

A Proppian Approach to the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxene*

Un enfoque proppiano a los *Hechos de Jantipa y Polixena*

Carlos Julio Martínez Arias
<cmartinez@slsonline.org>
University of Murcia

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ABSTRACT: Our aim in this paper is to obtain for the first time the functional and morphological structure of the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxene*, according to V. Propp's model. The functions of the text will be analyzed in order to draw the sequences that constitute the plot of the story. Furthermore, the different types of Proppian characters will be enumerated. At last, the subsequent results will show more clearly the similarities between this and other novelesque or hagiographical texts.

KEYWORDS: Propp, Functional morphology of the fairytale, *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxene*, Greek novel, Apocrypha.

RESUMEN: Este artículo pretende obtener por primera vez la estructura morfológica-funcional de los *Hechos de Jantipa y Polixena*, siguiendo el modelo de V. Propp. Analizaremos las funciones de esta narración, y obtendremos las secuencias que componen la trama del texto. Además, enumeraremos los distintos tipos de personajes «proppianos» encontrados. Finalmente, a raíz de estos resultados, veremos con más claridad las similitudes entre nuestro texto y otros varios de corte novelesco o hagiográfico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Propp, Morfología funcional del cuento, *Hechos de Jantipa y Polixena*, novela griega, apócrifos.

1. Introduction¹

Vladimir Propp's² functional analysis has not lost its pristine worth. Furthermore, what contemporary research has shown is its broad versatility. Evidently, it is far easier to grasp

1. We personally wish to thank Consuelo Ruiz Montero, Ph.D. for her invaluable comments and emendations during the review of this paper.

2. Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp was born on April 29th, 1895, in the city of Saint Petersburg, Russia (formerly known as Petrograd, and later Leningrad). After majoring in Russian and German philology at Saint Petersburg University, he worked as a German teacher. It was during this period that he specialized in the study of folklore narrative. After analyzing more than a hundred Russian fairy tales, Propp realized most of them had a basic similar structure, characters, events, etc. He summarized his work in his renowned *Morphology of the folktale*, first published in Russian in 1928. His main thesis was that it was possible to analyze Russian fairy tales as systematically as someone can morphologically analyze, for instance, any sentence. Propp's work was not immediately recognized, but it gradually began to call scholars' attention, particularly in the West after it was first translated into English in 1958. Since then, it has influenced a

the structure of a narrative by observing it as a whole, in the likes of a «summary». This has an enormous utility not only when analyzing narratives, but when comparing them with one another.

Although Propp's investigation was only drawn in the context of Russian folktales, or even any kind of fairy tales, recent studies have demonstrated the quasi-universal applicance of its morphology. For that matter, it is worth noticing the work of Ruiz Montero regarding Greek ancient romances or «novels». She uses Propp's approach to analyze the five known Greek romances (Ruiz Montero 1988). Accordingly, this method has also been applied to certain narratives that blend Christian content with novelesque characteristics, such as the hagiographical Greek texts, the *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*³ or «Christian novels or romances» (Ruiz Montero 2014, 2016). Indeed, some authors such as J. Peláez (1984) have even applied Propp's morphology to the Holy Gospels. The conclusion of all of these studies is that these texts certainly have the same basic structure and the same characters that perform the same actions, or «functions» as Propp would call them. All of these texts also have similar traits: dramatic soliloquies, high-paced rhythm, and orality features, such as polysyndeton and reiteration, *inter alia*⁴. As we can see, then, Propp's analysis is useful as a mean to deepen the studies of narratives and to notice intertextual similarities or links therein.

The purpose of this paper is to apply for the first time Propp's functional method to one of these texts: the *Acta Xanthippae et Polyxenae*⁵. Therefore, we will (1) first, obtain the narrative morphology of the text, that is, the basic structure of the *functions* and *sequences* in this narrative; (2) then, we will identify the basic Proppian types of characters that appear therein; and (3) ultimately, we will draw some conclusions based on the elements we encounter in our investigation. But first, it is important to give some details about AXP itself.

2. About *Acta Xanthippae et Polyxenae*⁶

This text is a Christian romance dated *circa* VI a.D. whose original title is Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τῶν ὁσίων γυναικῶν Ξανθίππης Πολυξένης καὶ Ρεβέκκας («Life and conduct and the holy women Xanthippe, Polyxene and Rebecca»). It tells the story of St. Paul the Apostle's arrival to Spain, the conversion of three women, and all the vicissitudes they encounter in order to obtain «the seal of God's herald» (σφραγίδα κήρυκος θεοῦ).

