

‘AT THAT TIME THE GROUP AROUND
MAXIMIAN WAS ENJOYING
IMPERIAL POWER’: AN
INTERPOLATION IN GREGORY OF
NYSSA’S HOMILY IN PRAISE OF
THEODORE

Abstract

The sentence ‘For at that time the group around Maximian was enjoying imperial power’, the only chronological indicator in Gregory of Nyssa’s *In Theodorum*, may be identified on literary grounds as a scribal interpolation. When this is recognized, the *Passio Theodori* (BHG 1761) becomes the oldest evidence for the dating of Theodore’s martyrdom.

In his panegyric on Theodore the Recruit (BHG 1760) Gregory of Nyssa gives an account of Theodore’s first interrogation before an (otherwise unspecified) court. The text runs as follows:

‘Ὡς γὰρ ἐκάθισε ὁ δαίμων αὐτῶν πονηρὸν δικαστήριον καὶ ἡγεμῶν καὶ ταξίαρχος εἰς ταῦτ’ συνελθόντες, ὡς Ἡρώδης ποτὲ καὶ Πιλάτος, τὸν δούλον τοῦ σταυρωθέντος εἰς κρίσιν ὁμοίαν τοῦ δεσπότητος κατέστησαν. “Καὶ λέγε,” ἔφησαν, “πόθεν σοι θρασύτος καὶ τόλμη ἐγγενομένης εἰς τὸν βασιλικὸν ἐξυβρίζεις νόμον, οὐχ ὑποκύπτεις δὲ τρέμων τοῖς τῶν βασιλέων προστάγμασιν, οὐδὲ προσκυνεῖς κατὰ τὸ δοκοῦν τοῖς κρατοῦσιν;” Οἱ γὰρ ἀμφὶ Μαξιμιανὸν τότε τῆς βασιλείας ἡγούντο. ‘Ὅς στερῶν τῷ προσώπῳ καὶ ἀκαταπλήκτῳ τῇ γνώμῃ εὐστοχον τὴν ἀπόκρισιν τοῖς λεχθεῖσιν ἐπέθηκεν. “Θεοὺς μὲν λέγειν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰσὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, δαίμονας δὲ ὑμεῖς ἀπατεῶνας πλανᾶσθε τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ τιμῶντες προσηγορίᾳ: ἐμοὶ δὲ θεὸς ὁ Χριστὸς, ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ μονογενὴς υἱός.”’

For, when their demon had constituted an evil tribunal in which his general and the leader of his unit came together, just like once Herod and Pilate did [cf. Luke 23:12], they organized a trial for the servant of the Crucified similar to that which the latter had organized for his Master. ‘Tell us’, they said, ‘from where do you get that over-boldness and recklessness so that you violate the imperial law, you don’t bow trembling for the emperors’ edicts, you don’t kneel when it suits the mighty?’ For at that time the group around Maximian was enjoying imperial power. With a stubborn expression on his face and undaunted

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purposefulness he gave them the following witty answer: 'I cannot call them gods, because in truth they are not. In honouring deceiving demons with the name god you are wrong. To me Christ is God, the Only-begotten Son of God.'¹

Reading this passage, one is struck by the sentence *Οἱ γὰρ ἀμφὶ Μαξιμιανὸν τότε τῆς βασιλείας ἠγούντο*, if not for its vagueness and lack of precision, then surely for its brevity. For literally all other sentences in Gregory's panegyric are much longer and more complicated, usually containing multiple subordinate clauses or long paratactic constructions. This would already be enough to cast some doubt on Gregory of Nyssa's authorship of this sentence. In what follows I will argue that this sentence was indeed not written by Gregory but that it is a scribal interpolation that only later made its way into the text. In support of this thesis, the following four arguments can be brought forward.

First, the sentence clearly disrupts the flow of the text. Everything runs much more smoothly when it is deleted: the dialogue regains its dynamic character with question and reply occurring in quick succession. Moreover, the dialogue between Theodore and his opponents does not stop at the end of the quoted passage but resumes after a few transitional lines. This time the dialogue is between Theodore and a fellow soldier who mocks the Recruit's belief in an only-begotten Son of God and suggests that he must have been begotten in the normal human way, i.e. with passion. He is severely reprovved by Theodore, on the basis of the absurdity of his own belief in a female god and his veneration for her, 'a mother of twelve children, a kind of very fertile goddess who just like a hare or a sow effortlessly conceives and gives birth!'.² In the whole of this long, fast-paced, and witty passage, our sentence is superfluous and in stark contrast to the tone and content of its context.

Secondly, the content of this sentence, contextualizing as it does the events leading up to Theodore's martyrdom, is in contrast with the nature of the text, which can best be styled as 'hagiobiographical'. The author's concern is not historical precision but to present his hero as a *hagios*, a holy person whose life is worthy of being narrated in order that it could be

¹ For the Greek text, see Gregory of Nyssa, *In Theodorum*, ed. J. P. Cavarnos in *Gregorii Nysseni Sermones Pars II*, ed. F. Mann (*GNO X*, 1/2; Leiden: Brill, 1990, p. 65, l. 15–p. 66, l. 8). The English translation (modified) was taken from J. Leemans, B. Dehandschutter, P. Allen, and W. Mayer, 'Let Us Die that We May Live': *Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 87.

