

The Purpose of Rhetoric in Late Antiquity

Edited by
ALBERTO J. QUIROGA PUERTAS

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From Performance to Exegesis

Edited by

Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas

Mohr Siebeck

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Rhetoric for a Christian Community: the Poems of the *Codex Visionum*

Laura Miguélez-Cavero

The fourth century AD does not at first seem an attractive proposition as regards Greek epic poetry. There is a temptation to consider it as a gap between the riches of the third century (Oppian's *Cynegetica*, the *Sack of Troy* by Triphiodorus, and Quintus of Smyrna and his *Posthomerica*) and the grand presence in the fifth century of Nonnus of Panopolis, who wrote the *Dionysiaca* in forty-eight books and the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* in twenty-one. Palladas and the abundant poetic production of Gregory of Nazianzus do of course stand out in this period, but in terms of the epic the *Lithica*, attributed to Orpheus,¹ and the poem by Naumachius² seem to be no more than poor relations of the genre, even if we bear in mind the information we have about lost poems.³

If we restricted our view of the fourth century to this evidence, we would be confining our analysis to highbrow epic poetry. Fragments of smaller compositions extant on papyri⁴ prove however that the genre appealed to versifiers of all levels, and the *Codex Visionum* provides evidence of the use of epic poetry in a Christian context. In the *Codex Visionum*, dated from the turn of the fifth century AD,⁵ six different hands copied *Visions* 1–4 of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (*P. Bodmer* 38),⁶ along with

¹ Halleux and Schamp (1985), 82–123.

² Heitsch (1963–1964), no. 29.

³ Such as those copied in codex 279 in Photius' *Library*, on which see Hammerstaedt (1997).

⁴ See Miguélez-Cavero (2008), nos 19–39, to which we should add: *P. Oxy.* 72.4852 Hexameter verses on Meleager (= LDAB 13267); *P. Oxy.* 72.4853 Book-Title: Areios (?), *Theogamia* (= LDAB 13268).

⁵ Dating of the copy of the *Codex*: early fifth century (Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt [1984], 117; Cavallo ap. Carlini [1991], 123–124), second half of the fifth century AD (Van Haelst, ap Carlini [1991], 124). Full description of the *Codex* in Carlini (1991), 103–128; Crisci (2004), 115–122.

⁶ *Editio princeps*: Carlini (1991). The Ποιμήν, probably written in Rome in the second AD, is divided into five ὁράσεις (*visiones*), twelve ἐντολαί (*mandata*, ethical instructions) and ten παραβολαί (*similitudines*, parables). The author narrates four *Visions* given

a series of poems of which no other copy survives and which were probably composed during the fourth century.⁷ The *codex* was part of a rich library which included Greek, Latin and Coptic books of Christian and non-Christian content.⁸ Its design and the poems included in it make it an oddity which apparently had no impact on the practice of poetry either locally or on a wider scale.

The *Shepherd* was a popular text in antiquity, and the first four *Visions*, narrated in prose and simple in linguistic terms, provide a general introduction on how to be a Christian, focusing on a spiritual progression towards complete obedience to God in order to secure salvation. Christian life is seen as a long trial during which different events test the participant and help him to grow in faith and closeness to God.

The first of the poems is the *Vision of Dorotheus* (Ὁρασις Δωροθέου, *P. Bodmer* 29),⁹ in which Dorotheus¹⁰ recounts his vision of the palace of God. There he commits a double error for which he is judged and punished, and later purified and baptised so as to gain the necessary strength to complete his task of vigilance over the palace of God. The purpose of the poem is to honour God. The 360 hexameters are difficult to understand due to the poor preservation of the *codex* and the lack of clarity in the narrative. At first the poem was related to the figure of the *lapsi*, who had denied their faith and offered sacrifices to save their lives in a context of persecution: Dorotheus had not given proof of his faith when it was requested of him, but, after experiencing the renovation of the baptism, he became strong enough to embrace martyrdom.¹¹

to him by an old woman (the Church). For the fifth vision she is substituted by a messenger dressed as a shepherd. The *Codex Visionum* originally contained *Visions* I–IV, but *Vision* IV went missing with the loss of the central folio.

⁷ They seem to be copies of poems composed earlier, though in the [*Eulogy*] of the *Lord Jesus* there are significant corrections in the margins of lines 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, proposing new versions of the lines, which Carlini (2002), 137 suggests are authorial corrections. The poem may simply have been recent enough to admit improvements, or else members of the community where the *Codex* was copied may have known different versions of the text.

⁸ Description in Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 218–223.

⁹ *Ed. pr.*: Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt (1984). *Ed. altera*: Kessels and van der Horst (1987).

¹⁰ On the identity of Dorotheus, see Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt (1984), 33–36, 43–49; Vian (1985), 47–48; Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 13–14, 68–70; Gelzer (2002). The *ed. pr.* and Kessels and van der Horst (1987) date him from the turn of the fourth century; van Berchem (1986), a little later; Livrea (1986), 688–702 at 342–362; Bremer (1988; 1993) from the latter part of the fourth century.

¹¹ Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt (1984), 33–36, 43–49.

Subsequent readings have explored metaphorical interpretations,¹² assuming that, after the end of the violence against Christians, martyrdom had remained in the Christian imaginary as an image for mortification and the ultimate surrender of life for the sake of God (especially in the context of ascetic rigorism). According to Lukinovich,¹³ Dorotheus dreams that he is a novice deacon serving in the court of God, so that when he commits the sin of arrogance and fails to complete his duties he is not failing his fellow churchmen, as he would have done by attending a church on earth, but God himself.¹⁴ His sinful nature is only atoned by the mercy of God and a severe physical punishment. The *Vision* would thus serve as a warning about their duties for both Dorotheus and any ecclesiastical officer (deacons in particular). Morard (2002) points out the possibility of reading the *Vision* in an ascetic context as an exhortation to a community to be vigilant regarding the dangers of sin.

The second poem is *On Abraham* (Πρὸς Ἀβραάμ, *P.Bodmer* 30).¹⁵ Including a prelude (lines 1–3), an alphabetic acrostic (lines 4–27) and a conclusion (lines 28–31), it juxtaposes the speeches of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac to welcome the sacrifice of the latter. The earliest reference for this episode is *Gen.* 22:1–19, but *P.Bodmer* 30 deviates from this markedly, incorporating resonances of the figure of Isaac as found in the books of the *Maccabees* and the *New Testament*, and in early Christian tradition.¹⁶ The closest parallel is the prayer or liturgical hymn about the sacrifice of Isaac, also an alphabetic acrostic, copied in the fourth-century miscellaneous *codex* now at the Abbey of Montserrat,¹⁷ which belonged to the same library as the *Codex Visionum*.

The *Speech to the Righteous* (Πρὸς δίκαιους, *P.Bodmer* 31)¹⁸ follows the *On Abraham*. The 164 elegiac distichs address a community of right-

¹² Allegorical readings of the *Vision* are uncertain because even the elements which seem closest to the contemporary world are never clear enough: the vestments of Dorotheus see him classified as an Imperial palace guard (Van Berchem [1986]; Bremmer [1988], 86) or as a deacon (Lukinovich [2002], 44–45). See also Bremmer (1988) on the poem as a key source on military organisation at the imperial court in the second half of the fourth century.

¹³ Lukinovich (2002), esp. 38–47.

¹⁴ On the duties of deacons in fourth century Alexandria, see Martin (1996), 193–195.

¹⁵ *Ed. pr.*: Hurst and Rudhardt (1999). *Proekdosis*: Livrea (1994). English translation: van der Horst and Parmentier (2002), 157–159. Van der Horst and Parmentier (2002), 156 translate ‘On Abraham’ understanding πρὸς as ‘with regard to,’ as it appears in the New Testament. Hurst and Rudhardt (1999) translated *Adresse à Abraham*.

¹⁶ See Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 38–42; van der Horst and Parmentier (2002), 159–172.

¹⁷ Roca-Puig (1994), 117–126. Description of the *codex* in Torallas-Tovar and Worp (2006), 15–24.

¹⁸ *Editio princeps*: Hurst and Rudhardt (1999). *Ed. alt.* Livrea (2006–2008).

eous men (δίκαιοι) and remind them of the perils of sin in a strongly paraenetic tone, focusing on the attraction of worldly possessions. The context is that of divine judgement and of the importance of a full conversion (μετάνοια), which might lead to martyrdom. Dorotheus thus becomes something of a test case, given that, in spite of his previous failings, he was taken to paradise after suffering martyrdom for obeying God's commandments.

The remaining poems are considerably shorter. The [*Eulogy*] of the *Lord Jesus* (or [*Works*] of the *Lord Jesus*, [] τοῦ δεσπότου Ἰησοῦ, *P. Bodmer* 32) is another alphabetic acrostic. It celebrates the figure of Christ and mentions key concepts such as his divine filiation, his kingship and ἀρετή (virtue and power, which includes bringing peace on earth and freeing humanity from sin and death).

Words of Cain ('What would Cain say when killing Abel?', Τί ἂν εἴποι ὁ Καὶν ἀποκτείνας τὸν Ἀβελ;, *P. Bodmer* 33) is an *ethopoea*,¹⁹ a reconstruction in 19 lines of the words which Cain might have said after killing Abel, in accordance with the general spirit of *Genesis* 4:9–19. This piece focuses on the pain of Cain when he realises that he has been condemned for his sin.