The narrative is divided into two parts. The first one comprises chapters 1 through 21 and it tells us about the conversion of Xanthippe, a woman married to Probus, an eminent man, well-known in Spain. The second part (chapters 22-42) details the conversion of Xanthippe's sister Polyxene and of a Jewish girl named Rebecca.

The purpose of the work is to present these three women as role models to be emulated, combining the *docere* and *delectare* traditions of classical rhetoric. But which genre should this story be assigned to? Szepessy (2004: 322-325 and 340) does not place it in a specific genre, but he does give some clues by pointing out two ways in which AXP is completely

significant amount of *viri docti* such as C. Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes or A. Veselovski (Cf. Méléntinski 1977).

3. AAA from now on.

4. For further details vd. Ruiz Montero, 2006.

5. AXP from now on.

6. Cf. Martínez Arias 2020: VIII-X.

different from the other AAA: in AXP the protagonists are the converts, not the apostles as in the AAA, except perhaps for Thecla, who is the protagonist of his Acts and not Paul; moreover, in AXP the ability to perform miracles does not seem to be the privilege of the apostles, but seems to be acquired by anyone who becomes a Christian; moreover, this scholar points to the «methods of novelistic writing» that this work makes use of.

Junod (1989: 97, 101 and 104), for his part, is certain that this work «cannot be classified in the hagiographic literature», since the characters «are fictitious and the text does not pretend to establish or confirm a cult». On the other hand, he points out several novelistic features present in the AXP (which are also present in the other AAA), such as the complaints, lamentations, and dramatic soliloquies of Xanthippe and her sister Polyxene, all full of tragic and rhetorical elements; Xanthippe's bribery of the porter and her immediate flight from the pursuit of the demons; the abduction of the evil kidnapper and his sorcerers; the sailing, and so on. Moreover, Junod notes that «the adventures of Rebecca, the shepherd, and the prefect's son are little novels in themselves». Narro (2013: 268), on the other hand, sees in these AXP an authentic Christian romance, but confirms its attribution to the hagiographic narrative, which would be particularly permeable to the narrative and stylistic influences of the novel genre (Messis, 2014; Narro, 2016). For his part, Eastman (2016: 421) considers it an «eclectic» work, as a warp of apocryphal, novelistic, and hagiographic elements.

Thus, always within the realm of hagiographic literature, it could be considered that the genre of this work cannot be other than that of the «Christian romance»⁷. For this reason, in this work we can observe the coexistence and the natural influence of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures, since naturally «the crossing of cultures would be accompanied by the crossing of genres» (Ruiz Montero 2016: 129).

The *editio princeps* of the text was in charge of M. R. James (1893), who found the text in the *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1458* (XI century A.D.), the only manuscript that contains the full story. Some important emendations⁸ have been made to this version, but it is still the only complete edition of the text we have up to this date. The text has been translated into English (Craigie, 1896; and Eastman, 2016), Dutch (Hunink, 2013), and Spanish (Martínez Arias, 2020). For the purpose of this work, we will use this latter text. The number between parenthesis indicate the number of the chapter, according to James' division of the text.

3. Sequences of the plot

Propp's methodology is fairly simple: while reading the story you must identify the *functions* that appear, then you can list them all together to make it easier for you to compare your schemes and to draw conclusions. To help you identify the functions, Propp made a list of all the possible functions that can appear in a story⁹. However, here we provide you with a list of all the functions used in AXP:

7. For more information about the *Bios* tradition in Greek literature these works can be helpful: De Temmerman, Koen, and Kristoffel Demoen, eds. *Writing biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative technique and fictionalization*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Fairweather, J. (1974), «Fiction in the Biographies of Ancient Writers», *Ancient Society* 5: 231-275. Lefkowitz, M. R. (2009), «Biographical Mythology», en U. Dill & Ch. Walde (eds.), *Antike Mythen: Medien, Transformationen, und Konstruktionen (Studien in Honorem Fritz Graf)*, Berlin: 516-531.

8. *Analecta Bollandiana* 13; Bonnet (1894).

9. For the full list, vd. Propp 1968: 150-155.

α	<i>initial situation</i> : the context of the story where characters are introduced
ζ	<i>delivery</i> : the villain receives information about his victim
\uparrow	<i>departure</i> : the hero leaves home
\downarrow	<i>return</i> : the hero returns
A	<i>villainy</i> : the villain causes harm or injury to the hero
Aux	<i>help</i> : someone helps the hero
a	<i>lack</i> : a member of a family lacks or desires to have a magical object
B	<i>mediation</i> : the lack of the object is made known
C	<i>counteraction</i> : the hero chooses a positive action
F	<i>provision</i> : receipt of the magical object
F _{neg}	<i>negation of magical object</i> : the object is not received or taken away
K	<i>liquidation</i> : the initial harm is repaired
P	<i>peril</i> : a dangerous situation
W	<i>wedding</i> : in this case, we talk of a deeper and more spiritual wedding, since in a Catholic perspective receiving the baptism and the Eucharist binds the hero with Christ

Part I (1-21)

The story begins with Probus' slave in Rome hearing the word of God (1), before going back to Spain with his master's letters. Therefore, this is the *initial situation* (α) that frames the whole sequence. Then we have a *delivery* (ζ) when Xanthippe asks the slave for information about Paul and his teaching (2).

