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Cover

Māshad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *grec* 1853, f. 186v

A. Marmodoro - N.B. McLynn (eds.), *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2018, xi + 263 pp.

A constant stream of research has been produced on Gregory of Nyssa since the forties of the past century, when Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jean Daniélou started publishing their seminal works on his theology, philosophy, and exegesis. The complete critical edition of Gregory's works, which was initiated by Werner Jaeger and has recently reached its penultimate volume,¹ and the ongoing International Colloquia on Gregory of Nyssa, which today amount to fourteen symposia,² prove that the scholarly interest in the 'Father of the Fathers' has been steady and vigorous. The present volume, which collects eleven essays presented at a seminar convened in Oxford in 2016 by a group of scholars of different backgrounds, provides further testimony to this ongoing 'Gregorian Revival'.

It begins with a short Introduction (pp. 1-6), which summarises the contents of the chapters.

The first essay by John Anthony McGuckin, "St Gregory of Nyssa: Bishop, Philosopher, Exegete, Theologian" (pp. 7-28) functions as a general introduction to the figure of Gregory. It provides an account of his life and works within their historical context which runs for several pages (7-21). The remaining part, dedicated to Gregory's spirituality, exegesis and theology, and to the modern scholarly 're-engagement' with him, is rather sketchy but nonetheless informative.

Neil B. McLynn's fine essay "The Two Gregories: Towards Nyssen from Nazianzen" (pp. 29-48) brings to light the overlooked relationship between Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, which was long obscured by the dealings of Basil of Caesarea with each of them. This assessment of the documentation – which consists for the most part of eight letters by Nazianzen – leads to an original and multifaceted portrayal of the relationship between the two throughout more than twenty years, which included moments of friendship and mutual support, but also competition, and perhaps hostility. McLynn's challenges to the dating and reading of a number of documents, as well as to the common view that Gregory of Nyssa was "the quiet man of the Cappadocian political scene" (p. 48) appear well-argued and overall convincing. There is little doubt that they will provoke reflection and debate.

Susanna Elm, "Dressing Moses: Reading Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* Literally" (pp. 49-73) focuses on the first part of the *Life of Moses*, Gregory's historia of the life of Moses, and more precisely on the description of Moses' dress, which is different from that given in the Septuagint. She interprets it as revealing Gregory's concern for the "self-presentation of male members of the Christian elites" as well as "a prescription of how to display elite Christian masculinity in the 380s and 390s" (p. 58). Elm dwells on the historical dynamics which determined the emergence of barbarians, especially Goths, in the Roman army, and of their "barbarian style" first within the army and then within the imperial administration. This phenomenon excited criticisms from late Roman authors such as Synesius or Claudian, which mirrored the antagonism of competing elites over imperial and ecclesiastical power. Elm thus shows that Gregory's description of Moses' garments "evoked ... the sumptuous military-barbarian-civilian fashion of the late Roman elite man" and omitted all references to Persian or Gothic clothing. Given Gregory's allegorical interpretation of the priestly

¹ Gregorii Nysseni *De Anima et resurrectione. Opera dogmatica minora*, Pars III ed. by A. Spira, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2014 (Gregorii Nysseni Opera, 3/3).

² The last Colloquium was held in Paris in September 2018 and was dedicated to Gregory's *Homilies on the Lord's Prayer*. The next one will take place in Exeter in 2022 and focus on the *De Anima et resurrectione*.

clothes, which is dominated by the theme of the necessary combination of contemplation and action, Elm argues that his description of Moses' dress was meant to guide elite Christian men towards a virtuous life, "dressing part included" (p. 73).

The stated aim of Mark Edwards' essay "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the *Song of Songs*" (pp. 74-92) is to prove, contrary to a certain tendency in recent scholarship, that Gregory's Commentary on the *Song of Songs* is evidence that he was more 'Platonic' than Origen, "at least if this term is taken to connote a dualistic anthropology and a lower valuation of the written text as a medium of instruction" (p. 74). Edwards offers interesting comments on both these subjects which could lay the ground for a more detailed comparison between the doctrinal and exegetical perspectives of these two major authors.

