

Marianus Scholasticus' *AP* 9.668-9:

A Close Reading of a Reception of the *Locus Amoenus* in Christian Late Antiquity

The 6th century Byzantine epigrammatist Marianus Scholasticus composed poetry among the writers featured in Agathias Scholasticus' *Cycle*, following in the wake of Nonnus of Panopolis' "new classics," the *Dionysiaca* and *Paraphrase of John*, which set a new bar for competition with the ancient models in the Hellenistic "art of variation" (Agosti 2018). In this paper I give a close reading of a pair of Marianus' epigrams that have not been exclusively analyzed before, *AP* 9.668-9, "On a Suburban Park in Amasia called Eros" (Εἰς προάστειον ὀνομαζόμενον Ἔρωτα ἐν Ἀμασειᾷ). Key to this reading is my affirmation of the scholarship of Averil and Alan Cameron (1966, 1967, 2016), that the Marianus these epigrams are attributed to is indeed Marianus Scholasticus rather than the misattributed Marianus of Eleuthoropolis. At the center of my analysis is the aporetic question at the final couplet of the epigrams, enticing the reader by asking: "Such is Eros. What other name would be appropriate for a place / replete in every way with charm and loveliness?" (all trans. W. R. Paton 1917).

I argue, following the work of C. A. Martins de Jesus (2017) which traces Marianus' Christo-Platonic aesthetics in another of his epigrams, that Marianus poses a riddle with two answers. This riddle ultimately hints towards Marianus' support for the theological ruling of the fifth century Council of Chalcedon –against monophysitism, the belief that Christ was of one heavenly nature– in favor of the belief that Christ was of two natures, one divine and one human. One answer to Marianus' riddle is that his unique presentation of the *locus amoenus* repurposes allusions to Plato's *Phaedrus* and Book 5 of Homer's *Odyssey* alongside references to biblical scripture. Between both *loci amoeni* of *Phaedrus* and Marianus' epigrams, the iconic plane tree

appears with water running beneath it, in addition to the epitomal cicada's singing. Similarly, there is a verbal echo between Homer and Marianus in the concluding part of book 5 of the *Odyssey* which finds its protagonist swimming, shipwrecked at sea (εἰ δέ κ' ἔτι προτέρω παρανήξομαι, *Od.* 5.417; ὀππόθι δενδρήεντα γέρον παρανήχεται Ἴρις/ χῶρον *AP* 9.668 ll. 7-8), as well as the shaded grove being established as the place for the traveller to ease from pain (δάσκιον ὕλην *Od.* 5.470, εἴ με μεθείη ῥίγος καὶ κάματος *Od.* 5.471-472; Δεῦρ' ἴθι, βαιόν, ὀδίτα, πεσῶν ὑπὸ δάσκιον ἄλσος,/ ἄμπαυσον καμάτου γυῖα πολυπλανέος *AP* 9.669 ll. 1-2). These kind imperatives in *AP* 9.669 ll. 1-2 are in agreement with the moral of the third of the three parables of Jesus that comprise chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. Therefore, one allegorical answer to Marianus' question for the reader to arrive at is 'Jesus' through a series of classicizing and neoplatonic allusions which are well suited for the Christo-Platonic aesthetics in the wake of the Nonnian "new classics"; allusions ultimately focused on church dogmatics, something the Byzantine scholastici were acutely aware of.

For the second, literal, answer I appeal to the geographer Strabo's own account of his hometown, the same Amasia in northern Turkey, in an attempt to speculate where the exact location of Marianus' *locus amoenus* is. This speculation is greatly aided by the "Extracts from Notes Made on a Journey in Asia Minor in 1836" of W.I. Hamilton (1837) who describes the locale in great detail. Corroborating Marianus' ekphrasis in his epigrams with Strabo's geography and in contrast with Hamilton's "Notes," I argue that the real world location of *AP* 9.668-9 is the Phanaroea valley, north-east to Amasia, through which the river Iris flows downwards toward the city. With this second answer to the riddle of these long neglected Christo-Platonic epigrams, I demonstrate how Marianus Scholasticus thus appeals to the

theological position of dyophysitism by posing a riddle with two answers, one allegorical, and one literal.

Bibliography

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