

# Sources and Models of the Zoological Excursus in George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*. Part 1: Aithyia, Ibis, Spider

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**For citation:** Zeltchenko V. V. Sources and Models of the Zoological Excursus in George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*. Part 1: *Aithyia*, Ibis, Spider. *Philologia Classica* 2024, 19 (1), 121–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2024.108>

This article opens a series devoted to investigating the sources of the ample zoological excursus (vv. 916–1223) in the *Hexaemeron* by George of Pisidia, a 7<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine poet. Since the two attempts to find a general formula for George of Pisidia's treatment of his models have led to directly opposite results (according to Max Wellmann, the poet distanced himself from pagan zoologists; according to Luigi Tartaglia, on the contrary, he drew material from them, favouring Aelian), it seems that the question of the poem's sources should be addressed by a step-by-step examination of passages, paying attention to such evidence as the coincidence of minor details or words. In v. 1116 the unusual metaphor “*aithyia*, bending its winged cloud” (in the sense of “spreading its wings”) makes one think of an (unconscious?) association with Arat. *Phaen.* 918–920, where “a stretching cloud” is mentioned in the catalogue of storm's signs in immediate juxtaposition to the flapping of the wings of seabirds. In vv. 1117–1124 (the self-cleansing of the ibis) the reference to Galen is not a mere metonymy (= “the most skillful physician”), as interpreters have hitherto thought, but points to the poet's source: in the Galenic corpus this story is attested three times, and the passage closest to George of Pisidia's account is [Galen.] *Introd.* 1.2. In vv. 1154–1159 (the structure of the web) the confused sequence of the stages of the spider's work (first concentric circles, then radial threads), that contradicts both reality and (which is more important) the ancient tradition going back to Book IX of *Historia animalium*, seems to betray the influence of John Philoponus (*De opif. mundi*, p. 257, 24 sqq. Reinhardt). In Philoponus' text this sequence is justified by the fact that his rhetorical passage describes, strictly speaking, not the web itself, but a drawing of it made by a “diligent geometer”.

**Keywords:** George of Pisidia, *Hexaemeron*, ancient and Byzantine zoology, Aratus, Galen, John Philoponus.

Apart from disparate observations such as those below<sup>1</sup> and from brief notes by editors and translators, the question of the sources of the extensive zoological excursus (vv. 916–1293) in the *Hexaemeron* by George of Pisidia (hereafter GP; 7<sup>th</sup> century) has been discussed in general terms twice. The first was Max Wellmann, one of the most vigorous and representative adherents of *Einquellentheorien*, who put his colossal erudition and wit at the service of resurrecting the shadows of many Greek medical and zoological writ-

<sup>1</sup> The first draft of this paper was presented online in December 2023 at a research seminar of the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences; I am grateful to all the participants for their valuable comments. For consultations and bibliographical assistance, I am deeply obliged to Denis Keyer, Daria Kohler, Tatiana Kostyleva, Anna Malomud, Luigi Miraglia, Elya Saribekyan, and Jan Shavrin.

ers — but at the expense of extant authors with whose flesh and blood he fed his ghosts.<sup>2</sup> In the case of GP, Wellmann’s presupposition was that a poet composing a praise of the wisdom of God should not have drawn his material directly from pagan sources. In his search for a Christian compendium that could serve as a basis for GP, Wellmann focuses on *De animalibus* by Timotheus of Gaza (about 500 AD), the treatise which has survived in the form of rather poor excerpts from an 11<sup>th</sup> century paraphrase but should have been known to the poet of *Hexaemeron* in its authentic version.<sup>3</sup>

On the contrary, Luigi Tartaglia in his 2005 contribution proceeds from an exactly opposite principle: obeying “una volontà di diversificazione”,<sup>4</sup> GP in zoological matters preferred to turn not to Christian (with the exception, of course, of Basil the Great’s *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, whose role as the main model of the entire poem of GP cannot be disputed) but to pagan writers, primarily Aristotle and Aelian; in the valuable notes to his Italian translation of GP’s works,<sup>5</sup> Tartaglia clearly favours the latter.

Already these disagreements suggest that the problem cannot be resolved in a general way. It may seem that in the presence of such a richly branched tradition of zoological notions, true and fantastic, which are reproduced with only slight variations by so many authors (Pliny, Plutarch, Aelian etc. etc.), it is impossible to establish the immediate source used by GP in describing, for example, the prudence of the sea urchin or the wisdom of the bee. Nevertheless, the rejection of Wellmann’s rigid *a priori* schemes does not necessarily lead to capitulation in the face of ‘common knowledge’. In this series of notes, I aim to show just how such minor clues as the coincidence of unique details, rare words or metaphors sometimes permit to establish, step by step, the direct sources of GP. I flatter myself with the hope that the approach proposed below supports the trend that postulates for early Byzantine authors a more comprehensive and direct acquaintance with ancient zoological writings: as a recent and convincing example, let me refer to the paper by Colten Yam reconsidering the sources of Basil the Great’s Seventh Homily, the material of which had previously, since Jean Levie, been reduced to an Aristotelian epitome.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. *Aithyia*, or The Shadow of the Cloud (vv. 1112–1116)