Τί τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἱατροῦ ἐκείνου, ἢ τί αὐτοῦ ἢ πρὸς ἄμυναν τοῦ τοιοῦτου πάθους θεραπεία;

What is the name of that teacher, or what is the treatment for warding off such a disease?¹⁰

All of these functions constitute what Propp calls the «preparatory part of the tale» (Propp 1968: 31).

And so, Xanthippe feels the *lack* (*a*) of Paul and her baptism: ἡ δὲ Ξανθίππη ἀνιάτως πάνυ εἶχε τὴν ψυχὴν περὶ ταύτης τῆς διδαχῆς (2). To the extent that Probus was also afflicted on account of her sufferings: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ Πρόβος ἐλυπεῖτο περὶ τῆς Ξανθίππης ὅτι ἦν κατατήκουσα ἑαυτὴν ἔκτοτε τῇ ἀγρυπνίᾳ καὶ ἐγκρατεῖα καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ σκληραγωγίᾳ (2, *mediation*, B). Abruptly, Paul arrives to the city and Probus takes him to his house (7-8, *counteraction*, C). But the news of Paul's arrival rush through the whole city (10) and they start coming from all around to see him. This event triggers the next function, the *provision* or *receipt of a magical agent*, but in this case in a negative way, since is a *negation* of that magical object (F_{neg}). Indeed, Τὸν οἶκόν μου οὐ καταδέχομαι πανδοχεῖον γένεσθαι (10) says Probus and immediately expels Paul (11), who must seek refuge at the house of Philotheus, another important man in the city. Not appeased by this action, Probus also locks Xanthippe up in her chambers, which constitutes a *villainy* (A). But Xhan-

10. We prefer to make use of a translation published already in English (Eastman 2016), rather than using our own. However, any differences or nuances we consider important for a better understanding of the text will be pointed out. For instance, in this passage, we would rather translate ἱατροῦ as *doctor*, instead of *teacher*.

thippe bribes the gatekeeper who was guarding her (13, *liquidation*, K) and runs towards Philotheus' house (*departure*, ↑). Nonetheless, more misfortunes await for her in the way, for some demons start chasing her (13, *peril*, P). But Paul suddenly appears next to Jesus, who adopts the figure of a beautiful young man, and they both save Xanthippe (13, *help*, Aux). And so, finally, Xanthippe arrives to Philotheus' house and there she receives the baptism and the Eucharist (14), which would constitute a special kind of *wedding* (W).

Εὐθέως οὖν λαβόμενος ὁ μέγας Παῦλος τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς, ἦλθεν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ Φιλοθέου, καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτὴν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. εἶτα καὶ ἄρτον λαβὼν εὐχαριστίας ἐδίδου αὐτῇ λέγων· Ἔστω σοι τοῦτο εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ εἰς ἀνακαινισμόν τῆς ψυχῆς σου. τότε λαβοῦσα ἡ μακαρία Ξανθίππη τὸ θεῖον χάρισμα τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, ἐπανήει ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτῆς χαίρουσα καὶ δοξάζουσα τὸν θεόν.

Immediately the great Paul took her hand, and they went into the house of Philoteus. He baptized her in the name of the Father, and the son, and the Holy Spirit. Then taking bread, he gave her the Eucharist, saying, «Let this be for you for the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of your soul.» Then blessed Xanthippe received the divine grace of holy baptism and went back to her house rejoicing and praising God.

Therefore, the functions of this first sequence would be: I. α ζ a B C = F_{neg} A K ↑ P Aux W.

Then we have yet another sequence. Chapter 18 tells us how Probus had a somewhat enigmatic dream, or rather a nightmare: there was an Ethiopian king who enslaved the whole world, until an eagle appeared who weakened the king's power and took many people out of the king's grasp; the eagle flew back to heaven and left a certain scepter; and those who held the scepter were bathed with pure water, while the king's men could do nothing against them. This whole dream is the *initial situation* (α). And so, Probus tells the dream to Gnosteas and Barandus, who interpret it in a Christian way (18): the Ethiopian king was the devil, those who were under his control were the heathen, and the eagle was Jesus Christ, who left the scepter, his cross, to comfort his disciples. After this explanation, Barandus tells Probus they should go to Paul and receive the Baptism (*mediation*, B). So Probus does this (21, *counteraction*, C / *departure*, ↑) and is baptized. His baptism may be considered the *liquidation* (K) or fulfillment of the need he had for it (which may also be considered a *lack*, a), after he heard Barandus' interpretation. And this is the end of the second sequence. The scheme is as follows: II. α = B C ↑ K.

