

(Im)piious Sisterhood: Maximus the Cynic's
Dangerous Liaisons. A new conjecture
on Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 41, *Contra Maximum*¹

Hermanidad (im)piadosa: las relaciones peligrosas de Máximo el Cínico.
Una nueva conjetura sobre Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 41, *Contra Máximo*

Alessandro De Blasi

<alessandro.deblasi@unipd.it>

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari (DiSLL)

Università degli Studi di Padova

Via E. Vendramini, 13, 35137 Padova (PD) – Italy

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines Gregory of Nazianzus' poem (II 1, 41) against his rival Maximus the Cynic, arguing that a gender-oriented reconsideration of women's roles in Early Christianity yields significant textual-critical insights. In vv. 49-53, the author appears to reference female assistants who allegedly conjured with Maximus against Gregory, yet this allusion remains obscure and requires further investigation. After a review of existing scholarship, the paper presents a new analysis and interpretation of the passage. By placing this reference within a broader context and exploring parallels with female communities in Gregory's works and contemporary patristic literature, it becomes evident that Gregory's accusation is related to the emerging phenomenon of «syneisaktism». This thorough and updated analysis achieves two main objectives. Firstly, it offers a new, more detailed, and culturally aware interpretation of the poem. Secondly, by examining the manuscript tradition of the passage and its Syriac translation, it highlights its corruption and advances a new conjecture.

KEYWORDS: Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Cynic, iambic poetry, Early Christian Women, Syneisaktism.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo se centra en el análisis del *carmen* (II 1, 41) de Gregorio Nacianceno contra su rival Máximo el Cínico, mostrando que una reconsideración de los roles de las mujeres en el cristianismo primitivo desde una perspectiva de género proporciona valiosas implicaciones textual-críticas. Se examina un pasaje específico (v. 49-53) donde el autor alude a ayudantes femeninas que habrían apoyado a Máximo, aunque esta referencia sigue siendo ambigua y requiere más investigación. El ar-

1. This article is based on research originally conceived for the *8th CISSR Annual Meeting on Christian Origins* in Bertinoro (Italy, 15-17 September 2022), where it was presented within the panel on women in ancient Christianity, organized by M. Dell'Isola (Università degli Studi di Milano Statale) and M. Resta (Università degli Studi di Bari). My deepest gratitude goes first and foremost to them for their willingness to include my work in this volume. I am also extremely grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, which have greatly enhanced this text (if any shortcomings remain, I evidently take full responsibility). Finally, special thanks to my friend M. Réal (Cornell University) for reviewing my English and, above all, for sharing with me his priceless suggestions.

título presenta un nuevo análisis del pasaje basado en una nueva edición crítica del poema, situándolo en un contexto más amplio y explorando paralelismos con comunidades femeninas contemporáneas en la obra de Gregorio y la literatura patrística. Este análisis actualizado busca ofrecer una lectura más culturalmente consciente del poema y sugiere una nueva conjetura debido a la corrupción del pasaje en la tradición manuscrita, incluyendo su traducción siríaca.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gregorio Nacianceno, Máximo el Cínico, Poesía yámbica, mujeres del cristianismo primitivo, *Virgines subintroductae*.

ἀλλὰ τίς οἴσει
τῶν παρὰ τῶν πολλῶν μῶμον ἐγειρόμενον;

*Who will ever endure the blame cast by many?*²

1. Introductory notes: Women in late antique society

As stated long ago by Peter Brown, in late antique Christian society, «the woman [...] was both a weak link and bridgehead»³. Women were thus regarded as strange creatures hard to define and integrate in the society: in other words, late antique women happen to be often conceived as a form of emerging Otherness in the eyes of the patriarchal culture in which they acted. Brown has in this respect rightly spoken of the late antique Christian woman as of a sort of «gateway» leading sometimes to the evil and sometimes to God⁴.

Whereas among Jews women had a biological role but were substantially excluded from the study and passing down of the Torah (as the Jerusalem Talmud states: «May the words of the Torah be burned and not be delivered to women!»)⁵, within early Christianity they were soon to emerge as patrons of the community. Indeed, as is well known, the 4th century in particular – the very timespan considered in this contribution – saw for example the emergence of rich *matronae* who acquired a prominent role in fostering and protecting Christianity. There is perhaps no need here to recall famous cases such as that of Jerome's wealthy female entourage established on the Aventine, composed of Marcella, Paula and Eustochium, or to recall the figure of Olympias the deaconess of Constantinople, brought up by Theodosia, an influential noblewoman of the capital, cousin to Gregory Nazianzen and close friend to John Chrysostom⁶.

2. Greg. Naz. *epigr.* 15b, 5-6 Palla.

3. See Brown (1988: 153). I owe much to Brown's seminal study, see in particular chap. 7 (*ibi*: 140-159), devoted to late antique promiscuous companionships, and chap. 13 (*ibi*: 259-284), on the ascetic life of women in the 4th century and syneisaktism (see below, pp. 175-176). For an historical contextualization of wealth and poverty in Late Antiquity and Christianity, see the monumental study by Brown (2012), especially p. 273-288 on women, patronage, and learning, though with a western focus on Rome.

4. *Ibidem*.

5. Jerusalem Talmud, *Sotah* 3, 4, 7: a passage, however, that has aroused considerable debate among sages from the very beginning.

6. Wealth and celibacy were deeply intertwined in Christendom: on this topic see also Clark (1982), who focused on the above-mentioned cases of Jerome's and John Chrysostom's female acquaintances. A recursive and unusual feature of such relationships was the fact that men were often of lower social status than women, see also Clark (1993: 55). Furthermore, an extensive survey on the very concept of masculinity in the Cappadocian Fathers has lately appeared: Howard (2022) argues for an intimate link between the Cappadocian concept of παιδεία and the idea of ἄρετή as closely inspired by a classical notion of masculinity, which is mirrored, for example, by a systematic depiction of the (Heterousian) opponents as lacking

The development of this phenomenon, which played such a key role in the final establishing of Christianity as the state religion, was undoubtedly dictated by the interplay between the particular social and economic conditions of the late empire, where a few very powerful families held limitless wealth, and the utterly Christian tendency to promote chastity and widowhood, which determined, in the end, the amassing of enormous fortunes in the hands of such powerful and pious women.

Thus, «virginity represented for the woman of late antiquity a way of social and spiritual emancipation from a patriarchal society», as emphasized by L. Perrone, and it enabled women to equate men, thus reaching their level⁷. This was true for wealthy widows of high rank as well as for those from humbler social backgrounds, who thereby could achieve a form of independence. As a matter of fact, «a woman without any family at all, had [...] no means of supporting herself other than living with a man in a 'pseudo marriage'», as stressed by S. Elm, and leading a virginal life might even represent the only choice for women of lower status.⁸

There is little doubt, however, that to some extent Christianity did expand women's scope, which is also attested by a rich corpus of patristic literature dealing with female figures⁹. And yet, in late antique society, gender roles continued nonetheless to be carefully defined and gender boundaries, meant as social and cultural features stereotypically assigned to men and women, functioned as a strong rhetorical device, leaving little space in the sources for such a female agency to emerge¹⁰. Traces of women's active political engagement must then be sought in the interstices of the text, sometimes in its very gaps.

This is why this contribution seeks to address a dual gap I have long grappled with, and to do that in a gender-oriented perspective: an interpretative gap of a historical-literary nature but also a textual gap, both affecting a specific passage of Gregory of Nazianzus' poem II 1, 41. This poem is part of his vast poetic corpus, one of the earliest and most remarkable examples of Greek Christian poetry. The critical edition with commentary of some iambic poems from this broad oeuvre were the focus of my Ph.D¹¹. Reconsidering

manliness. On the contrary, pro-Nicene women like Macrina or Gorgonia are often portrayed as virtuous and consequently masculine, see esp. Howard (2022: 212-271 and 186-200). Unfortunately, this work only sporadically mentions Gregory's poetry.

7. Perrone (2002: 15): «[L]a verginità ha rappresentato per la donna della tarda antichità una via di emancipazione sociale e spirituale da una società patriarcale, capace di portarla allo stesso livello del maschio».

8. Elm (1994: 51). Obviously, this whole pioneering study by S. Elm on early female monasticism must be regarded as a cornerstone to start from, but see also, e.g., Clark (1993: 126-130), with further bibliography. According to her: «[A] Christian woman could achieve respect by rejecting the claims of family, by devoting herself to the study of theology» (*ibid.*).

9. As Clark (1993: 140) plainly affirms: «Christianity did enlarge the possibilities of women». Clark herself admits, however, that women were often passive subject within patristic sources, which mostly focused «on the nature of woman and on how women should live» (*ibid.*).

10. Regarding this, one could mention, for example, the famous anathematization against transvestitism proclaimed at the Synod of Gangra, see Syn. Gangr., *can.* 13 Joannou: Περὶ γυναικῶν τῶν ἀμφιάσασιν ἀνδρῶν κεκηρημένων. Εἴ τις γυνὴ διὰ νομιζομένην ἄσκησιν μεταβάλλοι τὸ ἀμφιάσμα καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ εἰωθότος γυναικείου ἀμφιάσματος ἀνδρείον ἀναλάβοι, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω, which provides, at the same time, evidence for a wide-spread phenomenon, see also Cox Miller (2005: 150-151), and, for a wider contextualization, Castelli (1991), and the essays collected in Ahearne-Kroll et al. (2010).

