ... [a work] which you are more likely to laugh at than to praise.”¹⁹ To most readers, his claims are manifestly untrue and should be read as a formal feature and, indeed, simply ornamental. His humble denial of ability is an example of the Latin tradition of *recusatio* – recusing oneself from a subject, often used as a façade of humility. In contrast to Proba, Ausonius describes the creation of a cento in ludic terms. He goes so far as to compare it to the ostomachion, an ancient puzzle game. “You might say it is similar to a puzzle, which the Greeks call ostomachion,” Ausonius writes, “There are little pieces of bone: a total of fourteen constitute geometrical figures.”²⁰ He uses this metaphor of using something old, once living, and arranging it into something new and living, to characterize his creation while emphasizing that it is no more than a game. Even the modern scholar R.P.H. Green calls the cento “a frivolous genre.”²¹ I would argue resolutely against them. There is immense value in the study of cultural dynamics that can be drawn out of a cento. Through allusion and intertextuality, a cento can be read as a device of historical and traditional comparison.

Philip Hardie explains a different but now popular metaphor for the cento: the mosaic metaphor. “The mosaic analogy is often pinned to features of compositional technique and intertextual practice. A mosaic is a visual composition made out of little pieces, and late antique poetry is often characterized as put together out of bits, individual episodes loosely strung

¹⁹ *Perlege hoc etiam, si operae est, frivolum et nullius pretii opusculum, quod nec labor excudit nec cura limavit, sine ingenii acumine et morae maturitate. ... quod ridere magis quam laudare possis.* Ausonius, *Cento Nuptialis* Preface.

²⁰ *simile ut dicas ludicro, quod Graeci ostomachion vocavere. ossicula ea sunt: ad summam quattuordecim figuras geometricas habent.* Ausonius, *Cent. nupt.* Players attempt to arrange the fourteen pieces of bone into different objects, animals, and other recognizable forms. See also Archimedes’ book *Ostomachion* (or *Ioculus Archimedi* in Latin), a mathematical analysis of the geometrical puzzle game.

²¹ R.P.H. Green 1995.

together,” he writes.²² However the mosaic metaphor lacks a couple key aspects of a cento. First, a mosaic is generally composed of smashed up bits of blank tile or glass, not a previous artistic composition. By its very nature the cento is made up of an existing piece of literature, not plain phrases inserted from any old pieces of writing. Furthermore, the creation of a cento does not actually destroy the original, we still know what it looks like, it is not “blank.” If this were somehow the case, the study of intertextuality would be impossible. That is why Ausonius’ ostromachion metaphor is superior. He is specifying that the game pieces, which once made up the skeleton of something living, are simply rearranged into something new yet recognizable. Still, we are able to know what a skeleton looks like before being taken apart, just as we are able to know what Virgil’s work looks like before being centonized.

In the balance between allusion and intertextuality, Ausonius’ self-conscious appropriation evokes the similarly self-conscious poetics of allusion. In fact, the term “allusion” is derived from the Latin word *alludere*, originally having the meaning “to play, joke.” Allusion in literature is essentially an intellectual memory game;²³ it requires a system of knowledge – in this case, knowledge of the classical tradition – for its full effect. When using allusion, the author depends on the reader to have the required knowledge to understand it. For Ausonius, this is derived from an education in the Classics, a background every acquaintance of his would possess and have access to. His allusions were by no means obscure to the early Christian reader. Although a Christian convert himself, his poem is decidedly centered around paganism, describing a wedding full of pagan imagery and pagan gods. The poem ends with an erotic

²² Hardie 2019, 226.

²³ Like allusion – as it pertains to a required system of knowledge – the cento for Ausonius is a task of memory: *solae memoriae negotium*. Ausonius, *Cent. nupt.* Preface.

description of the newlywed's consummation. In addition to his trivial approach to the cento, the content of work is much different than Proba's. His narrative adheres to the classical tradition by including classical subjects, further claiming it to be nothing new, nothing serious.

The contrast between the two attitudes of the poets is extraordinary. While Proba claims to take her Christian duty²⁴ extremely seriously – attempting to cause Virgil “to sing” a Christian narrative – Ausonius posits that the reader may even find his cento humorous. Whether as a genuine concern or as a performance of disinterest, he feels the need to make a point of his nonchalant attitude toward the “game” of cento writing. This points to another key difference: the extent to which each centonist emphasizes the poem's own intertextual and allusive framework. By describing his cento as the metaphor of a game, Ausonius implies that the reader should be able to see and recognize the pieces by which the poem is made up. Proba's claim to make Virgil “sing” a new song suggests a seamless, undetectable blurring of her voice with Virgil's. Proba's overt allusion to Virgil and the classical tradition is, likewise, brief, occupying just a few lines in her proem. Ausonius' cento, by contrast, is explicitly pagan, with allusion to pagan gods and tradition from beginning to end.²⁵ Not only then does his poem revel in its appropriation of Virgilian lines, but it puts them to recognizably pagan uses. Though the two poets' formal stance towards allusion in their proems diverge significantly, they have much less control over textual interactions, that is, the intertextuality. Proba is able to limit her direct or formal references to the classical tradition, but with every line borrowed from a classical text, intertextual engagement is, as I mentioned above, unavoidable: by their very nature, the lines of a

²⁴ *maior rerum*, Proba, *Cento* 45.

²⁵ *dona laboratae Cereris*, 16. *Veneris iustissima cura*, 33. *cape Maeonii carchesia Bacchi*, 72. Ausonius, *Cent. nupt.*

cento can – and I would argue should – be understood by reference to their origin. Intertextual connections are nearly limitless, just as is the nature of the cento. Proba's and Ausonius' models for cento writing, which in many ways track the theories of allusion and intertextuality, represent in one sense the two poles of continuum. And they will be important for situating *De ecclesia* in its cultural and literary relationship with its source text.

Late Antique Critics of the Classics

A second important context for *De ecclesia* that Proba and Ausonius raise is the relationship between Christian ideology and the classical tradition. When Christianity had taken hold of the Roman empire in Late Antiquity – Christian practice being officially allowed in 313 with Constantine's Edict of Milan – there came a movement among some Christians to distance their new culture from the teachings of the classical world, including a staunch disapproval of the classical literary tradition being taught in schools.²⁶ The Christian writers and priests Augustine and Jerome – both eventually canonized by the Church²⁷ – wrote extensively against classical literature in favor of full devotion to Christ. In *Epistles* 22.29, Jerome preaches a clear denunciation of classical figures: “Do not wish to appear over-eloquent or play (*ludere*) with lyric songs in witty meter. ... What concord is there between Christ and Belial? What does Horace have to do with the Psalter? Virgil with the Gospels? Cicero with the apostles?”²⁸ For Jerome, Christian learning is incongruous with the study of classical writers and poets. On this view, Proba takes a middle ground or even offers a response: she manipulates classical poetry for

²⁶ R.P.H. Green suggests that Proba's Virgilian cento was in part an attempt to keep Christian teachers in Roman schools saying, “her text (as implied in the prologue) is a Vergil without gods, and so a Vergil no longer vulnerable to Christian criticism.” 1995, 558.

²⁷ St. Augustine in 1303 by Pope Boniface VIII; St. Jerome in 1767 by Pope Clement XIII.

²⁸ *nec tibi diserta multum velis videri aut lyricis festiva carminibus metro ludere. ... qui consensus Christo et Belial? 'quid facit cum psalterio Horatius? cum evangeliiis Maro? cum apostolo Cicero?'* Jerome, *Epistles* 22.29.

her own narrative, while still seeming to appreciate and honor its literary value, though not explicitly.

Yet, for all Jerome's rhetoric, cutting the cord between the classical and the Christian was not so easy. Their Roman education had thoroughly engrained the Classics in Jerome and Augustine; and reconciling their new beliefs was a serious hurdle to be jumped. Later in *Epistle* 22, Jerome reveals his struggle to cut ties with classical learning in favor of the teachings of Christ. He writes:

I could not abstain from the library which with great care and labor I had got together at Rome. And so, miserable I was, I would abstain, only to read Cicero afterwards. I would spend many nights in vigil, I would shed bitter tears called from my inmost heart by the remembrance of my past sins; and then Plautus would be taken up again in my hands.²⁹

As a result of his internal conflict, Jerome took an active role in removing pagan vocabulary from Christian texts. At several moments in his Latin translation of the Bible, which became known as the Latin Vulgate Bible, he decided to remove "Hades" and put "inferno" in its place. In Luke 10:15, for example, the original Greek Bible reads ἕως τοῦ ᾗδου, a phrase which Jerome replaces with *ad infernum*.³⁰ Perhaps on account of his guilt regarding his attraction to classical

²⁹ *bybliothea, quam mihi Romae summo studio ac labore confeceram, carere non poteram. itaque miser ego lecturus Tullium ieiunabam; post noctium crebras vigilias, post lacrimas, quas mihi praeteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manibus.* Jerome, *Ep.* 22.30.

³⁰ "Hades" becomes "inferno" in Matthew 11:23; Matthew 16:18, Luke 10:15, Luke 16:23, Acts 2:27, Revelation 1:18, Revelation 6:8, and Revelation 20:13-14.

studies, Jerome seemed to take it upon himself to distance Christian reading from pagan terminology.

Augustine describes a very similar predicament to Jerome's in *Confessions* 1.13: "Thus I was sinning as a boy when I gave priority to that useless trivia (*inania*) over these more practical skills, ... while most delectable of all was that vain parade—the wooden horse full of soldiers, and the burning of Troy, and the shade of Creusa herself."³¹ Just as Jerome, Augustine used to delight in reading and studying classical authors. Retrospectively though, Augustine considers it a moral failing for a Christian to indulge in such stories. Later in life he comes to detest classical pedagogy in Late Antiquity, loathing the "vain" topics of the classical curriculum he was forced into as a boy.³² From their letters and confessions on Christian virtues, it seems that for both Jerome and Augustine the reconciliation of classical thought and literature with their Christian faith was a dilemma perhaps impossible to solve.

This diversity of late antique Christian attitudes toward the classical tradition is indicative of a cultural tension that arose as Christianity began to replace the pagan dominion over the Roman Empire. On one hand, Ausonius seemed to enjoy the Classics and had no problem engaging with it. In the preface to his *Cento Nuptialis*, he feigned indifference toward the significance of the Virgilian cento in describing his work as trivial and engaged heavily in pagan themes. Proba, a devout Christian, seemed to respect Virgil the poet-prophet but forced his words into a Biblical narrative. In contrast to Ausonius' playful approach, Proba took the composition of a Christian cento seriously. Then, there are other prominent Christian writers in Late

³¹ *Peccabam ergo puer cum illa inania istis utilioribus amore praeponerem, vel potius ista oderam, illa amabam et dulcissimum spectaculum vanitatis, equus ligneus plenus armatis et Troiae incendium atque ipsius umbra Creusae.* Augustine, *Confessions* 1.13.

³² *vana discerem.* Augustine, *Conf.* 1.15.

Antiquity, such as Jerome and Augustine, who dismissed the old tradition and urged renouncement in order to be fully devoted to Christ. But even the most zealous of Christian converts recognized the struggle to cut ties with tradition, as admitted in Jerome's *Letters* and Augustine's *Confessions*, which are just two examples out of the many letters and treatises on Christianity produced in Late Antiquity.

The study of classical-Christian intertextuality in Late Antiquity exemplifies the cultural shifts in Rome caused by the rise of Christianity. The repurposing of the classical literary tradition appears most clearly in the Christian cento: a repurposing of the language and narratives that define Roman pagan culture. Supportive or subversive, formal or unintentional, intertextual connections are nearly limitless in the late antique Christian cento. The matter at hand, however, is to *make it mean*.

Chapter 1: *De ecclesia*, Christian and Classical Narratives

This chapter seeks to illustrate how *De ecclesia*, by nature of its centonic form, re-uses narrative and poetic techniques from classical materials for its Christian narrative. The poem engages in narrative intertextuality from which we can draw a multiplicity of meanings. What is revealed are the possibilities of this cento's purpose in syncretization or subversion.

Authorial Intention

One thing we are afforded in Proba's and Ausonius' centos that we are not in *De ecclesia* is a proem. The author does not reveal himself (at first) or state his intentions in writing this Christian cento. The poem launches straight into a scene of a church (*ecclesia*) and congregation (also *ecclesia*). Although the actual word *ecclesia* does not appear anywhere in Virgil, this author employs plenty of vocabulary chosen from passages describing pagan rituals and prayers. The line between Christian and pagan is clearly blurred. Some may take the pagan allusion and intertext as inharmonious, but I propose that it is more likely that the author, aware of the cultural and religious tension, was striving for some measure of Christian-pagan syncretism in obviously repurposing such ritual vocabulary. This cento may try to offer a kind of solution to the religious conflict that Proba seemed to detest. While the cento's subjects and narratives are strictly Christian (save for the last six lines, which I will discuss shortly), inferring from the many classical pagan allusions, it is not as serious or Christianizing as Proba's cento. But, without a proem it is impossible to know for sure the intentions of this author. This examination will bring to light the possible intention of the author, to be specific, his attempt to resolve some religious contention in Late Antiquity. To begin, I will start with the end.

De ecclesia's Centonic Coda

Cutting off the Christian narrative after line 110, there comes an interruption from the audience: “A second Virgil!”³³ The following is the author’s response in a short self revealing second cento:

Do not, I beg, do not force me into such a fight!

For he will always be a god to me, my teacher.

Indeed I remember – for I am not ignorant of earlier misfortunes:

a shepherd once wished to surpass beautiful Apollo in singing

and calling upon the gods for a contest in song,

and limbs beaten by the god he hung from a leafy branch.³⁴

This sudden authorial statement demands further investigation. What follows is an in-depth exploration of the implications of this centonic appendage.