The Lord to those who suffer (Ὁ δεσπό[τ]ης πρὸς τοὺς πά[σχο]ντας, *P. Bodmer* 34) consists of an introduction of three lines, where God addresses humanity, and an alphabetic acrostic (24 lines), with standard Christological content. The poem addresses the good and righteous whose lot is to suffer for the Lord, who will then reward them in the afterlife.

Words of Abel ('What would Abel say after being killed by Cain,' Τί ἂν εἴπ[ο]ι ὁ Ἀβελ ἀναιρηθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Καὶν; *P. Bodmer* 35) is an *eidolopoea* (a speech pronounced by a dead character) which paraphrases Psalm 102 (101) on the subject of the sufferings of the righteous.

The final two poems are too poorly preserved to allow extensive conclusions. *P. Bodmer* 36 is composed in hexameters and, according to Norelli,²⁰ contained a description of the Last Judgement, focusing on the importance of the care of the widow, the orphan and the poor (lines 13–24). At one point (lines 40–65) it refers to Psalm 148, stressing the importance of the praise of God. *P. Bodmer* 37, which follows this, could be a hymn.

From a literary point of view, the metrics are rather poor,²¹ as is the vocabulary used, an amalgam of epic phrases and words unsuitable for epic

¹⁹ Already identified as such in Fournet (1992).

²⁰ Norelli (2002).

²¹ Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 24–29; Agosti (2002), 87–88; Agosti and Gonnelli (1995–1996), 310–354.

composition (technical terms, Latin words, prosaic words)²². Agosti²³ reflects on the links of some of the poems with psalmic literature and hymns (*[Eulogy] of the Lord Jesus, Words of Cain, Words of Abel, P. Bodmer 36, P. Bodmer 37*) and of others with paraenetic literature (*The Lord to those who suffer*), biblical paraphrases (*On Abraham, Words of Cain, Words of Abel*), visionary literature (*Vision of Dorotheus*)²⁴ and elegies in distichs (*Speech to the Righteous*).

With the editing complete and several studies now published,²⁵ we can be sure that the *codex* was designed as the shared project of a male religious community.²⁶ The continuous emphasis on the struggle against the passions and the reflections on the presence of the devil in daily life provide clear proof that the *codex* was not designed as a tool for the conversion of pagans, but to improve the spiritual life of the Christian community.²⁷ The risk for the Christians to whom the *Codex* is addressed is not attacks from outside, but a lukewarm faith: martyrdom is not approached from the perspective of the aggressor and the victim, but as an oblation back to God of the life given by Him.

As regards the *raison d'être* of the *Codex Visionum*, this community seems to have chosen and ordered the texts carefully, intending to use them as a tool for personal and community instruction²⁸ and meditation.

²² Not in the same degree in all the poems. Latin words are frequent in the *Visio Dorothei* (Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt [1984], 23–26, 39), but absent from *The Lord to those who suffer*. On the vocabulary of *P. Bodmer* 30–37, see Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 31–35.

²³ Agosti (2001a), 200–216.

²⁴ See also Rudhardt (2002), 120–122.

²⁵ Especially those edited in Hurst and Rudhardt (2002).

²⁶ Early sources divided the monastic movement into eremitic (*Life of Antony*), semi-eremitic (*Apophthegmata Patrum*) and coenobitic (*Life and Rule of Pachomius*) forms, but these terms can be misleading, and a comparison with other sources of information reveals a more complex picture: see Goehring (2007). For an overview of the general context, see Martin (1996), 746–763; Rousseau (2000); Caner (2009). Lukinovich (2002), esp. 47–55, 58–59 prefers a community of diocesan priests and deacons. For fourth century AD Egyptian priests, see Martin (1996), 646–662.

²⁷ For sin and penitence in monastic contexts, see Kofsky (1999) and Bitton-Ashkelony (1999).

²⁸ According to the *Rule of Pachomius*, after the instruction given three times a week by the housemasters (20), the monks shall discuss among themselves what they have heard before going back to their quarters (19, 138) to continue to reflect on it individually in silence (122). The *Rule* also states that books can be borrowed from the main library of the monastery, and that these should be returned at the end of the week (25), and that the individual houses have a room where books are kept (82) and locked in a case at the end of the day (101). Each monk has a book which he should lock up when he goes to the *synaxis* or the refectory (100 – see also *Apophthegmata Patrum* 16.29, where the monk Paphnoutios is unjustly accused of having stolen another monk's book after the book has

The *Codex* may also have been used in the liturgy, since the *Shepherd of Hermas* had become a canonical text²⁹ and the shorter poems also have hymnic resonances (the *On Abraham* has been related to the prayer published by Roca-Puig in 1994).³⁰ Even the structure of the *Codex* itself has been described as liturgy-based.³¹

The order in which the texts were copied was not a random matter.³² The *Shepherd of Hermas* was copied first because it was considered to be an authoritative text,³³ a declaration of attachment to the tradition of the Church. The *Shepherd* and the *Vision of Dorotheus* share the focus on the *μετάνοια* or definitive conversion,³⁴ as well as certain images, such as that of the Church as a tower,³⁵ which reappear in other poems in the *Codex*. Together these outline the *Codex*'s character, so that the following poems contribute more thoughts on conversion and martyrdom and add nuances to the requirements of the *metanoia*.

The *Codex Visionum* reflects the religious identity of a community of δίκαιοι, but also their cultural identity. This was an established community, which already owned a rich library and decided to copy a composite book to gather together texts that had already been composed, chosen because together they create a coherent discourse, with clear mottos and easily recognisable language and rhetoric.³⁶ It is on the different areas where rhetoric³⁷ is present in the poems of the *Codex*³⁸ that this paper will focus.

been hidden in Paphnoutios' cell while the community was at the *synaxis*). More on this in Sheridan (1997), 211–215.

²⁹ Carlini (1991), 26.

³⁰ See the historical overview of early Christian hymns in Starowieyski (1992).

³¹ Lukinovich (2002), 56: 'Le tout est construit comme une liturgie où une première partie consacré à l'écoute d'une parole inspirée et à la commémoration d'un saint homme est suivie d'une deuxième partie homilétique, pour terminer avec une célébration (méditation de la parole biblique en relation avec le contexte particulier, psaumes, cantiques, louanges finales à Dieu).' The *Rule of Pachomius* clearly states that all monks have to attend several prayers every day (23, 121, 125, 126), as well as a weekly Eucharist and a smaller weekly service performed in the individual houses (15). On the Pachomian monastic liturgy, see Rousseau (1985), 80–82, 85–86; Veilleux (1968), 195–196, 226–248, 276–323.

³² See Agosti (2001a), 197–198; Carlini (2002), 134–135.

³³ Carlini (1991), 25–27; Brox (1991), 55–71. On its diffusion in Egypt, see Carlini (2008); Bagnall (2009), 40–48. On the common ground between the *Shepherd* and Pachomius, see Rousseau (1985), 136–138.

³⁴ *Μετάνοια* is a key concept in the *Shepherd of Hermas* from its very beginning, see *Vis.* 1.1.8.

³⁵ On which see De Spirito (2002).

³⁶ Hurst-Rudhardt (1999), 31–33 analyse what they call the 'vocabulary proper of the group' or 'mots de la tribu' in *P. Bodmer* 30–37.

³⁷ Rhetoric is to be understood here in a broad sense, as in Cameron (1991), 20: 'What we might call the 'rhetoric' of early Christianity is not... rhetoric in the technical sense;

Starting with the general rhetorical discourse (1), I shall then go on to analyse the rhetorical structure of the *Codex* and its links with the genre of biography (2), the influence of the rhetorical rules of biography (3) and the presence of rhetorical micro-structures (4). To this I will add some notes on the reasons for and the consequences of the choice of poetry as the vehicle of expression of Christian ideas in the *Codex* (5), and, in manner of a conclusion (6), some remarks on the attitude towards *paideia* in the *Codex*, within the general framework of Christian attitudes towards classical *paideia*.

The Rhetorical Discourse of the *Codex Visionum*

To understand the construction of the *Codex Visionum*, it is necessary to enumerate the elements which make up its general discourse. We notice the recurrence of a male character who often goes under the name of δίκαιος ('righteous'),³⁹ and who experiences μετάνοια (complete conversion), defeats sin (the main impediment to reach eternal life), and then commits himself fully to God.

Metanoia was in fact the constant companion of the monk from the very moment he discovered his vocation.⁴⁰ St. Antony says in his first letter that those who draw near to the love of God (i.e., those who seek an ascetic life) have in common a spirit of repentance or change of mind (*paenitentia*),⁴¹ the Latin equivalent of μετάνοια, which, according to the rest of

rather, the word is used in its wider sense, denoting the manner and circumstances that promote persuasion.'

³⁸ The *Visions of Hermas* and the last two poems will only be mentioned at certain junctures.

³⁹ Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 22–24, 70–73.

⁴⁰ On *metanoia* as 'repentance' and 'conversion,' see Bitton-Ashkelony (1999), 179–180.