11. Allow me to refer to A. De Blasi (2022), *Adversus inimicos. Carmi giambici di Gregorio di Nazianzo [cc. II 1, 14; II 1, 47; II 1, 39; II 1, 41; II 1, 40^{a/b}; I 1, 10]*. *Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Ph.D. Thesis, defended in Padua and Leuven, on June 6th, currently under revision to be published as an expanded monograph in the *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* series.

the role of women in 4th-century Christianity could shed some light on a long-standing hermeneutic-philological issue with significant historical-literary ramifications.

2. Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Cynic

As it is generally well-known among scholars, a crucial event in Gregory's biography took place in the late summer of 380 in Constantinople, as his former friend Maximus the Cynic, an Egyptian Christian philosopher who had apparently been sent by Peter, bishop of Alexandria, to the city in order to help Gregory, ended up betraying him and tried to seize the see of Constantinople during a nighttime irregular ceremony¹². Constantinopolitan people forced Maximus the usurper to escape to Thessalonica, seeking for Theodosius' protection. As he lost the support of both the emperor and Peter of Alexandria, however, he sought refuge with Ambrose at the Council of Aquileia, but his ordination as bishop of Constantinople was eventually invalidated *in absentia* by the Council of 381. Henceforth, we lose track of him¹³.

Among the verses I examined in my Ph.D. research, a significant number are concerned with Maximus' affaire, either covertly hinting at those events or, more rarely, openly targeting the enemy by name. Gregory often attacks him with harsh tones and denounces his betrayal¹⁴. This is particularly the case of poems II 1, 39, II 1, 40a/b¹⁵, and II 1, 41, the latter being the only one explicitly directed against Maximus, as its very title shows: Πρὸς Μάξιμον, in most sources¹⁶. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, these poems appear to have been conceived as a written response in verse within an ongoing literary skirmish

12. On these events, that constituted a turning-point in Gregory's life, and the profile of Maximus the Cynic, somewhat mysterious, besides the main biographical works on Gregory himself (McGuckin 2001: 311-320; Bernardi 1995: 190-193; Gallay 1943: 159-177), see Gregory's prosopography by Hauser-Meury (1960: 119-121) to be read together with Sajdak's (1909: 18-48) seminal study, and the many insights provided by J. Mossay, in his introduction to the *Oration* 25 (1981: 120-141), and in a specific article devoted to the topic (Mossay 1982: 229-236). New details on this figure have been additionally detected by F. Fatti (2008: 303-317), and, from the perspective of the history of Cynic philosophy, by M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (1990: 2791-2795). An updated and detailed historical account of the events is moreover provided by the more recent contribution of Torres – Teja (2013: 13-29). Finally, for a contextualization in the 4th-century Church history, with a heresiological focus, see the work of A.M. Ritter (1965: 49-53) and M. Simonetti (1975: 450-451 and 532-551[*passim*]).

13. *Soz. hist. eccl.* 7, 9, 4 (SC 516): Μάξιμον δὲ μήτε γεγενῆσθαι ἢ εἶναι ἐπίσκοπον [...] καὶ τὰ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἢ παρ' αὐτοῦ πεπραγμένα ἄκυρα ἐψηφίσαντο, see also *Theod. Cyr. hist. eccl.* 5, 8, 9 (SC 530), and *Dam. pap. epp.* 4-5 (PL 13, 365-369), to Acholius and the other bishops of Macedonia. Moreover, see also *conc. C.pol. I, can. 4 (CCCOGD 1)*: Περὶ Μαξίμου τοῦ κυνικοῦ καὶ τῆς κατ' αὐτὸν ἀταξίας τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει γενομένης, ὥστε μήτε Μάξιμον ἐπίσκοπον γενέσθαι ἢ εἶναι, μήτε τοὺς παρ' αὐτοῦ χειροτονηθέντας ἐν οἰωδήποτε βαθμῷ κλήρου, πάντων καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῦ γενομένων ἀκυρωθέντων. See also *Ambros. ep. extr. coll.* 9, 3-5 (CSEL 82/3).

14. On the historical background behind Gregory's iambic attacks against Maximus, see above all Torres – Teja (2013: 17-19), but allow me also to refer to two works of mine (De Blasi 2020a: 489-496, and 2020b: 246-269), which this contribution presupposes and partially integrates. Many valuable suggestions had been already provided by Hawkins (2014: 142-180).

15. According to my study of the manuscript tradition, what one today reads as one single poem, was originally conceived as two separate pieces, i.e. II 1, 40a (vv. 1-22) and II 1, 40b (vv. 23-33), which merged over the centuries in most witnesses, except for the Syriac translation and the codex **W**. Further evidence in this respect will be provided in my forthcoming edition of these iambic verses (see above, p. 163, n. 11).

16. This is among the few poems by Gregory whose title can be traced back to the author and regarded as authentic, since it is attested by almost all the witnesses, including the *Commentary* by Cosmas of Jerusalem and the Syriac translation. By calling the enemy by his name, Gregory violates a self-imposed rule,

with the rival, who, in turn, had composed against Gregory¹⁷. This is apparently implied by the opening of poem II 1, 41, v. 1 as well: Τί ταῦτα; τολμᾶς καὶ σὺ, Μάξιμε, γράφειν¹⁸.

These sources, together with other hints scattered throughout Gregory's poetical and rhetorical oeuvre, are of considerable interest, as they can be used by scholars in order to reconstruct some historical events of the year 380, during Gregory's brief ministry in the capital, and in order to better profile Maximus' obscure character.

A few years ago, I carried out an analysis of some of these passages, focusing on the depiction of the enemy as an outsider, completely unfit for the bishop's role he craved. These literary attacks targeting Maximus are well-crafted and rhetorically refined σκώμματα portraying the addressee as a long-haired androgynous creature and a lecherous eunuch with the aim of providing evidence for his banishment from the Church, based on Paul's teaching and on canonical law preventing clerics from self-castration¹⁹. Yet, the outsider was not alone: another specific issue which emerges from the sources and needs to be addressed is that of Maximus' female entourage and his relationship with women as described by Gregory in his oeuvre.

An ambiguous allusion to some female helpers can be read in the poem II 1, 41, vv. 49-53, entirely devoted to the critique of Maximus. The passage is rather obscure, thus sparking extensive debate among scholars about its correct interpretation. Currently, in the *Patrologia Graeca's* edition, it reads as follows²⁰:

Ἦ σοί γε μαῖαι τοῦτ' ἐνέπνευσαν θράσος,
αἱ σαὶ συνεργοί, καὶ λόγων συμπαίστορες, 50
ὧν εἴ σὺ κύκνος, αἷς ἐνηχεῖς μουσικόν,
ὅταν ῥέωσιν, ὡς ζέφυρος κατὰ πτερῶν
αὔραις πραεῖαις ἀσμένως ἀπλωμένων;

preventing him from the ὀνομαστὶ κωμωδεῖν, see Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 12, 21 Meier: οὐκ ὀνομαστὶ τοὺς λόγους ποιήσομαι.

17. Allow me to refer, once more, to De Blasi (2020b: 257-259). Conversely, Milovanović-Barham (1997: 501-504) suggested that Maximus' was either «prose writing» or «rhythmical, stress-based pattern metre». One does learn from Jerome (Hier. *vir. ill.* 127 Herding) of a prose treatise Περὶ πίστεως by Maximus, which however seems hard to identify with the writings alluded in Gregory's verses here.

18. The opening of the poem might bear some Callimachean reminiscence according to Hollis (2002: 48), particularly of Callim. *iamb.* 4, *fr.* 194, 1 Pfeiffer: Εἶς – οὐ γάρ; – ἡμέων, παῖ Χαριτάδεω, καὶ σὺ, where Callimachus turns to his mysterious rival Simus. The whole poem II 1, 41 teams with allusions to Maximus' writing ambitions, see particularly vv. 11-48, where he is labelled as a charlatan «talking nonsenses» (v. 11: σπερμολογῆση ῥήματα), «inspired by [fake] Muses» (v. 15: μουσόπνευστος, which is probably a Gregorian coinage or an unidentified quotation), «bubbling with verses, although completely ignorant of [metrical and moral] measure» (v. 19: ἔπειτα μέτρον ἔβλυσας ἄμετρος ὧν;), a «scribbler» (v. 21: λογογράφος) and a new «stuttering» «Orpheus» or «Amphion» (v. 27 and vv. 45-46, see also below, pp. 177-178).

19. See especially *I Cor.* 11, 1-16; *Conc. Nic. (325), can. 1 (CCCOGD 1)*, and *Can. App. apud Const. App.* 8, 47, 21-24 (*SC* 336). On the symbolic value acquired by the hair and effeminacy, in particular, see De Blasi (2020a: 495-496, with further bibliography): «Bollato come cinico d'accatto, seguace di uno stile di vita ripudiato a Gangra pochi anni prima, evirato e dunque estromesso dalla Chiesa, schiacciato sullo stereotipo del sofista imbellettato: Massimo finisce insomma relegato ai margini della società».