Previous Scholarship: “From *Maro Iunior* to Marsyas: Ancient Perspectives on a Virgilian Cento”

To orient ourselves, let us look at previous scholarship on this interesting authorial response to “*Maro Iunior!*” In 2014, Scott McGill’s article “From *Maro Iunior* to Marsyas: Ancient Perspectives on a Virgilian Cento” reviews authorial identity, form, and content in *De ecclesia*. To my knowledge, it is the only published discussion of *De ecclesia* in English. However, he only considers the ending: the exclamation of “*Maro iunior!*” and the six line

³³ *clamaretur “Maro iunior!” De ecclesia.*

³⁴ *‘Ne quaeso, ne me ad talis inpellite pugnas! / Namque erit ille mihi semper deus, ille magister. / Nam memini – neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum / formosum pastor Phoebum superare canendo / dum cupit et cantu uocat in certamina diuos, / membra deo uictus ramo frondente pependit.’ De eccl. 111-116.*

response. McGill does not comment on the author's Christian-pagan relationship, an aspect I believe to be crucial to the understanding of the poem. Though he does dismiss the first 110 lines, McGill provides us with helpful conjecture on the identity of the poet and the authorship of the last six lines. He suggests that the six concluding lines, a response to an audience member's shout, "*Maro iunior!*," may not have been composed by the same author of the first 110. He claims that "a basis for suspicion is that the cento technique in the six-line piece is more refined" than the previous section.³⁵ This is one reason McGill declines to consider the poem's connection to Christianity. Although in a footnote to his statement denying the connection between the Christian and pagan narratives, McGill concedes: "Christianity ... was of course in no way shut off from the currents of classical/pagan culture. Divisions were upheld in some cultural and rhetorical settings, but not in others; and the centonist could have supposed that his recitation was a place where switching from a Christian narrative to a classical myth would be tolerated."³⁶ This scenario is the one I prefer to accept, and one that my analysis of the poem will show is essential for understanding not only *De ecclesia* itself but also the relationship between the two parts of the poem.

For my intents and purposes in this study, the last six lines are in fact connected to the first 110. The poem's sudden shift in narrative and author's self-conscious reveal is a moment of such great contrast that the cultural implications must be acknowledged. While he does not consider this in his analysis, McGill makes excellent points on the author's appropriation of subordination to Virgil. He writes,

³⁵ McGill 2014, 18.

³⁶ McGill 2014, 18 n.11.

By his actions, the centonist shows that Virgil's canonicity was an invitation and a spur to creative reuse. Absolute dependence on Virgilian language coexists with bold alternation: by giving Virgil's lines new semantic functions through how he rearranges them, the centonist creates a work that unites parasitism and independence, repetition and defamiliarization.³⁷

McGill makes very clear the poet's objective in appropriating and emulating Virgil, that is to take advantage of Virgil's "canonicity and cultural authority"³⁸ while at the same time submitting to him by rejecting the competitive title of "second Virgil."

Recusatio

Something which McGill does also does not explore in his discussion of the centonist's respect for Virgil is that the response to "*Maro iunior!*" serves as a *recusatio* as well. The author is explicitly denying that he is at all equal in talent to Virgil, and that claiming to be would be similar to challenging a god. "Do not, I beg, do not force me into such a fight!" our centonist exclaims, "for he will always be a god to me, my teacher."³⁹ Furthermore, *recusatio* is a staple of classical literature employed by great poets of Antiquity, from Horace to Ovid to Propertius to Callimachus and beyond. Even Ausonius, as I mentioned before, uses *recusatio* as a formal feature in his introduction to his *Cento Nuptialis*. Though McGill does not mention it, the authorial denial that the author expresses is programmatic enough to be compelling as a formal feature – *recusatio* – in this cento. Overall, I agree with McGill's argument and appreciate his

³⁷ McGill 2014, 26.

³⁸ McGill 2014, 29.

³⁹ *Ne quaeso, ne me ad talis inpellite pugnas! / Namque erit ille mihi semper deus, ille magister. De eccl.* 111-112.

contributions to the understanding of *De ecclesia*. However, he fails to analyze some essential pieces of the cento; these, with original analysis, I hope to illuminate myself.

Sphragis

In addition, the author's *recusatio* prompted by "*Maro iunior!*" is an authorial "reveal" known in classical poetry as *sphragis*. The Oxford Classical Dictionary defines this term as "a motif in which an author names or otherwise identifies himself or herself, especially at the beginning or end of a poem or collection of poems."⁴⁰ Proba's and Ausonius' *sphragides* come at the beginning of their centos. Their self-revealing prefaces act as a cypher to "unseal" the poem that follows. Ausonius' *sphragis*, as previously discussed, includes his *recusatio* as well as a layout of rules for the creation of a cento. Proba's *sphragis* declares her purpose – to Christianize Virgil – and the importance of the task. *De ecclesia* has no such preamble. Rather, the *sphragis* comes at the end of the poem as a sort of poetic coda. Therefore we must begin at the end in order to position ourselves within this poem. The coda asks us to reconsider the relationship between Christianity and Classicism, and it invites us to re-evaluate what we have already read in a new light.

Since we have no proem – and there is no evidence to suggest there ever was one – this centonist reveals himself perhaps unwillingly, being forced to respond to a comment, or rather anticipated critical appraisals, after the main Christian narrative of *De ecclesia* is finished. The poet, writing now in the first person, likens calling himself a "second Virgil" to the myth of Marsyas, who, after challenging the god Apollo in a musical contest, is flayed and hanged on a tree. The author considers the claim that he is near to Virgil in talent is inherently antagonistic.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Roberts 2016.

⁴¹ *Ne me ad talis inpellite pugnas! De eccl.* 111.

McGill writes, “the poet shows himself to be aware of one model of centonic authorship, one defined by aggressive competition.”⁴² Instead of engaging in competition, the author takes a reconciliatory approach. Indeed the Virgilian hypotext of line 111⁴³ is from a speech delivered by the Latin Venulus who urges his people not into war with the Trojans, instead into harmony. By intertextual association with this Virgilian speech this centonist urges reconciliation between Christian belief and non-Christian classical tradition.

The centonist is adamant that he does not engage in competition by trying to outdo Virgil, for Virgil is still his “god and master.”⁴⁴ This statement is interesting in consideration with lines three, four, and five of the cento, which describe the Christian God as the “ruler of high Olympus,” and, “omnipotent God, who rules over the matters of men and gods with eternal power.”⁴⁵ The author – if we accept that he is the same who wrote the *sphragis* – who in these lines proclaims God’s supremacy over men as well as gods, may, in some ways, contradict himself in declaring Virgil his god and master as well, in line 112. McGill posits that a late antique audience “would be able to distinguish between the literary divinity Virgil and the Christian God.”⁴⁶ Still, there is a disconnect between the praises of the first and second centos which put the two concepts into relief.

These conflicting statements, positioned at opposite ends of *De ecclesia*, might hint at the performative nature of this cento. The author generally adheres to the programmatics of a Christianizing cento, following the likes of Proba, in the narrative of lines one through 110. But a

⁴² McGill 2014, 25.

⁴³ *Aen.* 11.278.

⁴⁴ *deus, ille magister, De eccl.* 112.

⁴⁵ *superi regnator Olympi, / deus omnipotens, qui res hominumque deumque / aeternis regit imperiis. De eccl.* 2-5.

⁴⁶ McGill 2014, 18 n.11.

complicating feature of this poem is the absence of a Proba or Ausonius style authorial statement, rendering the centonist's true attitude toward Christianity unknown. The *sphragis* only gives a glimpse of the author's authorial identity, but a glimpse nonetheless. It is reasonably inferred from the tone of the *sphragis* that he is not concerned with totally Christianizing Virgil like Proba is.

Considering the break between the Christian cento and the *sphragis*, as well as the drastic topical shift, we may take the first 110 lines as cento one, and the *sphragis* as cento two, but both within *De ecclesia*, and should be considered to have the same author. The first cento in this poem, the Christian narrative up to line 110, is a formal, third person retelling of Biblical subjects. The second, the poem's coda, is a first person response concluded by a comparison to a pagan myth. On the spectrum of Proba to Ausonius, *De ecclesia* occupies both ends. It includes both a serious Christian narrative, similar to Proba's cento, and a pagan story, similar to Ausonius' *Cento Nuptialis*. Christian and non-Christian come into sharp contrast with the sudden switch of content and context in the second cento. But the centonic form stays the same. Speaking again in terms of Proba and Ausonius, the narrative content is different, while the form stays the same. Both centos in *De ecclesia*, operate within the "rules" of the cento. The complicated relationship between form and content is presented in stark juxtaposition.

The Myth of Marsyas and Apollo

The six centonic lines that conclude *De ecclesia* allude directly to a classical pagan myth. The story of Marsyas and Apollo, which warns mortals against arrogantly entering contest with the gods, is summarized in the last lines of the cento.⁴⁷ The author uses the story as a parable for

⁴⁷ The myth of Marsyas, however, is not Virgilian, but in fact most known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.382-400. Also mentioned in *Histories* 7.26.3, Herodotus says Marsyas' skin was on display in Phrygia.

his possible authorial identity. The mortal challenging a god trope is found in multiple myths and classical literature, a famous example being Arachne's challenge of Athena. Of course, as all the stories go, the gods destroy their mortal opponent, often out of jealousy. Two more of these stories are actually hidden in the hypotext of the centonist's *sphragis*, both of which point to the Classical world as a model for the poet's restraint. After he declares Virgil as his god and his master, he writes:

Indeed I remember – for I am not ignorant of earlier misfortunes:
 a shepherd⁴⁸ once wished to surpass beautiful Apollo in singing
 and calling upon the gods for a contest in song,
 and limbs beaten by the god he hung from a leafy branch.⁴⁹

Line 114, “to surpass Phoebus in singing,”⁵⁰ is copied from *Eclogues* 5.9, a bit of dialogue between two shepherds, Menalcas and Mopsus. They wonder if Amyntas, a talented reed player in their region, could rival Apollo in music. “What if he should challenge Phoebus to surpass him in singing?” says Mopsus.⁵¹ But both men know that such a rivalry would end in ruin for Amyntas, and since they know that no man can ever get the best of a god, they dismiss the notion. *Eclogues* 5 leaves the result of such a challenge unexpressed but assumed, whereas *De ecclesia* is more explicit of the challenger's fate at the conclusion of the cento. Next, line 115, “and calling upon the gods for a contest in song,”⁵² is from *Aeneid* 6.172, which recalls the tragedy of Misenus, a talented horn-blower who challenges the sea god Triton to a musical

⁴⁸ i.e. Marsyas.

⁴⁹ *Nam memini – neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum / formosum pastor Phoebum superare canendo / dum cupit et cantu uocat in certamina diuos, / membra deo uictus ramo frondente pendit. De eccl. 113-116.*

⁵⁰ *Phoebum superare canendo. De eccl. 14.*

⁵¹ *Quid si idem certet Phoebum superare canendo? Ecl. 5.9.*

⁵² *et cantu uocat in certamina diuos. De eccl. 115.*

competition, which, of course, ends in a brutal death. “And with a blast of his horn he calls the gods to contest, only envious Triton, if it is worth it to believe, plunged the man into the frothy waves among the rocks,”⁵³ writes Virgil. Illustrated in countless classical myths, nothing good comes from arrogant mortals and jealous gods. The centonist uses these many layers of intertextual narratives and additional mythical allusions to formally attach himself to the Classics with abounding emphasis.

Marsyas, the Author, Jesus, and Judas

Beyond the significant content change that defines the *sphragis*, when read with *De ecclesia*'s Christian narrative, the myth reveals Biblical parallels that possibly uncover more about the centonist's authorial identity, as well as the complicated poetics of a cento. The flaying and hanging of Marsyas counts the third mention of death related to hanging from a tree or beam in *De ecclesia*. First in the order of the poem, Jesus is “thrust against the trunk of a tree,”⁵⁴ the tree, of course, being the cross he will die on. Later, at line 73, Judas “ties a knot of horrid death to a high beam,”⁵⁵ a reference to the mode of his suicide. Then in the coda, Marsyas “hung from a leafy branch.”⁵⁶ The modes of death are essentially the same (though it may be presumed that Marsyas was already dead at the time of his hanging). The similarities between the two narratives contained within one poem cannot be ignored and must be linked.

Also worth considering is the role of the executioners in these scenarios. One is hung by a god, another by a mortal authority, and one by his own hand. The range of instigators

⁵³ *et cantu uocat in certamina duos, / aumulus exceptum Triton, si credere dignum est, / inter saxa uirum spumosa immerserat unda. Aen. 6.172-174.*

⁵⁴ *arboris obnixus trunco, De eccl. 40.*

⁵⁵ *nodum informis leti trabe nectit ab alta. De eccl. 73.*

⁵⁶ *ramo frondente pependit. De eccl. 116.*

represents a spectrum of justified or shameful reasons for death. Jesus' crucifixion is undeserved and he dies a martyr at the command of mortal evil. Judas' death, though it may seem deserved, by taking his own life, is a shameful and cowardly one. Then Marsyas' death, by the force of a god, is seen as justified, a result of his mortal audacity. These three thematically similar narratives all in conjunction amplify the others' weight. The centonist seems to draw a link between classical hanging stories and Biblical hangings, creating a synthesis that confuses the line between what is pagan and what is Christian. He seems to make the point that the two traditions share an inextricable bond. Furthermore, he is associating himself, as an author, with these fates, and actively participating in the cento.

So, when the centonist is comparing himself to Marsyas, he may also be comparing himself to Jesus or Judas. Ironically, the closer the author comes to rivaling Virgil, and coming closer to a metaphorical Marsyas, the closer his fate is to that of these two possible Christian archetypes. The author confuses his self-identification with these multiple interpretations of rivalry and punishment. There is no definite answer to the question of the author's own identification within the terms of the author: Marsyas metaphor and the possible Marsyas: Judas or Marsyas: Jesus associations. A strong argument could stand that, in the hypothetical Marsyas scenario, the poet sees himself as a Judas figure. Namely, a traitor to what is divine. The author, in calling himself a "second Virgil," would betray Virgil, whom he calls his god and master.⁵⁷ In the Bible, Judas betrays Jesus, also his God and master. Taking these two narratives together, I argue there is a correlation, that the centonist would identify himself as a Judas character if he

⁵⁷ *Namque erit mihi semper deus, ille magister, De eccl.* 112.

accepted the title of “second Virgil.” So the centonist may deem punishment as a result of “*Maro iunior!*” to be deserved.

