THE CHRISTUS PATIENS AND ROMANOS THE MELODIST: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON DEPENDENCE AND DATING

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The title Christus patiens — or its Greek equivalent, viz. Χριστός πάσχων — is generally used by scholars when referring to the dramatic representation of the Passion of Christ, which is traditionally attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus. This attribution — and, accordingly, the authenticity of the play — has been contested since the last decades of the 16th century. In the Introduction to his influential critical edition of the text, A. Tuilier (1969) argues in defence of this much-disputed authenticity. However, when judging by the reviews and articles published in the intervening years, it seems that his arguments have not enjoyed general approval.

During the long dispute regarding the true origin of the Christus patiens, many literary parallels have been cited as part of attempts to identify either a terminus post quem, or a terminus ante quem, by which the possible date of origin of the play may be calculated. Scholarly opinion has discredited some of these alleged parallels as inconclusive, mainly for the following reasons:

1. The parallels involve themes or phrases which occur, or which may be expected to occur, quite frequently in literary presentations of the events relating to the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. These themes or phrases may be regarded as literary τόκοι, or loci communes, and they do not constitute any proof of the interdependence between two specific literary works.

2. Even in cases where literary dependence can be definitely established, or be argued with great probability, it often remains impossible to determine the direction in which the influence has operated. In other words, it may still remain impossible to indicate with certainty which of the works or authors concerned is the source, and which the recipient, of the influence producing the literary parallel.

Some of these parallels, however, warrant a renewed investigation, and a reconsideration of their significance. Among these are the analogies between certain passages in the Christus patiens, and the presentation of the Passion of Christ in two of the kontakia by Romanos the Melodist.
This study intends to analyse these parallels between the *Christus patiens* and Romanos, and to examine critically the conclusions which different scholars have drawn from them. Its aim is to illustrate that some of these conclusions go beyond the evidence upon which they claim to be based, while others are manifestly wrong. Finally, a newly formulated and duly verified conclusion will be given.

The most conspicuous parallels between Romanos and the *Christus patiens* occur in lines 454–460 of the play, and the first strophe of Romanos’ *kontakion On Mary at the Cross.*

In order to appreciate the full extent of the correspondence between these two passages, the text of both is given here:

*Christus patiens*, lines 454–465:

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Πη πη πορεύη, Τέχνον; ὅς ἀπωλόμην:  
ἐκείτι τίνος τὸν ταχύν τελείς δρόμον;  
μὴ γάμος αὕθες ἐν Κανά κάκει τρέχεις,  
ἲν' εἴς ὑδατος οἰνοποιήςς ξένως;  
Ἐφεύρωμαι σου, Τέχνον, ἢ μενῶ σ’ ἐτι;  
Δός δός λόγον μοι, τοῦ Θεοῦ Πατρὸς Λόγε,  
μὴ δὴ παρέλθης σίγα δουλὴν μητέρα;  
νῦν γὰρ στόματος φιλίου χρήζω σέθεν  
φωνῆς ἀκουσία καὶ προσειπεῖν, ὁ Τέχνον.  
Δός μοι, πρὸς αὐτοῦ Πατρός, ὁ Τέχνον, σέθεν,  
σοῦ θεσπεσίου χρωτὸς ἄφασθαι χερῶν  
φαῦσιν ποῦδον τε καὶ περιπτύξασθαι σε.  
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*On Mary at the Cross (Oxford 19/SC 35)*, strophe 1:

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Τὸν ἰδιὸν ἄρα ἢ ἀμνᾶς θεωροῦσα  
πρὸς σφαγῆν ἑλκύμενον ἡμολούθει Μαρία τρυχομένη  
μεθ’ ἑτέρων γυναικῶν, ταῦτα βοῶσα.  
Ποῦ πορεύη, τέχνον; Τίνος χάριν τὸν ταχύν δρόμον τελείς;  
Μή ἑτερος γάμος πάλιν ἕστιν ἐν Κανά  
κάκει νυνι σπεύδεις ἰν’ εἴς ὑδατος αὐτοῖς οἶνον πούήςς;  
Συνέλθω σου, τέχνον, ἢ μενῶ σε μᾶλλον;  
Δός μοι λόγον, Λόγε: μὴ σιγῶν παρέλθης με,  
ὁ ἀγνήν τηρήσας με, ὁ υἱὸς καὶ Θεός μου.  
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A mere glance at these passages will probably convince most readers that the works to which they belong are undeniably interdependent. The correspondence between them is quite obvious, and is so extensive, that there seems to be but one logical conclusion: One of the authors concerned has in all probability borrowed this passage from the other — unless, of course, the passage in the *Christus patiens* is merely a later interpolation. In that
case the borrower may be a scribe or an editor, and accordingly, the parallels would be irrelevant to any question regarding the interdependence of the original form of the works concerned.

It is scarcely probable, though, that the passage in question has been interpolated. It fits the context too well, as the following considerations indicate:

1. Both before and after these lines, there occur rhetorical patterns similar to those occurring in the passage itself; *e.g.* the repetitions (*anadiplosis*) in 433, 448, 453, 466, and 467, and the omission of conjunctions (*asyndeton*).
2. The themes of speech and touch occur in close connection, both in this passage (lines 459–463) and directly afterwards (lines 468–469).

Consequently, only two possibilities remain: Either Romanos has borrowed from the *Christus patiens*, or the author of the play has borrowed from Romanos. In terms of this preliminary conclusion, the question to be decided is 'who borrowed from whom?' Moreover, since scholarly opinion is still divided between the 4th and the 12th centuries as possible dates of origin for the play, and since the era of Romanos is a fixed point of reference squarely between these two extremes, the question may be formulated as follows: Does Romanos provide a *terminus ante quem* or a *terminus post quem* for the *Christus patiens*?

Supporters of the opinion that the *kontakion* *On Mary at the Cross* constitutes the literary source of *Christus patiens* 454–460, and that, accordingly, the play must be of later origin, argue along the following lines: These parallels prove only that the unknown author of the play has imitated the Melodist. This simply confirms — they seem to believe — what has been accepted already, *viz.* that the play is unauthentic and of late origin. After all — they say — the play is an imitation from beginning to end, and a dull and uninspiring one too.³

With the introduction of the *kanon* into Orthodox liturgy, the *kontakion* was reduced to *prooimion* and first strophe. These circumstances could imply that the first strophe of the *kontakion* in question may have been known to an author who did not have access to the *kontakaria*. Consequently, the fact that the parallels between the play and the *kontakion* are limited to the first strophe of the latter, is regarded by Grosdidier de Mótans⁴ as indicating the unauthenticity of the *Christus patiens*.

Furthermore, the fact that the material occurring in Romanos presents itself in amplified form in the play, is regarded by A. Momigliano⁵ as a definite indication that Romanos is the source and the author of the *Christus patiens* the imitator.

Exponents of the opposite point of view, *viz.* that the play is anterior to Romanos, cite the following evidence: the dramatic character of this *kontakion*, quite probably derived from a dramatic source; the habit of the first melodists to draw inspiration from the Fathers of the Church,
especially from Gregory of Nazianzus and from St. John Chrysostom; and the expressions belonging to dramatic language, specifically to the style of Euripides.

Tuillier (op. cit., 42–4) discusses four instances of expressions occurring within these parallel passages, which reflect the language of the classical theatre. These are:

- \( \pi \nu \pi \nu \pi \nu \pi \nu \nu \nu \nu \; \tau \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \; (454) 
- \( \varepsilon \kappa \pi \tau \tau \pi \nu \pi \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu 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Even though you descended into the grave, Immortal One, you have still destroyed the power of Hades and you have arisen as victor, God Christ, who extended joyous greetings to the women bearing perfumes and gave peace to your apostles, who provides resurrection to those who have fallen.