Τίς μαντικούς δίδωσι τοῖς πτηνοῖς ὄρους;  
Μαντεύεται γὰρ ὑετοῦς<sup>7</sup> ἐν αἰθρίᾳ  
τῆς μακρογῆρω τῆς κορώνης τὸ στόμα,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. a modern evaluation of Wellmann’s work on the sources of ancient medical writings: “...I should stress that this is not to belittle the merits of Wellmann’s contribution to the study of ancient medicine, which was based on incredible learning and reflected in a tremendous amount of ungrateful but invaluable philological donkey-work in the more recondite areas of Greek and Roman literature. Yet especially in matters of interpretation and assessment of intellectual exchange and influence on the basis of similarities between different texts, the weaknesses of Wellmann’s arguments stand in marked contrast to the confidence and authoritative tone with which he presents his conclusions. Underlying all this is a dubious urge to see resemblances everywhere, a striking tendency to establish relationships between ‘schools’, ‘pupils’ and ‘teachers’ wherever possible and at almost any cost, and a characteristic desire to put on every author a label of *Schulangehörigkeit*” (van der Eijk 1999, 300–301).

<sup>3</sup> Wellmann 1927, 197–204.

<sup>4</sup> Tartaglia 2005, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Tartaglia 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Yam 2023; cf. Levie 1920.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ὑετόμαντις <...> κορώνη in Euphorion fr. 89 Powell (on the possible context of the fragment: Nietzsche 1873: 236). The familiarity of GP with this verse is not as improbable as it might seem at first sight,

πρὸ τοῦ δὲ πνεῦσαι τὰς πνοὰς προδεικνύει  
αἴθυια κολπώσασα τὸ πτηνὸν νέφος.

Who gives prophetic advice to birds? The mouth of the long-lived crow predicts rain in the midst of a clear sky, and the *aithyia*, curving its winged cloud, indicates the wind before it blows.

The cawing of the crow and the flapping of the wings of αἴθυια (this seabird cannot be precisely identified)<sup>8</sup> have been included in catalogues of bad-weather signs beginning with Aristotle (fr. 270. 21, p. 467b, 14–17; 24–25 Gigon = Ael. *NA* 7. 7); further see Theophr. *Sign.* 28 (αἴθυια); 39 (crow); Arat. 918–921 (αἴθυια); 999–1004; 1022–1023 (crow) *cum schol.*; Posidipp. 21. 2 Austin — Bastanini (αἴθυια); Verg. *Georg.* 1. 383–388; Plin. *NH* 18. 362.<sup>9</sup> For his brief account, GP may well have confined himself to the information contained in his favourite Aelian (*loc. cit.*): κόραξ δὲ αὖ καὶ κορώνη καὶ κολιοὺς δειλῆς ὀψίας εἰ φθέγγονται, χειμῶνος ἔσσεσθαί τινα ἐπιδημίαν διδάσκουσι. <...> νῆτται δὲ καὶ αἴθυια πτερυγίζουσαι πνεῦμα δηλοῦσιν ἰσχυρόν. However, I would like to call attention to the expression αἴθυια κολπώσασα τὸ πτηνὸν νέφος (meaning ‘spreading her wings wide’) in v. 1116.<sup>10</sup> What is singular here is the unparalleled metaphorical use of νέφος, its incongruity with ornithological reality (the plumage of aquatic birds cannot be called lush), and, last not least, the whimsical mannerism. Yet, in Aratus’ catalogue of the signs of the storm immediately after the flapping of the wings of seabirds (including αἴθυια) there is a mention of a *stretching cloud* on the top of a mountain (918–920):

Πολλάκι δ’ ἀγριάδες νῆσσαι ἢ εἰναλιδίνα  
αἴθυια χερσαῖα τινάσσονται πτερύγεσιν·  
ἢ νεφέλη ὄρεος μῆκνεται ἐν κορυφῆσιν.

It would be adventurous to assume that GP misunderstood (or rather misremembered?)<sup>11</sup> the last verse as a *comparison* of open wings with a cloud, which predetermined the metaphor he invented; but it seems at least permissible to conclude that the juxtaposition of the words αἴθυια and νεφέλη in the text of Aratus’ *Diosemeia* gave impetus to his poetic imagination. In favour of the direct influence of Aratus is also the fact that this poet, as well as GP, places the conventional epithet of the crow ‘long-lived’<sup>12</sup> in the

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since it is cited in the scholia to Nicander’s *Theriaca* (ad v. 406c Crugnola), a work which was popular with early Byzantine authors (Hatzimichali 2009, 23–26; Overduin 2015, 131–135).

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the cormorant; v. Arnott 2007, 13 (with further bibl.); Lunczer 2009, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Keller 1913, 98–99; Thompson 1936, 29; 171; Wachsmuth 1967, 199–200 (about αἴθυια; Wachsmuth convincingly demonstrates how in this and other similar omens the observations of nature are inextricably combined with folklore and popular religion); Kidd 1997, 488–499; 502–503; 522–523; Sider 2005, 167–168; Sider, Brunschön 2007, 129; 156; Mynott 2018, 24–32; etc. Other weather signs are also associated with these two birds, which I do not discuss here.

<sup>10</sup> It is significant that in the source of the Slavonic translation this difficult verse appears to have been drastically rewritten: *εφερα обьимающа облакы своими крылы* (Shliapkin 1882 [Шляпкин И. А. Шестоднев Георгия Пизиды в славяно-русском переводе 1385 года. Санкт-Петербург, ОЛДП, 1882], 34).

<sup>11</sup> In the paradosis of Arat. 920 there is no alternative to ἦ.

