Lektüre zu empfehlen (wenn auch nicht immer leicht lesbar), es lohnt intensive Auseinandersetzung, weil es einem Gegenstand von beträchtlicher philosophie-historischer Relevanz gewidmet ist und in seinen Thesen nicht nur vielfache Anregung bietet, sondern auch überzeugt.

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Given the still very partial availability of trustworthy editions, translations and commentaries for the enormous verse production of Gregory of Nazianzus, any new monograph on his poetry is very welcome. Despite various ongoing projects, notably the bilingual edition of 'Les Belles Lettres' (one volume published) and the long-awaited editio critica in the 'Corpus Christianorum', Series graeca (see below), it is to be expected that the Maurist edition (1778–1840), reprinted in the 'Patrologia Graeca', volumes 37 and 38, will be the main reference for Gregory’s œuvre for some time to come. Yet, over the last decades, several individual poems or groups of poems have been the object of separate critical studies, often resulting from doctoral research, especially in Germany and Italy, and to a lesser degree in the English-speaking world. The two volumes under review here belong to this wave.

The small book by Andreas Schwab results from the author’s 'Magisterarbeit' at the LMU München. It deals with Gregory’s I,1.5, the fifth poem from the so-called poemata arcana, a series of theological poems in the didactic tradition (hence also written in hexameters), dealing with central dogmatic questions. Some of them were fiercely disputed in the fourth century. The subjects of the first poems are the First Principles, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Universe. The discussion of the Providence is followed by poems on the Spiritual Beings, the Soul and the Sacred History ('On the Testaments and the Incarnation of Christ'). The whole cycle of the arcana has been edited and translated in English by Claudio Moreschini and Donald Sykes in 1997 (OUP). Schwab has adopted the text with its critical apparatus from this edition (the mention 'Herausgegeben' on the title page is somewhat flattering), and added the first German translation of the poem, along with a general introduction and a commentary which is far more detailed than all previous discussions of this text.

The traditional introduction (‘Hinführung zu Leben und Werk’, p. 17–30) offers a concise presentation of Gregory’s life and poetry – nothing new, but relevant and up-to-date. The first part, on the textual tradition and earlier editions, with the Greek text of Περὶ Προνοίας, is completely based on Moreschini-Sykes. The second part (p. 45–53) presents the existing modern translations of the poem, and offers the German version – a translation that explicitly has no literary ambi-
tion (unlike, for instance, the several partial translations in German by Bernhard Wyss, who used elegiacs). By far the longest and most innovative part of the book is the commentary (p. 55–128). It starts with a convincing proposal for a subdivision of the poem into seven parts and a discussion of its title (the term πρόνοια is never used in its 71 verses), and general line of thought, which is shown to be similar to that of Gregory’s or. 14, ‘On the Love for the Poor’. The main parts of Gregory’s argumentation are directed against the belief in either pure chance or – especially – astral fatalism. Gregory’s own position defends a combination of divine providence and human responsibility. A summary, a selective but representative bibliography and three useful indices conclude the book.

The commentary deserves a special mention. Its professed aims are (a) to explain Gregory’s argumentation and (b) to interpret some difficult passages and to justify their proposed translation. This makes for a clear treatment, subdivided in line with the seven sections of the poems. Each section starts with a repetition of the Greek text and its translation, a paraphrase of the line of reasoning and a global analysis and interpretation. The latter parts especially are helpful, since Gregory’s reasoning and phrasing are sometimes rather opaque. Inevitably, the difficult Greek text can lead to divergent interpretations, and at certain points this reviewer disagrees with the proposed translation and/or explanation, yet without any serious implications for the overall comprehension of the poem.

One example. In the refutation of competing worldviews (second section), Gregory denies that the world is governed by chance. In two instances he uses the word αὐτόματος (v. 7 αὐτόματη φύσις and v. 9 αὐτομάτοισι λόγοισι); this repetition is lost in the translation, which reads ‘selbsttätige Natur’ and ‘Reden vom Zufall’, respectively, thus obscuring the identity of both notions. The commentary, p. 79–85, is clarifying, though. This is not the sole instance where the commentary is necessary in order to understand the translation correctly, see e.g. also vv. 34–40 on the divine government of things in heaven and on earth.

The larger part of the commentary is devoted to a minute verse-per-verse analysis – the opening section for instance, counting 6 verses, receives 14 pages in Schwab’s book. The analysis is mainly concerned with philosophical and theological content (not every monograph on Gregory lists J. Ratzinger in its bibliography), and offers illuminating parallel passages, both from Gregory’s own works and from the classical philosophical or the early Christian traditions. Unlike in most other German and Italian commentaries, Gregory’s language, metre and diction receive but little attention. In this respect, Schwab’s approach is a welcome addition to the mostly philological studies of Gregory’s verse, and it is also a definite improvement on the preceding commentary by Sykes.