This layered *sphragis* invites a number of interpretations. The ambiguity of the readings explodes the meaning and confuses the self-identification of the author. One method of analysis could tell us that the author exalts himself to the level of Jesus in the way that he compares himself to Marsyas affixed to a tree similarly to Jesus. Though given his vehement *recusatio* insisting on his inferiority to classical authority and the former cento’s praise of Jesus and the Christian God, it seems unlikely he would go so far to identify himself with Christ. But this is only one reading.

More likely, the centonist likens himself to Judas, insinuating that a betrayal of Virgil would be a sin so severe that suicide would be appropriate. The death of Judas, writes Damico 2010, “viene presentata come la conseguenza dei suoi peccati ... la sua morte è quasi giustificata come conseguenza necessaria della sua azione.”⁵⁸ Or perhaps, as McGill might argue, there is no narrative correlation at all, since the two sections are unrelated, and the author is offering a simple comparison to a classical myth. But the parallel stories of hangings seem to me to be further evidence that the first and second centos are in fact related.

As we have seen, there is no single cypher to decode the poem. This is suggestive of a poetic program where these interpretations are meant to be considered together, paradoxical yet cohesive. While, on the surface, the narrative of hanging on a tree or beam is the same, studying the intertext reveals a multiplicity of meanings. *De ecclesia*, then, speaks in multiple voices, not only Christian like Proba’s intention, but in a classical mythical voice.

⁵⁸ Damico 2010, 125-126.

***Fama* and Judas' suicide**

Fama, “rumor,” is a formal linguistic motif – common in classical epic – that comes into play in *De ecclesia*, which harnesses its connotations of destruction and suicide. Frequently personified and characterized as an entity of its own in Latin poetry, *Fama* instantly conjures an iconic image from the classical tradition. In *De ecclesia*, Judas is forced into suicide because of *fama*, that is, the “rumor” of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and his own betrayal, that spreads through Judea.⁵⁹ So if we accept that the centonist may self-identify with Judas, his *fama* would be the public declaration of “*Maro iunior!*,” a direct challenge to Virgil that would end in ruin for him. The centonist’s vehement denial of any conflict with Virgil and the narrative connection to Judas’ suicide may even hint that he would accept the punishment just as Judas did, perhaps even enacting self punishment. The punishment for the poet, though not indicated, would likely involve a great amount of shame, similar to the shame Judas suffered.

Furthermore, *fama* has strong Virgilian connotations. The unstoppable force of *fama* that flies through cities and brings personal ruin is one of the motifs that defines the *Aeneid*. In fact, the term occurs over fifty times in the epic. But with *fama* often comes death, and suicide most significantly, along with war and destruction. In the *Aeneid*, some form of *fama* is involved with the fall of Troy, Dido’s suicide, and the final battle against the Rutulians. Perhaps the most famous death to result from rumor is Dido’s suicide at the end of *Aeneid* 4. The rumor that ends Dido is described as *impia Fama* (*Aen.* 4.298), and as a windborne harbinger of bad news:

“At once Rumor runs through the great cities of Libya,

⁵⁹ *Interea magnam subito vulgata per urbem / fama volat. De eccl.* 68-69. This version of his suicide, however, diverges from the account in Matthew 27 where Judas resolves to hang himself upon hearing of Jesus’ conviction, before he is crucified.

Rumor, more swift than any other evil.

Speed invigorates her and she acquires power in going on;

small by fear at first, soon she lifts herself into the upper winds

and traverses on the ground and puts her head among the clouds.”⁶⁰

When the news reaches Dido – that Aeneas and his crew are departing from Carthage – she prepares her death. Though this is the most well known case of a *fama* related suicide in classical literature, the *De ecclesia* centonist selects lines from the death of Queen Amata episode for his Judas narrative.

Although Dido might seem like an ideal Virgilian model for this centonist, given its classical significance, the choice to use Amata’s suicide seems to lie simply in the mode of death: hanging. *De ecclesia* describes the death of Judas, changing the gender of the victim, as follows: “and he ties a knot of horrid death to a high beam.”⁶¹ This is a direct quotation of *Aeneid* 12, which perfectly translates to the fate of Judas. In addition, suicide, especially the suicide of a queen, has a certain connotation in Roman society which transfers to the suicide of Judas.

Damico 2010:

La morte della regina è definita *informis*, cioè disonorevole, perché disonorevole, secondo l'etica romana, soprattutto per una regina, era il suicidio praticato per mezzo dell'impiccagione. Nel centone l'aggettivo si veste di una carica semantica più ampia, che implica, oltre che il disonore, soprattutto il peccato commesso a seguito del rifiuto volontario della vita. Giuda, dunque, viene tratteggiato come un

⁶⁰ *Extemplo Libyae magnas it Fama per urbes, / Fama, malum qua non aliud uelocius ullum. / mobilitate uiget uirisque acquirit eundo; / parua metu primo, mox sese attollit in auras / ingrediturque solo et caput into nubila condit. Aen. 4.173-177.*

⁶¹ *et nodum informis leti trabe nectit ab alta. De eccl. 73, Aen. 12.603.*

doppio peccatore: nei confronti di Cristo, che ha tradito ignobilmente, per pochi denari; nei confronti di Dio perché si è privato, impiccandosi, della vita.⁶²

The queen's "dishonorable" death is salient here, and when intertextually applied to Judas, her suicide adds notable gravity to his fate. Notice as well that this line, 73, is not fragmentary. Most other lines in the cento are composed of two different hexameter lines connected to make a new meaning, a traditional feature of a cento. Here, the line is taken fully and directly from *Aeneid* 12.603 with no change in its meaning. This choice makes the intertextual connection to Amata's death and its implication so strong that it borders on allusion. The use of this full line provokes us to read Judas as an Amata character. Both are characters of high standing within their contexts. Both express their feeling of guilt over circumstances they believe to have caused. And both resolve to die as a result.

Likewise, *De ecclesia* 72 is a full line from the same episode in the *Aeneid*: "she exclaims that she herself was the cause and the crime and the source of sorrows."⁶³ Amata believes herself to have caused Turnus' death (though he has not yet been killed). Interestingly, this may prompt us to make a connection between Turnus and Jesus. This would counter the multiple Aeneas-Jesus parallels drawn in *De ecclesia*, for Turnus, though a great warrior and leader, is the challenger to Aeneas, the enemy in the *Aeneid*. Though subtle and perhaps unintentional, this moment shows us an interesting subversion of character which could be interpreted as the author undermining the moral credibility of Christ. This is yet another example of the constellation of interpretations that result from an intertextual analysis of this cento, which leaves readers with multiple possible meanings rather than any definitive one.

⁶² Damico 2010, 125.

⁶³ *se causam clamat crimenque caputque malorum. Aen.* 12.600.

So how do we position ourselves after exploring this intertext? So far, I have outlined and analyzed the Marsyas cento and the poet's authorial self-positioning hinted at in the *sphragis* and *recusatio*. The diverse narrative intertextual interpretations, from the author identifying with Christ to identifying with Judas, and the comparisons of Jesus to conflicting Virgilian characters, gives us more questions than answers. We are left to accept to ponder the multiplicities. Both syncretism and subversion are expressed through the layered intertextual links.

Chapter 2: The Church and The Church

The *Ecclesia*

Now the title, *De ecclesia*, must be unpacked. So far we have seen that the cento forces readers to confront an array of possible interpretations of the connections between its Virgilian sources and its own narrative. To anchor our readings we must look for places in the text that may hint at its overall structure or purpose. It is natural to begin with the title, whose meaning is neither immediately evident, nor necessarily clarified by a cursory or surface-level reading of the poem. The definition of *ecclesia* has evolved over the centuries, adopted into Latin from the Greek word *ἐκκλησία*, meaning a “political assembly.” Latin retained the definition of “assembly” or “gathering” until, as the language approached Late Antiquity, it came to have a religious connotation, coming to mean “congregation.” The term was adopted by late antique Christians to describe parishioners at church, then, in the fourth century (contemporary with our cento) *ecclesia* came to also mean the church itself, that is, the physical holy building.⁶⁴ Augustine makes this distinction in his *Epistle* 190.5.19 with one of his frequently used metaphors, the wine and cup: “For the wine is the content, the cup the container. Just as, therefore, we call the *ecclesia* the basilica, in which the people are contained who are truly called the *ecclesia*; so that the name *ecclesia*, that is, the people who are contained, we signify the place which contains.”⁶⁵ In our cento, *ecclesia* also deploys both meanings. The first line describes “a giant august roof, with one hundred sublime columns.”⁶⁶ Then the church’s congregation is

⁶⁴ For example, Jerome’s Vulgate Bible (completed at the turn of the fifth century) uses *ecclesia* to mean the physical “church.”

⁶⁵ *vinum enim continetur, vas continet. Sicut ergo appellamus ecclesiam basilicam, qua continetur populus qui vere appellatur Ecclesia; ut nomine ecclesiae, id est, populi qui continetur, significemus locum qui continet: ita quod animae corporibus continentur.* Augustine *Ep.* 190.5.19.

⁶⁶ *Tectum augustum ingens, centum sublime columnis, De eccl.* 1.

described in lines seven-eight and fourteen: “here [in the church] mothers and boys and mingled girls all together sing the sacrament,” and the priest addresses “mothers and men, boys and unwed girls.”⁶⁷ Both of these entities, the building and the people, are to be considered the *ecclesia*. It is interesting to note, however, that the word *ecclesia* never appears in any of Virgil’s works. This Virgilian cento has a title that is not actually Virgilian. This strange configuration of title and content is somewhat confusing. The centonist may have felt the need to distinguish right away between describing a pagan temple and a Christian church, though the narrative would have eventually made that clear. Again, the author’s motivations are not entirely apparent.

Furthermore, the double meaning of “the church” is analogous to the essential dualities of the cento’s form and content, as well as its hypotext and hypertext. The form is the centonic composition of the poem, and the content is the narrative which it contains; the hypertext is the scriptural story it presents, and the hypotext is the Virgilian source material out of which the story is constructed. Just so, the church is the physical form and the congregation – or in fact, all Christians around the world – are the content. Without content there is no form and without form there is nothing to contain the content. Without a physical place for people to gather, there can be no congregation, and without the people to gather, the Church is just a building. Without a cup, the wine spills; without the wine, the cup is purposeless. And so on. What we take away from this analogy is the idea that, though there is a spectrum of concordant and conflicting intertext, the hypotext and hypertext rely on each other for meaning. The duality of both the title, *De ecclesia*, and its content, Christian and classical, further express the multi-layered nature of the centonic genre.

⁶⁷ *Hic matres puerique simul mixtae puellae / sacra canunt, De eccl. 7. matres atque uiri, pueri innuptaeque puellae, De eccl. 14.*

The Gospel of Nicodemus as a Narrative Source

To what kind of “church” – physical or metaphysical – does the *De ecclesia* potentially refer? Some clues about the positioning of the poem are given by its apparent use of unusual Christian source texts for the biblical narrative. Signaled by details that diverge from the Biblical canon (the New Testament), *De ecclesia*’s narratives seem to have been influenced by an apocryphal text called the Gospel of Nicodemus.⁶⁸ The Gospel of Nicodemus is considered officially non-canonical in the modern Christian church, however it seems that early Christians accepted and knew its narrative well. “The first known written version [of Nicodemus] is from the fifth century, but it was undoubtedly widely known before that, and it was accepted as canonical for centuries,” says Turner (1993).⁶⁹ Thus the author of *De ecclesia* would certainly have been familiar with the narrative. The hypothesis that the centonist follows the Gospel of Nicodemus is based on a couple narrative points. First, the timeline of Judas’ suicide is different from the account in Matthew 27 where Judas ends his life out of guilt upon hearing that Jesus has been condemned to the cross. In the narrative of *De ecclesia*, however, Judas hangs himself upon hearing the rumor that Jesus will return from the dead.⁷⁰ There are several different accounts of Judas’ death, but as far as we know, the Gospel of Nicodemus is the only gospel to recount this version. Secondly, *De ecclesia* includes the story of Jesus’ descent into Hades, also known as the Harrowing of Hell. Although referenced in many later works, Dante’s *Inferno*, for example, the

⁶⁸ The New Testament only mentions the name Nicodemus once, when a Pharisee named Nicodemus appears to Jesus in John 3:1-21. It is unclear if we are to assume this Nicodemus is the author of the Gospel of Nicodemus.

⁶⁹ Turner 1993, 67.

⁷⁰ One manuscript, according to Ehrman 2016 (28-29), says that after hearing the rumor, Judas runs home to his wife who is cooking a chicken. He tells her the news, but she does not believe him. She replies with something along the lines of, “there is no better chance this roasting chicken will come back to life as Jesus will.” As soon as she says this the chicken starts clucking and Judas runs off to hang himself.

first clear narrative of the Harrowing of Hell is found in the Gospel of Nicodemus. While no one can say for sure that *De ecclesia* draws directly from Nicodemus, I find this evidence convincing.

The Gospel of Nicodemus itself is hard to pin down, as well. Known also as the Acts of Pilate, this text concerning Jesus' conviction, the Crucifixion, and Resurrection is preserved for us in multiple manuscripts. Ehrman (2011), in a preface to his English translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus, writes: "There was no fixed text; rather, the stories were told and retold, written and rewritten, over the centuries. This makes it difficult – well nigh impossible – to speak about an 'original' form of these traditions."⁷¹ The Gospel of Nicodemus is most known for its account of Christ's descent into Hades. This story is recognized by different names; some refer to it as the Descent into Hades (sometimes shortened simply to the Descent⁷²), some call it the Harrowing of Hell. I choose to use the latter for its more descriptive and compelling ring.