<sup>12</sup> According to the famous verses of Hesiod (fr. 304. 1–2 Merkelbach — West), ἐννέα τοι ζῶει γενεὰς λακέρυζα κορώνη / ἀνδρῶν ἡβῶντων; ancient interpreters have debated whether Hesiod’s γενεὰ means a period of human life, a generation (i. e. 30 years) or simply a year (Plut. *De def. orac.* 415C sqq.; a detailed

context of its ability to predict weather; v. Arat. 1022–1023: [to the signs of storm refers] καὶ ἐννεάγῃρα κορώνῃ / νύκτερον αἰδουσα.<sup>13</sup> As Kenneth Dover formulated on a similar occasion, “poets drew upon poets, not on bird-watchers”.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Ibis, or The Living Clyster Pipe (vv. 1117–1124)

Ἴβις δὲ ποίων εὐπορεῖ διδασκάλων  
 καὶ τοῦ Γαληνοῦ δείκνυται σοφωτέρα;  
 Τῆς γὰρ κάτωθεν ἐμφραγείσης ἐξόδου  
 ἀμηχανοῦσα πῶς ἀνοίξει τὴν θύραν, 1120  
 τὸν μακρὸν ἐκτείνασα λοξῶς αὐχένα  
 σίφωνα γοργὸν τεκτονεύει τὸ στόμα  
 καὶ χυλὸν ἄλμης ἐμβαλοῦσα τοῖς ἔσω  
 τὰ ξηρὰ ρευστοῖς ἐξεφόρτωσεν βάρῃ.

What kind of teachers does the ibis, which proves to be wiser than Galen, have at its disposal? For when its lower exit is locked, unable to open the door, it stretches out its long neck obliquely, turns its beak into a powerful pump and, launching a flow of salt water into its innards, gets rid of the dried-up heaviness by means of these streams.

The text we print here differs from that of Fabrizio Gonnelli<sup>15</sup> in one point. Following Leo Sternbach,<sup>16</sup> Gonnelli adopts in v. 1118 δεικνύει σοφοτέρους (sc. διδασκάλους; “e mostra che sono più sapienti di Galeno”), meanwhile *in apparatu* he expresses sympathy (“fort. recte”) also for δεικνυται σοφωτέρα<sup>17</sup> favoured by all previous editors.<sup>18</sup> The choice is not a simple one. Although δεικνύει σοφοτέρους has an obvious advantage as *lectio difficilior*, an analysis of similar constructions in GP’s poetry (he uses δεικνυμι more than 100 times) shows that in such a case we would rather expect a resumptive αὐτοῦς or ἐκείνους;

discussion of this confusing question: van den Broek 1972, 76–97). For a long list of places illustrating the common notion of crow longevity, v. Otto 1890, 93; Thompson 1936, 169; Merkelbach, West 1967, 159; Pollard 1977, 25–29; Arnott 2007, 168; etc. In fact, the life span of the crows is much shorter than that of humans: these birds seldom live to be 20, and most of them die before they are 10 (Arnott 1993, 129).

<sup>13</sup> The same Aratean combination is to be found in Hor. *Carm.* 3. 17. 12–13: *aquae <...> augur, / an-nosa cornix.*

<sup>14</sup> Dover 1993, 354.

<sup>15</sup> Gonnelli 1998, 190–192.

<sup>16</sup> Sternbach 1899, 26, n. 2.

<sup>17</sup> To the manuscript witnesses of this reading must be added the Slavonic translation: *и Галина явлжетсѧ премудрѣиши* (Shliapkin 1882, 35).

<sup>18</sup> Gonnelli seems to have hesitated until the last moment: his *Index verborum* (s. v. σοφός), contrary to the text, records in v. 1118 σοφωτέρα. This trifle would not have merited mention, had it not been for some consequences. Luigi Tartaglia, who was assembling the bilingual *Opera omnia* of GP at the same time as Gonnelli was working on his critical edition of *Hexaemeron*, received from the latter a typewritten Greek text of the poem and reproduced it without changes (Tartaglia 1998, 51; Gonnelli 1998, 5). As a result, Tartaglia’s edition reads δεικνύει σοφωτέρα, apparently a Gonnelli’s *pentimento*, while in his translation Tartaglia treats this strange combination as if it were *acc. plur. neutr.* σοφώτερα (“Ibis, che rivela cose più saggie di Galeno”; Tartaglia 1998, 378–379). To point out this mishap seems important because of the now common perception that the hard-to-find text of Gonnelli 1998, which came out in a limited number of copies, can be consulted from Tartaglia 1998 (cf. Lauxtermann 2019, 216, n. 93: “This splendid edition is not widely available in academic libraries; thankfully, however, it is reproduced, but without the critical apparatus... etc.”; surprisingly, it is Tartaglia’s and not Gonnelli’s text that is included in *TLG*).

cf. *In Heracl. red.* 69: αὐτὸς γὰρ ἡμῖν τὰς πρὸς εἰρήνην θύρας / τοῖς σοῖς ἀνοίξει πανταχοῦ σπουδάσασιν / δεικνὺς ἐκείνην τῷ κράτει σου σύνθρονον; *Epigr.* 108. 8–10: ἐφ’ οἷς συνεργήσας τε καὶ συνασπίσας [sc. ὁ Θεός] / τῷ πατρὶ τῷ σῶ <...> / ἔδειξεν αὐτὸν κοσμικὸν φονοκτόνον. For δεικνύται with *nominativus duplex* cf. *De van. vitae* 142; *Contra Sever.* 395.