But the chapter does not end here. We still read about a great party that was taking place in Xanthippe's house to celebrate the spouses' conversion. During this *initial situation* (α), a demon appeared in the likeness of an actor to scare Xanthippe (*peril*, P). But she grabbed a pedestal and hit the demon, who flees yelling:

Ὡ βία ἀπὸ τοῦ κογχοστάτου· καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες ἔλαβον ἐξουσίαν τοῦ τύπτειν ἡμᾶς.

O an act of violence by this vase pedestal! Even the women have received power to strike us!

It is worth noticing that in this case Xanthippe is her own *auxiliary*. However, this sequence does not contain any *lack* or *villainy*, and so according to Propp's theory it cannot

be considered as properly *functional*. This means it is just an addition to the story that does not affect its main development, as an *ornatum*.

Part II (22-42)

In chapter 22 a new character is introduced: Polyxene, Xanthippe's sister, νεωτέρα ὑπὲρ αὐτῆν, καὶ ὠραία τῇ ὄψει. We are told she has a terrible dream about a dragon eating her up but being saved by Paul¹¹.

Οἶμοι, ἀδελφή μου Ξανθίππη, ποῖός μοι κίνδυνος προΐσταται ἢ θλίψις σὺ γινώσκω· ἐώρων γὰρ ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ μου ὅτι δράκων αἰσχυρὸς ἐλθὼν διένευέν μοι ἐλθεῖν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐμοῦ δὲ μὴ βουλομένης ἀπελθεῖν, δραμὼν κατέπιέν με ἀπὸ ποδῶν λαβόμενος· ἐμοῦ δὲ συνταρασσομένης εἰς τὸ ἡλίου φῶς ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ ἀέρος νεανίας τις εὐειδῆς ὃν ἐνόμιζον ἀδελφὸν εἶναι Παύλου ἐφώνησεν λέγων· Ἀμήν· οὐκ ἰσχύεις οὐδέν. ὅστις καὶ λαβόμενος μου τῆς χειρὸς ἐξέσπασέν με παραυτίκα ἐξ αὐτοῦ, καὶ εὐθέως ὁ δράκων ἀφανῆς ἐγένετο· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ ἦν εὐωδίας πλήρης ὡς ἐκ βαλσάμου ἢ ἄλλης τινὸς ἐπὶ εὐνοίας.

Woe is me, my sister Xanthippe. What kind of danger or trouble stands before me, I do not know, for I saw in my dream that an ugly serpent is coming to beckon me to come to him. When I was unwilling to go, he ran and, grabbing me by my feet, devoured me. After I had been thrown into confusion, suddenly into the light of the sun and from the air a certain attractive young man, whom I thought to be the brother of Paul, spoke and said, 'Truly you are able to do nothing.' Taking me by the hand, he immediately drew me out of it, and right away the serpent disappeared. Behold, his hand as full of a sweet smell, as a balsam or some other kind of fragrance.

This is, consequently, the *initial situation* (α) of this first sequence. Polyxene tells Xanthippe about this terrible dream, and she tells her to go to Paul to be baptized (22, *mediation*, B). After telling this to Polyxene, she goes to the «hearing of the word» (23, *counteraction*, C / *departure*, ↑). Right after this point, we will lose track of Xanthippe, for we will not see her again until the very second-to-last chapter of the book (41). So Polyxene stays alone in his house. Taking advantage of this situation, a powerful man, rival of a suitor of hers, kidnaps her (23, *villainy*, A) and tries to take her to Babylon. But a strong headwind makes the ship go astray. The ship passes right next to another one where St. Peter, warned by a vision of Polyxene's mishaps, prays for her (24, *provision*, F).

Μεριμνητὰ τῶν τεθλιμμένων Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἡ θλίψις τῶν ἐν ξενιτείᾳ κινεῖ πρὸς εὐσπλαγχνίαν, ὃν ὁ κλαυθμὸς τῶν ἐν αἰχμαλωσίᾳ ἐπὶ γῆς σε ἐλθεῖν ἐποίησεν, ὁ δωρούμενος ἡμῖν πάντοτε ὅσα βουλόμεθα, καὶ μηδέποτε ἀποστρεφόμενος τὴν αἴτησιν ἡμῶν· ποιήσον καὶ νῦν ἔλεος καὶ ἀντίληψιν μετὰ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ ἐκείνῳ χειμαζομένης· ὅτι σὺ πάντοτε οἰκτεῖρεις τοὺς ἐν ὀδύνῃ, κύριε.

