

Constructing Order through Narration: Narrator and Narratees in George of Pisidia's *Bellum Avaricum*



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Recibido: 03/09/2019. Aceptado: 03/11/2019.

Abstract

The object of the paper is to analyse the roles of the narrator and the narratees in George of Pisidia's *Bellum Avaricum*. The article puts forth the hypothesis that through the hierarchic relationship of narrator and narratees, the poet aims at mirroring the ideal form of kingship under the Christian emperor Heraclius (reg. 610-641 C.E.) both on a secular and spiritual level. Therefore, the focus will lie on the following three questions: How does the narrator represent himself? How does he address his narratees and communicate with them? And what is his ideological goal in establishing and structuring the narration? By viewing the poem particularly with regard to its narrative techniques of rhetoric and panegyric, the analysis promises to provide a deeper insight into the socio-political and spiritual concepts of Byzantium at the beginning of the 7th century.

KEYWORDS: narrator, narrates, panegyric, *Bellum Avaricum*, Byzantium

Construyendo orden a través de la narración: narrador y narratarios en el *Bellum Avaricum* de Jorge de Pisidia

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las funciones del narrador y de los narratarios en el *Bellum Avaricum* de Jorge de Pisidia. El artículo postula que a través de la relación jerárquica entre narrador y narratarios, el poeta aspira a reflejar la forma ideal del reinado del emperador Cristiano Heraclio (610-641 d.C.) tanto a nivel secular como espiritual. Por lo tanto, el foco estará puesto en los tres interrogantes que siguen: ¿cómo se representa el narrador?, ¿cómo se dirige a sus narratarios y cómo se comunica con ellos? y ¿cuál es su objetivo ideológico

al establecer y estructurar la narración? A partir de estudiar el poema especialmente en lo que respecta a sus técnicas narrativas vinculadas a la retórica y al panegírico, el análisis intenta profundizar en los conceptos sociopolíticos y espirituales de Bizancio al comienzo de siglo séptimo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: narrador, narratarios, panegírico, *Bellum Avaricum*, Bizancio

1. Outline and preliminary remarks

George of Pisidia is a turning point in the history of Greek literature and culture as Mary Whitby (2003:174), one of the leading scholars dealing with this Greek author, metaphorically states: “he stands Janus-like at the junction of the classical and medieval worlds”. He is the witness of political and military changes at the beginning of the 7th century C.E. when the conflict between the Sasanian kings and the Byzantine empire reached its maximum and proved to have a far-reaching impact on the Eastern Mediterranean area as a whole. As with several other encomiastic poems by Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* is framed by the military campaigns which were undertaken by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (reg. 610-641 C.E.) against the Sasanians and their allies, the Avars and Slavs, in the years 604 to 628 C.E. Culminating in the siege of Constantinople in the year 626 C.E., which was operated under the Sasanian Shah Khusro II. (reg. 590 to 628 C.E.) and executed by the Persian military commander Shahrvaraz together with the Avar and Slavonic allies, the conflict was resolved in favour of the central power of Byzantium (*cfr.* Treadgold, 1997:297-298; Kardaras, 2019:84-87).¹ As will be shown, several protagonists of these historical events are in close connection to the narrative structure of the poem.

The essential groundwork that was done by the latest editors of the poems –Agostino Pertusi (1959), Fabrizio Gonnelli (1998) and Luigi Tartaglia (1998)– as well as by a handful of scholars who dedicated a significant part of their research to Pisides –*cfr.* Joseph Frendo (1974, 1975, 1984 and 1986) and Mary Whitby (1994, 1995, 1998 and 2003)– provides the basis for the present paper. My aim is not to deliver an analysis of the historical dimension or validity of George’s poems, but I approach them from the viewpoint of literary studies and focus on their narrative structure, literary expression and modulation of imperial propaganda on a literary level. My objective is twofold. First, by offering a close reading of *Bellum Avaricum*, I will highlight the narrative technique of this particular poem.² The analysis of the narrator and his addressees –or narratees as they are called in the narratological terminology³– as well as their relations to each other promises to yield a better understanding of the narrative structure and the mechanisms of Pisides’ poetry in particular as well as of late antique panegyric literature in general. It will be argued that through the hierarchic relationship of narrator and narratees the poet wants to mirror the ideal form of kingship under the emperor Heraclius, who distinguished himself as the re-conqueror of formerly lost Eastern territories as well as the defender of the capital Constantinople and, therefore, the warrantor of the

¹ For the historical event of the siege see Howard-Johnston (1995).