⁴¹ Antony differentiates between three types of ascetic hopefuls: 1) 'those who are called by the law of love which is in their nature, and which original good was implanted in them at their first creation' [I. *Quidam enim per testamentariam legem et inditum in eis semel bonum, a prima sui conditione pertingere verbo Dei ad eos morati non sunt, sed perrexerunt parati cum eo*]; 2) those 'who hear the written Law testifying of pains and torments prepared for the wicked and of the promises prepared for those who walk worthily in the fear of God; and by the testimony of the written Law their thoughts are roused up to seek to enter into the calling' [I. *Qui audiunt scriptam legem testificantem eis universa supplicia quae peccatoribus praeparantur, et annuntiantem de sanctis promissionibus ad eos qui proficiunt, quibus et per testimonia inscriptae legis sobria voluntas exsistit, et per hanc quaesierunt intrare in vocatione vocantis*]; and 3) 'there are souls which at first were hard of heart and persisted in the works of sin; and somehow the good God in his mercy sends upon such souls the chastisement of affliction, till they

the letter, will guide them throughout the different stages of purification of soul and body.⁴² The initial μετάνοια was considered to develop into a constant quest for the love of God, the necessary state of mind of the monk,⁴³ which is why it is the central concept of the *Codex*, which was designed as a spiritual aid for the monks.

The *metanoia* provides the δίκαιος with the strength to fight sin and to face the suffering allotted to him, in the most extreme cases in the form of physical martyrdom. The poems of the *Codex* therefore introduce a variety of characters confronting sin: while Dorotheus accepts physical punishment for his failure to perform his duties and his sin of arrogance, the *Speech to the Righteous* deals with greed and avarice in the context of the Last Judgement. The descriptions of the virtue of Jesus in the [*Eulogy*] of the Lord Jesus can be understood as a source of inspiration for the fight against sin, and *Words of Cain* describes in detail the pain of the sinner. In *P. Bodmer 36*, the sins punished in the Last Judgement are balanced with the charity towards the weakest members of society. These poems also present the righteous dealing with suffering: Dorotheus endures physical punishment, in *On Abraham* Isaac and his family face the martyrdom of Isaac with joy, Abel cries aloud to God in *Words of Abel*, and the Lord himself consoles those who put up with suffering in *The Lord to those who suffer*.

δίκαιος is frequently used in reference to godly men, both in the Old and the New Testament.⁴⁴ The title was also given to Egyptian monks by the local communities who believed that their righteousness lent their prayers a special force and enabled them to heal the sick and dying even

grow weary, and come to their senses, and are converted, and draw near, and enter into knowledge and repent with all their heart, and they also attain the true manner of life' [I. *duris cordibus saepe inter vitia et in peccati operibus permanentibus, aliquoties benignus Deus infert labores ad increpandum, donec sentiant per aerumnam, et poenitentes ex toto, accipientes et ipsi virtutes*]. Latin text: Migne, *PG* XL.977–8. English translation: Chitty (1975).

⁴² The vocation of Antony as narrated by Athanasius contains both elements of *metanoia*, the repentance and conversion from an old way of life to a new one, focused solely on God. According to Athanasius (*VA* 2–3), he experienced a deep desire to follow the model of sanctity provided by the Apostles and the first Christian communities of the *Acts of the Apostles* as a means to go to heaven. Greek text: Bartelink (2004), 124–376; English translation: Vivian and Athanassakis (2003).

⁴³ According to St. Paul (*1Cor.* 9:24, *Phil.* 3:12), all are called to pursue perfection. Though none will attain it in this life, all are ordered to strive to obtain the prize. The ascetic's constant striving towards God implies that sanctity is not necessarily the result of innate virtue. See *Vita Pachomii (Vita prima Graeca* 25, ed. Halkin), on which Rousseau (1985), 129.

⁴⁴ Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 22–24, 70–73.

without physical contact.⁴⁵ The *Codex Visionum* would therefore serve as a guide to δικαιοσύνη ('righteousness') for monks, who were to discern the implications of the virtue from the different characters depicted in the texts. On the spiritual path towards God, the Christian *cursus honorum*, Christ was the ultimate referent, but as mortal men they also turned their eyes to earlier believers (Abel, Isaac, Hermas, Dorotheus), all of whom fitted the archetype of the righteous man willing to sacrifice his life.

In earlier, rougher times, μετάνοια implied a display of Christianity in public, which would prove a Christian's full commitment to faith, as such a display was frequently followed by martyrdom, the 'express route' to heaven and a confirmation of Christian perfection. With growing tolerance of Christianity, martyrdom was no longer an option for those aiming at sanctification, and ascetic life became an attractive alternative for those seeking total observance of the teachings of the Gospels. In fact, the Fathers often assimilate the merit of asceticism to that of martyrdom.⁴⁶ The context would explain the links between *metanoia*, martyrdom and asceticism.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E.g. in the fourth century Paulos and Tapiam write to Nepheros, Ophellios and the brothers of the Monastery of Hathor, asking to be cured by their prayers, in the knowledge that they are going to be listened to because they are righteous, *P. Neph.* 1.10-15: ἐγὼ γὰρ ἢ Ταπιὰμ' ἐνόσησα καὶ ἔτι ἀνάκειμαι. παρα-/καλοῦμεν οὖν, εὐξασθαι ὑπὲρ τῆς ὀλοκληρίας / ἡμῶν' καὶ γὰρ πρὸ τούτου τὰ παιδία ἡμῶν ἐνόσησαν / καὶ διὰ τὰς εὐχὰς ὑμῶν ἐπαύσαντο. πιστεῦο-/μεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ κύριος ὑμῶν δικαίων ὄντων / ἀκούσεται ('Because I, Tapiam, have been ill and I am still in bed. Thus we ask you to pray for our good health, because, before this our children were ill and thanks to your prayers were cured. Hence, we believe that the Lord will listen to you, because you are righteous' – referring to *Letter of James* 5:16 πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη 'The earnest prayer of a righteous man is powerfully effective.'). Greek text: Kramer and Shelton (1987), 36. To be read with Martin (1996), 748–750. δικαίος was also the name used in some texts to differentiate between those living according to justice and those living according to grace (the 'perfect ones'): see Neri (2010).

⁴⁶ See Markus (1990), 69–72, including references to late antique Christian literature in 71, n. 27. See also Rousseau (1985), 122–134; Girardi (1990), 27–28. The fourth and fifth centuries saw an extraordinary flowering of the cult of martyrs and the Fathers paid particular attention to them in their homilies: see those gathered in Leemans *et al.* (2003).

⁴⁷ However, asceticism and martyrdom did not always mix well. In particular, Pachomius seems to have given more importance to *metanoia* than to physical mortification or martyrdom. In the *Vita Pachomii (Vita prima Graeca* 85, ed. Halkin), a monk captured by men from the desert is tortured until he makes a libation of wine to their gods. Pachomius regrets the fact that he has refused the crown of martyrdom which was offered to him, but says that in the end God wants all men to be saved and that *metanoia* is the key to salvation, not martyrdom. Rousseau (1985), 122–127 reads this anecdote in the context of moderation (σωφροσύνη) and practicality, which seems to have been the hallmark of Pachomian monasticism and asceticism. On the different interpretations of monastic life beyond the link with martyrdom, see Markus (1990), 72–83, 157–179.

The rhetorical discourse of the *Codex Visionum* is that of a male community in search for models not for a one-off conversion, but for continuous conversion as a way of life. The pillars of the *Codex* are the Christian detachment from sin and temptation, and the use of μετάνοια as the ultimate tool to become a δίκαιος.

2. Structure and Genre

We can agree that the *Codex Visionum* was copied by a Christian community of hopeful δίκαιοι as a tool for meditation on and a guide to the fundamental μετάνοια. Together, the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the poems of the *Codex* offered the readers different variations on the motif of the *metanoia* to help them grasp the concept and apply it to their own lives. This rhetorical pattern of repetition of the central element in a series of lives also operates in the collective biographies of Late Antiquity, both pagan (such as the *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* of Eunapius of Sardes) and Christian (such as the anonymous *Historia monachorum*).⁴⁸ In Eunapius' case, the repetition of the biographies builds up an image of the ideal philosopher, while the *Historia* does the same with the ideal monk, and both collections use different metaphors to tell what is essentially the same story.⁴⁹ It would be excessive to call the *Codex Visionum* a collective biography of righteous men, but it definitely does work on similar principles to the *Historia monachorum*.

In the first place, Christian collective biographies⁵⁰ tend to be selective as regards the elements narrated about each individual: personal details such as ancestry or circumstances of birth and death, physical descriptions or references to the socio-cultural context, all of them conventional in

⁴⁸ On all of these, see Miller (2000). A similar pattern of repetition and variation occurs in heresiological writings: see Cameron (2003), 472–482; Kim (2010), the collection of biographies of the heresiarchs builds a composite image of unholy life).

⁴⁹ Miller (2000), 229: 'When the interest of a collection is in depicting human identity by means of its exemplars, the result is a parade of metaphors each of which tells essentially the same 'story.' That is, each part of the whole that is the collection functions as a metaphor of the whole... the individual 'lives' that make up the *Vitae sophistarum* and the *Historia monachorum* can be seen as a series of icons that function as anthropological images, repeatedly picturing understandings of human identity in such a way as to bring out the religious vision of the collection as a whole.'