20. Despite some ongoing projects (such as the volumes within the *CUF* series directed by G. Bady) and several valuable monographs devoted to single poems (mostly by young scholars under the supervision of R. Palla), Gregory's *Carmina* still await an updated and comprehensive edition; many of them are still to be read in the *Patrologia Graeca* (vols. 37-38), whose edition reproduces in turn the so-called Maurist one from the end of the 18th century. Poem II 1, 41 is in *PG* 37, 1339-1344. English translations are mine, unless otherwise specified.

Did your μαῖαι perhaps infuse you with courage,
 your companions in enterprise, and partners in letters,
 whose swan you are, in whose ears you make sweet tones resound, 50
 when they blow like Zephyrus upon the wings
 spread to the gentle breezes?

Here, Gregory is accusing Maximus of having been supported in his betrayal by some mysterious she-companions, labelled as μαῖαι. Ironically resorting to a classical poetic metaphor, Gregory describes these helpers as bird-like creatures with Maximus as a swan inspiring their attacks, supposedly directed against Gregory himself²¹. The overall context and imagery are typical of Gregory's poetry, where, for example, similes with various species of birds are extremely common: whereas enemies are usually likened to geese or crows, the poet often assimilates himself to an eagle or a swan²². In particular, the ironical metamorphosis of Maximus into a swan here must be reconnected to Gregory's self-portrait as an old swan singing his goodbye all alone, in the poem II 1, 39²³.

It remains nonetheless unclear, however, why the author chose to define Maximus' helpers as μαῖαι, nor is there any agreement on how this term should be literally understood. Until recently, both F. Morel, the 16th-century French editor and translator of the poems²⁴, and modern scholars like J. Mossay or C. Crimi, in his much more recent Italian translation, interpreted it as a synonym of «old ladies» (Latin: *anus*, Italian: «megere», which stands for «old hags», or even «admiratrices âgées»)²⁵. This seems also suggested by an allusion made by the author a few lines above in the same poem, at v. 23: πάντων ὁ χάριτος, ἡ γραφίς καὶ γραϊδίῳν, «Paper is available to everyone, the pen even to old ladies!». Here too, from a literary perspective, one could call into question a covert hint at the traditional figure of Iambe, but from a much more concrete and historical perspective, the passage explicitly speaks of a circle of old ladies actively supporting Maximus, apparently even by writing in his defence²⁶.

21. Maximus' helpers are said to torrentially «breathe» (ρέω) their words against him, with a particular meaning and usage of the verb noted by Crimi (2012: 269), as in Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 1937 Tuilier – Bady: Γλῶσσαι δὲ μοι ρεῖτωσαν ὡς αὔραι κεναί; *carm.* II 1, 68, 30-31 Conte, and especially *carm.* II 1, 39, 1-2 (PG 37, 1329): πολλοὺς ὀρῶ [...] ρέοντας εὐκόλως. See also Crimi – Costa (1999: 160).

22. See, *ex.gr.*, Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 17, 91-92 (PG 37, 1268) and *carm.* II 1, 39, 103 (PG 37, 1336): χωρὶς κοιλοῦν κάετῶν ὑψώματα, according to a well-established rhetorical tradition (see originally *ex.gr.* Pind. *Nem.* 3, 80-82 Maehler, and later parallels such as Ael. Arist. *or.* 49, 394 Dindorf; Max. Tyr. *or.* 23, 4, 12 Trapp, and Lib. *ep.* 1427, 2 Foerster).

23. See Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 39, 54-57 (PG 37, 1333), perhaps reminiscent of Callim. *iamb.* 4, *fr.* 194, 47-48 Pfeiffer, as highlighted by Hollis (2002: 49). See also Greg. Naz. *ep.* 114, 4-6 Gallay. See also Sternbach (1910: 19-23) and Demoen (1996: 21).

24. Frédéric Morel (1558-1630) was a French scholar specialized in the publication of Patristic texts, who collected previous editions of Gregory's oeuvre into two volumes of the *Opera omnia* (Paris, 1609-1611), facing the Greek text with a Latin translation. On him, see Way (1971: 59, 94-97, 101-102) and Kecskméti (2014: esp. 15-19). Morel's verse translation is reproduced under Caillau's prose translation in the PG edition of the poem.

25. See, respectively, Mossay (1982: 233) and Crimi – Costa (1999: 160).

26. Peculiarly enough, Gregory advances similar obscure allegations against emperor Julian's poetry, see Greg. Naz. *or.* 4, 108, 1 (SC 309), leaving both ancient and modern commentators at a loss: see ps.-Nonn. *comm. in or.* 4, *hist.* 64 (CCSG 27), and Kurmann (1988: 357-358), Lugaresi (1993: 389), and Lefherz (1958: 46-52). Iambe's myth was well known among Christian authors, see, *ex.gr.*, Clem. Alex. *protr.* 2, 20, 3 (SC 2), and Eus. Caes. *praep. ev.* 2, 3, 33 (SC 228). Furthermore, on the «twofold pen» (γραφίς διςτιχος) of his enemies, see Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 1015-1016 Tuilier – Bady.

Yet, in 2008, F. Fatti remarked that, aside from further derogatory implications, the proper meaning of the term *μαῖα* should be that of «nanny» or «midwife» and we should consequently understand it as such in this passage²⁷. Further evidence on this point was provided some time later by C. Crimi, who reconnected these verses to another passage from poem II 1, 39²⁸, where Gregory vents anger against an unnamed effeminate enemy (as a matter of fact, Maximus again) and laughs at his iambic poetry, whose results are nothing but ἀμβλώματα, a term drawn from medical vocabulary as a metaphorical reference to his «literary abortions»²⁹, with «a wonderful insult in the purest spirit of the *ιαμβικὴ ἰδέα*», as emphasized by G. Agosti³⁰.

μέτρον κακίζεις εικότως ἄμετρος ὄν
ιαμβοποιὸς συγγράφων ἀμβλώματα.

You criticize the metre, certainly because you have no measure,
iambographer composing abortions.

Hence, in poem II 1, 41, Gregory allegedly alludes to some «nannies» that helped Maximus the poetaster give birth to bad verses against him. However, this explanation, though indeed fascinating and plausible, is not entirely supported by textual evidence. On the contrary, a survey of the manuscript tradition of the passage reveals the very reading *μαῖαι* to be a conjecture by the 16th-century German humanist David Hoeschel relying on just one witness³¹, out of fourteen transmitting this poem³². Here is a provisional apparatus to the passage:³³

27. See Fatti (2008: 308).

28. Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 39, 69-70 (PG 37, 1334).

29. See Crimi (2012: 271). On the tight similarities and echoes between poem II 1, 39 and II 1, 41, see De Blasi (2020b: 254-255). In the specific, *carm.* II 1, 39, 69 occurs almost identical in *carm.* II 1, 41, 19.

30. Agosti (2001: 231), see also Fatti (2008: 311) and Hawkins (2014: 156). Terms like ἀμβλωμα and ἀμβλωσις belong to the medical vocabulary and obviously imply a comparison between the medicine of the body and that of the soul. Gregory, whose brother Caesarius became archiater, really liked such technicalities and often reveals a penchant for medicine, see Keenan (1941: 8-30). A Callimachean echo might be detected in this passage as well, see Callim. *iamb.* 13, *fr.* 203, 13-14 Pfeiffer. On the effeminacy of the enemy here implied, see De Blasi (2020a: 491).

31. In 1591, the German humanist and prominent Lutheran philologist David Hoeschel (1556-1617) published a small collection of selected poems in Leiden, which has been so far mostly overlooked. This was the *editio princeps* of poem II 1, 41 (together with others), based on the sole **Mo** (see here below, n. 32), perhaps occasionally comparing it with H. Löwenklau's earlier edition (Basel, 1571), when possible. See also De Blasi (2020b: 249).

32. Hereinafter, I resort to the *sigla* widely used by scholars concerned with the *Carmina* and their textual transmission. In view of the critical edition of the poem II 1, 41, eleven witnesses have been considered: *Bas. gr. A VII 1*, 12th and 15th century (**Ba**), *Oxon. Bodl. Clark. 12*, 10th century, ff. 121*-126* added around the 14th century (**C***), *Laur. plut. 7.2*, first half of the 14th century (**G**), *Laur. plut. 7.10*, 9th/10th century (**L**), *Mon. gr. 582*, middle 16th century (**M**), *Mon. gr. 416*, second half of the 12th century (**Mo**), *Oxon. Barocc. gr. 96*, 14th century (**S**), *Vat. gr. 482*, yy. 1310-1330 (**Va**), *Vind. theol. gr. 43*, 16th century (**W**), Cosmae Hiersolymitani *Commentarius ad Carmina Gregori*, by the 8th century, preserved in the *Vat. gr. 1260*, 12th century (*Cosm*), and Theodosii Edesseni *Versio syriaca Carminum Gregorii*, translated between the 8th and 9th century, mostly preserved by the *Vat. syr. 105*, 9th century (*SyrV*). Three further manuscripts containing these verses, though *eliminandi*, must be also mentioned: *Ottob. gr. 202*, 16th century (**Ot**), *Vat. gr. 480*, 16th century (**v**), and *Vat. gr. 1949*, 16th century (**Ve**).