The story of the ibis’ self-cleansing, which prompted the Egyptians who observed this bird to use a clyster, is widespread and well known.<sup>19</sup> According to Ann Ellis Hanson, the common source for authors mentioning this property of the ibis was some Hellenistic catalogue of skills taught to humans by animals.<sup>20</sup> At first glance, the GP’s account may seem entirely evasive and periphrastic, but in fact he uses the technical language of medical authors;<sup>21</sup> euphemisms, and quite telling ones (‘open the door’ in the sense of ‘defecate’), appear only in the v. 1121.<sup>22</sup>

Reconstructing the sources of the passage, Wellmann creates the following combination: the mention of the self-cleansing of ibis is found in the excerpts from the *Περὶ τῶν κατὰ συμπάθειαν καὶ ἀντιπάθειαν*, written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD by an otherwise unknown Nepualius (21 Gemoll); Nepualius was used by Timotheus of Gaza; GP, in turn, drew his information from a lost part of Timotheus’ work (whose excerptor at one point offers a bare list of wise animals mentioned by Timotheus, including the ibis: Timoth. *De anim.* 50 = p. 27, 10 Haupt).<sup>23</sup> But, however the general question of Timotheus’ dependence on Nepualius may be resolved,<sup>24</sup> the latter’s account of ibis is not merely “ungenau”, as Wellmann labeled it,<sup>25</sup> but fundamentally at odds both with GP and, as we shall see below, with the entire tradition: according to Nepualius, the ibis does not wash his intestines with salt water, but drinks it to induce vomiting (*loc. cit.*: ἴβις νοσοῦσα ὕδωρ ἀλικὸν πολὺ πίνει καὶ ἐμεῖ καὶ οὐ νοσεῖ).

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<sup>19</sup> Roeder 1914, 810; Wellmann 1927, 202, Anm. 7; Thompson 1936, 114; Pfeiffer 1949, 307, ad Call. fr. 382 dub.; Pease 1958, 873; Griffiths 1970, 558; Weber 1996, 124; Caramico 2006, 146; Petit 2009, 110 (with an instructive summary of its reception in New European literature and emblematics); etc. On the real background of this legend (ibises, like other birds, collect with their beaks the oily secretions of the coccygeal gland, which are necessary for plumage care; on the other hand, ancient Egyptian physicians widely used enemas since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC), v. Friedenwald, Morrison 1940, 68–71.

<sup>20</sup> Hanson 1985: 26.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. e. g. Hippocr. *De flat.* 7: ἐμφραχθείσης δὲ τῆς κάτω κοιλίας; Galen. *Ars med.* vol. I, p. 391, 13 Kühn: ἡ δ’ [ἐμφραξις] ὑπὸ κόπρου σκληρᾶς ἐμφραχθείσης ἐντέρῳ, *et saepius*. On the use of ἔξοδος to denote the anus in the zoological writings of the Aristotelian corpus, v. *LSJ*, s. v. A II 3. The word σίφων is a *terminus technicus* referring to pipes for various kinds of medical infusions and extractions (Bliquez 2015, 225–226, 231–232). Ancient medicine distinguished between soft (πρᾶοι, ἀπαλοὶ) and hard (δριμεῖς, δραστικοί, σφοδροὶ) lavages; for these latter, among other ingredients, salt water (ἄλμη) or sea water (θάλαττα) was used. See e. g.: Hipp. *De mulier. affect.* 1. 178; 187; Galen. *De method. med.* vol. X, p. 815 Kühn; *De simpl. med.* vol. XI, p. 488 Kühn; Kind 1921, 886. In *Περὶ κλυσμών* by Rufus of Ephesus, the material of which is preserved in the compilations of Oribasius and Aetius of Amida (Daremborg, Ruelle 1879, 331–338, fr. 64), the ἄλμη-enema is mentioned more than once: cf. Oribas. *Coll. med.* 8. 24. 1; 34; 47 (in the latter case specifically as a remedy for constipation); *Synops.* 1. 19. 15–16; 8. 5. 3; *Eclog. med.* 54. 9; Aet. *Amid.* 3. 159.

<sup>22</sup> It is characteristic that Manuel Philes (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries; *De anim.* 378–387), imitating GP in a poem on the same subject, makes extensive use of his predecessor’s vocabulary, but does not support his euphemistic manner, employing strong words as πύγη and κοπρία. Here the generic difference between Philes’ ‘naturalistic’ zoology and GP’s religious and hymnic one (Gonnelli 1996, 117–118; Lauxtermann 2019, 216) is manifested at the lexical level.

<sup>23</sup> Wellmann 1927, 202.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. a rather sceptic view: Zumbo 1996, 425.

<sup>25</sup> Wellmann 1927, 202, Anm. 7.

On the contrary, Luigi Tartaglia, faithful to his principle of bringing the zoological material of *Hexaemeron* to Aelian as much as possible, points to *NA* 2. 35 and 10. 29.<sup>26</sup> One cannot agree with this either: although Aelian, unlike Nepualius, explicitly says that the ibis taught the Egyptians how to use enemas, he defiantly refuses to pass on the details of this bird's self-cleansing, apparently for reasons of decency (2. 35: "and how he taught the first who saw it, others will tell"; the second passage mentioned is equally evasive: in retiring to sleep, the ibis "washes and cleans itself"). The details necessary for a colourful description by GP are not found either in Cicero (*ND* 2. 126; apparently from Panaetius) or in Plutarch (to the reference to *De soll. anim.* 974C given by Querci and Gonnelli<sup>27</sup> it must also be added *De Isid. et Os.* 381C): both of them limit themselves to a brief indication that the ibis purges itself (Plutarch adds "with salt water", using the same word ἄλμη as GP), and the Egyptians adopted this skill from it. Pliny's account to which Morel and Querci refer<sup>28</sup> is more detailed, but also insufficient due to its omissions (*NH* 8. 97: *simile quiddam et volucris in eadem Aegypto monstravit, quae vocatur ibis, rostri aduncitate per eam partem se perluens, qua reddi ciborum onera maxime salubre est*).