"Τούτο δὲ τούτου τοῦ σκοποῦ οἱ συνετάλ φυμηθεῖσαι προεπεμφαν, ὡς οἴμαι, τὴν Μαγδαληνὴν Μαρίαν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ὡς λέγει ὁ Θεολόγος.

"Ἡν δὲ σκοτία, ἀλλ' ἐκείνην πόθος κατέλαμψεν· ὅθεν καὶ κατείδε τὸν μέγαν λίθον ἐκκεκυλισμένον ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας τῆς ταφῆς καὶ εἶπεν ὑποστρέφασα· Μαθηταὶ, μάθετε τοῦτο δείδων καὶ μή με κρύφητε, ἢν νοήσητε· ὁ λίθος οὐκέτι καλύπτει τὸν τάφον· μὴ ἄρα ἤραν τὸν Κύριόν μου;

"Οἱ φροντοὶ γὰρ οὐ φαίνονται, ἀλλ' ἐφυγὼν μὴ ἐγήγερται ὁ τοῖς πεσοῦσιν παρέχων ἀνάστασιν;

Agreed on this point, the wise women sent forth — I think — Mary Magdalene to the tomb, as the Theologian says.

It was dark, but fervour illuminated her; and therefore she observed that the large stone had been rolled aside from the entrance of the tomb, and having returned, she said:

Disciples, discern this which I have seen and do not hide it from me if you understand:

No more does the stone cover the tomb; have they perhaps removed my Lord?

For no guards are to be seen; they have fled: has He risen who provides resurrection to those who have fallen?

The main theme of both the kontakion and the third part of the play is the victory of Christ over the power of death. Of course, this theme is explicitly formulated in the first προοίμιον of the kontakion. It is repeated in the second προοίμιον, in the climactic formula Ἀνεστή ἁγία Χριστός. In the play, this theme is expressed in various ways. It occurs during the course of the deliberation of the θεοτόκος (1920–9), as part of the expression of her hope and longing to see her Son resurrected (2025–30), and in her reaction to the announcement by the first angel (2070–8). The
The imagery pervading these passages involves the association — the equa-
tion, almost — of the tomb (ὁ τάφος) with the abode of Hades. This is
plainly evident in lines 1920–2, line 1926, lines 1927–9, and lines 2026–7.
(Cf. the text given above). However, in line 2072 this imagery is given
particular impact by the announcement that ‘the guards have deserted
the gates of Hades’. This statement seems to be an allusion to the report in Mt
28.4, that ‘the guards were shaken with fear of him, and became like dead
men’ — ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν
ὡς νεκροὶ. This is supported by the fact that the statement is contrasted
with lines 2073b–4a (νεκροὶ δὲ πρὸς φάσας χθόνα σχημάτισαν), also an allusion
to Matthew’s Gospel (27.52 καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνέφερθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα
τῶν κεκομιμημένων ἁγίων ἡγέρθησαν).
Apart from its Scriptural references, though, the passage is based upon the *Bacchae* of Euripides (lines 445–8):

φροοῦδαλ γ’ ἐκεῖνα λελυμέναι πρὸς ὀργάδας
σκιρτῶσα Βρόμον ἄνακαλούμεναι θεόν;
αὐτοῦμα θ’ αὐταίς δεσμὰς διελύθη ποδῶν
χληθείς τ’ ἀνήκαν θύρετρ’ ἄνευ θυγής χερός.

When the passage in the *Christus patiens* is compared to these lines from the *Bacchae*, the following changes may be noted:

1. The meaning of λελυμένος is different in the new context, being defined by φόβῳ (2072) and by the antithesis implied in σκιρτῶσαι (2074).
2. The phrase Βρόμον ἄνακαλούμεναι θεόν (*Bacchae* 446) is replaced by σῶκον ἐκκαλούμενοι Θεόν (line 2074), changing the meaning of the verb from ‘calling upon’ to ‘proclaiming as’.
3. The most significant alteration is the replacement of the phrase χληθείς τ’ ἀνήκαν θύρετρα (*Bacchae* 448) by φροοῦροι τ’ ἄβδος θύρετρ’ ἄνεισαν (line 2072). Instead of bolts giving way and letting the doors fly open, the image becomes that of guards deserting their posts, overcome with terror.