⁵⁰ The *Historia monachorum*, but also Palladius' *Lausiaca History* and Theodoret's *Historia religiosa*. These three works are also referred to as collections of *diegeseis*, a Christian term for an anecdote or story of edifying character, a way of storytelling that finds its preferred application in hagiographical writing, typically featuring brevity of content, simplicity of style and attention to detail. See Rapp (1998).

biographies and encomia,⁵¹ are often omitted. Christian narratives focus on the details or stories which function as a metaphor for the whole life (βίος) of the individual or, more precisely, for the way of life (πολιτεία) which (s)he has chosen.⁵² The narrative aims to illustrate the presence of Christ as the backbone of the saint, who becomes an icon by losing his personal traits.

In the poems of the *Codex Visionum* (esp. *Visio Dorothei*, *On Abraham*, *Speech to the Righteous*, *Words of Cain* and *Words of Abel*), the removal of all references to birth, origins, family background and education is extreme: of Dorotheus we know only his vision (*Visio Dorothei*) and general notions about his fight against sin (*Speech to the Righteous* 76–162), while in *On Abraham*, the life of Isaac (and of his parents) is reduced to the moment when they say yes to the oblation of his life to the Lord (there are no recollections of the earlier life of Abraham and Sarah and no references to the sacrifice of Isaac and his life later on). Similarly, we are told nothing of the lives of Cain and Abel beyond their reactions to Abel's death.

As regards the inclusion of the usual topics of biography and encomium, there are two elements of comparison. On one hand, the panegyrics of the martyrs by the Church Fathers expose the tension between the structure of the encomium and its Christian content. Their usual solution was to reformulate the standard topics from a Christian point of view:⁵³ for instance, the element of the fatherland and birthplace may be substituted by the *contemptio mundi* (it does not make sense to refer to the origins of the saint, given that he has rejected this world) or by a referral to the authentic Christian fatherland, the celestial Jerusalem.⁵⁴ The poets and scribes of the *Codex Visionum*, however, did not feel the pressure of the genre as the Church Fathers did. It is possible that the difference in the quality of the final result has much to do with this: they did not attempt to comply with the rules of the genre because rhetorical quality was not important enough

⁵¹ See the scheme proposed by Men. Rh. (368.1–377.30) for the encomium of the emperor (βασιλικὸς λόγος): proem (προοίμιον), country (ἐπὶ τὴν πατρίδα), people (ἔθνος), family (γένος), birth (τὰ περὶ γενέσεως), physique (περὶ φύσεως), upbringing (ἡ ἀνατροφή – usually combined with the *paideia*), occupations/attitudes (ἐπιτηδεύματα), actions (ὁ περὶ τῶν πράξεων λόγος), fortune (τύχη), full comparison (τελειοτάτη σύγκρισις), epilogue (ἐπίλογος), and prayer (εὐχή).

⁵² Theodoret accounts for this selection in his prologue, *HR* pro. 8: ἀλλ' ὀλίγα τῶν ἐκάστῳ βεβιωμένων ἢ πεπραγμένων διηγησάμενοι, καὶ διὰ τῶν ὀλιγῶν τοῦ παντὸς βίου τὸν χαρακτῆρα παραδείξαντες ('We shall narrate only a little of the life of and actions of each man, and shall represent the character of the whole life through these few indicators.') Full analysis in Miller (2000), 230–232.

⁵³ Cf. Bartelink (1986), 30–36. See also Fatti (2004).

⁵⁴ A version of the latter occurs in *Speech to the Righteous* 111–112.

for them. Of course, there is no way of knowing how conscious they were of the poor quality of their poetry.

On the other hand, the rendering in verse of contents usually formulated in prose, such as lives, can lead to a disfigurement of the content due to the metric and linguistic difficulties of the genre. Take the case of the panegyric of the Patriarch Eutychius by Paul the Silentiary (*Ekphr. St. Sophia* 978–1029).⁵⁵ Paul elevates the commonplace topics of hagiographic literature to epic stature by using epic phraseology, which means that the underlying hagiographic material is sometimes transformed beyond comprehension and can only be understood when contrasted with the prose *Life of Eutychius* by Eustathius.

In all probability, neither the poets nor the scribes of the *Codex Visionum* paid so much attention to the difficulties of the transposition of the material which would later affect Paul the Silentiary. The main reason for this was the *Codex* was aimed at a community which was already converted and had full background knowledge of the subject, which meant that they sought in the poems a renewal of their experience of conversion, and not a complete account of the subject. The keys for achieving this were the authority of the figures invoked and the capacity of the text to arouse emotion.⁵⁶ The humble *dikaioi* had nothing to do with the sophisticated elite that attended the performance of Paul's poem in Constantinople.

There is also another shared element by the *Codex Visionum* and Christian collective biographies. In the *Historia Monachorum*, the natural development of the life of the monks from birth to death is substituted by a rapid succession of anecdotes, primarily stories of action, whether performative (such as miracles) or dialogical (like quotations of conversations of teachings). These anecdotes describe the constant spiritual advancement of the monk in his imitation of Christ.⁵⁷ The biographical details of the monks are irrelevant because, as the writer clearly states in the prologue, the collection aims to bring particular benefits both to the

⁵⁵ I refer to Whitby (1987), esp. 299.

⁵⁶ For more general comments on Christian rhetoric, see Kennedy (1980), 123: 'It is... frequently the case that the Judeo-Christian orator is addressing an audience on whom the Spirit has worked in the past and for whom the prerequisite grace has been provided earlier, but whose experience of conversion is no longer vivid. There is a possibility of reminding such an audience of the religious experience it has already known, recalling individuals to the truth through rational or emotional means... Under these circumstances... the character of the speaker, the evidence he can present in his speech and the extent to which he can arouse feelings of emotion, including hope of future reward or fear of punishment, become crucial to the success of his speech.'

⁵⁷ Miller (2000), 233–235.

readers and to the writer in the form of an imitation of their edifying way of life.⁵⁸

The individuals of Christian collective biographies are not embedded in history, but in humanity's salvation history.⁵⁹ This was particularly important in the fourth and fifth centuries, when the triumphant post-Constantinian Church was aware of the generational gulf with its persecuted predecessor and needed to highlight the patterns of continuity to confirm that theirs was still the Church of the martyrs. Markus⁶⁰ identifies two chief means of bridging this divide: through the work of ecclesiastical historians (especially Eusebius), who offered continuous narratives stressing the permanent features inherited by the contemporary Church, and, with broader support, the cult of the martyrs, i.e. the celebration of the martyr as a living and intercessory presence in the community.⁶¹

Those who had succeeded in their approach to the Lord (the prophets of the Old Testament, the apostles and the first communities of the New Testament, and more recently the martyrs and the saints) were the obvious models for fourth-century Christians.⁶² The path of salvation of one person became a pattern of salvation for all Christendom, which explained the interest in writing down the *Lives* of the saints. They were composed as a mirror to the life of a saint, and also used by ascetics and Christians in general as images of the state of mind they wanted to achieve.⁶³ This

⁵⁸ *Historia monachorum*, Prol. 2: ταῖς αὐτῶν εὐχαῖς καταπιστεύσας ἐτόλμησα πρὸς τὴν διήγησιν ταύτην τραπήναι, ἵνα κάμοι τι κέρδος γένηται τῆς αὐτῶν ὠφελείας, μιμησάμενον αὐτῶν τὴν πολιτείαν καὶ τὴν παντελεῖ τοῦ κόσμου ἀναχώρησιν καὶ ἡσυχίαν διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῶν ἀρετῶν, ἧς μέχρι τέλους κατέχουσιν ('I have therefore trusted in their prayers [those of the community that lives on the Mount of Olives who have asked him to give testimony of what he saw in his voyage to the Egyptian desert] and presumed to apply myself to the composition of this narrative so that I too should derive some profit from the edifying lives of these monks through the imitation of their way of life, their complete withdrawal from the world, and their stillness, which they achieve through the patient practice of virtue and retain to the end of their lives.') English transl.: Russell (1981).

⁵⁹ On what follows see Markus (1990), 87–95.

⁶⁰ Markus (1990), 91–93.

⁶¹ More on this in Markus (1990), 97–106.

⁶² After all, martyrs too could be reduced to Biblical archetypes: Girardi (1990), 19–22, 34–41, 79–144.

⁶³ Cameron (1991), 57: 'written *Lives* provided the guidelines for the construction of a Christian life, and the ascetic model... provided the guidelines for the construction of a specifically Christian self... Written *Lives* were mimetic; real ascetic discipline in turn imitated the written *Lives*. Like visual art, early Christian discourse presented its audience with a series of images. The proclamation of the message was achieved by a technique of presenting the audience with a series of images through which it was thought possible to perceive an objective and higher truth.' On the *Lives* as an image, *ibid.* 141–147.

movement of reenactment⁶⁴ and the repetition of models of behaviour made them all the more powerful.

The adult lives of the characters of the *Codex Visionum* operate on a similar premise. Hermas, Dorotheus, Isaac, Abel and the anonymous δίκαιοι to whom the texts are directed, are divested of birth, place of origin and other personal circumstances which do not illustrate their initial or constant μετάνοια. The δίκαιοι become members of the eternal community of God's beloved, because of their constant quest for the love of God and for the fulfilment of God's law. After death they are all freed from suffering and personal circumstance. The lives of the characters of the *Codex Visionum*, like those of the monks of the *Historia Monachorum*, are chapters of humanity's history of salvation, always focused on the after-life.