O Jesus, you who have cared for the distressed, you who are moved to mercy by the trouble of those in a foreign land, you who were made to come by the weeping of those in captivity on earth, you who give to us at all times whatever we wish and never turn away from our request, give mercy and support now to the soul that is being tossed about in that ship, because you always have pity on those in pain, Lord.

11. About premonitory visions in biographical stories about women, cf. Eun. *VS*, VI 90-93.

The ship then is surprised by a storm, and they end up in Greece.

Providently, the apostle Phillip was there, warned by a vision, of course, and entrusts Polyxene to one of his disciples (25, *provision*, F) who takes her to his house. But the raptor tries to snatch Polyxene again, so he prepares an army of 8000 men (25, *villainy*, A). And during all this turmoil, Polyxene runs away (25, *help*, Aux / *departure*, ↑). Nevertheless, the slaves of the house raise a wooden cross and with 800 soldiers they kill 5000 hostiles, and the rest of them flee (25, *help*, Aux).

Meanwhile, Polyxene seeks refuge in a lioness' den, which happened to be empty. But the lioness comes back (27, *peril*, P / *departure*, ↑) and Polyxene, swearing κατὰ τὸν θεὸν Παύλου, orders her to stay back, which she did (*help*, Aux). And so, Polyxene goes out of the woods and encounters the apostle Andrew (28, *counteraction*, C / *departure*, ↑). She asks the apostle to be baptized, and when they arrive to a spring, a Jewish slave named Rebecca also asks for baptism (this would be, therefore, another *lack*, a). Finally, Andrew baptizes both girls (30), which constitutes again the spiritual *wedding* (W) of Polyxene and Rebecca with Christ. The scheme of this first sequence would be: I. α B C ↑ A F = F A Aux ↑ P ↑ Aux C ↑ a W.

In chapter 31 we see both girls meeting a rancher or cattleman who happens to be also a Christian. He tells them the story of his conversion: how after having heard Phillip the apostle's preaching, he sold everything he had and bought bread and wine to distribute it among the poor. But the Devil put his neighbors against him (32, *peril*, P). However, although they tried to attack him, they could not see him (*help*, Aux).

Εἰ θέλεις μαθεῖν τί ἐδάκρυσα, ἄκουσον τὴν λέξιν· οὐ γὰρ χρὴ ἀποκνῆσαι τὰ περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐξαγγέλλειν· ἐγὼ ἐμαθητεύθην ὑπὸ Φιλίππου τοῦ ἀποστόλου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἰδὼν πᾶς ἢ μέριμνα αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἦν εἰς τοὺς πτωχοὺς, ἔλαβον εἴ τι εἶχον, καὶ διεπώλησα· καὶ λαβὼν τὸ τίμημα, ἠγόραζον ἄρτους καὶ οἶνον καὶ διεδίδουν αὐτὰ εἰς τὰς πόλεις τοῖς δεομένοις· ὡς οὖν ἐποίουν τοῦτο ἐπὶ ἰκανὸν χρόνον, ἐν τῇ πλησίον πόλει εἰς τις λελωβημένος ἔκραξε λέγων (οὐκ αὐτὸς δὲ ἐλάλει ἀλλ' ὁ Σατανᾶς διὰ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ)· Οὐδὲν θέλω· οὐ λαμβάνω τι παρά σου, ὅτι χριστιανὸς εἶ. καὶ ἐπανεστη μοι ὅλη ἡ πόλις καὶ ἐζήτησαν με κρατῆσαι. ἔτρεχον δὲ ἄλλος ἄλλαχού, μέσον αὐτῶν πορευομένου μου καὶ μηδενὸς ὁρῶντος με. ἐξελθὼν δὲ τῆς πόλεως ἔδωκα αἶνον καὶ δόξαν τῷ θεῷ ὅτι οὕτως μου ἀντεποιήθη·

If you want to learn why I wept, hear the truth, for there is no need to shrink back from proclaiming things about Christ. I was taught by Philip, the apostle of Christ, and seeing how all his care was for the poor, I took whatever I had and sold it. I took the proceeds, bought bread and wine, and was distributing them in the cities to those in need. After I had been doing this for some time, in a neighboring city a certain maimed man cried out and said – yet he was not speaking but Sata through his mouth – ‘I wish for nothing. I am taking nothing from you, because you are a Christian.’ The whole city arose against me and sought to seize me. They ran one this way and another that way, while I walked in the midst of them and no one saw me. Having left the city I gave praise and glory to God, because I had been paid back in this way.