² On the *Bellum Avaricum* see Speck (1980) and Van Dieten (1985).

³ For the definition of the term ‘narratee’ as the narrator’s addressee *cfr.* the entry in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*.

empire as such. The narratological categories of narrator and narratee have, during the last decades, received increased attention within the communities of classical as well as, more recently, of Byzantine studies.⁴ To approach the poetry of George of Pisidia through these narratological categories, promises to deliver more insight into the literary techniques of this particular author as well as into the general design of Greek poetry at the period of transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

Furthermore, a second way of reading the text is suggested, namely that a special Christian worldview is represented which can be traced in the double narrative structure of the poem: the profane and the spiritual level. Each narrative *persona* –the narrator and the narratee(s)– belongs to a certain extent to both of these different levels of narration.

2. The omnipresent narrator

The overall structure of George of Pisidia's *Bellum Avaricum* is made up of three sections: (1.) the prologue (v. 1-15), (2.) the *narratio* (v. 16-501) and (3.) the epilogue (v. 502-541).⁵ Instead of delivering a mere epic narration recounting each single event, the narrator –i.e. “the text internal construct that mediates the narrative”⁶– transposes the historical events on a metaphorical level and provides the reader with plenty of pictorial passages which tie the profane level of the narration to a spiritual one.⁷ Throughout the narrative, we find an ample use of first-person interventions which indicates a strong presence of the narrator, who appears as an overt narrator⁸ and can be recognised by the first person “I” as early as in the proem in verses 10-11. There, he introduces himself in the most direct way by using the personal pronoun ἐγώ: “ἐγὼ δὲ μικροῦς τῶν ἀγώνων, ὡς ῥόδα, / λόγους συνάξας ἐξ ἀκανθῶν τῆς μάχης”. After two transitional verses in which the narrator reappears (v. 44-45: “ἐγὼ δὲ τοῖς ἔναγχος ἐντυχῶν χρόνοις / αὐτοπροσώπως πραγμάτων ἐφάπτομαι”), an elaborate catalogue of metaphors visualises the threat exerted by the Persians (v. 49-84).

Then, the narrator emphasises, again in first person, the impossibility of finding the appropriate words for describing “the foreign-born monster” of ‘barbaric’ invaders (v. 87: “δὲ οὐ φράσαιμι τὸ ξενόσπορον τέρας”). In verses 125-126, a short proem-within-the-story, the narrator announces his intention to turn now to the “trophies of the new battle”: “ἀλλ’ εἶμι λοιπὸν πρὸς τὰ τῆς νεωτέρας / μάχης τρόπαια”. After having delivered another two passages of encomiastic praise (v. 126-153 vis-à-vis the patriarch Sergius and in v. 154-164 the amplification of this praise by means of a vine-metaphor), he moves on to the

4 For applying narratological methods to classical studies see De Jong; Nünlist; Bowie (2004), for narratology in Byzantine studies *cf.* Messis; Mullett; Nilsson (2018) and the up-to-date research report in Holmsgaard Eriksen; Kulhánková (2019).

5 For the narrative structure of *Bellum Avaricum* see Nissen (1940:310-314) and Espejo Jáimez (2015:229-234).

6 Contzen (2018:54).

7 For the concept of the narrator in narrative texts *cf.* Prince (1982:7-16), Bal (32009:18-31), Schmid (2010:57-78) and Fludernik (42013:42-44). For a critical discussion of the concept of the narrator in medieval texts *cf.* Contzen (2018).