This concentration on *metanoia* and the constant quest for God is the Christian adaptation of the principle of the genre according to which the biographer concentrates on the deeds and events which best reveal the character of the protagonist of his biography.⁶⁵ *Metanoia* is always considered from the perspective of the afterlife: the lives of Dorotheus, Isaac and Abel are worth the poetic investment of the *Codex* because their *metanoia* guarantees them a place at God's side after their death.⁶⁶ Recompense in the afterlife and the notion that the only important moment in the life of a saint is his death, because the rest of his life is void of chronological markers,⁶⁷ establishes a fundamental difference with the classical tradition of biography. For instance, Plutarch needed to face the problem that virtuous men did not always win, and had to play with posthumous recognition, τύχη and of his characters' failure to adapt to their situations to resolve the problem.⁶⁸

Links with collective biographies are not restricted to the general structure of the *Codex Visionum*. Events in the adult lives of some of the char-

⁶⁴ Cameron (1991), 123: fourth-century 'Christian writers and speakers... claimed the past... through the writing and reading of *Lives* – the continual reworking and reenactment of idealized Christian biography, the pattern of Christian truth in action.'

⁶⁵ Cf. Duff (1999), 22–30, on Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives*. The *Parallel Lives* are sustained by a value system or moral framework: *ibid.*, 72–98 ('[72] transgression of, or adherence to, these norms both determines the moral status of the subject and reinforces the norms themselves. The value system implicit in the *Lives* can be related to Plutarch's background in Platonic thought: in particular, Platonic conceptions of human psychology.') Miller (1983), 12 calls this a '*pars pro toto* technique.'

⁶⁶ Cf. *Speech to the Righteous* 1–4, 55–56, 67–75, 157–162; *The Lord to those who suffer* 1–3, 15–19.

⁶⁷ Harl (1993), 319: 'Le seul moment qui sera considéré comme un véritable *kairos* où tout peut basculer est le moment de la mort: la mort, naissance à la vie véritable, est la seule référence temporelle qui oriente la conscience du saint.'

⁶⁸ See Duff (1999), 135–141.

acters may be linked to patterns present in other biographies, such as Dorotheus' dream in the *Visio Dorothei*, or his poetic investiture in the manner of Hesiod. Dorotheus' vision displays clear parallels with one of Jerome's visions as recounted in his *Letter to Eustochium* (*Ep.* 22.30.2–5).⁶⁹ Jerome was so much in love with secular literature that he found the style of the Scriptures crude and distasteful. He then fell ill and dreamt that he was dragged to a tribunal where he was judged for holding Cicero in higher esteem than Christ, and subsequently flogged as a punishment, whereupon he promised to give up his beloved books and regained consciousness, physically bruised but very much transformed. In both dreams we find the trial, the physical punishment, repentance and conversion, as well as the explicit reference to the saving mercy of God.

The *Visio* is unusual in restricting the narrative to the visionary element,⁷⁰ without describing its consequences in the dreamer's life. For instance, Hermas leads a better and wiser life after each of his visions and uses what he has learnt for the benefit of his community (he has been ordered to inform the elders and priests) and his household (encouraging them to convert). Jerome, too, gives up his non-Christian reading. On the contrary, in the *Visio Dorothei* the only purpose of the dreamer is to sing to the glory of God, although the end of the poem is not the end of Dorotheus' experience, since the references to his later life in *Speech to the Righteous* confirm that readers of the *Visio* knew more about him.

As regards the three references to the investiture of Dorotheus as a poet in the *Visio Dorothei*,⁷¹ the author makes him into a Christian counterpart of the inspired poets of the past. He alludes both to the poetic initiation of

⁶⁹ Analysed in Miller (1994), 211–215.

⁷⁰ On the links between the *Visio Dorothei* and visionary literature, see Rudhardt (2002), 120–122; Agosti (2001a), 205–208.

⁷¹ *VD* 3: ἤμερον ἐν στήθεσσι διδοὺς χαρίεσσα[ν ἐπ' οἷμην ('while putting in my heart a desire for graceful song;') 172–177 [to Gabriel] ὡς σύ [μ' ὄνησας // δεῖξας σήματα πάντα, βαλὼν χαρίεσσαν ἀοιδίην] // ἐν στήθεσσι μοῖσι, ὅπιν χεῖρα[ς] ὠγ[...].εφ[// ἐν λιμέσιν μαλακοῖσιν ἐφεζόμενον λιτανεύειν. // τοῖα δ' ἐνὶ στήθεσσι μοῖσι ποτικάμβαλες ἀοιδίην // θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ' ἐσόμενα π[ρ]ό τ' ἐόντα ('so did you help me / by pointing out all the signs and by putting graceful song / into my heart, you have poured out a voice... / for me to pray sitting in a peaceful harbour. / Such were the things that you have laid into my heart as subject / of divine song, that I may celebrate all that has been and will come;') 339–343 εὐξάμην ὑψίστοι θεοῦ ἕνεκ' ἄγγελος εἶναι // πάντων ὧν μ' ἐφάρκε. καὶ ἐν στή[θεσσι] ἀοιδίην // παντοῖην ἐνέηκε παρεστάμενα[ι καὶ ἀείδ]ειν[// ἔργων δικαίων ἡδ' αὐ Χρηστοῖο ἄνακτος // εἰς ἔτος ἐξ ἔτους γλυκερότερον αἰέν [ἀοιδ]ῶ ('I prayed to be a messenger in the service of God Most High / of all the things that he laid upon me. And in my heart he / has laid songs of various kinds as to keep guard and sing / about the deeds of the righteous and also of Christ the Lord, / year after year ever more delightful for a singer.') Greek text and English translation from Kessels and van der Horst (1987). Retaken in *Speech to the Righteous* 154–156.

Hesiod⁷² and to the conclusion of the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius.⁷³ Through the repetition of recognisable patterns, Dorotheus becomes a recognisable *dikaïos*, who not only had personal contact with God through a vision, but was invested by Him as an inspired poet. Divine investiture made poetry innocent and pious enough to cite pagan authors at will.

As a collection of lives transformed by *metanoia*, the *Codex Visionum* invites its readers to become part of the catholic (i.e. universal) community of the saints, all the more interesting because the *Codex* functioned as the spiritual guide of a specific community. In this context, rhetorical rules mattered only if they boosted the authority of the protagonist, or the emotional drive of the text. This detachment would have been unthinkable for the Greek Fathers, who had had a thorough classical *paideia*, but it made sense within the walls of a secluded community. Life here was organised to promote spiritual advancement and the social conventions of the surrounding world mattered less than the rules which organised personal and community life. The quality of the Christian life of the *δίκαιοι* was the main concern, whereas literary genres were considered to be marginal categories and rhetorical structures were welcomed only through a Christian prism. The *δίκαιοι* who copied the *Codex Visionum* are connected to the rhetorical trends of contemporary Christian communities as expressed in collective biographies, and not to the path chosen by the more sophisticated Fathers.

3. More on the Rhetorics of Biography

The connection between the *Codex Visionum* and Christian collective biographies affords a method to interpret the structure of the *Codex*, as does biography as a genre.⁷⁴ Many of the characteristics of Christian biography, the archetype of which is the *Vita Antonii* by Athanasius,⁷⁵ are already present in the classical genre (e.g. in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*). In Christian biographies there is only a minimal historical intent, given that they do not aim to record what happened, but to establish a connection with sacred history, and such biographies were written mainly for the edification of

⁷² VD 176-177 ~ Hes. *Theog.* 31-32: ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν / θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ' ἔσσομένα πρό τ' ἔοντα. Rephrased also by Quintus of Smyrna (*Posthom.* 12.308-310) and in the *ethopoea* of Hesiod extant in *P.Oxy.* 50.3537r. Analysis in Agosti (1997); Agosti (2002), 94; Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 321-322.

⁷³ VD 343 ~ AR 4.1743-4 αἰοδαῖ / εἰς ἔτος ἐξ ἔτεος γλυκερότεροι εἶεν ἀεΐδεν. See Agosti (2002), 94, 109.

⁷⁴ On the history of the genre, see Miller (1983), 5-16, 45-65, 134-149. See Duff (1999), 13-51 on the programmatic statements in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

⁷⁵ Bartelink (1986), 37-40.

writer and readers.⁷⁶ In this they amplify the trend already present in classical biographies, which were written within the boundaries of historiography and encomia,⁷⁷ and aimed to reveal the character of the subject to help the reader to improve his own character.⁷⁸

The amalgam of revelation of character and moral knowledge, already present in the classical genre,⁷⁹ recurs too in the *Codex Visionum*. The lives of Hermas, Dorotheus, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jesus, Cain and Abel, and the anonymous righteous teach readers about human nature and personal growth. The Christian context in which the *Codex* was produced leads readers towards spiritual contemplation, but it was the recognition of the genre of the *Codex* which triggered in them a disposition to learn, so necessary for personal growth.