Simelidis’ book is in many respects different from Schwab’s, and it is more ambitious – no wonder, since it is the revised version of a doctoral thesis (Oxford). In a way, the book is only a small sample of what is to come: Simelidis has been entrusted the edition of Gregory’s poems for ‘Corpus Christianorum’, a long-term project that was run by the late Martin Sicherl for several decades. This monograph offers a critical edition of four poems: I,2,17, ‘Beatitudes of different kinds of life’, a gnomology in elegiacs (66 verses); II,1,10, ‘To the priests of Constantinople and to the city itself’, an autobiographical poem looking back
on Gregory’s frustrating removal/retirement, in 381, from the episcopal see in 
the capital (elegiacs, 36 verses); II,1,19, ‘A lament on his own painful cares’, a
long prayer with an embedded autobiographical narrative, dealing with the trou-
bles in Nazianzus after his return from Constantinople (104 hexameters); and
II,1,32, ‘On the idleness and unreliability of life and on the end that is common
to all’, a moralizing lament on a trite theme (60 hexameters). Simelidis does not
really explain his choice for these heterogeneous poems. One reason, evidently,
has to do with the text history: all four belong to the ‘Gedichtgruppe I’ (see p.
92), which means that they are transmitted in more or less the same manuscripts
(Simelidis has collated 29 manuscripts in all). Besides, they are all written in a
dactylic metre – implying a common metrical and linguistic tradition, a primary
concern in the commentary. All in all, the selection offers a fairly representative
sample of Gregory’s more personal poetry – an interesting supplement to the
dogmatic poem presented by Schwab.

The book opens with a long Introduction (p. 21–102), arguably including the
most innovating – and controversial – parts of the book. It opens with a sympa-
thetic presentation of Gregory’s poetry, in stark contrast to the brief review of
the sometimes dismissive neglect of previous scholars. In the long and well-
documented section on ‘Gregory and Hellenistic Poetry’, Simelidis perhaps
overstates his case when he speaks of Gregory’s ‘obsession with Callimachus’ (p.
31), and certain examples provided to illu-
strate Nazianzen’s ‘allusive art’ (p. 37–
46) are not entirely convincing.

Sometimes, Simelidis is clearly aware of the speculative nature of the intertextual hints
he suggests (e.g. ‘This hymn might have been known to Gregory and might have been
popular; it may be suggestive that...’, p. 39); yet elsewhere he is rather apodictic when he
states that Gregory ‘borrows vocabulary from the Sibylline Oracles and [Manetho’s]
Apotelesmatae’ (p. 38) or makes ‘use of Euphorion’s fr. CA 98’ – the latter is based on «a
unique expression at the same metrical sedes» and this «adoption» is said to be «intended
to stress Christ’s triumph over death». Given the very fragmented state of the transmission
of ancient literature, I would be more cautious myself when interpreting possible parallels
with non-canonical texts. The suggested sophistication of Gregory’s arte allusiva, more-
over, cannot easily be reconciled with a statement in Simelidis’ discussion of the poet’s
style, more specifically his frequent repetitions of words, phrases or even whole lines: «His
huge corpus may also suggest that perhaps he could not always recall in detail the use of
the same phrase in other poems» (p. 32). It is difficult to imagine a writer consciously
alluding to (and expecting his readers to recognize) a rare word in a specific verse from a
rather obscure poet, and at the same time forgetting what he has written himself. An over-
interpretation of a different kind is, to my mind, the suggestion that a false quantity (nota-
ably in πᾶν) is to be «understood as a deliberate device to reinforce the sense» (p. 33).

What becomes absolutely clear, though, is that Gregory does deserve a fuller
study and appreciation as a literary artist, and not just as a Father of the Church
indulging in the writing of verse. The second part of the introduction deals with
the reception of Gregory’s poetry in Byzantium, a promising field of research for
which Simelidis gives an important impetus on these pages, from a wide range of
texts (and even objects, e.g. an amulet from the cathedral of Monza). In chapter
2.2, he argues that Gregory’s poems were used in Byzantine schools, a claim that
will not be generally accepted, even if Simelidis has a point when he refers to the
exegetical corpus on the poetry: two commentaries, four lexica and anonymous
prose paraphrases of many poems – material «always needed in the classroom» (p. 76). The three Byzantine paraphrases of the poems edited in this book are usefully edited as an appendix, p. 247–264, and are duly discussed in the Introduction, p. 79–88. The final part of the Introduction deals with the transmission of the poems. It starts from the stemma of ‘Gedichtgruppe I’ proposed by Gertz in his 1986 study of the manuscript tradition, but Simelidis demonstrates abundantly that this provisional work needs thorough revision – as does the stemma offered by Tuillier in the 2004 first volume of the édition Budé. This chapter clearly reflects work in progress, and is a promising taste of the editio critica.

Next comes the text with full critical apparatus (p. 103–115). One may regret that there is no convenient list of deviations from the PG text, the standard edition that is also included in the TLG. Apart from differences in punctuation and use of capitals, these deviations are not that numerous, and only seldom do they have any effect on the meaning of the text.