8 For the narratological concept of the overt narrator *cf.* Fludernik (42013:42) and for the definition and function of the narrator in general see Prince (1982:7-16) and Bal (32009:18-31).

actual battle narration. In verses 165-168 the first-person narrator enunciates the narrative technique which he aims to apply, and promises a narration of the events “like a battle close-by”, but “due to fresh fear” of the vast scope and chaotic twists and turns in the battle, he is forced to abridge his narrative and is not able to narrate *in extenso* as he would like to:

θέλω δὲ τοῦτων τὰς ἀφορμὰς τῶν λόγων
ὡς τὴν ἔναγχος ἱστορήσαι σοι μάχην,
ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἐναύλου τοῦ φόβου συστέλλομαι
καὶ μηδὲν εἰπεῖν ὡς θέλω βιάζομαι. (Geo. Pis. *Bell. Avar.* 165-168)

But I want to tell you, as the origin of these verses, about the battle that has just taken place, but because of the still fresh fear I hold on myself and force myself not to say it the way I want to

The narrator reappears in verses 226-231 by implementing another rhetorical topos, namely to pretend not to mention developments which, for the reason of rhetorical effect, are actually realised in the following narration on the role played by the patriarch Sergius during the siege:

ἐγὼ δὲ ταῦτα συγκαλύψαι σοι θέλω
—οὐκ ἠγνόουν γὰρ ὡς λαθεῖν καὶ νῦν θέλεις—
σιγᾶν ἔμελλον· ἀλλ’ ὁ νοῦς ἠρυθρία
κλέψαι τοσοῦτους εἰσορών συνειδότας,
οὐκοῦν ἀνάσχου· δυσχερὲς γὰρ εἰκότως
κοινὴν καλύψαι καὶ λαθεῖν ὑποψίαν. (Geo. Pis. *Bell. Avar.* 226-231)

But I wanted to hide all this from you - because it did not go unnoticed by me that you too now want it hidden - and I wanted to keep silent about it. But in my mind, I was ashamed to keep it from you because I saw that there were so many eyewitnesses. So, take it upon yourself! Because it is difficult to hide and conceal a general suspicion properly

Furthermore, the narrator appears in very short parentheses in which he reflects on his opinion about possible events and outcomes of the battle and evaluates the leading defenders –Heraclius, Sergius and Bonus (v. 374: “οἶμαι”; v. 440: “καὶ μοι πρόσεστι τοῦτο θαυμάσαι πλέον”, v. 451-452: “μόνην γὰρ οἶμαι τὴν Τεκοῦσαν ἀσπόρως / τὰ τόξα τεῖναι καὶ βαλεῖν τὴν ἀσπίδα”, v. 459: “οὐκ οἶδα πῶς”). Announcing an epic-style catalogue of single combats, in verses 413–416, the narrator links the sheer chaos of the situation to the difficulties in handling the narration properly:

κάμοι δὲ μίξις νῦν ἐπήλθε καὶ μάχη,
καὶ πανταχοῦ μοι τοῦ σκοποῦ πεφυρμένου
καὶ συγκροτοῦντος τοὺς λόγους ὡς εἰς μάχην
τί πρῶτον εἰπῶν δευτέρων ἀπάρξομαι· (Geo. Pis. *Bell. Avar.* 413-416)

I too now faced chaos and struggle, and since I was confused on every level and the words huddled together like in a battle, what shall I say first and with what start second?

Moreover, at the end of *Bellum Avaricum*, the poet closes his narration with his last first-person intervention in verses 535-536 (“ἐνταῦθα μοι νῦν τὸν βραδύγλωττον λόγον / τὸ συμπέρασμα τοῦ σκοποῦ περιγράψει”) and in verses 535-541 leads over to Heraclius’ son, successor and emperor-to-be,

Heraclius Constantinus (reg. as Constantinus III in 641 C.E), who is directly linked to the goddess Nike and, therefore, promises to yield potential material for a future eulogy. As can be seen from this overview, the narrator of *Bellum Avaricum* reflects on the possibilities of narrating a proper panegyric on the emperor, which also adds a variety of rhetorical techniques of encomium to the distinctive epic flavour of the battle scenes.