There is another aspect, too, in which the *Codex Visionum* relates clearly to classical tradition. In the prologue to the *Lives of Demetrios and Antony*, Plutarch justifies the inclusion in the *Lives* of bad men: he compares himself to two flute players who took their pupils to see both bad and good flautists, concluding that readers would be more enthusiastic in their imitation of the better *Lives* if they could also examine the lives of the base and castigated (*Demetr.* 1.6). Demetrios and Antony are thus to be seen as negative or 'deterrent' examples.⁸⁰

The *Codex Visionum* seems to work from a similar starting point. *Words of Cain* functions as the deterrent, with a clear focus on the pain of the sinner, while the [*Eulogy*] of the Lord Jesus and *The Lord to those who suffer* illustrate the opposite extreme of the line of salvation, presenting the life of Christ as the ultimate salvific model. The *Visio Dorothei* and the *Speech to the Righteous, On Abraham* and the *Words of Abel* help readers to visualise the intermediate points. The figures of the Old Testament (Isaac in *On Abraham* and Abel in *Words of Abel*) make the ultimate oblation of their lives by accepting the physical cost of salvation: Isaac will be spared,

⁷⁶ See Harl (1993), 314–316.

⁷⁷ Miller (1983), 7–8; Duff (1999), 17: 'The boundaries between history, political biography, and related forms of writing such as *enkomion* and the so-called historiographical monograph, were never clearly drawn; rather, generic differences were open to construction by individual authors in order to distinguish their work from those of rivals.'

⁷⁸ Duff (1999), 30–45, on the calling to imitate the good aspects of characters in Plutarch's *Parallel lives*.

⁷⁹ Duff (1999), 39: 'The *Lives*... not only instil a desire for imitation but actually change or 'mould' the character... This is achieved by the observer not simply looking, but also investigating, considering, testing; applying, as Plutarch might have put it, philosophy and reason.' In other words, '[39] a desire for imitation which follows upon full moral knowledge.' See also 66–71. On the encomiastic tradition of biography, see Billault (2009).

⁸⁰ Cf. Duff (1999), 45–49. More on positive and negative lives in Duff (1999), 53–65. See also Miller (1983), 13 on Suetonius.

whereas Abel dies and cries out to the Lord for justice. Closer to the reality of the readers of the *Codex*, Dorotheus strives to follow God's designs, with sin and temptations as his obstacles (pride in the *Visio Dorothei*, worldly possessions in the *Speech to the Righteous*), and the mercy of God and the intercession of the saints on his side.

The reader of these poems is asked to learn from the examples provided and to find his way towards the angelical life offered by Christ, bearing in mind the pain of those who, like Cain, fail. The *Codex Visionum* functions as a poetic and spiritual guide to δικαιοσύνη for the hopeful δίκαιοι, but it will only be used as such if the readers understand the rhetorical links with the genre of biography, as seen from a Christian perspective but not disconnected from the Classical tradition. This should serve as a warning against a hasty disregard of Classical referents even within the enclosed world of the cloister.

4. Other Rhetorical Structures

The presence of rhetoric in the *Codex Visionum* is not restricted to the general discourse and the design of the book, but it is also noticeable in the links which bring the poems together into pairs and threes and in the construction of individual poems.

4.1 Comparison

The connection between different modes of comparison and the collective biography is obvious in Plutarch's *Parallel lives*.⁸¹ In his analysis of Plutarch's use of *synkrisis*, Duff notes that when two men are chosen for a pair it is because Plutarch thought that they 'had enough similarities, combined with some significant differences, for their Lives, when told side-by-side, together to demonstrate or explore a common moral issue or set of issues.'⁸² The cultural and chronological distance between the two men (one Greek, one Roman, and from different periods) would help readers to focus their attention on the shared elements, none other than character and moral status.⁸³ The fact that Plutarch added a formal comparison of the two figures, evaluating their lives and characters, encouraged the reader to make his own judgement about them.⁸⁴

The case of the *Codex Visionum* is different in that there is no explicit comparison between all the figures, but they all fit into the timeline of sal-

⁸¹ Duff (1999), 243–309.

⁸² Duff (1999), 249.

⁸³ Duff (1999), 250–251.

⁸⁴ Duff (1999), 256.

vation history, which would lead the readers to see them as different patterns of salvation. Two of the poems, *Words of Cain* and *Words of Abel*, are naturally set up in opposition, since they are both the reconstructed speeches of the participants in one event, the killing of Abel by Cain: both suffer, but whereas Abel can turn to the Lord for help⁸⁵ and expect to be listened to because He has always cared for his people (lines 28–44), Cain realises that no land will receive him (lines 1–15a) and that the anger of the Lord will pursue him for all eternity, the fate of all sinners.⁸⁶ The alphabetical acrostic *The Lord to those who suffer*, copied between the two *ethopoeae*, guides the reader towards the correct interpretation: those who suffered in this world will be received in Paradise after death,⁸⁷ while those who harmed the righteous will be thrown out of God's presence.⁸⁸ More than this, the three poems (*Words of Cain*, *The Lord to those who suffer*, *Words of Abel*) can be said to respond to the theoretical explanation previously given in *Speech to the Righteous* (55–57, 71–90), where the outcome of the lives of the righteous and of the evil ones is contrasted.

The pair formed by Abel and Cain necessarily come into comparison with the family of Abraham in *On Abraham*: for Abel, his family (i.e. Cain) is the cause of pain and martyrdom, whereas Isaac's parents support him when he is granted the possibility of giving his life back to the Lord. The broken family of Adam and Eve comes into contrast with the saintly one of Abraham, in which all the members are intent on following God's law. In particular, the role of Sarah (which can only be read partially in lines 10–12) is reinforced by the existence of the Biblical paradigm of the spirited mother of the martyr, discernible when the Maccabean brothers face martyrdom with dignity encouraged by their mother (2 *Macc.* 6–7; 4 *Macc.* 14–16).⁸⁹

As in the case of the *Parallel lives*, the different background of all the characters allowed the readers of the *Codex Visionum* to focus on what all the protagonists of the *Codex* have in common. When they learnt about several figures from the Old Testament (Abraham's family, Abel and Cain), the protagonist of the New Testament (*[Eulogy] of the Lord Jesus*, *The Lord to those who suffer*), and more recent individuals who have lis-

⁸⁵ *Words of Abel* 1–2: Κέκλυ[θί μοι] πάσχοντι πάτερ θεε δημοεργέ, // και φω[νῆς ἐ]πάκουσον ἐς αἰθέρα κεκληγῶτος.

⁸⁶ *Words of Cain* 15b–17: και δέ κεν ὕπιστος χ[]αι χόλον[] ὄπασσε[ν // ἴφθιμος αἰώνιοι[ἄνα]ξ.....[] . // ὅς τε κακορρέκτ[ην ἀ]ποτίνυται, ὅς κεν ἀμάρτη.

⁸⁷ *The Lord to those who suffer* 17–19: ξηρ]ός δ' ἀ[ῦθ'] ὄδε κόσμος, ὑμῖν δ' ἀγαθός πάλιν ἔσται // ο]ὔν[ε]κα μ[ο]χθήσαντ' ἱερὸν ποτὶ χῶρον ἴκοισθε // πύργ[ον ἔσ]ω δικαίων, τεθραμμένοι ἐν παραδείσῳ.

⁸⁸ *The Lord to those who suffer* 20–21: ρί]ψω[γὰρ] κακοεργοῦς ἐκάς τ' ἔμεν, οἱ τε φερίστοις // σύμπιπτο]ν κλονέοντες ἔριν καῦσαν δέ τε β[ί]βλου[ς].

⁸⁹ Analysis in Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 39.

tened to the Lord (Hermas, Dorotheus), the readers would recognise that all the texts in the *Codex* refer to *metanoia* and the path to salvation. Furthermore, two of the poems (*Speech to the Righteous* and *The Lord to those who suffer*) are sufficiently paraenetic to lead readers to the conclusion that the parallels between all the figures in the *Codex* are there to help them to design their own route to salvation.

There are elements for comparison in the *Codex*, but the comparisons are not drawn as explicitly as, for instance, in the *Parallel Lives*. This was probably left for additional explanations and commentaries in the case of community readings and for personal interpretation in the case of individual readings. After all, the Church Fathers made use of the *synkrisis* both in the rhetorical criticism of the Bible and in more philological exegesis,⁹⁰ which implies that anybody who was familiar with Bible analysis and homiletics (as the *dikaioi* surely were) would have learnt how it worked. The correct interpretation of the poems of the *Codex* implied therefore knowledge of a specifically Christian rhetoric, from which we can deduce that spiritual growth required some sort of rhetorical training and understanding.

4.2 Paraphrase and ethopoea

The lives of monks and hermits revolved around a constant iteration of the Scriptures. Not only did they read them constantly, but they learnt them by heart so as to meditate on them when they were performing their daily chores or to quote them as an instrument to fight temptation, to help others or to answer the questions that arose from the way of life they had chosen.⁹¹ The study of the Bible with a view to discerning its spiritual mean-

⁹⁰ See the overview in Sheerin (1998).