It is remarkable that all commentators pass over the mention of Galen in v. 1118, apparently believing that GP names him in a generic and figurative sense, as an example of a famous physician (to such a usage cf. vv. 934, 1501, and especially 1345, where God is called Γαληνός τῶν ὄλων, 'Galen of all things', i. e. the healer of all diseases; also *De resur.* 28; *Heracl.* 2. 41). In our case, however, the reference to Galen is quite specific, since the account of the self-cleansing of the ibis is attested three times in the corpus of writings ascribed to him:

- (1) A brief mention in Galen. *De venae sect. adv. Eresistr.* vol. XI, p. 168 Kühn: ἔγωγε <...> πολλάκις εἶδον <...> τὴν Αἰγυπτίαν ὄρνιθα κλυστήρα μιμησαμένην;
- (2) An elaborate narrative in the introduction to the pseudo-Galenic treatise *De clysteribus et colica*, which is to be reconstructed from Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew translations, as far as from the paraphrase by the 6<sup>th</sup> century medical writer Severus Iatrosophista (on the ibis see Sever. *De clyster.*, p. 1–2 Dietz).<sup>29</sup> This particular version of the story, which has never yet come to the attention of scholars who have written about the ibis' self-healing, uses a number of details that find no parallel in the rest of the tradition (ibis diet causing constipation; its retreat to a seashore; false reference to Herodotus as the source of the tale etc.);
- (3) Finally, in the opening section of another work known under Galen's name, the widely popular *Introductio sive Medicus*,<sup>30</sup> in the discussion of the origins of Egyptian medicine we find the story of the ibis (1. 2; vol. XIV, p. 675 Kühn): καὶ τὸ κλύζειν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰβειῶς φασὶν εὐρεθῆναι, πληρούσης τὸ περὶ τὸν τράχηλον δέρμα, ὡς κλυστήρος ἄσκωμα θαλασσοῦ ὕδατος καὶ Νειλαίου καὶ διὰ τοῦ ῥάμφους ἐνείεισθαι ἐαυτῇ ὀπισθεν ("and the enemas are also said to have been invented thanks to the ibis, which fills the skin round the neck with sea and Nile water, like a bulb of a syringe, and by means of its beak injects it into its rear"). As can be seen, this passage is closer to the text of *Hexaemeron* than any

<sup>26</sup> Tartaglia 1998, 379; Tartaglia 2005, 45, n. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Querci 1777, 223; Gonnelli 1998, 191.

<sup>28</sup> Morel 1584, 40; Querci, *loc. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> For the texts of the various versions see Bürgel, Käs 2016, 67; 82; 86; Aubin 2021/2022, 236–238; 241–243; 286.

<sup>30</sup> Its dating is a matter of controversy (Petit 2009, XXXVI–LI; Jouanna 2009, 382–388); in any case, a Latin translation of the 5<sup>th</sup> century provides the *terminus ante quem*.

other account of the story known to us, and contains all the material that GP needed for his rhetorical amplification. The GP's familiarity with medical literature is certified by the abundance of relevant terminological vocabulary in his poems.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The Spider, or The Drawing of the Web (vv. 1151–1168)

Τίς τοὺς ἀράχνας λεπτοδακτύλους πλάσας  
 νήθειν διδάσκει καὶ πρὸς ἔργα τοὺς μίτους  
 ἐκ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐντέρων ἀναπτύειν;  
 Ποία δὲ τέχνη γραμμικὴ πρὸς τὰς βάσεις  
 βάλλουσιν ἀρχὰς καὶ προτείνουσιν δέσεις, 1155  
 μέσῳ δὲ κέντρῳ τὰς ἐπάρσεις τῶν μίτων  
 κύκλους ἀπαρτίζουσιν ἠκριβωμένους  
 καὶ τῇ μεταξὺ τοῦ κενοῦ διαστάσει  
 στύλους ὑφαρμόζουσιν ἀντισυνθέτους  
 ὅπως τὸ μηχανήμα τῆς λεπτουργίας 1160  
 ὡς ἐξ ἀράχνου συντεθὲν μὴ συμπίεση,  
 ὃς διττὸν ἔργον ἐξ ἑνὸς ποιεῖ μίτου,  
 λῖνα πρὸς ἄγραν καὶ πρὸς οἴκησιν στέγην;  
 Ὅν ἐντρεπέσθω πᾶς τις ἀφρόνως λέγων  
 ὕλην ἀναρχον· εἰ γὰρ ὕλην οὐκ ἔχων 1165  
 σκώληξ ὑφαίνει, τὴν μὲν ὕλην δευτέραν,  
 πρωτοχρόνους δὲ τοὺς ἀράχνας λεκτέον,  
 ὡς τῶν ἐνύλων ἀρχιτέκτονας μίτων.