3. The Narratees

3.1 *The first reference of 'you': who is it?*

In order to grasp the narrative structure even better, one also has to look at the narratees who are explicitly addressed by the narrator in the second person.⁹ What attracts the reader's attention is the frequent use of the direct apostrophe *σύ* in its various cases. It is especially this *σύ* which delivers the key for determining the narrative goal of *Bellum Avaricum*. We find the earliest reference of a form of *σύ* in verse 12 where the narrator addresses a *σοί*, which is further specified by the noun "τῷ φυτουργῶ", 'planter', 'gardener or—in a particular Christian sense— also 'creator'. According to Mary Whitby (2003:177-178 and 181-182; *cfr.* also Pertusi, 1959:207 *ad loc.*), this *σοί* refers to the patriarch Sergius (reg. 610-638 C.E.), who is the outstanding figure among Heraclius' agents during the siege of Constantinople and who is presented in *Bellum Avaricum* as the *spiritus rector* of the defensive measures. To illustrate the spiritual strength of the patriarch, the narrator employs one of his preferred metaphors, namely the roses that blossom in the middle of thorns (v. 10-13). If the reader of *Bellum Avaricum* perceives the *σοί* in this way, Sergius becomes the symbol of the double narrative structure of the poem, which also adds to the profane a spiritual layer of meaning.

However, the interpretation of the *σοί* in this passage can be put into an even wider context, for there is no clear specification which indicates that Sergius actually *is* the narratee at this point of the narration. The term "τῷ φυτουργῶ", which is linked to the *σοί*, allows—in addition to the interpretation as the patriarch Sergius— also an identification with the Christian God as the highest possible authority. This reading is supported by another statement made by the narrator at the very beginning of the poem in verses 1-9. Here, he introduces a 'painter', "ζωγράφων", as his own alter ego whom he imagines to paint a picture, "καὶ γράφοι τὴν εἰκόνα" (v. 3), on the very same subject which he is dealing with, namely the Byzantines' victory over 'the barbarians' in the battle over Constantinople in 626 C.E. As sign for this victory, "τὰ τῆς μάχης τρόπαια" (v. 1f.), the painter depicts the Mother of God, "τὴν Τεκοῦσαν ἀσπόρως" (v. 2), for she is viewed as the actual military power responsible for the victory. By placing the visual effect of this icon right at the beginning of *Bellum Avaricum*, the narrator defines his piece of poetry as an *encomium* on precisely this divine agent. One reason for starting the poem in this manner is to display the metapoetic level in order to deal with the possibilities of artistic representation in both the literary and the pictorial genre. The second and—for my argumentation— essential purpose of this iconic opening is to connect the profane and the spiritual level of the narration by putting it under the heading

⁹ *Cfr.* Prince (1982:16-26) for the different appearances of the narratee in a narrative text.

of God and the Mother of God.¹⁰ Of course, Sergius as the highest spiritual agent of God and Mary remains included in this dedication of the poem, particularly due to his special connection to the icon of the Virgin, which is also referred to in the *Hexaemeron* (cf. Whitby, 2003:185-186). Hence, the narrator deliberately blurs the identities of his narratees in order to promulgate the hierarchical system of the Byzantine empire, which defines itself through the close link between secular political powers and Christian-orthodox doctrine. Without the spiritual involvement of the patriarch the secular military forces would not have been able to save the city from the 'barbaric' onslaught.