33. Here, only the readings concerning the word *inter cruces* are reported.

ἦ σοὶ ἴβαβαιαι† τοῦτ' ἐνέπνευσαν θράσος,
αἱ σαὶ συνεργοί, καὶ λόγων συμπαίστορες,
ᾧν εἶ σὺ κύκνος, αἷς ἐνηχεῖς μουσικόν,
ὅταν ῥέωσιν, ὡς ζέφυρος κατὰ πτερῶν
αὔραις πραεῖαις ἀσμένως ἀπλωμένων;

50

49 βαβαῖαι **LC*** βεβαῖαι **Va^{mg}** βεβαῖα **BaG** βεβαιαι **W^{ac}M^{ac}S** βεβαίως **Va^{ac}** ܒܒܐܝܐ (*an*
βεβαίως) *SyrV* certius *Leuncl* γυναῖκαι **W^{mg}** γυναῖκες **M^{mg}** γε μαῖα **Mo** γε μαῖαι *coni.*
Hoesch sec. *Caill* anus *Mor* μᾶλλον *coni.* *Hoesch^{mg}*

As is evident from the high number of variant readings, the passage turns out to be a *locus vexatus*. What one reads in the *Patrologia* today, is nothing other but a conjecture by Hoeschel on the base of the late-12th-century codex *Mon. gr.* 416 (**Mo**), where the nonsensical reading μαῖα is found. Further research on this codex and the history of the printed editions has led to the conclusion that this was the only manuscript used by Hoeschel for his 1591 edition. The German humanist doubtfully turned it into the plural form μαῖαι, but he expressed his concerns about the text by suggesting the correction μᾶλλον in the margin.

Among the other witnesses, some, including the old and authoritative **L**, report the reading βαβαῖαι, which is also meaningless, whilst others trivialize it into forms aiming to reconnect it to the root of βέβαιος, albeit retaining awkward accentuations.³⁴ Interestingly enough, the extremely ancient source on which humanistic codices such as **M** and **W** rely, however, admitted its perplexity once again before the text, meaningfully glossing the obscure word with γυναῖκες for the benefit of the reader³⁵.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the form μαῖα attested in **Mo** is very likely to be a later corruption of βεβαῖαι or βαβαῖαι attested elsewhere in the sources, as it is well known that the confusion between β and μ is a typical minuscule mistake.

Even by expanding the survey back to the earliest stages of the text transmission, the analysis of the Syriac tradition of the poems³⁶, ascribed to Theodosius of Edessa and dating back to 802/803, unfortunately does not provide any better reading: what one reads in Syriac is nothing but the transliteration of a Greek plural word that the translator apparently could not understand³⁷. This is also proved by a Syriac scholium that demonstrates that the passage sounded mistaken already at the time when the translation was carried

34. The trivialization βεβαίως was evidently conceived *ope ingenii* by the copyist of **Va**, and thence it probably landed in Löwenklaus' edition (*certius*). The doubtful reading βεβαίως related to *SyrV* is in fact due to the tentative and circular rendering of the Syriac *hapax* by Brockelmann in his vocabulary (see below).

35. Both **W** and **M** derive from a *codex antiquior deperditus* probably brought in Florence short after the Fall of Constantinople and known to Marsilius Ficinus, see Sicherl (1986: 224-225).

36. On Gregory's Syriac translations in general, see the recent updated account by Haelewyck (2017). On the Syriac translations of Gregory's poetry, besides the pioneering and seminal study by Crimi (1997), see the detailed essay by Fiori (2019 *revera* 2020), together with the many contributions recently delivered by Sembiante (2017; 2021; 2022). Furthermore, an overall reassessment on the Syriac translators of the *Carmina*, containing a new edition of the oldest *versio* passed down to us, will soon appear in *Le Muséon*, see De Blasi (2024, *forth.*).

37. In Syriac, the *seyame* above the word and the final *semkath* (ܘ-) are common ways of marking plural form of Greek loanwords.

out, around the turn of the 9th century, to the point that a certain Basil, otherwise unknown, offered a concurring interpretation of the passage³⁸.

ἦ σοὶ †βαβαιαι† τοῦτ' ἐνέπνευσαν θράσος
 «Pay attention here, because the passage is unclear. Basil also translates differently».

ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ
 schol. ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ ܘܝܢܢܘܨܘܢ
 Syr^{ms}

Thus, in these verses, no «nannies» or «hags» are ultimately involved in Gregory’s attack against Maximus and what one reads in the most reliable witnesses – βαβαιαι or βαβαιαι – is a *vox nihili* indicating that the passage must be corrupt and calls for correction. Since there is enough evidence that the source on which Theodosius’ translation was conducted dated to the 5th or 6th century, one might even reasonably go as far as to infer that the whole of the tradition was originally affected by this (archetype) error.³⁹

To restore the passage, however, it is first and foremost necessary to shed light on these female figures who surrounded Maximus: who exactly were they?

3. Maximus’ female entourage: sources and interpretations

Given that Gregory of Nazianzus provides the only detailed extant account of the life of Maximus, aside from some vague or later hints one may find scattered across other sources, further information must be sought within his oeuvre⁴⁰. A famous reference to the women who apparently followed Maximus can also be found in Gregory’s famous iambic autobiography, the poem entitled *De vita sua*, where at vv. 933-937 one reads⁴¹:

Θήσεις δὲ ποῦ μοι τὰς τρίχας, πέμψεις δὲ ποῦ;
 Σκηναῖς θεάτρων, εἰπέ μοι, ἢ παρθένους;
 Τίσιν δὲ τούτων αὐθις; Ἡ Κορινθίαίς
 ταῖς σαῖς, μεθ’ ὧν τὰ θεῖα ἐξησκοῦ ποτε,
 μόνος μόναις τε πανσόφως κοινούμενος;

935

Where will you put the hair, where will you send it?
 To the theatre, for the stage? Or to the virgins? Do tell me!
 To which of them, then? To your Corinthian ladies,
 with whom you used to practice holy rites,
 most cunningly associating alone with them alone?

935

38. At present, it is impossible to determine who Basil was, maybe one further unknown translator of Gregory’s poetry, maybe just one of his many passionate Syriac readers and commentators. As E.B. Fiori privately suggested, he might be tentatively identified, f.i., with Lo‘zar bar Sobtho, also known as Basil, bishop of Baghdad in the early 9th century.

39. See Crimi (1997: 88) and Crimi – Kertsch (1996: 50). Many of these arguments have been extensively treated in my Ph.D. thesis, see De Blasi (2022).

40. For a survey on the sources available on Maximus, see above, p. 164, n. 13. As highlighted by Torres – Teja (2013: 21): «As for Maximus, we have described above the distorted portrait that has reached us, owing to the bias towards Gregory of our available sources» (*ibid.*, n. 3, the authors provide a full list of the sources concerning Maximus).

41. Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 933-937 Tuilier – Bady, for commentary and notes, besides Tuilier – Bady (2004), see also Jungck (1974) and Trisoglio (2005), *ad loc.*

Here, with regard to Maximus' nighttime and secret tonsuring in the capital, Gregory teases his enemy for his long curly hair, by further alluding to certain unknown Corinthian ladies he could send it to⁴². Despite being identified long ago and repeatedly commented on, I believe scholarship has not as yet achieved a full understanding of this passage.

As late as 2005, E. Trisoglio assumed that Gregory was here referring to a «female monastic community» founded by Maximus in Corinth, following in this the opinion of P. Gallay, who also took the passage literally and regarded it as the proof of Maximus' short stay in Corinth⁴³. On the other hand, some scholars have more correctly – at least in part – detected a mischievous hint at prostitution that was widespread in Corinth. Indeed, a comparison with the occurrences in Plato's *Republic* or Aristophanes or even the entry of the *Suda* (*sub voce* Ἑταῖραι Κορίνθιαι) demonstrates that the term «Corinthian lady» was used to reference a prostitute *par excellence*, in ancient literature⁴⁴. Chr. Jungck and G. Bady, for example, shared this opinion, and consequently believe that no «nuns» were implied by Gregory, but rather some «prostitutes» Maximus had allegedly engaged with⁴⁵.

Finally, in 2012, C. Crimi provided conclusive evidence in this sense, by establishing a connection between the allusion to mysterious «holy rites» (τὰ θεῖα) in this passage and a similar one in poem I 2, 10, which unequivocally targets the ambiguous relationships between philosophers and their disciples⁴⁶. From this perspective, even the adoption of the verb κοινῶ at v. 937 thus takes on an allusive and obscene meaning⁴⁷.