“Who made spiders slender-fingered and taught them to spin and send forth threads for their web from their own bowels? And what geometry is this that enables them to lay the foundations at the bottom, extend the connections, thicken the yarns at the very centre and turn them into perfect circles, and build a grid of supports in between the empty spaces, so that this structure of gossamer fabric, though spider-produced, may not collapse? Spiders make two things from one yarn: a hunting-net and a place to stay. Shame on anyone who insanely claims that matter is without beginning! For if the silkworm weaves without having materials, then one should say that matter comes second and that spiders, as architects of material threads, are first in time”.

The translation quoted (with some modification in v. 1166) is by Marc D. Lauxtermann,<sup>32</sup> in whose compelling book on Byzantine poetry the excursus on the spider<sup>33</sup> is

<sup>31</sup> Pertusi 1959, 41–42; Frendo 1975; Lauritzen 2020, 62–63; cf. above, n. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Lauxtermann 2009: 221.

<sup>33</sup> For ancient conceptions of spiders and webs see Keller 1913, 461–470; Steier 1929; Greco *et al.* 2021, and, first of all, Beavis 1988, 34–44, a comprehensive study on which I will constantly rely in this part of the paper (it is regrettably, however, that Beavis does not take into account GP and a number of other Byzantine authors, as well as Philo's dialogue *De animalibus* [§ 17–19] which has survived in Armenian translation: Terian 1981). As Beavis notes, the arachnophobia was almost completely unfamiliar to the ancient Greeks and Romans: due to its industriousness, hunting ability, and above all its sophisticated weaving skills, this animal is endowed with the same consistently positive connotations as bees or ants (Beavis 1988: 39; poisonous spiders were named by a separate word φάλαγξ/φαλάγγιον). The misunderstanding of this fact can lead to aberrations: for example, J. M. de la Fuente includes the hymn to the spider by Christodorus of Mytilene in the rhetorical tradition of “praise of unpleasant things”, together with encomia to the fly, flea, etc. (Fuente 2004, 96–99).

chosen to present to the reader the peculiar features of GP's didactic art and inspiration. Thanks to Lauxtermann, these lines became the third zoological passage in the *Hexaemeron* that had undergone any detailed commentary since the Querci's edition of 1777.<sup>34</sup> This is how he summarises their sources:

Whilst the theological interpretation of the spider and its web indirectly derives from Basil the Great, the zoological details ultimately go back to Aelian (*De natura animalium*, I, §21). And the somewhat superfluous remark about spiders building their web as 'a hunting-net and a place to stay' [vv. 1162–1163], which seems to disrupt the flow of the argument, goes back to the Second Theological Oration of Gregory of Nazianzos (*Or.* 28, §25). This kind of intertextual bricolage is typical of didactic poetry in general: all that is good is worth repeating, again and again. But this does not mean that the poets do not add anything of their own. The components Pisides uses here may be heterogeneous, but the assemblage is his and his alone.<sup>35</sup>

For all the depth and elegance, this description seems both overly categorical and incomplete; so, it is worth reviewing the sources of the spider passage, and I will begin with those that Lauxtermann refers to.<sup>36</sup> The influence of Greg. Naz. *Or.* 28. 25 is manifested not so much in the isolated formula *λίνα καὶ στέγην* (the question of its origin seems, on the contrary, more complex; see below), but first of all on the macro-level, i. e. in the very pairing of the bee (the subject of the preceding lines *Hex.* 1136–1350) and the spider as makers of geometrically perfect works. Although the juxtaposition of these two examples is in itself quite common,<sup>37</sup> GP's relation to Gregory is confirmed by the disparaging mention of Euclid who has much to learn from the little creatures of God: in the *Hexaemeron* it crowns the section concerning the bee (vv. 1148–1450), while his predecessor develops it in the paired description of a spider's web.<sup>38</sup>

GP's debt to Aelian, on the contrary, appears to be considerably more modest than Tartaglia and Lauxtermann have assumed (see below), but it can by no means be denied: following the author of *De natura animalium*, GP places special emphasis on the fact that the spider "spits out the thread from its own innards" (vv. 1152–1153); cf. *Ael. NA* 1.

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<sup>34</sup> The preceding ones are vv. 949–957 (catoblepas) and 1215–1232 (locust) thoroughly analysed in Gonnelli 1991 and Tartaglia 2005, 56–57 *resp.*

<sup>35</sup> Lauxtermann 2019, 223; the author draws on the conclusions of Tartaglia 1998, 381 and Tartaglia 2005, 47; 50.

<sup>36</sup> Theological matters lying beyond my purpose, I shall limit myself to a brief remark on the address-ees of the invective in vv. 1164–1168. Querci (the only editor to attempt a doxographic commentary on the passage) notes: "Aristotelem ipsum praecipue vexat Pisida" (Querci 1777, 224); Lauxtermann (2019, 222) also speaks of the "proof of the wrongness of the Aristotelian belief that matter is eternal" citing Basil. *Hom. in Hex.* 1. 2. In my opinion, however, the formula ὕλη ἀναρχος in v. 1165, as well as the counterexamples of the spider and silkworm, which, like God, create matter *ex nihilo* rather than work upon it, points to a different target, namely to Platonic cosmogony with its dualism of demiurge and matter (*Tim.* 81A sqq.). The Christian refutation of this view began with the early apologists: see Theophil. *Ad Autol.* 2. 4 (with explicit reference to Plato); Tat. *Or. ad Graec.* 5. 7: οὐτε γὰρ ἀναρχος ἡ ὕλη καθάπερ καὶ ὁ θεός, οὐτε διὰ τὸ ἀναρχον ἰσοδύναμος τῷ θεῷ, γενητὴ δέ; cf. Köckert 2009, 198 ff. Basil the Great contends with it at length in *Hom. in Hex.* 2. 2: it is there, and not in the First Homily, that the concept of ὕλη appears, in conjunction with the recognisable terminology of the *Timaeus* (Giet 1949, 143–144 n. 3; Köckert 2009, 350–356, and Anm. 180: "Basilius spielt deutlich auf platonische Materiebeschreibungen an") and, *inter alia*, with the example of (human) weaving. Later on, οὐκ ἀναρχος ἡ ὕλη became a kind of slogan in anti-Manichean polemics, which is also relevant to GP.