Again, we see here another sequence that lacks a *villainy* and, therefore, is not functional.

And so, Polyxena and Rebecca ask the cattleman to take them back to Spain (32), because they feel the *lack* (a) of Paul's presence. He advises Polyxene to dress like a man

(33, *provision*, F) to avoid further troubles. But mishaps seem to follow her, for the next day a prefect passing by sees her and orders his men to capture her and be taken to his palace (*villainy*, A). One of the soldiers also seizes Rebecca (35, *peril*, P), but she runs away and shelters in the house of an old woman, who kindly take care of her (*help*, Aux). The prefect, then, orders his men take Polyxena to his chambers (36, *peril*, P), but she warns the soldiers about God's punishment if they were to that, and finally they leave her alone (*help*, Aux). Later on, the prefect's son approaches Polyxene and tells her he is also a Christian. He says:

Μη φοβοῦ, κόρη· ὅτι οὐ ζητῶ νυμφευθῆναι σοι νυμφίος φθορᾶς <ἀλλὰ ζητῶ προσαρμοσθῆναι σοι εἰς τὸν νυμφῶνα τὸν μέλλοντα, ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιθυμία φθορᾶς>· οἶδα γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς προσευχῆς σου ὅτι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ θεοῦ τυγχάνεις νύμφη. ἐγὼ γὰρ οἶδα τοῦτον τὸν θεὸν ὃς ὑπ' οὐδενὸς νικᾶται ποτέ· ἀνὴρ γάρ τις ἐνδοξος τῷ προσώπῳ ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ πρὸ χρόνων τινῶν ἐκήρυττε τοῦτον <τὸν> θεόν, ᾧ καὶ παρθένος τις πιστεύσασα, ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐκινδύνευσε διὰ τὴν εὐμορφίαν αὐτῆς, ἧ ὄνομα Θεέκλα, περὶ ἧς ἤκουσα πρὸς θηρία κατακριθεῖσαν· ἐγὼ οὖν συνεχῶς ἠτένιζον πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα· αὐτὸς δὲ ἐπισημειωσάμενος εἶπέ μοι Προσχῆ σοι ὁ θεός, τέκνον· ἔκτοτε οὖν χάριτι Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἀπήειν εἰς τὰς θυσίας τῶν εἰδώλων, ἀλλὰ ποτὲ μὲν ἄρρωστίαν προσποιούμενος ποτὲ δὲ εἰς ἀσχολίας τινὰς ἑαυτὸν παριστῶν, ἔλεγέ μοι ὁ πατήρ μου ὅτι Ἐπειδὴ οὐ σπεύδεις εἰς τὰς θυσίας τῶν θεῶν, διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲ εὐρωστεῖς, μὴ ὦν ἄξιος τῶν θεῶν. ἐγὼ δὲ ἔχαιρον ἀκούων μὴ εἶναι ἄξιος τῶν θυσιῶν τῶν εἰδώλων· χάριτι δὲ θεοῦ ἐλήλυθας σὺ ὧδε, προνοία μου γινομένη.

Do not be afraid, girl, because I am not seeking to be married to you as a bridegroom of corruption, but I am seeking to be attached closely to you in the bridal chamber that is to come. This is not the desire of corruption, for I know from your prayer that you are the bride of the heavenly God. I know this God that is never conquered by anyone, for a certain man highly esteemed for his appearance was preaching about this God in Antioch some time ago. A certain virgin believed in God, followed the man, and experienced danger on account of her beauty. Her name was Thecla, and I have heard about her that she was sentenced to the wild beasts. Therefore, I was constantly gazing at the man, and he saw me and said to me, 'May God take notice of you, child.' Since that time by the grace of Christ I have not returned to the sacrifices for idols, but sometimes I have faked illness, and other times I have given myself to some other affairs. My father said to me, 'Because you do not hurry to the sacrifices for the gods, you thus do not show strength, for you are not worthy of the gods.' But I was rejoicing when I heard that I was not worthy of the sacrifices for idols. By the grace of God you have come here as an act of providential care on my behalf.

And so, they plan their escape to Spain (36, *mediation*, B / *counteraction*, C). But, alas, one of the prefect's slaves overhears their plan and tells the prefect about it. He orders them to be cast to the wild beasts (37, *peril*, P), but a lioness, instead of devouring them, licks Polyxene's feet (*help*, Aux). And so, the prefect and the whole city convert into Christianity (*wedding*, W), astonished by the miracle. This finishes the second sequence, which started with Polyxene's ransom. The scheme would be as follows: II. A P Aux B = C P Aux W.