Yet, the factual and historical context in which such allusions originated is bound to remain unexplained, unless one links this passage with another, mostly overlooked by scholars, which dates back to the time when Gregory and Maximus were on good terms. In 379, when Maximus visited him as an emissary of Peter, bishop of Alexandria, Gregory welcomed him with open arms, enthralled by Maximus' philosophical demeanour. As

42. As already noted in De Blasi (2020a: 492), Gregory stressed his friend's long hair also in *or.* 25, 2 (*SC* 284), where he calls Maximus a «Nazirean», that is a «monk» (see, *ex.gr.*, *Sud. lex.* v 10 Adler), and again in *carm.* II 1, 11, 920-921 Tuilier – Bady, where it is compared to Samson's. *Ibid.*, little above (vv. 754-756), the enemy's hair is described as a dyed wig and it becomes the symbol of Maximus amphibious and androgynous nature, see *ibid.*, vv. 767-771: Ἡ κουρά τοῦτ' ἔδειξε λανθάνον τέως. / Τοιαῦτα θαυμαθ' ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν νῦν σοφῶν, / διπλοῦν τιν' εἶναι τὴν φύσιν τὸ σχῆμά τε / ἀμφοῖν μερίζειν τοῖν γενοῖν τρισαθλίως, / κόμην γυναιξίν, ἀνδράσιν βακτήριαν. On the symbolic meaning of male hair in early Christianity, see Kötting (1984: 195-203).

43. See Trisoglio (2005: 196): «Appare certo, oltre che dal passo presente, il riferimento ad una comunità monastica femminile, che non si vede perché non potesse essere proprio a Corinto», in the wake of Gallay (1944: 160).

44. See Plat. *resp.* 404d Slings; Aristoph. *Plut.* 149 Wilson, and especially *Sud. lex.* ε 3266 Adler, but also Strab. *geogr.* 12, 3, 36 Radt, speaking of sacred prostitution in earlier times; Athen. *deipn.* 13, 32 Kaibel; Them. *or.* 20, 238b Downey – Schenkl, and Clem. Alex. *strom.* 2, 20, 118, 2 (*SC* 8). In addition to this, note the Aristophanean coinage κορινθιάζομαι, «practise fornication» (LSJ, *s.v.*, see Aristoph. *fr.* 370 Kassel – Austin). One could even push it so far as to maintain that Paul, while speaking to the Corinthians in *1 Cor.* 6, 18, is alluding to this same well-known phenomenon, on which now see also Kapparis (2018: esp. 31-33, 266-269).

45. See, respectively, Jungck (1974: 191), referring to Plat. *resp.* 404d, and similarly Tuilier – Bady (2004: 172).

46. See in particular Crimi (2012: 265-268), referring to Greg. Naz. *carm.* I 2, 10, 286-290 Crimi (see also Plat. *symp.* 219b and 222b).

47. *Ibid.*: κοινῶ would in this case «be united», see also LSJ, *s.v.* Gregory evidently meant to draw the reader's attention on this verse, as it is demonstrated by the initial polyptoton, rather allusive too. It should further be noted that παρθένοις in v. 934, contrasted with the subsequent Κορίνθιαις, both placed at the end of the verse, takes on a decidedly ironic and sharp tone.

he returned a second time to the capital, Gregory praised the Cynic, recalling the main steps of his life in his Oration 25, *In laudem Heronis philosophi*, dedicated to Maximus under the pseudonym of Heron⁴⁸. It is of particular interest to us that Gregory rhetorically asks his addressee what he was missing the most, when commemorating Maximus' exile to the Great Oasis, thus simultaneously outlining a eulogistic profile of his new friend and his philosophical habits⁴⁹:

Ὅασίς σοι τὸ φυγαδευτήριον, ἢ ἀπάνθρωπος ἐρημία [...] Τίνας ἐκεῖ φιλοσοφεῖν ἐδίδαξας; τίνας ἐκάθηρας τῶν ἀσεβῶν ὑπολήψεων; τίνας τῆ εὐσεβείᾳ προσήγαγες; Ὅρᾳν μοι δοκῶ τὸ ἐκεῖ παιδευτήριον, τὴν περὶ σὲ τελετὴν καὶ πανήγυριν. Εἰπέ καὶ τοῦτο. Εἶχες τινα παραμυθίαν τοῖς λειψάνοις τοῦ σώματος; ἢ καὶ τὴν πενίαν ἐφιλοσόφεις; Εἶχες τινας κοινωνοὺς τῆς ἀθλήσεως; ἢ καὶ τοῦτο πενόμενος ἤνεγκας; Ἐπόθεις τὰς ἀδελφάς, τὰς κοινωνοὺς σοι καὶ τῆς ἀγνείας, καὶ τῆς καρτερίας; ἢ καὶ τῆς τούτων συνηθείας ἧς ὑψηλότερος;

The Oasis becomes your place of refuge, a desolate and deserted spot. [...] While you were there, whom did you instruct in philosophy? Whom did you cleanse of godless thoughts? Whom lead to piety? I picture to myself the school you had there, the ceremonies and festivities of which you were the focus. Tell us this too: Was there any relief for your broken body? Or did you in fact lead a life of need? Did you have any to share your struggles? Or did you suffer destitute in this respect as well? Did you miss your sisters, your partners in both chastity and fortitude? Or did you surmount your need for their companionship also?

It can thus be learnt from this passage that around 379, as he first met Gregory, Maximus was already reported to be indeed surrounded by some ladies, perhaps already in his home city of Alexandria, and for this reason, while pitying his friend's solitude in the desert, Gregory tells the reader that Maximus might have missed them during his exile. Moreover, while recalling this, Gregory is even more specific in the Oration 25, where he refers to them as «sisters» (ἀδελφαί) and explicitly informs us that those women shared with Maximus a life of «chastity and self-restraint» (κοινωνοὶ ἀγνείας καὶ καρτερίας), and that, additionally, he was to them a sort of teacher: in my view, this is how reference to Maximus' παιδευτήριον should be understood.

The passage is clearly a reversed depiction of Gregory's later scoptic tirades, as it emerges from the subversion of the very vocabulary: those who will subsequently become Κορινθίαι are still benevolently regarded as ἀδελφαί, and their relationships with their male leader, which will later be frowned upon as a suspicious form of κοινωνία verging on συνουσία, are portrayed here as nothing other than a chaste and holy form of communion.

In light of such background events, Gregory's future insinuations about his former friend's conduct acquire a radically new and eminently concrete value. It becomes rather clear that when Gregory later mentions the murky relations of his enemy, he will not simply be discrediting him by inventing stories from nothing, nor will he properly be pointing out a monastic community that Maximus had founded in the very city of Corinth. One must instead conclude that he is rather elaborating on arguments to shame him, which are nonetheless based on an historical fact: Maximus appears to have actually organized

48. Even though Sajdak (1909) thought the addressee of *or.* 25 and Maximus the Cynic were two different persons, there is little doubt and general agreement among scholars nowadays that the philosopher called Heron in *or.* 25 is indeed Maximus the Cynic, see Mossay (1981: 120-141) and Id. (1982: 232-236).

49. Greg. Naz. *or.* 25, 14 (*SC* 284), Eng. trans. by Vinson (2003: 169).

some sort of female community with ascetic features around him. But what should we imagine this kind of sect looked like?

4. Dangerous liaisons: the problem of the *Virgines subintroductae*

Rather than simply pointing to some «women, who are probably the hosts of the artist», as suggested by Fatti,⁵⁰ the phenomenon we can glimpse behind Gregory's descriptions reminds us more precisely of the so-called *παρθένοι συνείσακτοι* or *virgines subintroductae*, sometimes also called *ἀγαπηταί* and *agapetae*, a name that, as emphasized by A. Guillaumont, likely conceals a biblical and sacred origin, rather than the ironic and popular nuance suggested by H. Achelis.⁵¹

According to customs that already originated in the very first centuries of Christianity and saw, however, a great expansion specifically in the 4th century, the *συνείσακτοι γυναῖκες* were women who lived in mixed communities with one or more male ascetics, by either welcoming them into their own homes or moving with them elsewhere. Despite professing a vocation to complete celibacy, in the eyes of their critics, they were consequently sharing their lives with men *more uxorio*, and – as one would expect – the «syneisaktism», that is the habit of dwelling with maidens in such mixed communities, understandably caused much concern among fathers, even though it seems to have been tolerated to some degree. According to the seminal study of H. Achelis, a scriptural basis for this kind of lifestyle was initially provided by Pauline verses like 1 *Cor* 7, 36-38: «whoever is firmly established in his heart [...] to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well», or 1 *Cor* 9, 5: «Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?»⁵²

Accordingly, it seems plausible that Maximus too was among those «practicing» syneisaktism: he was somewhat involved in it during his earlier days in Egypt, and he probably tried to recreate such a community in Constantinople as well, which would perfectly align with Maximus' shifty profile, operating on the edges of Christendom and coming from the Cynic philosophical milieu⁵³.

50. Fatti (2008: 308): «Intravediamo inoltre delle donne, che sono probabilmente le padrone di casa, ospiti dell'artista» (my translation).