<sup>37</sup> Dickerman 1911.

<sup>38</sup> Tartaglia 2005, 50.



21: οὐδὲ ἔξωθεν λαμβάνει τὸ νῆμα, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς οἰκείας νηδύος τοὺς μίτους ἐξάγουσα <...> καὶ δι' ὧν ἐξυφαίνει παρὰ τῆς γαστροῦ λαβοῦσα, διὰ τῶνδε ἐκείνην ἐκτρέφει πάνυ φιλεργούσα.<sup>39</sup>

The question of the sources of the main part of the excursus, which successively records the web creation, is much more difficult. Most authors praising the art of the spider describe his marvellous work in general terms, without separating the stages of its origin: among them both Aelian (*NA* 6. 57) and Gregory of Nazianzus (*loc. cit.*; see also Sen. *Epist.* 121. 22; Plut. *De soll. anim.* 966E–F). It must be said that for ancient observers the exact sequence in which a spider weaves a circular web was not easy to determine; modern understanding of this complex process is based on monitoring spiders under laboratory conditions, which include photo and video recording.<sup>40</sup> Despite these complications, a generally correct view of the problem was already achieved in the pseudo-Aristotelian Ninth book of *Historia animalium*.<sup>41</sup> This concise description, like most of the subsequent ones, makes extensive use of weaving terminology (623a, 7–11): ὑφαίνει γὰρ πρῶτον μὲν διατείναν πρὸς τὰ πέρατα πανταχόθεν, εἶτα στημονίζεται ἀπὸ τοῦ μέσου (λαμβάνει δὲ τὸ μέσον ἰκανῶς), ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ὥσπερ κρόκας ἐμβάλλει, εἶτα συνυφαίνει (“first the spider weaves the stretch, [creating] the borders [of the web] on all sides; then it brings out the warp threads starting from the centre — it knows how to determine the centre — and on them it throws something like weft threads; then it weaves them together”). The same triple sequence is found in Pliny (*NH* 11. 80), who reproduces Pseudo-Aristotle “with certain immaterial expansions”.<sup>42</sup>

On the contrary, GP in his detailed account unexpectedly reverses the second and third stages: the creation of the contour (1154–1155) is first followed by the concentric circles inscribed in it (1156–1157) and only then by the radial (ἀντισύνθετοι, litt. ‘perpendicular’) threads supporting the construction (1158–1159).<sup>43</sup> It might seem that a parallel to this transposition is given by Philostr. *Imag.* 2. 28. 3;<sup>44</sup> but, as Beavis justly remarks, this passage “occurs in the context of a description of a painting, and depicts in static terms the same three component parts as are detailed in the *Historia <animalium>*”.<sup>45</sup> In other words, Philostratus describes in an arbitrary sequence the *result* of the spider’s work, not its *progress*. Thus, we need another, a more dynamic example of the inverted order; and such an example, I believe, is provided by John Philoponus (*De opificio mundi* p. 257, 24–258, 1 Reinhardt):

<sup>39</sup> Querci 1777, 224; Gonnelli 1998, 195; Tartaglia 1998, 381, n. 182. “There were two rival theories among classical zoologists as to the method by which the silk was actually produced. The more accurate, ascribed to Democritus, was that it was formed internally as a kind of excretion (*HA* 623a; Pliny XI. 80; Aelian I. 21), and the alternative that it developed as some kind of external or surface product” (Beavis 1988, 42; cf. also Lurè 1970 [Лурье С. Я. Демокрит: Тексты. Перевод. Исследования. Ленинград, Наука, 1970], 134; 347; 539, ad Democr. fr. 544; Greco *et al.* 2021, 140–142).

<sup>40</sup> See, e. g., Reed 1968, 74–89.

<sup>41</sup> Beavis 1988, 40–42; Greco *et al.* 2021, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Beavis 1988, 41; cf. Capponi 1994, 132–133.

<sup>43</sup> In imitation of GP the same sequence is adopted later by Christodorus of Mytilene (11<sup>th</sup> century) in his short poem about a spider (*Vers. var.* 122. 32–41; 64–67; 79–81 De Groote; on Christodorus’ dependence on GP see Lauxtermann 2019, 221–222) and by Manuel Philes (*De anim.* 1466–1469).

<sup>44</sup> (1) Τετράγωνος μὲν αὐτῆ μήρινθος περιβέβληται ταῖς γωνίαις οἷον πείσμα τοῦ ἴστου, (3) περιήπται δὲ τῇ μηρίνθῳ λεπτός ἰστός πολλοὺς ἀποτετορνευμένους κύκλους, (2) βρόχοι δὲ ἐκτενεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου κύκλου μέχρι τοῦ σμικροτάτου διαπλέκονται διαλείποντες <ἀπ’> ἀλλήλων ὅσον οἱ κύκλοι.