⁹¹ Burton-Christie (1993), 61–62, 107–133. Illiterate novices of the Pachomian monasteries were taught to read and had to memorise parts of the Scriptures (*Rule of Pachomius* 139, 140). On the attitude of the Desert Fathers towards books in general and the Scriptures in particular, see Burton-Christie (1993), 43–48. The monks were expected to know the Scriptures by heart so as to spend the day reciting them as they performed their daily chores, in a process of constant *meditatio* which would help them to achieve purity of heart: see Rousseau (1985), 143–144. Similarly, Antony listens so intently to Scripture readings that he remembers everything: Athanasius *VA* 4.1. For the declarations which presbyters and deacons wrote when they were ordained, committing to learning Biblical passages by heart, see Wipszycka (1996, 186–188; 2007, 343). Also, Evagrius Ponticus suggests in his *Treatise on the Eight Thoughts (Antirrhetikos)* that the best way to fight the eight demons which attack the monk (gluttony, fornication, love of money, sadness, anger, listlessness, vainglory and pride) is to respond to them with the appropriate passage from the Scriptures.

ing and as a means of spiritual nourishment was known as φιλολογεῖν, with monks and hermits thus becoming φιλόλογοι.⁹²

In this context it is not surprising that the Bible provides the starting point for three of the poems in the *Codex Visionum*,⁹³ which can be also studied as *ethopoeae* (imaginary speeches composed to fit a given context):⁹⁴

– *On Abraham*: the juxtaposition of the three speeches of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac when the latter is about to be sacrificed takes the Biblical narrative (*Gen.* 22) as a flexible starting point. It does not paraphrase one particular text, but refers to the exegetical tradition of the event, both in the Bible and among Judaic and Christian commentators.

– *Words of Cain*: Cain becomes aware of the consequences of the crime he has committed in *Gen.* 4:1–16 and pronounces a lamentation, based on *Ps.* 139 (138): 7–10, a passage on the impossibility of escaping the eyes of God. It can also be seen as a variation of the *topos* πῆ φεύγω, developed in the example of *ethopoea* included in Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* (36.14).⁹⁵

– *Words of Abel*: this is the speech pronounced by Abel after being killed by Cain. The cue for the poem is *Gen.* 4:10–11, where God complains to Cain because Abel's blood cries out to him for vengeance, but it also reads as a paraphrase of *Ps.* 102 (101), on the suffering of the righteous.

These poems were not composed to exhaust the interpretation of the Biblical text or to replace it – the centre of the life of a religious community will always be the Bible – but to appropriate the patterns of the chosen texts and adapt them to contemporary needs and tastes. The three poems complete the original text by revealing the reactions of the characters involved, so that this more comprehensive (and vivid) account of the event enhances the spiritual benefit for the reader. To complete the text the poet resorts to other passages in the Bible which are of easy and coherent application (two psalms in the case of *Words of Cain* and *Words of Abel*) or to the exegetical tradition (*On Abraham*). The chosen form – direct speech – is intended to carry more *pathos* and thus have a stronger effect on the reader than plain narrative would, especially considering that the people these poems were addressed to knew the Bible passages by heart.

What we are seeing here is the application to the Bible of methods used at school for Homeric texts:⁹⁶ the students were given a Homeric situation

⁹² Sheridan (1997), 185 n. 29, 199–201.

⁹³ On their stance in the history of Christian paraphrastic literature, see Agosti (2001a), 203–205; Agosti (2002), 90–91. On the rhetorical treatments of the paraphrase, see Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 309–312.

⁹⁴ Agosti (2005), 43–45; Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 330–336. On the precepts for the *ethopoea*, see the anthology in Ventrella (2005).

⁹⁵ See Agosti (2009), 316–317.

⁹⁶ Examples of combination of paraphrase and *ethopoea* in verse with a Homeric subject appear on papyri from the second century AD onwards:

and they were asked to write a composition in Homeric style, both in terms of form and content, for which they used the methods of paraphrase.⁹⁷ Depending on their level and ability, they were either capable of producing something original or simply resorting to an amalgam of Homeric phrases. The poets of the *Codex* had acquired expertise in the initial compositions of the classical *paideia* (*progymnasmata*), and made use of the techniques in a Christian context. The question is whether the members of the community of the *Codex Visionum* were given any training to fully appreciate these compositions once they had become part of the community, and the fact that there were educational texts in their library speaks in support of this hypothesis.⁹⁸

The specific use of *ethopoea* and paraphrase in some of the poems of the *Codex*, mirrored in contemporary practice in schools and an extended literary trend, proves that the community behind his *Codex* was not isolated from the pedagogical and literary developments of the outside world.

P.Oxy. 42.3001 (= MP³ 1843.1 = LDAB 4840), second century AD: the ghost of Patroclus appears to Achilles (*Il.* 23.65-107). Half of the lines are taken from *Il.* 16-24.

PSI 6.722 (= MP³ 1834 = LDAB 5243 = Miguélez-Cavero (2008), cat. no. 12), third century AD: Priam's inner deliberation about what to do, after being visited by Iris and told of the ransom of Hector's body (*Il.* 24.159-187).

P.Oxy. 42.3002 (= MP³ 1857.31 = LDAB 2124 = Miguélez-Cavero (2008), cat. no. 29), fourth century AD: rephrases *Il.* 1.207-214, speech of Athena to Achilles, whom Agamemnon has just threatened with the requisition of Briseis.

TCD Pap. inv. D6, no 2 (= Heitsch 26 = MP³ 1844 = LDAB 6151 = Miguélez-Cavero (2008), cat. no. 52), fifth-sixth centuries AD: [Καλλιόπ]η παραμυθουμέ(νη) τὴν Θέτι[δα], after *Il.* 18.95 and 24.540.

Heitsch 38 (= MP³ 1857.3 = LDAB 3534 = Miguélez-Cavero (2008), cat. no. 53), ca. 500 AD: words of Achilles when he appeared on his tomb requesting the sacrifice of Polyxena as his *geras* (*Eur. Hec.* 109-115, QS 14.185-222).

⁹⁷ See Ureña Bracero (2005).

⁹⁸ Greek mathematical exercises (Chester Beatty ac. 1390), a Greek grammar and a Graeco-Latin lexicon (Chester Beatty ac. 1499), scholia to *Odyssey* 1 (*P.Rob. inv.* 32 and *P.Colon. inv.* 906 – ed. Henrichs [1971], no. 8), a *cahier d'écolier* (*P.Bouriant* 1), a *livre du maître* (Clarysse and Wouters [1970]); and a handbook of Greek stenography (*P.Monts. Roca* 1 – ed. Torallas Tovar and Worp [2006]).

5. Why Poetry and not Only Prose?

At first sight the rhetorical elements of the *Codex Visionum* seem to make more sense in prose: there is the construction of a rhetorical discourse for a community striving for δικαιοσύνη, the rhetorical structure of collective biography and Christian (divestiture of personal circumstances and socio-cultural context, insertion of the characters into salvation history) and Classical connections (roots of the genre, combination of positive and negative characters, use of comparison). However, with the exception of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the texts gathered in the *Codex Visionum* are all poems, and so there is a need to look again at the functions of poetry among the Christians of Late Antiquity.⁹⁹

The choice of epic hexameter for some of the poems of the *Codex Visionum* can be associated with the forms employed in some of the poems, in particular *ethopoea* and paraphrase. This combination of epic forms and rhetorical structures was inextricably linked to an educational background where Homer was always centre stage.¹⁰⁰ The community of the *dikaioi* could have used the *Codex Visionum* as an educational tool for young members,¹⁰¹ but we need to be cautious here, since the introduction of Christian elements into school material was very slow and often restricted to the copying of Christian names and Biblical texts.¹⁰² We also need to bear in mind that we are not dealing with a pedagogical community focused solely on youngsters, but with a community of adults.

In this respect, we know that some Christian authors composed poetry to offer their fellow believers an acceptable counterpart to non-Christian literary heritage.¹⁰³ Reading (and writing) poetry can be considered an inal-

⁹⁹ On the uses of poetry in late antiquity see Agosti (2002), 75–76.

¹⁰⁰ Criore (2001), 140–143, 194–197, 204–205. In his *Address to young men*, St. Basil concludes that Homer and Hesiod are appropriate to a school curriculum, though adults should prefer the truths proclaimed by the Scriptures. Gregory of Nazianzus too justifies his poetry for its pedagogical function: *Carm.* 2.1.39 (*In suos versus*, PG 37.1329–1336); *Carm.* 2.1.1.96–101 (*De Rebus suis*, PG 37.977). *In suos versus* offers a more complex scrutiny of the relationship between classical literary form and Christian content: overview in Bezarashvili (2008).

¹⁰¹ Rey (2002), 192–193 explores this possibility.

¹⁰² This refers to education in Greek. Pupils studying in Coptic practiced exclusively on Christian religious texts. See the Coptic educational texts gathered in Hasitzka and Harrauer (1990), and the comparison of Greek and Coptic education by Criore (1999).