The Harrowing of Hell

At line 52 of *De ecclesia*, just after Jesus is crucified, the narrative changes to Jesus' descent into Hell/Hades. As mentioned above, this story is most thoroughly recounted in the Gospel of Nicodemus, however Ehrman points out that the Descent is also hinted at in 1 Peter 3:19: "he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison."⁷³ As well in John 5:28-29 Jesus (pre-Crucifixion) seems to foretell his communication with the dead and their resurrection: "The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life."⁷⁴ As will become clear, *De ecclesia*'s author

⁷¹ Ehrman 2011, 465.

⁷² Ehrman 2011, 466.

⁷³ *NRSV*.

⁷⁴ *NRSV*.

gives us a highly abridged version of the Harrowing of Hell reported in Nicodemus. Besides omitting some major plot points of the original tale, *De ecclesia* presents an abbreviated and paganized retelling of Jesus' experience in Hell. The ten chapters the Harrowing of Hell occupies in the Gospel of Nicodemus is confined to just seventeen Virgilian cento lines in *De ecclesia*.

First, let us get to know the original Harrowing of Hell narrative in the Gospel of Nicodemus. Usually considered in two parts, A and B, the Gospel of Nicodemus essentially retells the Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and in part B, the Harrowing of Hell. Jesus, supposedly during the three days he was entombed after his crucifixion, descends into Hell and speaks to trapped prophets and souls of the faithful, including such figures as Adam, Eve, Isaiah, David, and John the Baptist. Jesus argues with Satan and triumphs, saving the souls and releasing them to heaven. Jesus then returns to earth and reveals himself to his disciples, as the canon goes. The story is recounted by two brothers, whom Jesus raised from the dead, who claim to have witnessed the entire thing. In its telling in the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Harrowing of Hell is a testament to Jesus' power over forces of evil as well as an interesting take on resurrection and the afterlife. This non-canonical text has cultural significance within Christian doctrine. In theory, it seeks to reconcile the covenants of Old Testament Judaism and New Testament Christianity by clarifying how figures of the Old Testament – Moses, Abraham, Adam, and others – ascend to Heaven without having been alive to benefit from Christ's saving death on the cross, providing a further layer of attempt at cultural accommodation. The explanation of Hell and the afterlife is not dissimilar to Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas' journey through Hades clarifies the procedures of the Underworld and how the souls occupy the space. Just as Aeneas'

katabasis narratively explains pagan beliefs of the afterlife, the Harrowing of Hell explains aspects of the Christian afterlife, that is, ascension and eternal life in Heaven.

Nicodemus' account of Hell is already a hybrid between pagan and Christian: while explicitly a Christian narrative, it includes very classical ideas of the Underworld. Indeed, both the Biblical Satan and the pagan Hades are characters in the story.⁷⁵ And both are defeated by the Christian God's power. So, for *De ecclesia's* centonist, considering his probable interest in Christian-pagan syncretism, Nicodemus' Harrowing of Hell seems a perfect narrative to include in his poem.

The Harrowing in the Gospel of Nicodemus is dialogue-heavy, wasting few words on description of the scene. *De ecclesia*, on the other hand, emphasizes the imagery of Hades in terrifying poetic description:

From there an easier journey is given. And already the
 rocky fields held him, guarded by the black lake and gloomy grove
 immediately he came to the rank jaws of the grave Avernus,
 then at last with a dreadful sounding screeching hinge of the gate
 the vast columns are laid open with hard solidness,
 by their own will the shadowy caverns deep within lay open.
 Taking his leave he enters the cave; then with the greatest tumult,
 when they saw God and the gleaming face through the shadows
 they trembled with mighty fear.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Gospel of Nicodemus B, Chapter 20ff.

⁷⁶ *inde datum molitur iter. Iamque arua tenebat / scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris / ut statim ad fauces uenit graue olentis Auerni, / tum demum horrisono stridentis cardine portae / panduntur uastae solidoque adamante columnae, / sponte sua umbrosae penitus patuere cauernae. / Ingredditur linquens*

Words like *scrupea* (53), *nigro* (53), *tenebris* (53), *olentis* (54), *horrisono* (55), *stridentis* (55), *uastae* (56), *umbrosae* (57), and *fulgentiaque* (59) create a vivid *ekphrasis* of the scene.

Ekphrasis, characterized by extended and detailed description, is a classical literary device employed by epic poets including Virgil himself. In contrast to the detailed vision of Hell, just three lines, 62-64, are devoted to Jesus' dialogue to the souls of the faithful. Granted, the fact that *De ecclesia* is a poem allows for extended and embellished imagery, compared to a fairly cut and dry gospel that is Nicodemus. However the traditionally Virgilian description of Hell in this cento stands out, particularly how it uses Virgilian vocabulary and *ekphrasis* as a formal feature.

Virgilian & Classical Katabasis

Katabasis is a generic facet of what we call the "hero's journey" in classical epic and myth. And Virgil uses katabasis multiple times in his poetry. In *Georgics* 4, he retells the myth of Orpheus' descent into the Underworld.⁷⁷ Virgil's most famous katabasis, of course, is Aeneas' descent into Hades in *Aeneid* 6. Driven by fate, his exploration of the Underworld is symbolic of Roman pagan religious systems. Classical katabasis has religious undertones, not in a liturgical sense but as a narratological exegesis of the religion's post-death operations. In this way, Virgil has some religious authority – just one aspect of his authority that the centonist co-opts for Christian purposes. This leads us to a close reading of *De ecclesia*'s Harrowing of Hell and its Virgilian source text.

De ecclesia's illustration of Hell is instantly recognizable as an imitation of the Underworld of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In fact, every single line and line fragment *De ecclesia* 52-60 is

antrum; tum maxima turba, / ut uidere deum fulgentiaque ora per umbras / ingenti trepidare metu. De eccl. 52-60.

⁷⁷ *G.* 4.467-558. This myth is similarly recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book 10.

selected from *Aeneid* 6, primarily taken directly from Aeneas' famous journey down to Hades. This kind of clustering is rare in *De ecclesia* and considered uncharacteristic of proper centonic form, which is to break pieces from far and wide in the hypotext, drawing from multiple unrelated narratives and arranging them into a new cohesive one. Little to no variation in the hypotext's narrative is being applied here, making the classical bond even more underlined. This cento offers a highly Virgilian and therefore paganized version of the Christian Hell. Line 54 even references Lake Avernus,⁷⁸ which in the classical tradition is understood to be the entrance to the Underworld. The Hell described in *De ecclesia* is nearly an exact copy of Virgil's Hades. Jesus therefore is heavily associated with the hero Aeneas and his katabasis in *Aeneid* 6, a connection any educated late antique audience member would quickly perceive.

Just before the scene closes in *De ecclesia* and Jesus returns to earth, Christ gives a three line speech to the faithful souls in Hell:

‘Do not fear, my spirits and paternal shades:
rest has been allotted for you. For my father gives
such messages to me: he drives you to strive for these near ends.’⁷⁹

The “near ends” he speaks of presumably refers to the end of the souls' suffering in Hell and promise of an afterlife eternally blessed in heaven. This two sentence dialogue essentially summarizes the core of the Harrowing of Hell story: Jesus, by the power of his father, saves the souls of the prophets and the righteous, allowing them to enjoy an everlasting afterlife in the kingdom of God. Exactly as it is recounted in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

⁷⁸ *Aen.* 6.201.

⁷⁹ ‘*Ne trepidare, meae animaeque umbraeque paternae: / uobis parta quies. genitor mihi talia namque / dicta dedit: prope uos haev limina tendere adegit.*’ *De eccl.* 62-64.

In this brief excerpt we see a significant connection between Jesus and Aeneas. There is a remixing of Classical dialogue that shows the author's belief in the Jesus-Aeneas parallel. The lines for Jesus' speech here in *De ecclesia* are all sourced from speeches of Aeneas. *De ecclesia's* apparatus fontium for lines 62-64 is as follows: 62] *Aen.* 9.114, 5.81. 63] *Aen.* 3.495, 7.122. 64] *Aen.* 10.600, 6.696. The contexts for these source-lines thus create a kind of "subtextual narrative" that augments the significance and cohesion of the centonic dialogue. The second fragments of both lines 62 and 63 contain important intertextual connections related to Christian-pagan religious practice. *Aeneid* 5.81 (*De eccl.* 62) is part of a prayer spoken by Aeneas offering libations before they begin the funeral games. Wine, milk, and sacrificial blood are poured into the earth.⁸⁰ *Aeneid* 7.122 (*De eccl.* 63) is from a scene in which Aeneas and his men eat their "tables," which turn out to be their own bread rations, an event previously prophesied to indicate the Trojans have reached their new home. Aeneas rejoices at this realization and commands his men to pour out their wine as an offering to Jove.⁸¹ Both of these moments in the *Aeneid* have religious overtones, the most notable being the ritual pouring of wine and blood libations. In the context of *De ecclesia*, there seems to be a deliberate intertextual connection to the ritual of communion, consuming the blood (wine) and body (bread) of Christ. These episodes of religious practice in the *Aeneid* must have been at the front of our centonist's mind. He is able to draw tight and meaningful ties between the pagan rites Virgil describes and Christian ritual. It seems intentional that these two intertextual references to bread, wine, and blood are contained in consecutive lines.

⁸⁰ *hic duo rite mero libans carchesia Baccho / fundit humi, duo lacte nouo, duo sanguine sacro, / purpureosque iacit flores. Aen.* 5.77-79.

⁸¹ *nunc pateras libate Ioui, Aen.* 7.133.

De ecclesia line 64 also has a noteworthy intertextual narrative parallel, which further associates Aeneas and Jesus. The second fragment of the line,⁸² comes from Aeneas' experience in the Underworld. Aeneas speaks these words to the shade of his father in Hades; in the context of *De ecclesia* and the Harrowing of Hell, Jesus speaks these same words to the souls of his ancestors in Hell.⁸³ Aeneas is, thus, the perfect Virgilian parallel to Jesus: he is a half divine hero, leader, and founder of what would become one of the greatest empires in history. Writers for centuries have made this connection, some calling Virgil an early Christian prophet.⁸⁴ The centonist, well aware of this thought, takes advantage of it in his intertextual intentions, in the process arguing for a Jesus-Aeneas entanglement.

Ascension and Apotheosis

After Jesus reveals himself to the apostles and delivers his message (*De eccl.* 79-84), the poem turns to the ascension and apotheosis of Jesus:

He spoke and on even wings rose up to heaven
to the building in the clouds: from here the Savior ascended to the
lofty kingdom
bearing gifts for his dear father and his mouth:
he kissed the lips and clung onto the right hand in an embrace.⁸⁵

Here again the centonist diverges from canonical scripture – that is, the New Testament –, for there is no mention of wings or affectionate embrace.⁸⁶ These details do not significantly change

⁸² *prope uos haec limina tendere adegit. De eccl.* 64, *Aen.* 6.696 (*prope uos* added).

⁸³ *meae animaeque umbraeque paternae. De eccl.* 62.

⁸⁴ *Eclogues* 4 especially is thought by some to be a prediction of the birth of Christ.

⁸⁵ *Dixit et in caelum paribus se sustulit alis / conditus in nubem: hinc regia tecta subiuit / dona ferens uictor cari genitoris et ora: / oscula libauit dextramque amplexus inhaesit. De eccl.* 85-88.

⁸⁶ Description of the Ascension is essentially absent from the Gospel of Nicodemus.

the accepted narrative of the Ascension, but are Virgilian embellishments on the part of the centonist, “un’innovazione poetica del centonario,” as Damico puts it.⁸⁷ At line 85, for example, the entire verse is lifted from *Aeneid* 9.14 which refers to Iris’ visit to Turnus, urging him to attack the Trojans at once. This seems to invert the earlier connections to the hero Aeneas by associating Jesus with this scene of enemy plot. Damico argues that the line is simply too fitting for the centonist to pass up. Perhaps less intertextually significant, Damico writes that the centonist seems more inclined to this line more by “poetiche e compostive motivazione,” than scriptural accuracy.⁸⁸

These lines are demonstrative of the advantages and limits of the cento. Line 85, while the intertextual narratives of good and evil are conflicting, fits well, poetically and compositionally. In many places, the centonist inserts, omits, or edits hypotext, fixing temporal or sensical issues to better suit the narrative.⁸⁹ Then, there are moments where a fragment is nearly perfect in intertextual connection and narrative. The first hemistich of line 86, “wrapped in a cloud,” (*conditus in nubem*)⁹⁰ is one such instance. From *Georgics* 1.442, the original subject of *conditus* is Sol. Jesus, who is often characterized as emitting a divine light, is therefore linked to the pagan sun god. Furthermore, in *De ecclesia*’s narration of the Ascension, *conditus in nubem* is a very specific reference to a verse from Acts 1. When Jesus was risen to heaven before the apostles, “he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”⁹¹ Often, due to limited source text, a cento must resort to summarizing a narrative. Here, however, is an example of

⁸⁷ Damico 2010, 134.

⁸⁸ Damico 2010, 134.

⁸⁹ The second hemistich in line 86 above, just for example, omits *sic* (*Aen.* 7.668).

⁹⁰ *De eccl.* 86.

⁹¹ Acts 1:9, *NRSV*.

source text matching nearly word for word. These lines reveal how the cento can exploit the hypertext in order to add a further layer of meaning. The hypertext combines two parallel religious systems that, in the language of Proba, sing with one voice.

Classical Apotheosis

The apotheosis of heroes and emperors is a common motif in classical literature, in both fiction and non-fiction works. Virgil is drawn to such narratives especially in his *Georgics*. As a patron of Augustus he includes the apotheosis of Julius Caesar in his *sphragis* at the very end of the *Georgics*: “and great Caesar ... seeks the path to Olympus.”⁹² So too does Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* include the apotheosis of Caesar and the apotheosis of Aeneas. Just before the *sphragis* in his final book, Ovid recounts the death of “divine Julius”⁹³ and how Venus “snatched Caesar’s passing soul from his body not allowing it to be dissolved into the air lifted him up to the stars of the heavens,”⁹⁴ so that “he may hear the prayers” of mortals.⁹⁵ *Metamorphoses* 14.441-623 tells of the triumph and apotheosis of Aeneas, son of Venus. His mother brings him up to heaven where he will be worshiped from Rome with many temples and altars, testaments to his divinity. Just about 250 lines later, Ovid refers to the apotheosis of Romulus. Deification is a major trope of classical literature, often functioning at the intersection of history and myth (e.g., the deifications of Aeneas, Romulus, and Caesar Augustus).