3.2 Patriarch Sergius and emperor Heraclius

The next passage in which the narrator addresses a narratee in the second person can be found in verses 125-153. There, the repeated use of the personal pronoun σύ, the possessive pronoun σός and a series of verbs in the second person singular does not imply the precise narratee either. However, this time we find hints at the intended addressee in terms of various references to the spiritual efforts undertaken by the σύ: the prayer (v. 127: "τῆς σῆς προσευχῆς"), the care for the human soul (v. 130-131: "ὧ πάντα πράττων ὥστε μὴ στειράν ποτε / ψυχὴν παρελθεῖν") and the bond with God and the Mother of God (v. 132-133: "καὶ τεκνοποιῶν τῷ Θεῷ καθ' ἡμέραν / καὶ παρθενεύων καὶ πλέον μήτηρ μένων") suggest a reading in favour of Sergius. In addition, the fact that the σύ is referred to as 'vigilant' (v. 137: "πρακτικῆς ἀγρυπνίας"), 'ready in the heart' (v. 138: "ἐξ ἐτοίμου καρδίας") and deploying his tears as weapons against 'the barbarians' (v. 141-142: "τῶν ἐνόπλων δακρῶν / τῶν πυρπολούντων τὸ θράσος τὸ βάρβαρον") indicates likewise that, here, the patriarch is addressed.

However, again we find a deliberate blurring of the narratees when the σύ is twice apostrophised as 'commander of the army' (v. 137 and 141: "στρατηγέ") and provided with 'steadfastness' (v. 139: "ἡ δὲ σὴ στάσις"). In both cases not only Sergius –who spiritually represents the physically absent emperor during the military defence of the city– but also Heraclius himself is meant by the narrator. By omitting the precise names of his narratees, he links both persons in charge of the Byzantine defensive measures and, once more, merges the spiritual and the political spheres.

The mixing of these two spheres can be found in yet another passage. In verses 366-389 we find again a narratee addressed in the second person who is presented as the official legal representative of the city of Constantinople and as the warrantor of the diplomatic and military measures against the 'barbarians'. Here, the narrator particularly stresses the narratee's lawful and fair handling of the 'barbarians': he stages him as "agent or attorney of the community" (v. 369: "τῆς κοινότητος ἐντολεύς") who, during an imagined trial, delivers a 'plea' (v. 370: "συνήγορον λόγον") and 'files a lawsuit' against the 'barbarians' (v. 372: "γραφὴν κατ' αὐτῶν ἀσφαλῶς προεξέθου"). Moreover, the narratee is marked as the legislative authority who imposes Roman law upon the incriminated 'barbarians' (v. 379: "κόμψευσος αὐτοῖς ἡ

¹⁰ In verses 169-171 we find another reference to the equality of the spoken/written word and the medium of painting. Here, the narrator chooses to narrate in the 'pictorial mode', "ὁ πάντων εἰκονογράφος λόγος" (v. 169), and sees himself 'as a scribe who realises every kind of material', "ὡς παντὸς ἔργου πρακτικὸς καλλιγράφος" (v. 171). The emphasis on visuality in the proem of *Bellum Avaricum* corresponds with Pisisides' predilection of figurative and metaphoric language; on metaphor in Pisisides' poems cf. esp. Trilling (1978).

δικη καθίστατο”).¹¹ Thus, even when interacting with ‘barbarians’, the narratee is depicted as a stabilising agent who seeks to restore justice vis-à-vis his subjects. This function of legislative authority which the narrator ascribes to the narratee suggests, in the first instance, an identification of the narratee as the emperor Heraclius in his role as lawgiver. However, in verse 371, the narrator clearly hints at patriarch Sergius in his function as the defender of the city during the Avar’s siege: with the wording ‘and running to the wall’ (“καὶ πρὸς τὸ τεῖχος ἐκδρομῶν”) the narrator insinuates the procession led by the patriarch in which he carried the icon of the Mother of God as an *apotropaion* against the ‘barbaric’ onrush.¹² Once more, it is the intention of the narrator to deliberately confuse the highest secular and spiritual authorities and their competences in order to allow a double reading of the poem as an *encomium* which is praising both the emperor and the patriarch.