We still have one sequence to be concluded, the one triggered by Polyxene and Rebecca's need to go to Spain. Following this up, both girls and the prefect's son embark in company of Onesimus and Lucius, disciples too of Paul, who happened to be sailing to Spain to see the apostle (39, *departure*, ↑). After some twenty days of journey, they stop

at an island to rest. But the savage men who inhabited it make war to them (*peril*, P), being eventually defeated by those fighting for Polyxene (*help*, Aux). Meanwhile, Polyxene gets frightened by the thought of being captured again, so she throws herself to the sea (*peril*, P), but luckily was seen by the captain of the ship, who saves her unharmed (*help*, Aux). Eventually, they arrive to Spain (*return*, ↓ / *liquidation*, K). And when everything seemed to be perfect, the powerful man who at the beginning captured Polyxene, tries to seize her again (42, *peril*, P). However, Paul talks him out of this idea, and eventually the abductor converts and gets baptized, and so does Polyxene's suitor too, his rival (*help*, Aux). Finally, we are told that Polyxene never again abandoned Paul, but always was beside him (*wedding*, W).

ἡ δὲ ἔκτοτε οὐδ' ὄλως ἀπελείπετο τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου, φοβουμένη τοὺς πειρασμούς. τούτων οὖν οὕτως γινομένων, πάντες ἔχαιρον ἐν κυρίῳ, δοξάζοντες πατέρα καὶ υἱὸν καὶ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, τὸν ἕνα θεὸν, ᾧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. ἈΜΗΝ.

From then on, fearing temptations, she never left the blessed Paul. Because these things turned out in this way, everyone rejoiced in the Lord, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one God to whom be glory and power now and forever and ever. Amen.

This final sequence has the following scheme: III. a F ↑ P Aux P Aux ↓ K P Aux W.
To sum up, here is the list of all the sequences in this story:

Part I:

- I. $\alpha \zeta a B C = F_{\text{neg}} A K \uparrow P \text{Aux} W$
- II. $\alpha = B C \uparrow K$

Part II:

- I. $\alpha B C \uparrow A F = F A \text{Aux} \uparrow P \uparrow \text{Aux} C \uparrow a W$
- II. $A P \text{Aux} B = C P \text{Aux} W$
- III. $a F \uparrow P \text{Aux} P \text{Aux} \downarrow K P \text{Aux} W$

We can clearly see certain structures and functions are widely repeated throughout the story. Later on, we will talk about them, when we discuss our own conclusions. Now we must focus on the characters that carry on these functions.

4. Characters¹²

Propp not only formulated a morphology for the functional sequences of a narrative, but also indicated that these functions were always carried out by certain *types* of characters. Following his nomenclature, we can distribute these functions among the *dramatis personae* of this story and make the following division. We can also provide some details about the characters in question.

There is always a *magical object* which heroes will try to obtain, and villains will try to prevent this from happening. Therefore, being Baptism the *magical object*, we have:

12. Besides the Proppian approach (which is a novelty), this information is taken from Martínez Arias 2020: XII-XVII.

- *Seeker-heroines*: the ones who try to obtain this object:

- *Xanthippe*: The true protagonist and the one who moves the thread of the story, at least in the first part of the work. Of noble lineage, her conversion does not follow the «normal» pattern that we would expect of any neophyte. From the very beginning Xanthippe shows much eagerness to listen to the man of whom her slave speaks, even though she has never heard of him before. We see, then, that her conversion is the fruit of what Szepessy (2004) calls an «inner enlightenment». That is, more than through Paul's preaching or through hearing the Word of God, her conversion is in some way worked by herself; it is she who, through her extensive monologues, grows deeper in her knowledge of God, a knowledge that never ceases to surprise us, since she even uses biblical phrases or paraphrases the Beatitudes without even having learned the name of the apostle. And so, she is the one who eagerly tries to obtain the baptism, very much like a heroine looking for the magical object.

- *Polyxene*: Xanthippe's sister, «younger than her and beautiful in appearance» (νεωτέρα ὑπὲρ αὐτὴν, καὶ ὡραία τῇ ὄψει), is important in the story because she is the protagonist of the second part. She must go through even more hardships than her sister in order to convert to Christianity, being kidnapped and lost in foreign lands, just as her own name tell us: πολὺς «many» and ξένος «foreign». Because of all the hardships she endures in order to get baptized, she too is to be considered a heroine in search of the magical object.