² Gregory of Nyssa, *In Theodorum* (*GNO X*, 1/2, p. 66, l. 16–p. 67, l. 3).

imitated. It was, therefore, of primary importance to communicate to the audience how the hero of the story incarnated Christian virtues in accordance with the example of Christ and of other exemplary scriptural characters. In such a context it is hardly relevant to know in which exact historical circumstances and under which emperor something occurred. Moreover, in this literary genre, emperors are never mentioned *nominatim*. On the contrary, the opponents of the martyr are always indicated as 'the enemy' or 'the tyrant'. The use of these periphrastic turns is an effective *damnatio memoriae*, turning the spotlight away from the historical context and putting it on the struggle of the martyr against his opponents, i.e. on the struggle of the good versus the bad.³ In fact, nowhere in Gregory's panegyric sermons on martyrs, nor in Basil of Caesarea's, is the name of a historical personage ever mentioned. In other words, it is highly unlikely that our homilist would have included information which must have seemed to him hardly relevant for his purpose.

Thirdly, the *argumentum e silentio* can conveniently be applied here. Gregory of Nyssa delivered this sermon in the sanctuary of St Theodore, in Euchaita. At the time of the sermon (c. AD 380) Euchaita was the central place of the veneration of the saint. Evidence for this can be found in the presence of a richly adorned sanctuary, described by Gregory in great detail in the sermon. Thanks to the cult of the Recruit, the village would, over the course of the next two centuries, grow into a city with city status, an episcopal see, and a martyrrium with a monastery and a *hospitium* attached to it.⁴ It is very probable that the seeds of this later successful development were already present at Euchaita when Gregory was delivering his sermon. The vitality

³ A Wilson, 'Biographical Models The Constantinian Period and Beyond', in S Lieu and D Montserrat (eds), *Constantine History, Historiography and Legend* (London and New York Routledge, 1998), pp 107-36, J Leemans, 'Schoolrooms for Our Souls Homilies and Visual Representations The Cult of the Martyrs as a Locus for Religious Education in Late Antiquity', in M Depaepe and B Henkens (eds), *The Challenge of the Visual in the History of Education* (Paedagogica Historica, Supplementary Series, 6, Ghent CSHP, 2000), pp 113-31, M Van Uytvanghe, 'Biographie II (spirituelle)', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Supplement I (Stuttgart Hierseman, 2001), cols 1088-1364

⁴ Cf J Anderson, F Cumont, and H Gregoire (eds), *Studia Pontica*, III 1 *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines du Pont et de l'Arménie* (Brussels Lamertin, 1910), nos 197 and 202 (monastery) and 217 (*hospitium*) The sanctuary is also attested in the journal of the pilgrim Theodosius (first half of the 6th c) *Civitas Euchaita, ubi est sanctus martyr Theodorus* (ed P Geyer, in *Itinera Hierosolymitana saeculi IIII-VIII* [CSEL, 39, Vienna Tempsky, 1898], p 144) For the history of Euchaita, see H Delehayé, 'Euchaita et la légende de saint Theodore', in W H Buckler and W M Calder (eds), *Anatolian Studies*

of Theodore's cult in Euchaita, evident from the presence of the sanctuary already in Gregory's time, means that the hagiographical tradition around Theodore must have already been in full swing as well. The upshot is that Gregory's audience was at least as well acquainted with the life and death of the Recruit as was Gregory, if not even better. In other words an altogether rather imprecise historical reference like *Οἱ γὰρ ἀμφὶ Μαξιμιανὸν τότε τῆς βασιλείας ἤγούοντο* would have been wasted on such an audience. It is, therefore, rather unlikely that Gregory would have included it in his sermon.

Finally, interpolations are not foreign to the textual history of Gregory's writings.⁵ A clear example can be found in his *Tenth Homily on the Song of Songs*. The text runs as follows:

Τίς δὲ ἡ αἰτία τῆς τοῦ ἀνέμου τούτου μεταναστάσεως, Σκληρὸς ἄνεμος ὁ βορρᾶς ἐστὶ, φησὶ [ποῦ τοῦτο,] τῆς Παροιμίας ὁ λόγος, ὀνόματι δὲ ἐπιδέξιος καλεῖται

What is the cause of this turning of the wind? The northern wind is a rough wind, says the Book of Proverbs [where?]. Yet he is called by the name 'promise of happiness'.⁶

The *ποῦ τοῦτο*, interrupts the flow of the text. It is clearly a marginal note made by a copyist, which in a later stage of the transmission was integrated into the main text.⁷ Similarly,

Presented to Sir W M Ramsay (Publications of the University of Manchester, 160, Manchester University Press, 1923), pp 129–34 (= *Melanges d'hagiographie grecque et latine* [Subsidia Hagiographica, 42, Brussels: Societe des Bollandistes, 1966], pp 275–80), C Mango and I Sevcenko, 'Three Inscriptions of the Reigns of Anastasius I and Constantine V', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972), pp 379–93, esp 379–84, F Trombley, 'The Decline of the Seventh-Century Town: The Exception of Euchaita', in S Vryonis (ed.), *Byzantine Studies in Honour of M V Anastos* (Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 4, Malibu, CA: Undena, 1985), pp 65–90.