51. Thus Achelis (1902: 68-69), but see Guillaumont (1969: 33-37), who reconnects the term *ἀγαπητή* to the Hebrew *yāhīd*, which means both *ἀγαπητός* and *μοναχός*, *μονογενής* and other terms alike referring to monasticism and ascetic solitude, see also Giorgerti (2021: 175). Besides Achelis' pioneering monography, on the phenomenon of the *subintroductae*, see also Clark (1977: esp. 171-176); Rader (1983: 62-71); Elm (1994: esp. 48-51) and Ead. (2004); Hartney (1999); the anthology of texts offered by Cox Miller (2005: 117-150), and the recent and updated article by Giorgetti (2021). From a gender studies perspective, a recent (though occasionally inaccurate) overview spanning from ancient times to the 20th century is offered by Callan (2019: 118-123, on Late Antiquity). Rader (1983: 62) records also the Western names *mulieres adoptivae* and *extraneae*; Van der Sypt (2014: 707) that of *uxor spiritalis* (Tertullian), whereas modern scholarship sometimes refers to the relationship as to a «spiritual marriage» (even though, by means of *πνευματικός γάμος* could be also described the connection to God, in antiquity).

52. See respectively 1 *Cor* 7, esp. 38: ὅς δὲ ἔστηκεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἕδραϊος μὴ ἔχων ἀνάγκην, ἐξουσίαν δὲ ἔχει περὶ τοῦ ἰδίου θελήματος καὶ τοῦτο κέρκιεν ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καρδίᾳ, τηρεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον, καλῶς ποιήσει, and 9, 5: Μὴ οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς; As highlighted by Hunter (2008: 163), these passages «were the subject of ingenious attempts by Christian commentators to turn the apostle's ambivalent observations on marriage and celibacy into wholesale ascetic propaganda».

53. On the peculiar attitude of the Church Fathers towards Cynicism, see Goulet-Cazé (1990); Downing (1992); Elm (2011). Moreover, a new thorough study on the subject is about to appear, see Mecci (2024). On Gregory in the specific, see Asmus (1894) and Moreschini (2012).

One is led to assume this not only because of Gregory's continued and insisted references to such female companionship, but especially because only in this light do terms such as ἀδελφή or συνεργός used by Gregory acquire specific significance – the latter being a sudden subversion of the former in times of quarrel. This comes as no surprise, after all. Gregory himself, as he first came to Constantinople – one should recall – had been welcomed by his rich friend Theodosia and he established the famous Anastasia Church into her house. As pointed out by A. Hartney, indeed, «even the upholders of the system of patriarchy are as constrained by their own rules as those they aim to constrain».⁵⁴ Thus, whilst Gregory sounded keen on praising Maximus' behaviour from afar, once his friend revealed himself to be a rival seeking for consensus in the capital city, Gregory promptly censured his habits and spread naughty suspicion about them.

In the very 4th century, syneisaktism was causing much concern within the Church. Gregory's allusive allegations against his enemies are mirrored by coeval canonical literature, where similar practices are explicitly sanctioned. As early as the 3rd century, the Synod of Antioch condemned such behaviours in its rulings against Paul of Samosata (288/289)⁵⁵. Then, repeatedly, in the 4th century, first the local Synod of Elvira (306) strictly forbade clerics from associating with a *virgo Deo dicata*, while that of Ancyra (340) warned that those living with «virgins» as «sisters» should be considered bigamous⁵⁶. Finally, Canon 3 of the Oecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) unequivocally prevented clerics from living together with unrelated women⁵⁷:

Περὶ τῶν παρὰ κληρικοῖς συνεισάκτων γυναικῶν. Ἀπηγόρευσε καθόλου ἡ μεγάλη σύνοδος μήτε ἐπίσκοπον μήτε πρεσβύτερον μήτε διάκονον μήτε ὄλως τῶν ἐν τῷ κλήρῳ τινὶ ἐξεῖναι συνεισάκτων ἔχειν, πλὴν εἰ μὴ ἄρα μητέρα ἢ ἀδελφὴν ἢ θείαν ἢ ἄ μόνᾳ πρόσωπα ὑποψίαν διαπέφυγεν.

On women living with clerics. The great council absolutely forbids that a bishop, or a priest or a deacon, or in general a member of the clergy should have a woman living with them, unless she is their mother or sister or aunt, or one of those persons who are above suspicion.

Similarly, coeval patristic literature teems with invectives against what was regarded as a despicable and questionable custom and was in fact a free form of exchange and com-

54. Hartney (1999: 41).

55. Only fragments of the Synodical letter are preserved through Eus. Caes. *hist. eccl.* 7, 30, 2-17 (SC 41), for further bibliography see Van der Sypt (2014: 707). On the accusation of syneisaktism against Paul of Samosata as an excuse to reject his heretical Adoptionism, see also below, pp. 175-176, and Perrone (1992: 275-287).

56. See, respectively, Syn. Elv., *can.* 27 Hefele – Leclercq: *Episcopus vel quilibet alius clericus aut sororem aut filiam virginem dicatam Deo tantum secum habeat; extraneam nequaquam habere placuit*, and Syn. Anc., *can.* 19 Joannou: Ὅσοι παρθενίαν ἐπαγγελάμενοι ἀθετοῦσι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, οὗτοι τὸν τῶν διγάμων ὄρον ἐκπληροῦτωσαν. Τὰς μέντοι συνεργομένας παρθένους τισὶν ὡς ἀδελφάς ἐκωλύσαμεν. Whereas references concerning syneisaktism declined starting from the end of the 4th century, within the Syriac world it continued to be sanctioned, see Giorgetti (2021: 183-185), providing many useful sources on the «concubines» of clerics, and on the sect of the *Bnay Qyāmā*.

57. Con. Nic. (325), *can.* 3 (CCCOGD 1). On the precise meaning of the term συνεισάκτος in this text, see Giorgetti (2021: 174), referring to Lampe, *s.v.*, with bibliography. Furthermore, see Clark (1977: 173), who reports about «church councils of the fourth century» banishing syneisaktism. Nevertheless, the practice kept spreading all over the ancient world (Ireland, Syria, North Africa). Achelis (1902: 35) regarded canonical prohibitions as mostly directed towards proper forms of concubinage.

munication beyond gender restrictions⁵⁸. For example, eastwards, this practice frequently drew rebukes from the other two Cappadocians⁵⁹. In his treatise *On virginity* (371 ca.)⁶⁰, Gregory of Nyssa condemns such a kind of «brotherhood», whose members cloak their base instincts in an air of austerity, whereas in his coeval *Letter 55*, Basil of Caesarea firmly replies to Gregory, a Cappadocian presbyter reluctant to expel women from his house: «Read the Canon pronounced by the Holy Fathers»⁶¹.

One could also mention Epiphanius' harsh reproaches against the Encratites of Tiatianus⁶². Even some time later, on the threshold of the 5th century, syneisaktism continued to constitute a major threat and a pressing concern especially for John Chrysostom, who devoted two treatises, «among the most interesting and clever of his writings»⁶³, to these suspicious cohabitations: one is addressed to *Those Who Have Virgins with Them*, i.e. male ascetics, and a second one directly appealing to women, for *Ascetic Women Should Not Live with Men*⁶⁴. As shown by A. Hartney's analysis, the two texts aim to «re-emphasize the boundaries between sexes, both biologically and behaviourally»⁶⁵.

In the West, syneisaktism was the central target of Jerome's attacks against the *agapetae* in his letters 22 and 117⁶⁶, the former, where the author equates the *agapetae* to «harlots» and «concubines», being particularly remarkable for its notorious and usual virulence⁶⁷:

58. See Rader (1983: 70): «The practice of syneisaktism or celibate cohabitation was an external expression of the Christians' belief in a new age which allowed an expansion of the normative male/female husband/wife relationship».

59. Obviously, the following list does not aim to be exhaustive; I refer to the bibliography previously mentioned for a full account on the 4th-century sources about syneisaktism (see above, note 13).

60. Greg. Nys. *virg.* 23, 4 (SC 119): οὐ μόνον τῇ γαστρὶ τὰ πρὸς ἡδονὴν χαριζόμενοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναιξὶ κατὰ τὸ φανερόν συνοικοῦντες καὶ ἀδελφότητα τὴν τοιαύτην συμβίωσιν ὀνομάζοντες, ὡς δὴ τὴν πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον ὑπόνοιαν ὀνόματι σεμνοτέρῳ περικαλύπτοντες. An updated analysis of the whole passage has been recently provided by Van der Sypt (2014), who is persuaded that in the passage Gregory is not necessarily targeting Messalianists, but rather syneisaktism in general as a widespread custom of his era.

61. Basil. Caes. *ep.* 55 Courtonne, who directly appeals to the authority of the Nicaean Fathers: ἀλλ' ἀνάγνωθι τὸν ἐξενεχθέντα κανόνα παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων ἡμῶν τῶν ἐν τῇ συνόδῳ Νικαίας, ὃς φανερῶς ἀπηγόρευσε συνεισακτοὺς μὴ εἶναι (elsewhere the presbyter is called Paregorius). See also Van der Sypt (2014: 710-711).