Classical apotheosis is a sort of inverse of the human vs. divine narrative. One concept represents mortal-divine unification, while the other represents mortal-divine antagonism. *De*

⁹² *magnus Caesar / viamque adfectat Olympo. G. 4.560, 562.*

⁹³ *diuus Iulius, Ovid, Met. 15.842.*

⁹⁴ *Caesaris eripuit membris nec in aera solvi / passa recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris. Ovid, Met. 15.845-846.*

⁹⁵ *faueatque precibus, Ovid, Met. 15.870.*

ecclesia includes both classical motifs. Jesus, mortal, is deified in lines 85 to 88, after being crucified on a beam. Marsyas, also mortal, is hung on a tree after challenging a god. There is a special connection, yet intentional separation, between these two narratives. The centonist reserves the antagonistic human-god story for the pagan cento and applies the cooperative human-god story to the Christian one. Conflict and confluence of humanity and divinity, a common classical theme, is explored multiple times in *De ecclesia*.

With all the above considered, it is striking — and worthy of investigation — that *De ecclesia* does not use any specifically Virgilian references to apotheosis, even though Caesar’s apotheosis in *Georgics* 4 seems an easy target for the centonist’s narrative. I would suggest an intertextual connection to a Roman emperor would possibly be offensive to a Christian audience, since the Roman empire under “pagan” rule was directly responsible for the persecution of Christians and the death of Jesus. Dawson 1954 strongly writes that in Late Antiquity there was “irreconcilable hostility of Christianity to the imperial culture” of Rome.⁹⁶ Perhaps, though interested in the harmony of Christianity and the Classics, the author draws the line at this secular connection. The difference between the apotheosis of Caesar and the apotheosis of Aeneas is that Aeneas is a literary and somewhat mythical figure. No Christian would believe Caesar actually to be divine, so the equivalency with Christ is off the table. An association of Jesus with Aeneas is much more appropriate and acceptable than one with a controversial imperial leader. This point shows that our centonist prefers syncretism with the classical literary tradition rather than Roman imperial history: political and religious ascent is deliberately separated.

⁹⁶ Dawson 1954, 35.

The difficult navigation of reconfiguring classical themes brings us back to the Marsyas cento. The constellation of ideas and multitude of interpretations makes it hard to pin down a specific reading of this text. We are reminded of the Christian-pagan tensions the centonist has to deal with in constructing this narrative. The apotheosis scene presents another moment of human vs. divine antagonism that does not involve Virgil, perhaps intentionally resisting his involvement despite the thematic connections. The centonist is aware of the dangers of such obvious associations with pagan politics and may not want to cross that boundary.

The poet's tight attachment to the pagan past is clear in just the third line, and he is not subtle about it. God is named "ruler of high Olympus,"⁹⁷ obviously referring to Jupiter in the source text.⁹⁸ It is important that the author chooses to retain the name Olympus, the most recognizable symbol of the classical pagan gods. This allusion is not one that requires an extensive education in the Classics to understand, which indicates that the author is very conscious of the ways in which his work is rooted in classical paganism and does not attempt to conceal it. Perhaps, as I have mentioned, the purpose of this phrase is to assert the Christian God's supremacy over the pagan gods in saying that he rules over them as well as men. Still, the author is recognizing paganism's existence and cultural influence in Late Antiquity. Right away the cento blurs the distinction between pagan and Christian, a theme which continues throughout the intertext.

In the very next line, the author asserts the supremacy of the Christian God in an interesting way. Not only is God the king of men, but he is "the all-powerful God, who rules over

⁹⁷ *superi regnator Olympi, De eccl. 3*

⁹⁸ *Aen. 2.799.*

the matters of men and gods with eternal power.”⁹⁹ Cognizant of the still very familiar polytheistic pagan tradition of the time, the author acknowledges the existence of other gods in late antique Rome. The line may also be a reference to the Old Testament verse Deuteronomy 10:17,¹⁰⁰ which says, “for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords.” Although the author presumably does not actually believe in the pagan gods, the explicit recognition is significant.

Congregational Language

At line seven, the poet’s use of Virgilian language produces a conspicuous allusion to the broader Latin poetic tradition. In describing the congregation, the centonist refers to “mothers and boys at the same time mixed with girls.”¹⁰¹ In addition to appearing frequently in Virgilian poems – examples of which will be mentioned below – similar phraseology is commonly found in other classical poetry and prose, most notably used by Ovid and Horace. Ovid writes *mixtae puellae* several times in his *Amores*, and Horace uses the phrase *mixtae pueris puellae* in his fourth book of *Odes* in a birthday celebration scene.¹⁰² Proba also uses the phrase *matres atque viri pueri innuptaeque puellae*¹⁰³ at line 55 in her cento’s proem. Even Ausonius uses *innuptaeque puellae*¹⁰⁴ in his *Cento Nuptialis*. So common is this language that it appears

⁹⁹ *Deus omnipotens, qui res hominumque deumque / aeternis regit imperiis, De eccl.* 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ *NRSV*.

¹⁰¹ *matres puerique simul | mixtaeque puellae, De eccl.* 7, *Aen.* 11.215 + 11.476 + *G.* 3.473 (*Aen.* 7.340. 9.358) *simul. Aen.* 5.293 (*mixtique*) + 2.238 (6.307). *G.* 3.473, *Aen.* 7.340, *Aen.* 9.358, and *Aen.* 5.293 are instances of single words that just match the location and syntax within a line (*simul* and *mixtaeque*), not the entire hemistich.

¹⁰² Horace, *Odes* 4.2.10.

¹⁰³ *G.* 4.475, 476. Note that these Virgilian lines are different from the lines used in *De ecclesia* for essentially the same meaning.

¹⁰⁴ Ausonius, *Cent. nupt.* 64.

multiple times within Virgil's work, which is apparent by all three centos employing lines from different locations in the *Aeneid* and *Georgics*.

Furthermore, these common phrases of “mothers, boys, and unwed girls” (*matres puerique innuptaeque/mixtaeque puellae*, or variations thereof) frequently accompany descriptions of religious ceremonies. The first hemistich of *De ecclesia* 7 (*hic matres puerique simul*) is adopted from multiple sources in the *Aeneid* (listed in note 101). *Aeneid* 11.215 is the episode in which the Latins grieve their fallen with a funeral ceremony; *Aeneid* 11.476 is the moment the Latins prepare to defend their city and ascend to the temple for asking favor from the gods. The second hemistich of line seven (*mixtaeque puellae*¹⁰⁵) is taken from *Aeneid* 2.238 where Trojan boys and unwed girls “sing prayers”¹⁰⁶ at the arrival of the ill-famed wooden horse. Similar source words for this hemistich are found in *Aeneid* 6.307 in which Aeneas witnesses the shades of boys and unwed girls having been burned on funeral pyres.¹⁰⁷ These phrases characteristic of ritual and religious moments in classical, pagan literature – though the Virgilian hypotext is grim – are repurposed for a Christian religious ceremony in *De ecclesia*. While any well-read late antique Roman would pick up on the classical religious allusion, the centonist perhaps aims to re-associate these phrases for Christian purposes.

Line 14, “mothers and men, boys and unwed girls,”¹⁰⁸ has nearly the same syntax and vocabulary as line seven, though here in the vocative instead of nominative case. Images of congregation are specified by gender and age connected by the conjunctive suffix *-que*. As proof of how generic this pairing and syntactical positioning of words is, *De ecclesia*'s apparatus

¹⁰⁵ The centonist changes *innuptaeque puellae* to *mixtaeque puellae*.

¹⁰⁶ *sacra canunt*, *Aen.* 2.239.

¹⁰⁷ *imposuitque rogis*, *Aen.* 6.308.

¹⁰⁸ *matres atque uiri, | pueri innuptaeque puellae*, *De eccl.* 14, *Aen.* 6.306. 307.

fontium identifies five different instances in just the *Aeneid* from where this hemistich might come. And more often than not these assemblies of people are involved in (pagan) religious ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings, and group prayer. The centonist repurposes these associations for a group of Christian churchgoers.

Religious Language Repurposed

As a religious text, *De ecclesia* uses religious language from its source text to reconfigure it within a Christian narrative. Pagan ritual allusions and parallels begin to appear in the intertext, sometimes supplementing and sometimes confusing the hypertextual narrative. The phrase “lifting/stretching his hands to the stars” (*ad sidera palmas*) is a classical favorite when referring to pagan prayer. Some iteration of it shows up four different times in the *Aeneid*.¹⁰⁹ Ovid, as well, deploys the phrase word for word twice in his *Metamorphoses*.¹¹⁰ And this centonist takes full advantage of this highly recognizable phrase, using twice a variation of “extended palms” in *De ecclesia*.¹¹¹

First, line 30 describes Pontius Pilate raising his palms, ritually purified by water, up to the sky as he questions the validity of Jesus’ conviction.¹¹² The hypotextual narrative refers to the Greek prisoner upon whom Trojan king Priam takes pity after the man betrays the secret of the wooden horse and agrees to aid the Trojans. Begging witness of the gods the defector raises his palms to the stars and prays. Through this intertext, Pilate is associated with the soldier who questions his loyalty and seems to be converted to the “good side.” Though questioning his

¹⁰⁹ *Aen.* 5.256, 1.93, 2.687-688 (*oculos ad sidera...extulit, palmas tetendit*), 2.153.

¹¹⁰ Ovid *Met.* 6.368 (*tollensque ad sidera palmas*), 9.175 (*tollens ad sidera palmas*).

¹¹¹ *De ecclesia* 37 includes *ad sidera tollunt* (*Aen.* 2.222), but the word – or sense of the word – *palmas* is missing, as well as there being no significant ritual/religious connotation.

¹¹² *sustulit ablutas lymphis ad sidera palmas. De eccl.* 30, *Aen.* 2.153.

position on the guilt of Jesus, Pilate yields to the crowd and allows Jesus to be crucified. Both characters can be read as traitors who attempt some kind of mercy begging prayer.

The second hemistic of *De ecclesia* 41 (*palmas utrasque tetendit*), which describes Jesus raising his palms in prayer as he is hung on the cross, picks up another interesting allusion. The moment of the *Aeneid* from which this hemistic is taken shows Aeneas extending both of his hands to his father Anchises in the Underworld.¹¹³ Son-father piety is a major theme in the *Aeneid* as well as in Christian doctrine. The relationship between the Father (God) and the Son (Christ) is constantly referenced in the Bible as well as an overall sense of loyalty and respect for one's own parents. Just one example in the New Testament is from Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord."¹¹⁴ In the context of the *Aeneid*, the line expresses a general devotion to one's mortal father, but in the context of *De ecclesia*, the stakes are raised to the divine. Yet the sentiment is passed untouched through the intertext.

A second, perhaps more salient parent-child intertextual connection in *De ecclesia* comes in line 88, which describes Jesus kissing his father as they are united in heaven (*oscula libauit*). The hypotext involves Jupiter kissing his daughter Venus on Olympus. The fact that they are both divine beings in heaven (Mt. Olympus) expressing parent-offspring affection relates more closely to the narrative in *De ecclesia*. However in this instance the intertext reverses the role of parent and child. Jupiter (the father) is the subject of *libauit* in Virgil, while it is Jesus (the child) who is the subject of the verb in the cento. We have already seen an instance of gender inversion through the intertext in the Amata-Judas suicide episode. These types of intertextual connections

¹¹³ *alacris palmas utrasque tetendit. Aen.* 6.685.

¹¹⁴ *NRSV*.

show how a cento can use intertext to both enhance the narrative and subvert or change it by slight disconnections.

Radical Disjunction

Of course, any Christian Virgilian cento will contain some disjunction through its many intertexts, by nature of the opposing religious systems and the centonist's need for religious language. An example of radical disjunction in *De ecclesia* is in line 3 – as discussed earlier – where God is called “ruler of high Olympus.”¹¹⁵ On occasion, however, an instance of radical disjunction is hidden in the intertext. Line 77 is one such extreme disjunction of hypotext to hypertext. In *De ecclesia*, Jesus “uplifts his sacred face and gleams in a bright light.”¹¹⁶ The first hemistich, “he uplifts his sacred face,” is taken from *Aeneid* 8.591, where the subject is the Morning Star, Lucifer. The preceding lines and the full line from which 77 is chosen (*Aen.* 8.589-591) reads, “just like when Lucifer (Morning Star) soaked in the waves of Ocean, whom Venus prefers before any other fires of the stars, uplifts his sacred face to the sky and disperses the darkness.”¹¹⁷ Being extensively familiar with the works of Virgil, the centonist would have certainly been aware of the source subject, yet he chooses still to use the line, changing Lucifer to Jesus. And while Jesus is often portrayed as emitting a divine light, and the Lucifer of the Bible was once an angel, the name Lucifer has been permanently reassociated with Hell and evil since the Old Testament.¹¹⁸ Possibly only a result of the limitations of the cento, this strange disjuncture is highly subversive, intentional or not. If we assume the connection is intentional,

¹¹⁵ *superi regnator Olympi, De eccl.* 3.

¹¹⁶ *extulit os sacrum | claraque in luce refulsit. De eccl.* 77.

¹¹⁷ *qualis ubi Oceani perfusus Lucifer unda, / quem Venus ante alios astrorum diligit ignis, / extulit os sacrum caelo tenebrasque resolvit. Aen.* 8.589-591.

¹¹⁸ Isaiah 14:12. *NRSV*.

the centonist rips up the very fabric of Christian ideology, that Jesus/God is the ultimate good, and Satan/Lucifer is the ultimate evil. For a devout late antique Christian to have discovered the intertextual connection might have earned the centonist a bad reputation.