3.3 Third person-address: the *magister militum Bonus*

The narratees can be identified more clearly if we consider how the secular powers are addressed. Just as Sergius serves as a substitute for Heraclius and as a spiritual protector, the πατριάρχος Bonus takes over the function of the profane military coordinator of the city (*cf.* Whitby, 1998:251). He implements military operations and defensive strategies against the imminent ‘barbarians’ and, as civil governor, fulfils the function of the official legal representative of Heraclius’ still underage son Heraclius Constantinus. Bonus’ role as representative of the secular power is reflected in the narrator’s address in the third person: in verses 313f. he is –together with state officials (“τοῖς ἄρχουσι”) and other persons under imperial authority (“τοῖς ὑπηκόοις”)– referred to as *magister militum* (“τῷ μαγίστρῳ τῶν ἐνόπλων ταγμάτων”) in the third person. In the same passage we also find indirect references to Sergius and Heraclius (v. 315: “ὕμιν” and v. 316: “σὺν σοί”). These references sketch an explicit hierarchy which comprises the emperor on top, Sergius and Bonus as his highest spiritual and secular representatives, as well as subordinate military ranks.¹³

3.4 Political and spiritual power: Heraclius in third and second person

Of special interest for the analysis of *Bellum Avaricum* from a narratological point of view is the narrative *persona* of Heraclius. The narrator addresses the emperor both in third and second person and aims at gradually establishing a bond between him and his subjects. In the passages where Heraclius is referred

11 For the rare adjective κόμφευσος deduced from the Latin *confessus* see the entry in the *Lexikon zur Byzantinischen Gräzität*. The use of a Latin term to characterise law as such points to the Roman legal tradition which, here, is adopted by the narrator in order to promote Heraclius as the regulatory and peacekeeping sovereign after years of wars and political instability.

12 *Cfr.* Pertusi (1959:220 ad v. 370ff.) for the identification of Sergius in this passage and for further historical sources concerning the procession.

13 *Cfr.* verses 315-316.: “ἀεὶ γὰρ ὑμῖν εἰς τὸ πᾶν συνημμένοι / τὰ κοινὰ σὺν σοὶ τῶν πόνων ἐβάστασαν” and also the following verses 315-327 in which the duties of the subordinate officials in charge are described: ἀεὶ γὰρ ὑμῖν εἰς τὸ πᾶν συνημμένοι / τὰ κοινὰ σὺν σοὶ τῶν πόνων ἐβάστασαν / καθ’ ἡμέραν τρέχοντες ὡς ὀδοιπόροι / καὶ συμπαρόντες τῇ πολυπλόκῳ μάχῃ / ὄπλοις λογισμῶν, τακτικαῖς ἀγρυπνίαις, / καίτοιγε ταῦτα μὴ πονοῦντες ἐξ ἔθους, / ὅπερ μάλιστα τοὺς πόνους ποιεῖ πόνους / παρ’ οἷς τὸ μοχθεῖν εἰς μάχην οὐ γίνεται, / ὅμως ἔδοξεν ὥστε πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους / ἄνδρας σταλῆναι παντὸς ἔργου καὶ λόγου / πολλὴν ἀποστάζοντας εὐαρμοσίαν / προσαγγελοῦντας ὥστε λύσαι τὴν μάχην / πέρας τε κοινῶν συντεθῆναι φροντίδων. [For always they were entirely connected to you, endured the hardships together with you, were walking like wanderers every day, and were involved in the tortuous battle with the weapons of the mind, with their tactic vigilance and, moreover, out of habit, had no trouble with – which, after all, turns troubles into troubles, except those who are not suffering from struggle. So, it still seemed good to them to send to the barbarians men of all deeds and words, to let fall drop by drop a lot of good spirits and to report that they are willing to stop the fight and wanted to put an end to our common anxieties.]