The chapter of Christopher A. Beeley, "Gregory of Nyssa's Christological Exegesis" (pp. 93-109) seeks to demonstrate that Gregory's Christology and Christological exegesis are more consistent over time than usually acknowledged by scholars. By exploring the third book of the *Contra Eunomium*, the *Letter to Theophilus*, *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, *Life of Moses*, and the *Catechetical Oration*, Beeley seeks to show that Gregory's doctrinal point of view had already been developed at the time of his controversies with Eunomius and Apollinaris. This continuity is shown in particular by Gregory's strong resistance to the *communicatio idiomatum* which is expressed by a prominent dualistic Christological stance and reflected by an "exegetical method of double predication" (p. 96): by distinguishing "two referents within the single referent" (*ibid.*) while dealing with biblical passages ascribing human and/or divine aspects to Jesus, Gregory sought to keep the divine and human elements of Christ clearly distinct. Beeley does not conceal the difficulties deriving from later exegetical works attesting a more unitive Christology and concludes that "Structurally speaking, it operates with a two-stage model that moves from a dualist scheme prior to Christ's resurrection, shifting to a kind of unitive picture afterward" (p. 106). At the same time, he confirms the conventional claim that Gregory's Christology is divisive.

Ilaria Ramelli's essay "Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul (and the Restoration)" (pp. 110-41) focuses on the *De Anima et resurrectione* and has several declared purposes (which are time and again reiterated verbatim): first, to place Gregory's work within the tradition of philosophical treatises *De Anima*; second, to scrutinize the idea of the restoration of the soul in the light of Gregory's definition of soul and the "Platonic ideal of harmony and unity" assumed in his doctrine of the soul and *nous*; third, to expound the role of the soul in what Ramelli calls Gregory's "theology of freedom", to explore Gregory's influence on Evagrius' theories of resurrection and "unified *nous*" and, eventually, to show that "the Christian Neoplatonist Eriugena was right to trace the latter doctrine back to Gregory of Nyssa" (pp. 110, 124, 135-137). Ramelli's extensive previous work on these subjects is visibly reflected in this paper, to the extent that at times the reader is left with the feeling that the author presupposes familiarity with her work in that her arguments are not always explained here in full.

Also Johannes Zachhuber's essay "The Soul as *Dynamis* in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and Resurrection*" (pp. 142-59), which is an English translation of an article already published in German in 2012,³ is dedicated to the *De Anima et resurrectione* and aims to scale down the common belief that Gregory's theory of the soul is basically Platonic. Zachhuber believes that this was not only due

³ "Die Seele als *Dynamis* in Gregor von Nyssa: Überlegungen zur Schrift *De Anima et resurrectione*", in C. Sedmak - M. Bogaczyk-Vormayr (eds.), *Patristik und Resilienz: Frühchristliche Einsichten in die Seelenkraft*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2012, pp. 211-30.

to Gregory's adhesion to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body and to his denial of the pre-existence of the soul, but above all to his empirical approach. Zachhuber argues indeed that the main features of Gregory's definition of the soul, such as being "created, living and intellectual", were inferred from the functions observed in the body, that is being alive and provided with sensory perception.⁴ That for Gregory "the soul's substance coincides with its dynamis" (p. 150) is then deduced, according to Zachhuber, on the basis of this inductive approach as well as of the argument, which Gregory elaborated during the theological dispute with Eunomius, that there is an "insoluble unity and ontological equality of a being [*ousia*] with its natural operation [*dynamis*]" (p. 148). Zachhuber's views are well reasoned and balanced, and yet the "tension" (p. 154) which he himself acknowledges as stemming from Gregory's definition of the soul as existing by and for itself (αὐτῆ καθ' ἑαυτήν, PG 46, 28B) – as it contrasts the thesis that the soul is, for Gregory, δύναιμις – appears to be unresolved.

Morwenna Ludlow's chapter "Christian Formation and the Body-Soul Relationship in Gregory of Nyssa" (pp. 160-78) deals with Gregory's anthropological views in three ascetic works, the *Professione christiana*, *De Perfectione*, and *De Instituto christiano*, which scholars have mostly examined in order to investigate Gregory's spiritual teachings. In comparison to previous chapters, this pays more attention to exploring Gregory's "language of formation" – characterised, for instance, by temple metaphors and head-body analogies – and less to tracing the influences exerted on him by earlier philosophers and theologians. Ludlow illustrates that Gregory's ascetic works, which are less technical than the *De Anima et resurrectione* and *De Opificio hominis*, show a significant tendency to concentrate more on the whole person than the soul alone when addressing issues of spiritual and moral formation.