Radical Conjunction

At line 79, having just returned from Hell, Jesus delivers a short speech to his disciples. He finishes at line 84 saying, “When it is time, I myself will cleanse everyone.”¹¹⁹ There are several significant intertextual layers to this line. In the source text, *Eclogues* 3, two shepherds, Damoetas and Menalcas, talk about love and sheep. Damoetas says to Manalcas, “Tityrus, drive back the grazing sheep from the stream: when it is time, I will wash them all in the spring myself.”¹²⁰ The first connection is just the fact that the man speaking is a shepherd, an obvious reference to Jesus’ frequent characterization as a spiritual shepherd. There are countless examples of Jesus being a shepherd guiding his flock of religious followers (e.g., John 10:1-18, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 5:1-4). The image of Jesus holding a shepherd’s staff is prolific. The intertext combines the notion of Jesus as the good shepherd with the idea of baptism. The metaphor perfectly aligns when Damoetas says that he will wash all of the sheep in the stream. Just so, Jesus, as shepherd, intends to cleanse his followers of sin through baptism. Like line 86 with *conditus in nubem* being a radical canonical conjuncture, this is one instance of exceptionally confluent multi-layered intertext in this cento. And, when put in comparison with the radical disjunction of line 77, line 79 highlights the spectrum of conflict and confluence intertext may offer.

¹¹⁹ *Ipse, ubi tempus erit, omnis in fonte lauabo. De eccl. 84. Ecl. 3.97.*

¹²⁰ *Tityre, pascentis a flumine reice capellas: / ipse, ubi tempus erit, omnis in fonte lavabo. Ecl. 3.96-97.*

Missing Texts

Unfortunately, after line 20 an unknown length of text is missing from the manuscript. It is likely a continuation of a priest's sermon that began in line 13: "God begins to speak out of the divine mouths of the priests,"¹²¹ and seems to be continued at line 20: "The word of God is lifted by the elder spirits and he sings."¹²² When the manuscript continues, it is difficult to say who the speaker is, perhaps it is still the sermon of the priest, possibly it is the author himself speaking. It is understood to be a person addressing an audience, whether that be the *ecclesia*, the reader, or both, indicated by the vocative *miseri* in line 23. Ambiguity certainly seems to be characteristic of this cento.

At line 21, the narrative is in the midst of a description of the divine Jesus Christ ("Thus a new race descends from the high heavens. But now already the established year has made you God."¹²³). These verses are selected from *Eclogues* 4, a book often interpreted as a pre-Biblical Christian narrative. It has been discussed by scholars and theologians alike, even Augustine recognizes it and quotes *Eclogues* 4 in several of his works.¹²⁴ *Eclogues* 4 is strikingly similar to the birth of Christ. It tells the familiar story of a boy born of a god and a virgin mother fated to lead a new golden race. Houghton (2017) confirms that Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* "had been regarded from the very earliest days of the ascendancy of Christianity in the Roman Empire as a conscious or unconscious prophecy of the birth of the Savior."¹²⁵ It seems as though *Eclogues* 4, considering its familiarity and history of Christian interpretation, would be an easy target for the

¹²¹ *Incipit effari | divino ex ore sacerdos. De eccl. 12.*

¹²² *Ore dei | adflata est spiritu proprio canitque: . De eccl. 20.*

¹²³ *Sic nova progenies caelo descendit ab alto. De eccl. 21. Ecl. 4.7.*

¹²⁴ Augustine, *Ep.* 104.3.11, 137.3.12, 258.3. As well as *De civitate Dei* 10.27.

¹²⁵ Houghton 2017, 58.

Christian centonist, yet these two lines are the only lines in *De ecclesia* that are picked from this poem. Perhaps the author considered it too easy a target for content and chose to take much more from the longer and more complicated *Aeneid*. It is possible that the poet avoids *Eclogues 4* because it has already been Christianized and therefore already reconciled. The author's interest in blending Classics and Christianity perhaps would have been wasted on such an obvious source-text. Though the focus of this analysis is to find out what the cento is doing in context, we can glean something about the meaning structure of the poem when we attend to what it is *not* doing. We can uncover authorial motives by discovering moments in the intertext that defy our expectations, like here, where we expect allusion to *Eclogues 4*, but it is missing completely.

Judgment Day and the Apocalypse

The finale of the Biblical narrative in *De ecclesia* is an image of Judgment Day and the Apocalypse described in the book of Revelation. It reads:

Of these you will choose the one approaching from a deep seat¹²⁶
to destroy the high citadels and the walls to be dismantled
and that all opulent men be burned up by crackling flame.
Then the innumerable families and crowded peoples
are terrified by this sudden sight. The same king of everything
will give judgment to the people equally and he will compel them to
confess,
whoever is near superiority over another, rejoicing in vain deceit¹²⁷

¹²⁶ The meaning of this line is a little blurry. The source text is highly fragmented.

¹²⁷ *Huius in aduentum cernes a sedibus imis / eruere summas arces et moenia uerti / atque omnem ornatum flamma crepitante cremari. / Tunc autem innumerae gentes populique frequentes / terrentur uisu*

The story is recognizable and canonical. The intense vocabulary used in this section has interesting Virgilian origins, however. The notable hemistichs are actually taken from prophecy scenes in the *Aeneid*. Line 91 is picked as a whole line from *Aeneid* 7.74, the moment the Latin princess Lavinia's hair catches on fire. As she runs through the palace spreading yellow smoke, witnesses interpret it as a divine portent of a great war (*magnum portendere bellum*)¹²⁸. And, as we know, a great war does come. Just like the many prophecies recorded in the *Aeneid* – and in classical literature in general – the book of Revelation is essentially a prophecy of the end of times and the final judgment of souls.

Lines 94 and 95 also have particularly interesting intertextual connections. The second hemistich of line 94 and the entire line 95 are actually sequential lines from *Aeneid* 6, Aeneas' journey through the Underworld.¹²⁹ In this section the Sibyl is guiding Aeneas through Hades and explaining the procedures of the dead. To be specific, these lines describe Radamanthus, the supreme judge of the shades, the one who determines innocence or guilt, punishment or freedom. The following lines tell the brutal outcome for the guilty. The association of the pagan judge of the dead – the classical character Radamanthus – and the Christian God is very direct. Both divine judges of mortals, they have the power to punish sin. *Aeneid* 6, with its fiery imagery and religious overtones, was certainly on the mind when our centonist was composing *De ecclesia*. Much of the narrative of book six is perfectly analogous to Christian narratives – the Harrowing of Hell portion of the cento, for example – which gives it a highly significant role in *De ecclesia*.

subito. Rex omnibus idem / iura dabit populis pariter subigetque fateri, / quae quis apud superos furto laetatus. De eccl. 89-95.

¹²⁸ *Aen.* 7.80.

¹²⁹ *castigatque auditque dolos subigitque fateri, / quae quis apud superos, furto laetatus inani. Aen. 6.567-568.*

Additionally, lines taken from *Aeneid* 6, since it is so well known in classical literature, expose more obvious intertextual connections than, say, Virgil's *Eclogues*.

Return to the *Ecclesia*

There is another gap in the manuscript between 95, the end of the Apocalypse scene, and 96, which starts another liturgical section. "But you, o chosen ones," it begins, "on behalf of such a great name are with the sword."¹³⁰ The speaker is not specified, but the narrative seems to return to the church, ostensibly a priest's sermon. Specifically, these lines describe a congregation participating in Communion:

The others follow the pious life of their teacher:
some of them cut up scraps and loaded gifts for the altar;
then the boys and the trembling mothers of the community stand round in
a long array.

Then with his hand he spread out all those pressed close together,
thus he in front approached the tables and he himself begins.

And after, he is the first to touch as far as to the top of his lips,
the leaders accept and equally do all the priests
and the young boys: then the rest of the adults follow.¹³¹

This, undoubtedly, is the *ecclesia*, which in this instance, as well retains its dual meaning: the church and the church. *De ecclesia*'s Biblical narrative is bookended by scenes of the active

¹³⁰ *Sed uos, o lecti, ferro pro nomine tanto, De eccl. 96.* The "sword" refers to the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17, NRSV).

¹³¹ *Succedunt alii graues aetate ministri / pars in frustra secant onerantque altaria donis; / tum demum pueri et pauidae longo ordine matres stant circum. / Quos ubi confertos manu circumtulit omnes, / sic prior adgreditur mensas atque incipit ipse. / Et postquam primus summo tenus adtigit ore, / accipiunt proceres pariterque autistites omnes / et pueri rudes: sequitur tum cetera pubes. De eccl. 100-108.*

church. Again we are reminded of the idea of content and container relationship. On the most basic level, it is the Christian church that contains and teaches New Testament stories, and that is reflected in the structure of *De ecclesia*.

Compositionally, the cento wraps neatly the Crucifixion, Harrowing of Hell, Apotheosis, and Apocalypse narratives within the church scene descriptions. It gives us the sense that those narrative are exclusively within the Christian church. But in studying the intertextual connections we see that *De ecclesia* is not confined within the Christian church, it is Christian and classical. The return to the *ecclesia* at the end of the first cento makes the addition of the *sphragis*, marked by the *Maro iunior!* exclamation, all the more shocking and significant. The reader, when confronted with the Marsyas narrative, is forced to reconsider the interpretation of the seemingly straightforward Christian narrative of lines one through 110. It confuses the established impression and calls into question the author's intentions. Is he aiming at syncretism between two opposing religious systems or subversion of a Christian narrative? The multiplicity of interpretations and full spectrum of confluent and conflicting intertexts contained in *De ecclesia* makes a definitive reading answer impossible. And the addition of the Marsyas cento is only a reminder of that fact. The centonist's sudden reveal and switch to a classical narrative leaves us to question his allegiances, whether they be Christian or Classical. I argue that he is somewhere in between: A dedicated Christian Classicist attempting some amalgamation of the two systems through a Christian Virgilian cento.

Conclusion

The complexities of original textual analysis, especially multilayered intertextual analysis, pose a sizable challenge to a researcher. There seems to be an infinite number of directions I could pursue in interpreting *De ecclesia*. In this study I have presented what I have found to be the most significant moments of intertextual syncretism or subversion in this cento. In concluding this analysis I have found that there is no single right or wrong reading. Therein lies the work of the intertextual analyst: to make the text *mean* something out of what is provided and argue its case.

Although we have discovered that there is no single correct interpretation of the centonist's intentions in composing *De ecclesia*, we can attempt to situate the cento in relation to the works of other late antique Christian centonists like Proba and Ausonius. Proba's intentions in her cento are strictly Christianizing: to make Virgil sing the "gifts of Christ."¹³² Any undermining intertextual conflicts are apparently unintentional on her part. Ausonius, although officially identifying as a Christian, seems to have no particular interest in either syncretization or subversion in his work. His *Cento Nuptialis* describes a traditional pagan wedding, containing no trace of his Christian beliefs. Ausonius' allegiances seem to lie on the side of the Classics. So, fitting authorially somewhere between Proba and Ausonius, the centonist of *De ecclesia* at the same time Christianizes the Classics and classicizes Christianity. That is to say, the classical hypotext is reconfigured to tell a Christian narrative, and the hypertextual narrative is altered by the hypotextual narratives, on the spectrum of syncretizing and subverting. Like Proba, our centonist makes Virgil "sing" a Christian narrative, but like Ausonius, he does not appear to

¹³² *deus omnipotens, sacrum, precor, accipe carmen, . . . praesens, deus, erige mentem; / Uergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi.* Proba, *Cento*. 9, 22-23.

make any effort to separate himself from the classical tradition, nor does he feign any indifference toward his work. I have argued that, overall, the anonymous centonist does in fact aim at a degree of cultural syncretism with *De ecclesia*, in which he effectively entangles the two belief systems.

De ecclesia, as well as many other late antique centos, participates in sustained interplay with each centonic line. Subtle subversion and confusion can frequently be drawn out from conflicting narratives and semantic divergences in the hypotext. By virtue of intertextuality, language can be bent as it passes between the two texts. Therefore the meanings are exploded over and over again. The Virgilian hypotext is also altered in the centonic process. Beside the fact that his lines are chopped up and rearranged, the alternate narrative that results from that rearrangement recontextualizes the original. Like with Proba's work, a late antique centonist may endeavor to force a Christian interpretation of a classical text, there being no way for the classical author to rebuke. So, while our centonist does manipulate Virgil into a Christian narrative, he does not seem to be as serious as Proba in *Christianizing the Classics*, as I have shown in my analysis of *De ecclesia*.

Duality is a constant in a cento. For one, the form of a cento is inherently dual, requiring a close study of both hypertext and hypotext. A cento is also both canonical and noncanonical. A Virgilian cento dismembers the classical tradition – or what we might call the classical literary “canon” – and reassembles it, forming it into something new, or non-canonical. *De ecclesia*'s narrative itself also accommodates a form of canonical duality. The narratives in lines one through 110 contain both Christian canon and non canon. Christ's Crucifixion, Ascension, and the Judgment Day/Apocalypse line up with the New Testament narratives without conflict. The use

of the Gospel of Nicodemus, an apocryphal text, however, leads *De ecclesia* slightly astray from official Christian scripture. This understanding requires a system of knowledge similar to how a classical education may be needed for a late antique reader to fully appreciate the intertextual references and allusions in a Virgilian cento. The complexities of the cento as a literary expression cannot be understated.

I have shown that *De ecclesia*, like many other late antique Christian centos, can be read as a reflection of culture, in this case, a moment of a cultural religious shift that, in some ways, has defined Late Antiquity. It was a time when old and new clashed, and a Christian Virgilian cento became the perfect venue for its syncretism and mutual subversion. Old and new literary traditions are entangled and then contained in the centonic form. Just as the ancients mixed wine and water, both are contained in the same cup.

Appendix

Abbreviations

Unless otherwise noted, all abbreviations are as in standard reference works (e.g., Oxford Classical Dictionary).