62. See Epiph. *pan.* 47, 3, 1 (GCS 25). As highlighted by Van der Sypt (2014: 715-716) Epiphanius did know syneisaktism very well and often resorted to this kind of accusation against heretical groups to discredit them. One could refer, in this respect, to Epiph. *pan.* 63, 2; 67, 8; 78, 11; see also Achelis (1902: 20, 67-68) and Giorgetti (2021: 182-183).

63. Clark (1977: 175).

64. See Ioh. Chrys. *Contra eos qui subintroductas habent virgines* (CPG 4311) and *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant* (CPG 4312). Beside the English translation of selected passages provided by Cox Miller (2005: 123-150), the two pamphlets can be now read in the new Italian translation by Ciarlo (2018). They were once traditionally ascribed to the year 382/383, but Adkin (1992: 266) challenged this view, opting for 398 as a *terminus ante quem*.

65. Hartney (1999: 48).

66. Hieron. *ep.* 117 (CSEL 55). On this letter, see Cain (2009): according to him, the letter was composed between 386 and 406.

67. Hieron. *ep.* 22, 14 (CSEL 54): *Pudet dicere, pro nefas! triste, sed uerum est: unde in ecclesias agapetarum pestis introit? unde sine nuptiis aliud nomen uxorum? immo unde nouum concubinarum genus? plus inferam: unde meretrices univirae? eadem domo, uno cubiculo, saepe uno tenentur et lectulo, et suspiciosos nos uocant, si aliquid aestimemus. frater sororem uirginem deserit, caelibem spernit uirgo germanum, et, cum in eodem proposito esse se simulent, quaerunt alienorum spiritale solacium, ut domi habeant*

There is another scandal of which I blush to speak yet, though sad, it is true. From what source has this plague of 'dearly beloved sisters' found its way into the Church? Whence come these unwedded wives, these new types of concubines, nay, I will go further, these one-man harlots? They live in the same house with their male-friend; they occupy the same room and often even the same bed; and yet they call us suspicious if we think that anything is wrong. A brother leaves his virgin sister; a virgin, scorning her unmarried brother, seeks a stranger to take his place.

Interestingly enough, Gregory of Nazianzus himself took a firm position against the so-called spiritual marriage and the *συνείσακτος*⁶⁸. In fact, compared to his Cappadocian colleagues, he wrote much more extensively on this topic, and hints at it are scattered particularly throughout his poetical oeuvre. A whole series of epigrams (10-20) in his poetic corpus are directed at the *ἀγαπητοί* and the *ἀγαπηταί*⁶⁹. In addition to them, many more epigrams and poems deal with the issue⁷⁰. Some years ago, R. Palla tentatively reconstructed, at least in part, a collection of epigrams, probably constituting a pamphlet devoted to this topic⁷¹. The tone of these verses is extremely bitter as well: women should flee every man, especially the *συνείσακτος*, who is like a viper⁷², a «death's remedy» that the virgin should never welcome as protector⁷³. Monks, in turn, should «keep away from women»⁷⁴ and «live their monks' life», not a «couple's life»⁷⁵. Even more bluntly, Gregory simply tells the *agapeti* and *agapetae*: «Go to hell, corrupters of Christians!»⁷⁶.

Most of these sources, moreover, originate from the same timespan during which Gregory composed his verses against Maximus. From what has been said so far, it should be clear enough that Gregory, while resorting to a typical argument to discredit his rival, was also specifically alluding to syneisaktism as a practice firmly attested in his time, one that was arousing increasing trouble. As recently highlighted by S. Giorgetti: «Often the accusation of cohabiting with women was attributed to leaders of heterodox movements in order to weaken their authority»⁷⁷, and this is precisely what Gregory did in our case, just as had happened one century earlier with Paul of Samosata, whose conviction as a

carnale commercium (transl. Wright). On this text, see the commentary by Adkin (2003), Achelis (1902: 50-51), and Cain (2009: 135-141), for a comparison with *ep.* 117.

68. As underlined by Van der Sypt (2014: 711) as well: «Gregory of Nazianzus wrote a lot about syneisaktism in comparison to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa».

69. Greg. Naz. *epigr.* 10-20 (*PG* 38, 85-94). Besides the cursory reference by Achelis (1902: 51) and the useful remarks by Van der Sypt (2014: 711-712), on these epigrams, see the seminal study of Palla (2010).

70. See, at least, Greg. Naz. *epigr.* 21-24 (*PG* 38, 94-96) and *carm.* I 2, 2-5 (*PG* 37, 578-643). See, in particular, *carm.* I 2, 2, 96-109, with the notes of Zehles – Zamora (1996: 76-81).

71. See the hypothetical reconstruction in Palla (2010: 132-134).

72. See Greg. Naz. *epigr.* 14, 1 (*PG* 38, 88): Ἄρσενά παντ' ἄλγεινε, συνείσακτον δὲ μάλιστα, and also Greg. Naz. *carm.* I 2, 4, 11b Palla: φεύγειν ἔχιδναν καὶ συνείσακτον φρενός.

73. See *epigr.* 18, 1-2.4 (*PG* 38, 92): Παρθένε [...] / Μηδὲ συνεισαγάγῃς ἄρσενά κηδεμόνα. [...] / Τί χρήξεις θανάτου φάρμακον ἔνδον ἔχειν;

74. See *epigr.* 19, 2 (*PG* 38, 92): Τοῦνεκά μοι, μοναχοί, τῆλ' ἀπὸ θηλυτέρων.

75. See *epigr.* 20, 1-2 (*PG* 38, 93): Οἱ μοναχοί, μοναχῶν βίον ἔλκετε. Εἰ δ' ἀγαπηταῖς / Συζῆτ', οὐ μοναχοί· ἢ δυὰς ἀλλοτρίῃ.

76. See *epigr.* 13, 1-2 (*PG* 38, 88): Τοῖς ἀγαπητοῖς κηρύσσω τάδε, ταῖς τ' ἀγαπηταῖς / Ἔρρετε, Χριστιανῶν δηλήμονες.

77. Giorgetti (2021: 181): «Spesso l'accusa di convivere con delle donne era attribuita ai leader di movimenti eterodossi, allo scopo di indebolirne l'autorità?».

heretic was burdened by his custom of cohabitating with women in this form of «spiritual marriage», as is recorded in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical history*⁷⁸.

The συνείσακτοι γυναῖκες were women who transcended the boundaries of their gender, thereby unavoidably reversing the roles of the men they shared their lives with. After all, as noted by E. Clark and A. Harley, this is Chrysostom's main accusation: «The *sub-introductae* are not behaving as proper women should, while the male ascetics are forgetting the masculine behaviour which is befitting to them».⁷⁹ This also further explains the allegation of effeminacy directed at Maximus by Gregory. He is a συνείσακτος, «double in nature and appearance»⁸⁰, a «grey individual» sprung from «a mixture of black and white»⁸¹; by constantly living with women and seeking their approval, Maximus has revealed his true twofold nature: that of a womanish eunuch, a feminine θελυδρία⁸².

5. Restoring corruption: a new conjecture for the passage

We shall now return to our corrupt passage, in an attempt to provide a possible correction, considering, on the one hand, the manuscript evidence that excludes the reading μαῖα as the exact and original one and, on the other, the whole and broader historical and social context in which Gregory's reproach must be situated.

From what has been shown, it clearly emerges that, far from randomly slandering the enemy, Gregory's harsh iambic attack to Maximus conceals an allusion to some sort of mixed community led by the Cynic philosopher. The depiction of Maximus' female entourage, initially regarded with benevolence as a pious companionship of virtuous sisters by Gregory in the Oration 25, turns into a grotesque clique of «old» and mischievous «hags». These ladies, who have now become a blatant proof of their leader's immorality, are ultimately described as his «playmates» (συμπαίστερες), by means of a rare Sapphic word echoed in an epithalamium oration by Himerius⁸³, which casts a shadow of erotic suspicion over the «divine practices» within such an association, as already suggested long time ago by C. Crimi⁸⁴.

78. See Eus. Caes. *hist. eccl.* 7, 29-30 (SC 41), where the definition of συνείσακτοι γυναῖκες occurs for the first time. Concerning the passage, see Achelis (1902: 9-11, 69), Rader (1983: 66), and Giorgetti (2021: 182).

79. Harley (1999: 44), see also Clark (1977: 181): «The monk acquired “womanish” traits by his constant association with the female sex».

80. Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 766 Tuilier – Bady: διπλοῦν τιν' εἶναι τὴν φύσιν τὸ σχῆμά τε.

81. Thus Greg. Naz. *epigr.* 15a Palla: Λευκοῦ καὶ μέλανος μικτὴ φύσις ἐστὶ τὸ φαῖόν, see also Van der Syt (2014: 712): «A woman should choose between a man and Christ because keeping them both is a sign of half-heartedness; mixing black and white produces gray, as Gregory says poetically. The only solution Gregory sees is a clear separation of male and female ascetics».

82. By combining the information collected in De Blasi (2020a) and this further interpretative layer of the passage of the poem II 1, 41, one gets a much more complete picture of the historical profile of Maximus, on the one hand, and of reasons laying behind the rhetorical strategies deployed by Gregory against him.