Sophie Cartwright, "Vulnerability as the Ground of Self-Determination in Gregory of Nyssa" (pp. 179-198) provides a perceptive analysis of how Gregory's treatment of physical weakness in the *De Opificio hominis* and of grief in the *De Anima et resurrectione* shapes the basis for his discourse on self-determination. To this end, she touches upon key subjects in Gregory's thought, such as αὐτεξουσία and προαίρησις, and deals with the issue of how Gregory's understanding of weakness subverts traditional gender roles (masculinity/thoughtness-virtue *vs* femininity/weakness-fragility). Cartwright shows that Gregory finds the acknowledgement of both physical and psychological vulnerability essential for exercising self-determination and concludes that he seems to have held two concepts of freedom: self-determination as the capacity to obtain freedom from constraint and as mastery over creation, and freedom expressed as wisdom and rational self-mastery.

The last two chapters by Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Anna Marmodoro are dedicated to examining *To Ablabius, On Not Saying 'Three Gods'*, where, as scholars generally acknowledge, Gregory expressed a synthesis of his Trinitarian theology. Gregory indeed wrote it to rebut the charge of tritheism that his endorsement of the doctrine of the three hypostases had earned him. The problem which the *To Ablabius* revolves around is as follows: how can one speak, when referring to three different men, of a single human nature in the singular and of three men in the plural, whereas, when referring to the three divine persons of the Trinity, one should speak of one single nature and one God only?

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Three Gods Problems: Activity and Etymology in *To Ablabius*" (pp. 199-219)⁵ argues that Gregory's central argument consists

⁴ By contrast, see Ramelli's approach to Gregory's definition of soul at pp. 124-5.

⁵ This essay is a shortened version of a chapter from his recent monograph *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works: A Literary Study*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2018, Ch. 3.

in maintaining that divine unity is unity of activity and not of nature on the grounds of two main claims concerning the term θεότης, ‘deity’. First, Gregory understands θεότης as different from ἄνθρωπος, ‘man’, because the latter is a “nature-name” (that is a “proper name” or an “essential description”, p. 210), whereas there are no proper names for the nature of the former, being ἄπειρον, ‘infinite’.⁶ Second, Gregory traces the etymology of θεότης back to θέα, that is “beholding” (Radde-Gallwitz clarifies this point in the light of passages from *Against Eunomius* 2), because what we know of God, the “beholder”, relates to his activity and not to his essence, which cannot be grasped. In other words, θεότης is an activity-name and θεός is an agent-name. If I understand correctly Radde-Gallwitz’s complex reconstruction, he suggests that since Gregory posits “that for any divine action (...) there is only a single act” (p. 212) and there are no different agents, and since activity-names do not, unlike nature-names (for instance, ‘sun’), pertain to their subjects, he is seeking to show that the activity of beholding should be assigned to a single θεότης even though it presupposes all three persons of the Trinity. The treatise *To Ablabius* thus would offer “Gregory’s greatest contribution to the question of Trinitarian unity” (p. 216) in what Radde-Gallwitz calls the “intentional action model”, drawn from “the psychology of intentional action”: according to this model the agent of divine action is, strictly speaking, the Spirit (that proceeds from the Father to the creature), but its activity presupposes the power of the Son and the will of the Father.

Anna Marmodoro, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Metaphysics of the Trinity (with Reference to his *Letter To Ablabius*)” (pp. 220-34) finds in the *To Ablabius* one of the versions of the One and Many problem of the Greek philosophical tradition and believes that Gregory achieves an original solution of this dilemma by drawing eclectically on both Plato and Aristotle. Marmodoro calls particular attention to the analogy of a lump of gold cut into coins: “gold, even though it be cut into many figures, is one, and is so spoken of” (cited at p. 223). This, Marmodoro argues, is evidence that Gregory discovered the difference between the masses and individuals and the different ways of quantifying them (the former are qualified as ‘much’ or ‘less’, the latter are countable), and that it is on this basis that Gregory developed his theory about the nature of things around the notion of “quantity of quality”. This concept, following the example of gold, can be summarised as follows: “the nature of gold is the total quantity of gold in the world” (*passim*). Gregory would have thus meant to say that the nature of God, which is one, is the total quantity of the divine in the world, which consists of his three persons.

The volume ends with a bibliography and a useful index, and has very few typos and errors.⁷ Scholars of Gregory in particular and of Late Antiquity in general will find this collection of papers of interest in terms of the variety of views expressed on a number of subjects covered and studied from different disciplinary perspectives.

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⁶ Radde-Gallwitz translates this term as “indefinite” (p. 217).

⁷ E.g.: both ‘*Thaumatourgos*’ and ‘*Thaumaturgos*’ are found on p. 8; ‘*tó* (*pathos*)’ instead of ‘*tò*’ at pp. 170-1; some bibliographical references from pp. 195-7 are missing in the Bibliography.

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