De ecclesia = De eccl.

Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vol. 16: Poetae

Christiani Minores, 621-627. Via archive.org/details/corpuscriptorum16.

Proba, *Cento Vergilianus de Laudibus Christi = Cento*

Bible quotations: New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*)

De ecclesia

Tectum augustum ingens, centum sublime columnis,
 religione patrum laetum | et uenerabile templum
 hoc dedit esse suum | superi regnator Olympi.

Nam deus omnipotens, | qui res hominumque deumque

aeternis regit imperiis, | ‘quo tenditis?’ inquit 5

‘hic domus est uobis, | haec ara tuebitur omnis’.

Hic matres puerique simul | mixtaeque puellae
 sacra canunt | pariterque oculos ad sidera tollunt,
 hic exaudiri uoces, | hic uota precesque:

noctes atque dies | ferit aurea sidera clamor. 10

Postquam prima quies | et facta silentia tectis,
 incipit effari | diuino ex ore sacerdos:

‘Accipite haec animis laetasque aduertite mentes,
 matres atque uiri, | pueri innuptaeque puellae.

Discite iustitiam moniti | et spes discite uestras. 15

Haut incerta cano: deus aethere missus ab alto,
 ipsius a solio regis, | uia prima salutis,

quem nobis | partu sub luminis edidit oras

uirginis os habitumque gerens |, mirabile dictu.

Ore <dei> | adflata est spiritu proprio canitque: 20

[...]

Sic noua progenies | caelo descendit ab alto.
 Ast ubi iam firmata deum te prodidit aetas,
 negauere deum | miseri, quibus ultimus esset
 ille dies, | quando furentes ac dira canentes
 insontem | magno ad regem clamore trahebant. 25
 Ille nihil, | namque ipse uolens, seque obtulit ultro,
 hoc ipsum ut strueret, | uatum praedicta priorum
 prodere iussa dei, | telluris operta subire.
 Primus ibi ante omnes, | sceptrum qui forte gerebat,
 sustulit ablutas lymphis ad sidera palmas, 30
 hoc dicens: | ‘equidem in iusto nil tale repertum:
 nec fas. | o miseri, quae tanta insania, ciues?
 <at> me nulla dies tantis neque fortibus ausis
 addiderit socium. | uestra’ inquit ‘munera uobis!
 Vos animam hanc potius quocumque absumite leto’. 35
 Tum magis atque magis | magnis furoribus acti
 clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollunt
 et magis atque magis | poenas cum sanguine poscunt.
 Has inter uoces | medio in flagrante tumultu
 arboris obnixus trunco | – tibi, magne, tropaeum, 40
 omnipotens genitor – | palmas utrasque tetendit
 teque uocans | multo uitam cum sanguine fudit.

Et tamen interea | tua nati maxima cura
 non tulit hanc speciem: | grauiter commotus et alto
 dat clarum e caelo signum. | Nam tempore in illo 45
 sol medium caeli conscenderat igneus orbem.
 Eripiunt subito nubes caelumque diemque
 et nox atra polum bigis subuecta tenebat.
 Tris tenuit diei spatium non amplius horas:
 tum repetens iterum sua | clara in luce refulsit 50
 nona diei melior | rebus iam rite peractis.
 inde datum molitur iter. Iamque arua tenebat
 scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris
 ut statim ad fauces uenit graue olentis Auerni,
 tum demum horrisono stridentis cardine portae 55
 panduntur uastae | solidoque adamante columnae,
 sponte sua | umbrosae penitus patuere cauernae.
 Ingreditur linquens antrum; | tum maxima turba,
 ut uidere deum fulgentiaque ora per umbras
 ingenti trepidare metu. | Nec plura moratus 60
 haec ait | et dictis maerentia pectora mulcet:
 ‘Ne trepidate, meae | animaeque umbraeque paternae:
 uobis parta quies. | Genitor mihi talia namque
 dicta dedit: | prope uos haec limina tendere adegit’.

Haec fatus | animas, quae per iuga longa sedebant, 65

deturbat | miseransque antro submittit aperto

et dicto parens | supera ad conuexa reuexit.

Interea magnam | subito uulgata per urbem

fama uolat, | illum expirantem sedibus imis

iam reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras. 70

Obstipuere animis alii; set | sanguinis auctor

se causam clamat crimenque caputque malorum,

et nodum informis leti trabe nectit ab alta

proque suis meritis | superis concessit ab oris.

Nec minus interea | se matutinus agebat 75

ad socios, | quibus in mediis sic deinde locutus

extulit os sacrum | claraque in luce refulsit,

omnia longaeuo similis, | cunctisque repente

inprouisus ait:

[...]

Ire iterum in lacrimas? | coram, quem quaeritis, adsum.

En perfecta mei | cari praecepta parentis. 80

Quare agite, o socii, tantarum in munera laudum

ite' ait, 'egregias animas | natique patrisque

sermonum memores | fluuiali spargite lympha.

Ipsae, ubi tempus erit, omnis in fonte lauabo'.

Dixit et in caelum paribus se sustulit alis 85
 conditus in nubem: | hinc regia tecta subiuit
 dona ferens uictor | cari genitoris et ora:
 oscula libauit | dextramque amplexus inhaesit.
 Huius in aduentum cernes | a sedibus imis
 eruere summas arces | et moenia uerti 90
 atque omnem ornatum flamma crepitante cremari.
 Tunc autem innumerae gentes populiue | frequentes
 terrentur uisu subito. | Rex omnibus idem
 iura dabit populis pariter | subigetque fateri,
 quae quis aput superos furto laetatus inani 95
 [...]

Sed uos, o lecti, ferro | pro nomine tanto,
 quod superest, | moriamur et in media arma ruamus:
 sanguine quaerendi reditus animamque litando'.
 Haec ubi pro meritis, | finem dedit ore precandi.
 Succedunt alii | graues aetate ministri: 100
 pars in frustra secant | onerantque altaria donis;
 tum demum | pueri et puidae longo ordine matres stant circum.
 Quos ubi confertos | manu circumtulit omnes,
 sic prior adgreditur | mensas atque incipit ipse. 105
 Et postquam primus | summo tenus adtigit ore,

accipiunt proceres | pariterque autistites omnes
 et pueri rudes: | sequitur tum cetera pubes.
 Protinus ad reditum quisquis, | ad tecta domorum
 tendimus | et laetum semper celebramus honorem.

110

Cumque † abortio clamaretur
 “Maro iunior!”
 ad praesens hoc recitavit:

‘Ne quaeso, ne me ad talis inpellite pugnas!
 Namque erit ille mihi semper deus, ille magister.
 Nam memini – neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum
 formosum pastor Phoebum superare canendo
 dum cupit et cantu uocat in certamina diuos,
 membra deo uictus ramo frondente pependit.’

115

***De ecclesia* English Translation**

By Abigail C. Blackburn

A giant august roof, one hundred sublime columns,
 with reverence and veneration for the blessed temple of the father
 the ruler of high Olympus gives this to be for his own people.
 For omnipotent God, who rules over the matters of men and gods
 with eternal power, says, ‘to where do you strive? 5
 This is your home, this altar will protect you all.’
 Here mothers and boys and mingled girls all together
 sing the sacrament and lift both eyes to the stars,
 here voices are heard clearly, here vows and prayers:
 by night and day shouting strikes the golden stars. 10
 After the first quiet and silence was established in the building,
 He begins to speak out of the divine mouths of the priests:
 ‘take these words to heart and pay blessed attention,
 women and men, boys and unmarried girls.
 Come to know justice having been warned and learn your hopes. 15
 By no means do I sing with uncertainty: God sent him from the high ether,
 the king himself from the throne, the first path to salvation,
 us whom he bore our faces unto the light,
 wearing the face and habit of a virgin, miraculous to say.

The word of God is lifted by the elder spirits and he sings: 20

[...]

Thus the new race descends from the high heavens.

But now already the established year has made you God,

you deny God, oh wretched ones, for whom that day

is the last, when raving and singing madness

drug the innocent to the king with a great roar. 25

It was nothing, for itself wishing, it bestowed itself voluntarily,

so that it construct this itself, the prediction of the old prophet

conveyed the order of God, to pass under the hidden things of earth.

The first one went before all, who was bravely bearing a scepter,¹³³

He raised to the stars his palms purified with water,¹³⁴ 30

saying this: ‘surely there is no such justice in this invention:

not God’s will. Oh wretched citizens, what such great insanity is this?

But for me there is no day for such great things nor a day that

will add an ally with a powerful bold act.’ He says, ‘your gifts are for you!

It is better that you take away this life by some death.’ 35

Then more and more with immense fury made,

at the same time horrendous clamor they raise up to the stars

and more and more they demand punishment with blood.

Between these voices at the middle of the flaming commotion

¹³³ Pontius Pilate.

¹³⁴ Matthew 27:24, Gospel of Nicodemus A 9:4.

thrust against the trunk of a tree – for you, great one, a divine monument, 40
 omnipotent Father – he extends both palms
 and speaking to you he pours out his life with a great amount of his blood.
 However meanwhile, your greatest care for your son
 could not bear this sight: shaken he gravely gives
 a clear sign from heaven. For at that time 45
 the sun rose to the middle of the sky, a fiery orb.
 Suddenly the clouds snatch away sky and day
 and the black night held the earth's pole conveyed on a double-yoked chariot.
 Not more than three hours stretched the span of the day:
 then repeating again it gleams with its own shining light 50
 at the ninth hour of the day it is better, having now duly completed the rites.¹³⁵
 From there an easier journey is given. And already the
 rocky fields held him, guarded by the black lake and gloomy grove
 immediately he came to the rank jaws of the grave Avernus,
 then at last with a dreadful sounding screeching hinge of the gate 55
 the vast columns are laid open with hard solidness,
 by their own will the shadowy caverns deep within open.
 Taking his leave he enters the cave; then with the greatest tumult,
 when they saw God and the gleaming face through the shadows
 they trembled with mighty fear. With no more delay 60

¹³⁵ Luke 23:44-45, Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33.

he said these things: and saying he appeased mourning hearts:

‘Don’t fear, my spirit and paternal shades:

rest has been allotted for you. For my father gives

such messages to me: he drives you to strive for these near ends.’

These words having been spoken to the souls, which long remained in chains, 65

he struck and mournful sent them down into the gaping cavern

and preparing them with these words he returned to the vaulted heavens.

Meanwhile a rumor flies through the great city suddenly well known,

that he already called back his expiring step from the deepest place

and that he escaped into the high winds. 70

The others were amazed by his spirit; but the originator of blood

exclaims that he himself is the cause and the crime and the source of sorrows,

and ties a knot of horrid death to a high beam

and on account of his own actions he submits to the exalted faces.

Not long after he delivered himself 75

to his companions, then in the middle of them having spoken thus

he uplifts his sacred face and gleams in a bright light,

like all from long ago, and suddenly to everyone

< unexpectedly he spoke: > ‘.....

To go again in tears? I, whom you seek, am present before you.

Lo, the teaching is completed by me with the care of my father. 80

Go, friends, in the honor of such great blessings,
 go,' he says, 'to the exceptional spirits of the son and the father
 mindful of the sermons and sprinkle with river water.

When it is time, I myself will cleanse everyone.'

He spoke and on even wings rose up to heaven 85

to the building in the clouds: from here the Savior ascended to the lofty kingdom
 bearing gifts for his dear father and his mouth:

he kissed the lips and clung onto the right hand in an embrace.

Of these you will choose the one approaching from a deep seat¹³⁶

to destroy the high citadels and the walls to be dismantled 90

and that all opulent men be burned up by crackling flame.

Then the innumerable families and crowded peoples

are terrified by this sudden sight. The same king of everything

will give judgment to the people equally and he will compel them to confess,

whoever is near superiority over another, rejoicing in vain deceit 95

[...]

'But you, o chosen ones, on behalf of such a great name are with the sword¹³⁷

As for what remains, let us die and fall in mid battle:

with blood and by atoning your spirit you must seek return.'

Once he spoke in accordance with what they deserve, he gave an end to the prayer on his lips.

The others follow the solemn life of their teacher: 100

¹³⁶ The meaning of this line is a little blurry. The source text of the first hemistich is highly fragmented.

¹³⁷ The sword of the Spirit, Ephesians 6:17.

some of them cut up scraps and loaded gifts for the altar;
 then the boys and the trembling mothers of the community stand round in a long array.
 Then with his hand he spread out all those pressed close together,
 thus he in front approached the tables and he himself begins.
 And after, he is the first to touch as far as to the top of his lips,
 the leaders accept and equally do all the priests
 and the young boys: then the rest of the adults follow.
 Whoever immediately seeks return, to the walls of the houses
 we strive and we celebrate the always blessed honor. 110

† And [*abortio*¹³⁸] † it is exclaimed:

‘A second Virgil!’

Presently he recites this:

‘Do not, I beg, do not force me into such a fight! 111

For he will always be a god to me, my teacher.

Indeed I remember – for I am not ignorant of earlier misfortunes:

a shepherd once wished to surpass beautiful Apollo in singing

and calling upon the gods for a contest in song, 115

and limbs beaten by the god he hung from a leafy branch.

¹³⁸ Abl. “abortion” does not make sense here. See note one of introduction.

***De ecclesia* Manuscript**

Anthologia Latina. Via Bibliothèque Nationale de France Gallica.