83. See Himer. *or.* 9, 4 and 16 Colonna (= Sapph. *fr.* 194 and 105a Voigt), but for συμπαίστωρ see also AP 6, 154, 3 and 162, 1 Waltz. It occurs also in Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 240-241 Tuilier – Bady to describe classmates in Athens in a positive way. Himerius' *Oration* 9 is an epithalamium to his pupil Severus (362 ca.), where the word συμπαίστωρ is a Sapphic fossil quotation that perfectly explains Gregory's employment as well. On Gregory's acquaintances with Sappho, see Cataudella (1926-1927), Koster (1964), and Ricceri (2013), but also the more dismissive stance of Pontani (2001: 234).

84. On the true meaning of the expression τὰ θεῖα, see Crimi (2012: 267-268), referring to the «Cologne Epode» by Archil. *fr.* 196a, 10 West.

In Gregory's eyes, what once used to be a feature of piety and holiness has now turned into an unspeakable example of the utmost indecency and impiety shrouded in a mystic allure. Within such a reconstructed context, the adjective βέβηλοι («impious») comes into play as a palaeographically suitable conjecture replacing the meaningless readings βαβαῖαι or βεβαῖαι which are offered by almost all the witnesses. The term is well-attested within the tragic vocabulary, and Gregory himself uses it elsewhere in his poems to describe something unholy or profane⁸⁵. What is more important, however, is that while at first glance it might not necessarily seem like a *lectio difficilior*, βέβηλος perfectly befits the female-initiatory context alluded to here.

Besides evoking the Scriptural memory of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, warning the Christian reader against sexual promiscuity and blasphemy⁸⁶, in Plato's *Symposium*, βέβηλος designates the uninitiated and unlearned listener whom Alcibiades asks to leave before recounting his attempted seduction of Socrates⁸⁷. This is in turn a widely recognized allusion to one of the most famous Orphic verses, which is also to be read in the commented theogony preserved in the *Derveni Papyrus*. Here, Orpheus once again admonishes the profane readership: φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι⁸⁸.

It will certainly be no coincidence that Orpheus himself makes his appearance a few lines above in our poem as the inspirational poetic model that Maximus is clumsily attempting to imitate⁸⁹:

νῦν δ' Ὀρφεὺς ἡμῖν πάντα κινῶν δακτύλοις
ἢ τειχοποιὸς Ἀμφίων ἐκ κρουμάτων·
τοιούτων εἰσιν ἦν τρυφῶσιν οἱ κύνες.

Now you have turned into Orpheus, moving everything
with your fingers or Amphion, building walls by plucking
the strings: such is the dogs' temper when they prance.

Here, Orpheus' clichéd character, paired with Amphion, belongs to a well-established rhetorical imagery⁹⁰. However, its deployment by Gregory against Maximus in this poem

85. The adjective βέβηλος (i.e. ἀνίηρος, ἀμύητος, see, *ex.gr.*, Hesych. *lex.* β 413 Cunningham) definitely belongs to the tragic vocabulary (see, *ex.gr.*, Aesch. *suppl.* 509, and Soph. *Oed. col.* 10) and to Gregory's poetic one: see Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 11, 1215 Tuilier – Bady; *carm.* I 2, 6, 45-46 (PG 37, 646); *carm. arc.* 1, 10-13 Moreschini etc. The placement of a two-ending adjective in such a strong hyperbaton might have also contributed to the corruption of the passage. On the etymology, see Schwyzer (1927: 252-255).

86. *Hebr.* 12, 16: [ἐπισκοποῦντες] μή τις πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος ὡς Ἡσαῦ.

87. Plat. *symp.* 218b: οἱ δὲ οἰκέται καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος ἐστὶν βέβηλός τε καὶ ἄγροικος, πύλας πάνυ μεγάλας τοῖς ὤσιν ἐπίθεσθε.

88. *Pap. Derv.* 19, 1 Janko: «I will speak to those for whom it is permitted; but you, profane ones, shut the doors». For an updated list of references to this verse see Kotwick (2017: 159). On this passage, see also Brisson (2010: 27-31). My deepest gratitude to M. Réal (Cornell University), who pointed out to me the initiatory meaning and Orphic use of the term while revising these pages. His Ph.D. thesis, *The Greeks and Their Texts: Interpreting Poetry before Aristotle's Poetics*, is soon to appear as a monograph.

89. Greg. Naz. *carm.* II 1, 41, 46-48 (PG 37, 1342).

90. On Orpheus and Amphion in Gregory's works, who attest to «the magical force of words and singing», see Demoen (1996: 190 and 302), whereas for their fortune as models of poetry in the rhetorical tradition, suffice here to reference, e.g., Men. *Rhet. id.* 393, 17-21 and 443, 3-12 Russel – Wilson. As demonstrated by his attacks against Julian and, more generally, pagans, Gregory often alluded to the Orphic mysteries when mentioning Orpheus as a poet: see, e.g., *or.* 5, 31 (SC 309) or *or.* 39, 5 (SC 358).

could be imbued with specific allusive implications related to the pagan mysteries. The proposed reading, if one is to accept it, turns the initiates' own mystic vocabulary upside down and against the addressees. Maximus the pious, Maximus the self-proclaimed bishop is in fact an obnoxious pagan philosopher suspected of secret cults⁹¹. His female entourage a mystic and promiscuous sect of βέβηλοι women.

The author's network of allusions – or, better to say, insinuations – would thus finally be restored. For this reason, in the critical edition I am preparing of the text, I will tentatively correct the text as follows:

ἦ σοὶ βέβηλοι τοῦτ' ἐνέπνευσαν θράσος
αἱ σαὶ συνεργοὶ καὶ λόγων συμπαίστορες, 50
ᾧν εἶ σὺ κύκνος αἴς ἐνηγεῖς μουσικὸν
ὄταν ῥέωσιν ὡς ζέφυρος κατὰ πτερῶν
αὔραις πραεῖαις ἀσμένως ἀπλουμένων;

49 βαβαῖαι LC* βεβαῖαι Va^{ms} βεβαῖα BaG βεβαιαὶ W^{ac}M^{ac}S βεβαίως Va^{ac} 𐤁𐤃𐤁𐤁 (an βεβαίως) SyrV certius Leuncl γυναικαὶ W^{ms} γυναικες M^{ms} γε μαῖα Mo γε μαῖαι conl. Hoesch sec. Caill anus Mor μᾶλλον conl. Hoesch^{ms} βέβηλοι conieci

6. Closing Maximus' circle

We do not know, of course, whether βέβηλοι is in fact what Gregory wrote, but the conjecture serves at least a diagnostic purpose and, in this respect, enhances our understanding of the passage compared to the current text of *PG*⁹². As Fatti stated, much of Maximus' brief affair that we would like to understand better is still bound to escape our knowledge, and it is perhaps impossible to determine who exactly aided Maximus upon his arrival in Constantinople⁹³.

Nevertheless, Gregory's biased accounts and the underlying events reconstructed from them testify to a femaleness that, while culturally deemed a disadvantage⁹⁴, could in fact play a decisive role in pivotal political moments of 4th-century Christianity. Be they συνείσακτοι παρθένοι or βέβηλοι Κορίνθιαι, the mysterious women surrounding Maximus the Cynic were not just passive admirers. Instead, they appear to have actively supported him, perhaps even through writing or speaking in his defence – learned and influential «literary playmates» poised to wield their «pen» in his service⁹⁵.

91. To some extent, this is additionally suggested by a minor detail generally overlooked by scholars: Maximus observed specific dietary restrictions, or this is, at least, what Gregory seems to imply in *carm.* II 1, 11, 778 Tuilier – Bady: Οὐδὲν γὰρ εἶχε βρῶμα τῶν εἰωθότων («He did not eat any usual food»).

92. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who kindly suggested alternatively reading γεραιαί. This is a solution I myself had initially reckoned and later excluded for several reasons: palaeographically, on the one hand, γεραιαί could hardly explain the corruption of the text into βαβαῖαι or βεβαῖαι, and, on the other, the term, though fitting, seemed to me indeed rather common and thereby unlikely to be misunderstood.

93. See Fatti (2008: 306): «Della breve avventura di Massimo, molto ci sfugge che vorremmo conoscere meglio. Ci sfuggono, per esempio, i tempi ed i termini esatti del piano di cui egli si fece esecutore, che non è chiaro se sia stato o meno preordinato sin dal principio. [...] Fortunatamente, ci sfuggono un po' di meno i metodi che il Cinico usò per farsi largo ai danni del suo rivale», and *ibi*, 308.

94. Thus Clark (1993: 119): «Femaleness, by general consent, was a disadvantage. It was assumed that females were physically weaker than males, were unlikely to be the intellectual equals of males, and had a more difficult time controlling bodily desires and the onslaughts of emotion».

95. I am referring to *carm.* II 1, 41, 23 (γραφίς) and obviously 50 (λόγων συμπαίστορες), see also above, p. 166.

In this two-sided story, filling the historical gap of their female agency has helped to fill a textual gap: addressing one without the other would have otherwise been impossible, since whoever Maximus' sisters plotting against Gregory of Nazianzus actually were, they indeed constituted, in the author's eyes, a political threat and an (im)pious sisterhood.

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