⁵ Other examples of interpolations are *το τοῦ πυρος ὕψος* in *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, 39, ed G Forbes (*Sancti Patris Nostri Gregori Nyssem Basili Magni Fratris quae supersunt omnia*, 1 [Burntisland: Pitligus, 1855], p 54, l 13) and *τα γὰρ τῷ αὐτῷ ὅμοια καὶ ἄλλοις ἐστὶν ὁμοία* in *Contra Eunomium* 1 447, ed W Jaeger (*GNO* I, Leiden: Brill, 1960, p 156, ll 20–1).

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *HomX Cant*, ed H Langerbeck, *Gregori Nyssem in Canticum Canticorum* (*GNO* VI, Leiden, 1960), p 299, ll 5–8.

⁷ This is also the interpretation of Hermann Langerbeck, the editor of the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. He points out that the Syriac version does not have the *που τοῦτο*, in the text. He assumes that an early copyist did not recognize the reference to Proverbs and made the note *που τοῦτο*, above the text, which then, sooner or later, became integrated in the stream of the textual transmission. *om Syr, delevi adnotatio erat scribae pervetusti locum laudatum non invenientis et super lineam scribentis 'unde?', GNO* VI, p 299.

it would not be surprising that a diligent copyist added in the margin or above the text of Gregory's panegyric some information about the date of Theodore's martyrdom and that this note was in a later phase integrated into the text.

If one accepts that the sentence *Οἱ γὰρ ἀμφὶ Μαξιμιανὸν τότε τῆς βασιλείας ἤγούντο* is indeed an interpolation, the next question is: why and when was it interpolated? The data collected in the critical apparatus to Cavarnos's edition of the sermon show that all the manuscripts have the sentence in their text. This means that it was inserted in the text at an early stage, highly likely before the stream of the textual transmission divided itself into two main branches, a split that occurred, according to Cavarnos,⁸ before the ninth century.

The reason for the interpolation is, of course, a matter of conjecture. The critical apparatus, though, contains a valuable pointer. It reveals that the reading *τῶν βασιλέων* (plural) at the ending of the previous sentence (*...τρέμων τοῖς τῶν βασιλέων προστάγμασιν, οὐδὲ προσκυνεῖς κατὰ τὸ δοκοῦν τοῖς κρατούσιν*;) is supported by only one manuscript whereas all the other witnesses have either *τοῦ βασιλείας* or *τοῦ δεσπότης* (singular).⁹ Hence, in all likelihood, one of these singular forms was the original reading. Moreover, both these readings conflict with the plural *τοῖς κρατούσιν* at the end of the sentence. This contradiction may be at the root of our interpolation: an enterprising copyist may have solved the 'problem' by inserting a sentence, explaining to the readers that Maximian shared his imperial power with those surrounding him.

The presence of an interpolated sentence in Gregory's panegyric on Theodore is important as a witness to the vitality of textual transmission in general and to the living, continuous development of hagiographical traditions in particular. More interesting, though, is its importance for the dating of the historical events of Theodore's martyrdom. Since it is no longer possible to invoke Gregory's authoritative testimony to date these events, the premetaphrastic *Passio Theodori* (BHG 1761), which is the second oldest document of the hagiographical tradition, becomes our oldest witness. Most manuscripts of this *Passio* date Theodore's martyrdom on a 17 February and situate it 'when Maximianus (Galerius) was Emperor', an indication

⁸ J. P. Cavarnos, 'Praefatio, de stemmate', in *Gregorii Nyssemi Sermones* (GNO X, 1/2), pp. clxiv-clxix.

⁹ See the critical apparatus *ad loc.* (GNO X, 1/2, p. 66).

probably placing the events in the years 306–11.¹⁰ This date also agrees with the indication in two manuscripts which date it under Maximianus and Maximinus (Galerius and Maximinus Daia).¹¹ The consequence of the interpolation in Gregory's sermon is that, since all other hagiographical texts about Theodore date from a much later period, this testimony of the *Passio* now stands alone as our earliest witness for the chronology of the Recruit's martyrdom.

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¹⁰ Cf. *Passio Theodori*, 9 (*Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, IV, 1925, pp. 29–39, at p. 39): Ἐτελείωθη δὲ ὁ ἅγιος μάρτυς τοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεόδωρος τῇ προδεκατριῶν καλανδῶν μαρτίου, βασιλεύοντος Μαξιμιανοῦ.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: ἐπὶ βασιλέων Μαξιμιανοῦ καὶ Μαξιμίνου.



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