22
 DE LAPSO CALOR · ADQUE INVENTOR VITARECESSIT

DE ECCLESIA

TECTUM VICIUSTUM INCENS CENTUM · SUB LIMECOLUNES
 RELIGIONE COMPETRUM · ET VENERABIL ET PLUM
 HOC DEDIT ESSE SUUM · SUPERIRECATOROLYMPI
 NAM D'S OMNIPOTENS · QUI REX HOMINUM Q; D'OMN;
 ETERNIS REGIT IMPERIIS · QUOTENDITIS IN QUID
 HIC DOMUS EST NOBIS · HEC CARITUEBITUROMNIS
 HIC MATRES PVERIQ; · SIMUL MIXT EQ; PUELLE
 SACRACANUNT PATEREQ; · OCULOS ADSIDERATOLLUNT
 HIC EXAUDIRI VOCES · HIC VOTAPRECESQ;
 NOCTES ADQ; DIES FERET · AUREAS IDERA CLAMOR
 POST QUAM PRIMA QUI ES ET FACTA SILENTIA NOCTIS
 INCIPIT EFFRIDI VINO · EXORE SACERDOS ·
 ACCIPITE HEC ANIMIS · ELIASQ; ADVERTITE MENTES
 MATRES ADQ; VIRI · PVERI INNUPTEQ; PUELLE
 DISCITE IUSTICIAM MONITI · ET SPES DISCITE VESTRAS
 AUT INCERTA CANO · D'S ETHERE MISSUS AB ALTO
 IPSIUS SOLIO REGIS · VIA PRIMAS ALUTIS
 QUE COM NOBIS PASTUS SUBLIMIS · EDDEDIT ORTUS
 VIRGINIS OS ABITUMQ; CERENS · MIRABILE DICTUM
 MORE AFFAT EST SPI · PROPRIORACANITQ;
 SIC NOU PROGENIES CELO · DISCENDIT AB ALTO ·
 AST UBIA M' FIRMA X DEUM · REPRODEDIT ETAS
 NEQ; ABERED' MISERI · QUI B; ULTIMISSIMUS ESSET
 ILLE DIES QUANDO PARENTES · HAC DIRACNENTES
 INSONTEM MACHO ADRECEM · CLAMORE TRAHENT
 ILLENIBILNAXQ; IPSE VOLENS · SEQ; OBtulIT ULTRO
 HOC IPSUM INSTRUERET · UXTUMQ; DICTA PRIORUM

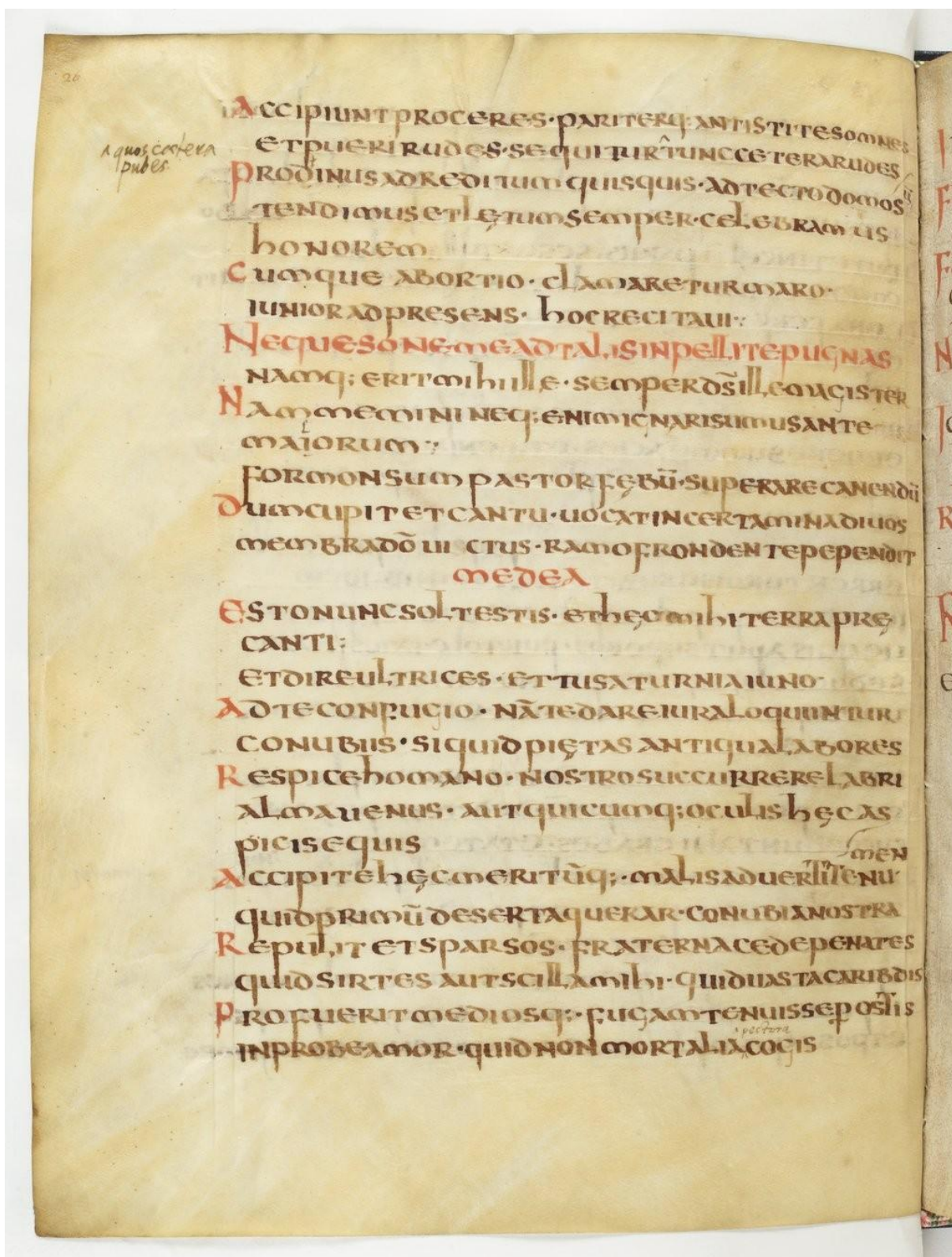
PRADERE IUSSIT. TELLUS Q; OPERTA SUBIRET
 PRIMIS IBI ANTE OMNES SCEPTUM. QUI UOCERETUR
 SUS TULLIT AB LATAS LIMPIS. ASIDERA PALMAS
 HOC DICENS EQUITEM IN IUSTONIL. TALE REPERTUS
 NEC FAS OMNIS ERIT. TANTAM SANIACICYS
 MENULLADIES TANTIS. NEQ; FORTIBUS AUSIS
 AD ODERE SOCIUM. UES TRAI NQUID MUNERA
 UOBIS.
 UOS ANI MALI HANC. PROPIUS QUOCUMQUE ADSU
 MITE LETO;
 TUM ENI MAGIS ADQ; MAGIS. MAGNIS FORORIB; ACPI
 CLAMORESSIMUL. HORRENDOS ADSIDERATOLLUNT
 ET MAGIS ADQ; MAGIS POENAS. CUM SANGUINA
 POSCUNT
 HAS INTER UOCES MEDIO. INFRACLANTE TUMULTU
 ARBORIS OBNI XOSTRUNCOTIBI MAGNE TROPEUM.
 OMNIPOTENS GENITOR. PALMAS UTASQ; TETENDIT
 TEQ; UOCANS MULTO. UIRTA CUM SANGUINE FUDIT
 ET TAMEN INTER EXTUANTIAM. MAXIMA CURA
 NON TULLIT HANC SPECIEM. GRAUITER COMOTUSE TAL
 DAT CLARUM ECCELO SIGNUM. NAOYTE MPORE INILLO
 SOL MEDIUM CELI CONSCENDERAT. IGNEOS ORBE
 ERIPUUNT SUBITO NUBES. CELUMQ; DIE Mq;
 ET NOX ATRA POLUBIGIS. SUBUECTA TENEBAT
 TRISTENUIT DIE SPATIUM. NON AMPLIUS ORAS.
 TEREPETENS ITERUM. SUA CLARA IN LUCERE FULSIT
 NON ADIGI MELIORREB; IAM RITE PACTIS
 INDE DATUM MOLITUR ITURITER. IAMQ; ARUXTENE
 STUBREXTU TALACUNICRON EMORUQ; TENEBRIS

1. nunt adeo me
 Lior

/ ceupea

UT STATIONE AD PRUCE SUE NIT. CRUCE COLLENTIS ABER NI
TUNC DEMUM HORRISO NOSTRI TRIDENTICARDINE
 PORTE:
 UANDUNTUR UASTE SOLIDOQUE DANTECOLUMNE
SPONTESUAE TUM BROSE PENITUS. PRATERE CABER
 INCREDITUR LINGUENS ANTRU. TUM MA XIAM TURBA
 UTUIDERE Dm. FULGENTIAQ; ORA PERUM BRAS
 INCENTITREPIDAREM. METUNEC PLUKA MORXTUS
HEC ATET DICTIS MERENTARECTORA MULCET
 NETREPIXTATE ME. ANIMEQ; UABREQ; PRATERNE
 UOBIS PRATAM QUIES GENITOR. MIHITALIANAQ;
 DICTA DEDITUOS. PROPHETIAM INXTENDERE EXIT
HEC PRATUS ANIMASQ; PERIUEALONCA SEDEBANT
 DETURBATAHQ; ANTRU. MISERANS SUBMITTITARTO
ET DICTORARENS SUPEREA. AD CONUEXAREUEXIT
 X INTEREA MA XANS SUBITO. UULGATA PERUIKBE
 FAMA UOLAT ILLUM EXPIRANTEM. SEDIB; IOMIS
 LAM REUOCARE CRADUM. SUPERBASQUE EUXDE
 RE ADAURAS
OBS PRUERE ANIMIS ALIUS. ET SANQUINIS XICTOR
 NEC XISX CLAM CRIMENQ; CAPUEQ; MALORU
ET NODUM IN FORMIS. LETITRABENECTITABALTA
 PROQ; SUIS MERETIS. SUPERIS CONCESSITABOKIS
NEC MINUS INTEREA. SESEM XITINIS XEBXT
 AD SOCIUS QUIB; IN MEDIIS. SIC DE INDE LOCUTUS
EX TULIT OSSA CRU. CLARAQ; IN LUCERE PULSIT
 OMNIX LONCEBUS SIMILIS. CUNCTISQ; REPENTE
JREITERUM IN LACRIMIS. CORA QUE QUERITIS ADSU
 EN PERFECTA MEICARI. PRECEPTA PARENTIS

QUARE ACIT EOS SOCIANTARU. IN MUNERA LACHRU
 PEALITE CRECIAS ANIMAS. NXTIQ. PATRISQ;
SERMONU MEMORES. PLUBIALI SPARETE LIORFA
 IPSE UBITE MPUSERIT. OMNI SINFONTE LARABO
DIXIT ET IN CELU PRXB; SESUSTULLIT ALIS
 CONDITUS IN NUBEM. HINC RECIATECTASUBUIT
DONAFERENS VICTOR. CXRICENITOKISET ORA
 OBSULALI BXLIT DEXTRAQ; AMPLEXUS...
 INHESIT
HUIUS INADUENTUM CERTIS ASEDIB; IMIS.
 ERUERE SUOMELCIES. ET MENIAUERTI
ADQ; OMNEM ORNATU FLAMMAM CREPITANTE
 CREMARI.
 TUNC AUTEM IN NUMERE REGENTIS. POPULIQ; FREQUENTER
TERRENTUR UISUSUBITO. REX OMNIB; IDEM
 IURADABXIPOPULIS. PRXITER SUBIEQ; FAXTERI
QUE QUIS APUT SUPEROS. FURTOLE TXUS INANI.
 SEDUOS OLEPI FERRO. PRO NOMINE TANTO
QUOD SUPER EST MORIAMUR. ET IN MEDIA RE MA
 RUDAMUS.
SANCTINE QUERENDI REDITUS ANIMAMQ; LITAKIDO
HEC UBI PROMERITIS PINE. DEDITORE PRECXNDI
 SUCCEDUNT ALI CRABES. ET TXTE MINISTRI. ^{his}
PARS INFRUSTRASECANT. HONORANTQ; ALTERIADO
 TU ODEMU MPUEKI. ET PRAUIDO LONGO OR
 DINE MXIRES STANT CIRCU.
QUOS UBICONFECTOS MANUS. CIRCU TOLITOMNES
SIC PRIORADCREDIRUR MENSAS. ADQ; INCIPTIPSE.
 ET POSTQUAMPRIUS SUOMOTENUS ADTEPTORE.



ACCIPIUNT PROCERES. PAVITERQUE ANTI STITES OMNES
 ET PVERI RUDES. SEQUITUR TUNC CETERA RUDES
 PRO DINUS ADREDITUM QUI SQUIS. AD TECTO DOMOS
 TENDIAMUS ET LETUM SEMPER. CELEBRAMUS
 HONOREM.

CUMQUE ADORTIO. CLAMARE TUR ANKO.
 JUNIOR AD PRESENS. HOC RECITAVI:

NEC VES ONE ME AD TALIS INPELLITE PUGNAS
 NALIQ; ERIT MIHI ILLE. SEMPER DSI LLE CAUCISTER
NALM MEMINI NEQ; ENIM ICNARISUM US ANTE
 MAIORUM:

FORMONSUM PASTOR FEBU. SUPERARE CANENDU
DUM CUPIT ET CANTU. UOCXT INCERTAM IN ADIUVOS
 MEMBRADO UICITUS. RAMOFRONDENTE PERPENDIT
MEDEA

ESTONUMCSOLTESTIS. ET HEC MIHI TERRA PRE
 CANTI:

ET DIRE ULTRICES. ET TUS ATURNIA IUNO.

AD TE CONPUGIO. NATE DARE IURALOQUUM TUR
 CONUBIUS. SI QUID PIETAS ANTIQUA LABORES

RESPICE HOMANO. NOSTRO SUCCURRERE LABRI
 ALAMUENUS. AUT QUICUMQ; OCVLIS HEC AS
 PICISEQUIS

ACCIPITE HEC MERITUMQ; MALIS ADUERLITENU
 QUID PRIMU DESERTAQUE IAR. CONUBI ANOSTRA

REPULIT ET SPARSOS. FRATERNACE DEPENARES
 QUID SIRTES AUT SCILLAMIBI. QUID IUS TACRIBDIS

PROFUEKIT MEDIOSQ; FUGANT TENUISSE POSLIS
 INPROBELAMOR. QUID NON MORTALIXCOCIS

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