- *Rebecca*: We are told very little about her in the story, and her conversion doesn't take much part of it. Nonetheless, she appears in the title, along with the other two protagonists, so that she must be considered a major character, at least as a companion to Polyxene's sorrows, even if this is not her main role. In fact, Junod (1989: 99-100) tells us that she is essentially a figure of Israel, the Israel once honored by the prophets, but now called, like the pagans and idolaters, to form one nation with the Christians, and that is why Rebecca and Polyxena must always remain united, inseparable. In this sense, she is also, like Polyxene, eager to get baptized, which makes her too a heroine looking for the magical object.

- *Magical auxiliaries* (both *donors* and *helpers*):

- *Paul*: It can be said that, in a sense, the whole work revolves around him, since it is through him that these «holy women» are converted and become Christians, although the apostle is hardly seen in action. As far as his role in the play is concerned, we see that he loses prominence to the women he converts; we can even perceive a certain passive attitude, as Szepessy (2004) points out, which we see reflected above all in how Probus brings him to his house, then expels him, then Philotheus takes him to his house... and all this in the midst of almost no action by Paul, who simply lets himself be carried away. This detail is important because it highlights the great importance given to women, even to the «detriment» (which really is not) of the apostles (Davies, 1980). This does not mean, however, that the apostle appears to be pusillanimous or lacking in virtue; On the

contrary, from the beginning he is described to us as the great «herald of Christ» (ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ κήρυξ), «the truly golden and beautiful nightingale» (τῆς χρυσοῦς ὄντως καὶ καλῆς ἀηδόνας), and even in the midst of so many adversities to which he is exposed, one never sees him falter or lose his composure, but always «his walk is sweet and proportionate» (πρῶτος αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁμαλὸς ὁ περίπατος) (Junod 1989: 96-97). He is in a way both a *donor* and a *helper*, because he provides the magical object to Xanthippe, and helps the others to obtain it.

- *Apostles*: In the second part of the work, a large number of apostles and disciples of Paul appear, such as Onesimus and Lucius. Junod (1989: 100) notes that Paul, though not present in all the places Polyxene goes, seems to act through his brothers in the apostolate. Indeed, Szepessy (2004) observes that all of these apostles (Peter, Philip, Andrew, and even Onesimus himself, though not an apostle but a very dear disciple of Paul) seem to be communicated in that they are all instructed through a dream or vision how to help Polyxene, and after doing so they all «go on their way rejoicing» or «glorifying God». Andrew can be considered the *donor*, since it is he who baptizes Polyxene and Rebecca. The others are *helpers*.

- There are other *helpers* too, such as the *cattleman*, the *prefect's son*, and the *old woman*. All of them help the heroines get the magical object.

- *Villains*: try to prevent the heroes from obtaining the magical object:

- *Probus*: He is described in the first chapter as ἀνὴρ βασιλικός «a man of the emperor,» known even to Nero, and therefore honored by the most powerful men in the city. This character appears as an obstacle in the conversion of his wife, although he ends up converting, and the virtues of the latter emphasize, through opposition, the pusillanimity and impulsive character of the former (Junod 1989: 96).

- Polyxene's and Rebecca's *abductors* and the *prefect* also try to prevent the heroines from getting the magical object. But in the end, they too are converted and are also baptized. It is important to notice that most of the villains in AXP end up converting in a positive way. This is an unusual and distinctive trait regarding the villain's character in Propp's basic scheme.

5. Conclusion

The Proppian scheme of AXP is similar to those of the classical Greek romances and many of the AAA, and therefore this is another evidence of a common literary thread regarding the genre of this writings.

As we said before, the author makes use of many resources typical of the AAA and the Greek novel, in order to entertain the reader¹³. Just a simple glance at the schemes of the Proppian functions reveals us that the pair of functions *peril-help* is by far the most used

13. For more details and stylistic traits regarding AXP and AAA, cf. Martínez Arias 2020: XIX-XXXIII.

in this narrative. It is like the backbone of the story, from which the rest of the functions are derived. This is not surprising; we see the same structure of repetition in other similar texts, sources which the author of AXP used to compose his narrative. We see it, for instance, in Xenophon's novel, and in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*¹⁴. Furthermore, details as travestism¹⁵, or the help of an old lady are very well-known episodes constantly used by these novelesque genres.

Therefore, it is safe to draw a conclusion: AXP is definitively a Christian novel in which the characteristics of the AAA, hagiographic tales and, above all, Greek romances converge. The Proppian morphology of this narrative shows us even more clearly the relation and dependance between AXP and the AAA, and of course between both and the Greek novels, in the sense that they use similar narrative structures and types of characters.

Further investigation is, of course, needed to support even more this assertion, but certainly the functional morphology gives us an incontestable aid to help us in our research.

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14. Ruiz Montero 1988; 2016: 127.

15. Ruiz Montero 2016: 122; Martínez Arias 2020: 63.

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