<sup>45</sup> Beavis 1988, 41.

ὁ δὲ ἀράχνης ἐν πόσῳ κόσμῳ καὶ κάλλει τὸ ἀράχνιον ἐξυφαίνει; ποῖος γεωμέτρης οὕτως ἀκριβῶς πλείονας ἀλλήλοις περιγράφει κύκλους στήμοσι λεπτοῖς οἷα συνδέσμοις ἴσον διεστῶσιν ἀλλήλων συνεχόμενους, μακραῖς πανταχόθεν ἰσὶ τοῦ παντὸς διατεταμένου τεχνήματος· οἶκος ἅμα τῷ πεποιηκῶτι καὶ δίκτυον εἰς ἄγραν τροφῆς ἐπιτήδειον;

As for the spider, in what order and with what beauty does it weave its web? What geometer can so carefully describe circles of increasing diameter, connected by thin filaments of warp, which are at an equal distance from each other — so that the structure, stretched on all sides by long fibres, serves its creator both as a house and as a net adapted for the extraction of subsistence?

The sequence that GP eventually adopts looks absurd, since if the spider were to create concentric circles before radial threads, these circles would hang in the air. This alogism, however, will be justified if we assume that GP relies on Philoponus, who in fact depicts not the web but a geometer's drawing of it (ποῖος γεωμέτρης οὕτως ἀκριβῶς κτλ.) that can be sketched in any order. The affinity of GP and Philoponus is supported by the final syntagm of the latter's account (οἶκος ἅμα τῷ πεποιηκῶτι καὶ δίκτυον εἰς ἄγραν τροφῆς ἐπιτήδειον), which corresponds to the epigrammatic *pointe* of *Hex.* 1162–1163. L. Tartaglia rightly cites as a parallel for these lines not only Greg. Naz. *Orat.* 28, 25 (οἰκησὶν τε ὁμοῦ τιμίαν, καὶ θήραν τῶν ἀσθενεστέρων εἰς τροφῆς ἀπόλαυσιν), as mentioned above, but also the passage of Philoponus;<sup>46</sup> cf. also Philopon. *In Aristot. Phys.* CAG, vol. XVI, p. 311, 5–6 Vitelli: ὁ γοῦν ἀράχνης ποιεῖ τὸ ἀράχνιον οὐ μάτην ἀλλ' ἔνεκά του, εἰς ἄγραν τε τροφῆς καὶ εἰς οἰκησιν. I have only to add that the interest of GP in Philoponus' writings has recently been postulated, with other examples and from a theological perspective, by Frederick Lauritzen.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Tartaglia 1998, 381, n. 182; Tartaglia 2005, 50, n. 37 (“tale circostanza rende a rigor di logica possibile la dipendenza del Piside a Giovanni Filopono”). The parallel with Philoponus is also adduced in Gonelli 1998, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Lauritzen 2020, 63–64; Lauritzen relates this interest to the milieu of Patriarch Sergius, the patron of GP and the addressee of *Hexaemeron*.

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## Источники и образцы зоологического экскурса в «Шестодневе» Георгия Писиды. Часть 1: *aithyia*, ибис, паук

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**Для цитирования:** Zeltchenko V. V. Sources and Models of the Zoological Excursus in George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*. Part 1: *Aithyia*, Ibis, Spider. *Philologia Classica* 2024, 19 (1), 121–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2024.108>

Статья открывает цикл, посвященный исследованию источников обширного зоологического экскурса в «Шестодневе» Георгия Писиды, византийского поэта VII в. Поскольку две попытки найти общую формулу для работы Георгия Писиды с его образцами привели к прямо противоположным результатам (согласно Макс Вельману, поэт дистанцировался от языческих зоологов, а согласно Луиджи Тарталья, напротив, черпал материал из них, отдавая предпочтение Элиану), представляется, что вопрос об источниках поэмы следует решать точечным разбором мест, обращая внимание на такие улики, как совпадение отдельных деталей или слов. В ст. 1116 необычная метафора «*aithyia*, изгибающая свое крылатое облако» (в смысле «расправляющая крылья»)

заставляет думать о (возможно, бессознательной) ассоциации со стихами Arat. *Phaen.* 918–920, где в каталоге примет бури в непосредственном соседстве с хлопаньем крыльев морских птиц названо «вытягивающееся облако». В ст. 1117–1124 (самоочищение ибиса) упоминание Галена не является простой метонимией (= «искусный врач»), как думали интерпретаторы до сих пор, но указывает на источник поэта: в галеновском корпусе соответствующий рассказ засвидетельствован трижды, и наиболее близок к Георгию Писиде пассаж [Galen.] *Introd.* 1.2. Наконец, в ст. 1154–1159 (строение паутины) перепутанная последовательность стадий работы паука (сперва концентрические круги, затем радиальные нити), которая противоречит как реальности, так и (что более важно) античной традиции, восходящей к IX книге *Historia animalium*, выдает влияние Иоанна Филопона (*De opif. mundi* p. 257, 24 sqq. Reinhardt); в свою очередь, у Филопона такая последовательность оправдана тем, что в его риторическом пассаже описывается, строго говоря, не сама паутина, а ее чертеж, сделанный «старательным геометром». *Ключевые слова:* Георгий Писида, «Шестоднев», античная и византийская зоология, Арат, Гален, Иоанн Филопон.

Received: 14.03.2024

Accepted: 19.06.2024