to in third person, he appears, despite his physical absence, as an active military strategist and a man of political capability who had undertaken diplomatic measures in order to come to an arrangement with the ‘barbarians’ without risking warlike operations (v. 94-107 and 246-265).¹⁴ Here, *synkriseis* and metaphors are implied in order to emphasise the emperor’s willingness to defend the city: as a symbol of political harmony and rhetorical power, Heraclius is compared to the mythological character of Orpheus taming wild beasts of all kinds (v. 101-107, *cfr.* Whitby, 2003:182f.):¹⁵

ποιάν δὲ γλώττης οὐκ ἐκίνησεν λύραν
ἐκ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ μουσικῆς ἠρμωσμένην,
ἧ πείθεται μὲν πολλάκις καὶ θηρία,
πραῦνεται δὲ καὶ τὸ δημῶδες θράσος
ὃ μυρίων τις εὐπορήσας Ὀρφέων
οὐκ ἂν μαλάξοι· καὶ γὰρ ἐργωδέστερον
ἄνθρωπον ἔλξει τοῦ μαλάξαι θηρία. (Geo. Pis. *Bell. Avar.* 101-107)

Which melody of the tongue he did not move, composed from the music within him, with which he often prevails upon even wild animals and also tames the vulgar impertinence of which I suppose that even one of the innumerable Orpheuses with his abilities could not appease? Because it is harder to attract a human being than to appease wild animals.

Moreover, he is shown as “a rose in the midst of thorns” when fighting against the ‘barbarians’ (v. 261: “ὡς εἰς ἀκάνθας ἐμπεπλεγμένον ῥόδον”). Pisides also deploys various rhetorical *topoi* at the service of his encomium in the case of Sergius: in verses 226-231 the narrator applies the *topos* of modesty, humility and reticence to the patriarch, makes it one of his leading character traits and, at the same time, announces his intention to report on his successful defensive measures against the besiegers.

The narrator addresses the emperor explicitly with the second person in verses 172-196. There, Heraclius is presented as the key figure in the defensive measures against the ‘barbarians’ and appears in the function of a steersman, which is traditionally attributed to sovereigns and by which the narrator seeks to highlight the emperor’s good governance. The analogon of seafaring and statesmanship comprises a reference to the Christian conception of sin (v. 184: “τῆς ἀμαρτίας”) and the redemption from it.¹⁶ As is typical for Pisides’ poetic design, the narrator connects both spheres by implying a highly pictorial language and transposing the redemption from sin to the profane field of seafaring. Like the cargo of a freighter which is unloaded at the port of its destination, the spiritual sins of “all” (v. 184: “πᾶσιν”; v. 186: “ἕκαστον”) can be eliminated by continuing the fight against the ‘barbarians’. The key word for linking both spheres is καρδιά (v. 186: “ἐκ τῆς καρδίας”) which, here, denotes both the sinful human heart as well as the belly of a heavily laden cargo ship. In the following verses, the narrator amplifies his verbal visualisation of the heavy load carried both by the ship and the human soul with the phrases ‘the burden of the abundant load’ (v. 187: “τὰ τῶν περιττῶν φορτίων βαρῆματα”)

¹⁴ In his absence, Heraclius sends letters to the capital in order to advise the Byzantines during the siege in their fight against the ‘barbarians’, *cfr.* Whitby (2003:184).

¹⁵ For the implementation of rhetoric in Pisides’ poems *cfr.* Whitby (2003:177-178), who highlights George’s professional handling of rhetorical techniques in his prose metaphrasis on the Acts of Anastasius of Persia.

¹⁶ On Heraclius’ relation to the divine sphere and divine *logos* *cfr.* (Whitby 2003:181).

and 'by the terrible weight' (v. 188: "τῷ δεινῷ βάρει"). Just as the narrator repeatedly obscures the narratee proper and renders a clear identification of his addressee impossible, he plays with the deliberate ambiguity of single words like καρδία and, therefore, designs a double layer of meaning touching both the secular and spiritual spheres.