¹⁰³ See e.g. Demoen (1993), 239 on Gregory Nazianzen: ‘According to his own saying, Gregory’s purpose was not merely to place the profane *logoi* (culture, literature, rhetoric, ...) in the service of Christian *logos* (doctrine, *the Word*, ...) but also to offer an equivalent counterpart to the non-Christian poetical tradition, also from a formal point of view (*Carm.* 2.1.39, *In suos versus*, v. 50, PG 37, 1333).’ Demoen (*ibid.*, 251–252) suggests that Gregory’s sporadic rejection of Greek culture is conventional and a proof

ienable leisure activity of the cultured, and the Christian poet might have felt the obligation to offer something suitable so that the Christian élite did not need to resort to pagan poets.¹⁰⁴ The poems of the *Codex Visionum* are poor in quality, but could have brought solace to the poetically adventurous souls of the community, who otherwise would only have eyes for the copies of Homer (*P. Bodmer* 48 and 49; *P. Köln Gr.* 1.40) and Menander (MP³ 1298) which were kept in the library. In a dream, Jerome was severely admonished to give up his love for Cicero (*Letter to Eustochium*, *Ep.* 22.30.3–5), whereas the members of this community were given a Christian alternative, though of clearly poorer quality.

In the context of the religious community, we should also take into account the liturgical and devotional uses of poetry. In fact, the library of the *Codex Visionum* included liturgical hymns in three different languages.¹⁰⁵ The presence of hymns (*On Abraham*, [*Eulogy*] of the Lord Jesus, *The Lord to those who suffer*, *P. Bodmer* 37) and the insertion of hymnic parentheses in the longer poems¹⁰⁶ suggest that these poems were read and understood as a celebration of God and of thanksgiving. In the monastic context, liturgy went beyond the boundaries of prayer times to seep into and indeed flood daily life with its resonances. In this sense, liturgical texts became instruments of the continuous prayer of the monks,¹⁰⁷ and the same could have occurred with the *Codex Visionum* in the community of δίκαιοι.

The longer texts (the *Visio Dorothei* and the *Speech to the Righteous*) would have to be divided up in order to be used for personal or communal teaching or meditation, but the shorter poems (*On Abraham*, [*Eulogy*] of the Lord Jesus, *Words of Cain*, *The Lord to those who suffer* and *Words of*

that the adoption of non-Christian literary heritage was still disputed in Christian milieu, which forced Gregory to yield sometimes to more cautious postures in order to entice sceptics into his camp.

¹⁰⁴ We should also remember Biblical poetry (*Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* of Nonnus, *Metaphrase of the Psalms* by Apollinaris, Eudocia's paraphrases of the Ocateuch, Zecchariah and Daniel – now lost). See the overview in Agosti (2001b).

¹⁰⁵ *P. Bodmer* 12 (Greek, third–fourth centuries); Mississippi Coptic Codex 1 (also known as the Crosby Codex, Sahidic, fourth century), and the Barcelona codex (LDAB 552) including a *Psalmus responsorius* (P. Barc. inv. 150b–154a – ed. pr. Roca-Puig [1965], Latin, fourth century) and a Greek Eucologius edited by Roca-Puig (1994) (P. Barc. Inv. 154b–5a Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer; 155b.1–18 Thanksgiving after communion; 155b.19–156a.5 Laying-on of hands on the sick; 156a.6–b.3 Exorcism of the oil for the sick; 157a–b alphabetic acrostic hymn – English translation and commentary in Stewart [2010], 22–38).

¹⁰⁶ The hymn to Christ-Gabriel in the *Visio Dorothei* 170–178, *Speech to the Righteous* 42, 67–68, 125, 155 and *P. Bodmer* 36.22 f., on which see Agosti (2001a), 201–202.

¹⁰⁷ On the continuous prayer of the Pachomian monks, see Veilleux (1968), 287–292.

Abel) could easily be learned by heart¹⁰⁸ and used in the constant recitation and meditation of spiritual texts that nourished the daily life of ascetic communities.

The choice of verse as the vehicle of expression of the *Codex*, then, is directly related to the cultural and spiritual context of the community which produced it. The *dikaioi* were aware of the cultural innovations of the world around them and engaged with them in their own texts. They responded to their cultural and spiritual needs through the use of poetry, aided by rhetoric.

6. Conclusions: Rhetoric and *Paideia* in the Community of the *Codex Visionum*

Rubenson explores the different strategies used by early Christian biographers as regards classical education.¹⁰⁹ At one extreme, Athanasius presents Antony in his *Life* as uneducated and illiterate, capable of defeating pagan philosophers because of his God-given wisdom achieved through visions, ascetic combat and an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures. Jerome generally maintains that a Christian should detach himself from classical heritage and stick to the simple faith of the Bible. In his presentations of the ideal life of a saint, there is no tension between faith and the knowledge acquired through classical education. In the biographies by Gregory of Nyssa, the revelation of true wisdom (i.e. the mysteries of God) is only achieved after a long training either in secular education (in the cases of Gregory Thaumaturgos and Moses) or by a thorough study of the Scriptures (Macrina). Finally, in the *Vita Pachomii (Vita Prima Graeca)*, Pachomius is a holy man by virtue of his discernment, his interpretation of the Scriptures, and his profound insight. He encourages education, literacy and the study of the Scriptures, but there seems to be no place for classical tradition in his communities: *paideia*, part of the monk's previous life, is dropped on entering the monastery.

But how is the *Codex Visionum* related to any of these approaches? The mere existence of these poems contradicts the image of the uneducated and illiterate monk, whose knowledge and authority depended solely on his intimacy with God and the Holy Scriptures (such as Antony in Athanasius' *Life*). The poems are also a far cry from the literary achievements of the Church Fathers, empowered by a thorough classical *paideia*. What we read in the *Codex Visionum* is generally unaccomplished, but never ill at ease or

¹⁰⁸ The use of alphabetical acrostics in *On Abraham, [Eulogy] of the Lord Jesus, The Lord to those who suffer* and *Words of Abel* could also be a mnemonic strategy.

¹⁰⁹ Rubenson (2000).

uncomfortable about the mish-mash formed by the amalgamation of elements that came from different sources. The poets of the *Codex* are experimenting with classical forms, but with no purist intent to resurrect the classical past.¹¹⁰

With the selection, copying and use of these texts, it is clear that the scribes and readers of the *Codex* are making use of Greek and classical *paideia*, with a heavy dose of rhetoric. The visions of Hermas and Dorotheus, as well as the constant references to both the Old and New Testament in all the poems, support the notion that for the community of the *Codex* God is the ultimate source of knowledge about himself, but the composers of the poems (and, we can surmise, also the *dikaioi* to whom they were addressed) were competent both in the wisdom of Christ (the natural wisdom generated by the saving influence of Christ¹¹¹ and a deep knowledge of the foundational texts of Christianity¹¹² and of the history of the Church)¹¹³ and in the deployment of classical poetry, with a clear Homeric referent.¹¹⁴

The solution for the *Codex* was then to be fully Christian in terms of content, while adapting the forms of classical tradition, sometimes rather

¹¹⁰ In contrast with later authors, such as Agathias and Paul the Silentiary, who systematically avoided loan words and technical terms and excluded references to Christianity wherever possible: Cameron (1970), 75–88; Whitby (1987).

¹¹¹ See esp. [*Eulogy*] of the Lord Jesus line 8 (Θεσπεσίην δ' ἐπέθηκε σοφοῖς σοφίην ἄμ' ἐπεσθαι), with the commentary in the note *ad loc.* of the *ed. pr.* and in Hurst and Rudhardt (1999), 108. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, experience is always superior to the knowledge that comes from books (see several examples from Chapter 10, on discernment: 7, 24, 54, 99, 104, 147, 167, 191), and the ownership of books is a temptation against the poverty desirable for monks (6.7, 6.16). There are also references to the use of books in the communities represented in the *Apophthegmata*: 10.25, 16.2, 16.29. For a more general analysis, see Kennedy (1980), 132: 'In place of worldly philosophy there exists a higher philosophy, only dimly apprehended by man. Much of the work of Christian exegesis in the following centuries is built on the assumption that there is a wisdom in the Scriptures, deliberately obscure, which man can, in part, come to understand with God's help.'

¹¹² The Old and New Testaments, but also the different exegetical traditions of the Bible: e.g. *On Abraham* presupposes not only the account in *Genesis*, but also later links between the figure of Isaac and other martyrs (in particular the Maccabees) and with Christ.

¹¹³ The *Speech to the Righteous* refers to the outcome of Dorotheus' life without narrating it, but the inclusion of the *Vision of Dorotheus* in the *Codex* only makes sense if Dorotheus triumphed.

¹¹⁴ Rey (2002), esp. 180–189; Hurst (1997); Agosti (1989); Hurst, Reverdin and Rudhardt (1984), 36–39.

poorly. The poets seem to have experimented with different forms,¹¹⁵ most of which existed previously but had not always been applied to Christian poetry earlier or in this manner. What the adaptation of rhetorical structures tells us is consistent with the enclosed environment of the monastery. Whether acquired before the arrival of the δίκαιος or nurtured with the help of the institution's library, the ability to produce and appreciate literary forms was secondary to the spiritual quest, and yet the use of the texts of the *Codex Visionum* for the purpose of spiritual advancement also required knowledge of the rhetorical rules of composition and interpretation. To be real δίκαιοι, the members of the community needed rhetoric, though never to the extent of prominent Christians such as Basil or the two Gregories.¹¹⁶

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¹¹⁵ Agosti (2001a), 199–200 relates the polymorphism or πολυειδεια of the *Codex* to the renovation and re-systematisation of the genres in post-Tetrarchic times, especially in Christian contexts, referring particularly to Fontaine (1977; 1988).

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