They can be retrieved in the apparatus and/or in the commentary, which mostly argues convincingly for the reading accepted in the text. As far as I could determine, the deviant readings (including ephelkustikon, divergent separation of words, different accentuation, or the correction of simple misprints in PG) concern the following verses: I,2,17: 15, 53, 57; II,1,10: 24, 28, 34; II,1,19: 23, 24 (the only case where a passage is obolized), 29, 37, 38, 43, 46, 64, 65, 74, 83, 84, 86; II,1,32: 3, 7, 9, 10, 18, 23, 48, 50, 56, 56, 58.

The running commentary (p. 117–246, without a page break between the successive handling of the four poems) is subdivided in every instance into four parts: ‘Outline’ (brief survey of the line of thought), ‘Literary characteristics’ (in fact a selective discussion of some peculiarities of the poem in question), ‘Place in Gregory’s life and thought’ (i.e., mainly, an attempt to date the poem and a discussion of the main sources of inspiration, including parallels from Gregory’s own prose), and ‘Comments on the text’. The latter part is by far the most comprehensive one, and it is primarily linguistic, dealing with the semantics, morphology, metrics and syntax of words, phrases and expressions, often referring to parallel passages from the ancient and biblical traditions, from Gregory himself, and from Byzantine literature. At times, Simelidis proposes a sophisticated literary interpretation, in the line of the Alexandrinism he has dealt with in the Introduction. As said before, the textual choices are also justified in these comments. Difficult lines (qua Greek or qua content) are paraphrased or translated. The entire commentary shows an admirable command of a wide range of philological tools (ranging from grammar and metrics to the use of Syriac translations), and on many occasions, Simelidis completes or corrects preceding scholarly work on (parts of) these poems – and mostly rightly so.

The commentary sometimes bears the marks of its origin as a doctoral thesis, in its exhaustiveness (few readers will care for the Homeric verses starting with κείνῳ, p. 200) and its consideration of possible interpretations that eventually are discarded (p. 174: the biblical story of David and Absalom is dealt with in half a page, only to conclude that we need not understand Gregory’s verses II,1,19, 2–5 as an allusion to it). On one occasion, I think Simelidis misunderstands Gregory. At p. 191, he comments upon the Homeric formula ἀλλι σεποθᾶσ, used in II,1,19, v. 33. It occurs in a passage where Gregory compares himself to John: Ἀλλις Ἰωάννης εἰμί: τὸ δ’ αἵτων ἀκριβές ἀομιόν. / Ὡς ἐν αὐθεντικόν μ’ ἄγεις, μάκαιρ, ὡς τιν’ ἀριστον / ἄντιον αὐθεντήρος ἀπνεός – ἀλλι σεποθᾶς ὅ, ὡς κείν
ἀριστεύσαντι γέρας καὶ κῦδος ὀπάσσῃς (tr. White with Simelidis’ correction in the final verse: ‘I am a second Job but for a different reason: you are not sending me to take part in a contest, blessed one, like some outstanding opponent of a tough athlete, confident of my strength, that you might grant the prize and glory to me after my success’). Simelidis comments ‘if the subject of πεποιθώς is God, the phrase does not make good sense: the Christian God cannot trust human strength’, and he discusses at length the ‘very attractive’ possibility that Gregory is the subject and ‘that the Homeric formula has become indelible’, (since one expects the accusative form if it refers to the poet). He even speculates about Gregory’s facial expression at the public reading of the poem for ‘making it clear that he was the subject’. Yet, there is no problem at all with God as the subject of πεποιθώς: the verses 32–34 do not relate to Gregory and the Christian God but to Job and the biblical God. The latter does trust his blameless servant Job (repeatedly, see Job 1:6–12, 2:1–6) and sends him to a contest against a tough athlete: Satan – at least, that is how Gregory manifestly interprets the divine role in the ordeals of Job, a role he emphatically does not claim in his own case.

An extensive bibliography and four indexes (general; selected Greek words discussed; selected passages discussed; manuscripts discussed) conclude the book.

There is one obvious absence in this book: the poems are not translated, and the reader is not explicitly referred to existing English or other translations (see Caroline White [1996: II,1,19] and Suzanne Abrams Rebillard [unpublished Brown thesis, 2003: II,1,19 and II,1,32]). Simelidis is, of course, well aware of these translations, which are repeatedly quoted in the commentary, often to be rebuked and corrected. No wonder: Simelidis himself regularly introduces his comments with phrases such as ‘these lines are not easy to understand’ (p. 207) or ‘the exact meaning of this phrase is not clear’ (p. 230). Here again a list of deviant interpretations from White (published with CUP) would have been useful for readers who are not sufficiently fluent in Greek, and who will tend to reach for a complete translation. This raises the question of the intended audience for the book. Skilled philologists, clearly: throughout the volume, long Greek quotations are inserted without translation or paraphrase; and even within English sentences, Greek words or phrases are used, and their comprehension is taken for granted. On the other hand, the author deems it necessary to explain, for instance, the legend of Icarus by summarizing the OCD entry (p. 144). One could call it an inconsistency – or an indication that this carefully edited and rich book serves a multiple audience.

K. Demoen: Gregor von Nazianz von Schwab / Simelidis, Selected Poems

Gent

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