The close association of imperial politics and Christian spirituality can also be perceived in verses 232-245, where the narratee –addressed in the second person– appears again to be indistinct. However, this time, several hints point to the patriarch Sergius rather than to Heraclius. First, the narrator draws a close connection to the Virgin (v. 232: "Παρθένον") with whom the addressee is said to have ventured his spiritual and military fight against the 'barbarians' (v. 234: "ταύτην συνασπίζουσαν"). Second, the narrator stresses the use of spiritual instead of real weapons as effective defensive measures: the hope in God as a bow (v. 237: "τόξον γὰρ εἶχες τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν ἐπίδα"), faith as towers of defence, tears as arrows and the Holy Spirit as fire (v. 239-240: "πύργους δὲ πίστιν καὶ βέλη τὰ δάκρυα / καὶ πῦρ τὸ Πνεῦμα") as well as prostration and the bending of one's neck as the symbol of military defeat (v. 241: "γόνυ προκλίνας καὶ καθείς τὸν ἀνχένα"). Moreover, the military testudo formation (v. 240: "χελόνας") is dismissed as an appropriate military strategy for defending the city.

Thus, with both this passage and the dedication to the Virgin Mary at the beginning of *Bellum Avaricum* taken into account, the poem is to be rated as a religious hymn to God and the Mother of God. Moreover, it is also an encomium on Sergius and Heraclius alike, who are pictured as the official representatives of Christianity in this world.

4. From the 'I' and 'you' to the 'we': performative aspects and concluding remarks

The close interrelation between narrator and narratees cumulates in verses 284-310. There, the reader finds the emperor addressed both in the third and second person through a gradual shift from the impersonal 'he' (v. 284-306) to the personal 'you' (v. 307-310). Moreover, the narrator also employs –as he does continuously throughout the poem– the pronoun 'we' in the first person plural (v. 287: "δι' ἡμᾶς", v. 308: "ἡμῖν"), bringing together himself, his narratees Heraclius and Sergius as well as the imagined audience who is present during the performance of his panegyric.¹⁷ The direct address of both the patriarch and the emperor in the second person implies their presence in the moment of performing the poem so that both are characters of the narrative and form an essential part of the audience as well.

The eventual goal of Pisides' poetry as a performative act is to establish an individual bond between the audience and the emperor and to promote the ideal form of kingship. As Mary Whitby (1998:251) puts it: "an important element of George's poetic role was to promote morale among the population of the capital and act as intermediary between them and the emperor". By establishing a precise system of narrative *personae*, the narrator transposes the distinct hierarchy of Heraclius' Byzantine state into his narration on the

¹⁷ For the function of the first-person pronouns 'we' and 'us' which can indicate both narrator and narratee *cf.* Prince (1982:17-18).

defence of its capital. With the *mélange* of three different narrative levels –the narrator, the narratees within the text and the imagined narratees beyond the textual sphere– the narrator calls upon a social community who is prompted to identify itself with the political and religious agenda of the emperor. This community is named “τὸ κοινόν” in verse 283 and can be identified with the citizens of Constantinople who, after the successful defence of the city, should celebrate and honour their victorious emperor.

It is the principle of victory by which the narrator closes the poem. In the last lines, he sketches a scenario with Heraclius’ son, Constantinus III., as the future emperor (v. 537: “τῷ σῶ δὲ τέκνῳ, τῷ νεοτέρῳ κράτει”) and the bridegroom-to-be for Nike, the goddess of victory. The last address in the second person is precisely directed to Nike, who is requested to take Constantinus as her husband (v. 539-540: “νίκη φάνητι· νῦν λαβεῖν σε νυμφίον / ἔξεστι τοῦτον”). By implying the second person ‘you’ for all four characters –the Virgin at the beginning, Sergius and Heraclius throughout the poem and the personification of victory at the end– the narrator draws a direct line between them and delivers an all-embracing panegyric which continuously switches between an encomium on high secular and ecclesiastical dignities and a religious hymn on the Mother of God.

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