This last change, especially, seems to reveal a conscious and deliberate effort to continue the τάφος-ξάδης imagery, as is suggested by the explicit definition φροοῦροι τ’ ἄβδος, and by the antithesis between φροοῦροι (2072) and νεκροί (2073). Thus the guards at the tomb are symbolically identified with the gate-keepers of the nether world. They are scared to death, while their prisoners, the dead, leap up into freedom.

Does the *kontakion* contain any parallel to this element in the *Christus patiens*? If it does, what can we learn from it?

According to Romanos (strophe 3, line 12), Magdalene found that the guards had fled from the tomb. This is significantly different from the Gospel narrative. Among the Evangelists, only Matthew mentions the effect which the events associated with the resurrection had upon the guards:

αὐδὶ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ Τηρῶντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί (Mt 28.4). The other three do not even mention the guards in this context. Note that Matthew does not imply that the guards fled, but rather that they were unable to do so. Nor does he mention that the women who had arrived there (and whom he identifies as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) took notice of the absence of the guards. Thus it appears as if Romanos is at variance with his main literary source, the canonical Gospels, when he makes Mary Magdalene say: οἱ φροοῦροι γὰρ οὐ φαίνονται, ἀλλ’ ἔφυγον.

However, when comparing this statement in Romanos to the presentation of the paschal events in the *Christus patiens*, the agreement is at once apparent. In the play Mary Magdalene is sent to the tomb in advance (1930–5 and 1941–2; confirmed by the θεσπόκος in 2421, and by Magdalene in 2438). Although she is accompanied by the θεσπόκος (1989), she
takes the lead as they approach the tomb (2004–6). Both women are constantly aware of the guards (1907–20 and 1980–1), and Mary Magdalene immediately notices their absence at the tomb (2032). Having noticed also that the stone has been removed, and the tomb is empty, she reports this to the disciples even before she sees the angel (2045–8). Note the expression φίλως μύστας ἐρω ἄριστον νέκυως. This recalls her words, which — according to Jn 20.2 — were addressed to Peter and John only. The synoptic Gospels have no record of such a report, but mention only the report commissioned by the angel. (cf. Mt 28.7 and Mk 16.7.) Thus it appears that the Christus patiens aims at harmonizing the different Gospel narratives, by mentioning that Magdalene (Jn 20.1–2) upon noticing that the guards have deserted their posts (Mt 28.4) and that the stone has been removed (Lk 24.2) reports that someone has taken the body of Jesus (Jn 20.2). Exactly these same elements occur in the third strophe of the kontakion. This is evidence of the interdependence existing between the Christus patiens and this kontakion of Romanos. An examination of the vocabulary occurring in the kontakion — especially the terms ἔκκεκυλισμένον, τάφος and φρουροί — will confirm this conclusion:

1. Romanos says that Magdalene saw the stone ἔκκεκυλισμένον ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας τῆς ταφῆς. The terms occurring in the Gospels are ἀποκεκύλιστα (Mk 16.4), ἀποκεκυλισμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου (Lk 24.2), and ἤρμενον ἐξ τοῦ μνημείου (Jn 20.1). The Christus patiens has ἐκκυλισθείς (2045). Accordingly, the term used by Romanos — ἔκκυλλιδω — finds a closer parallel in the Christus patiens than in any of the Gospels.

The question may arise whether this correspondence could be attributed to derivation from a common source other than the Gospels, or perhaps to the general usage of the time. The following facts seem to contradict both these possibilities: Forms of the verb ἔκκυλλιδω or ἔκκυλλιον occur 16 times in John Chrysostom — though never in the context of the resurrection; once only in Basil of Caesarea — also in a different context; never in Gregory of Nazianzus, except in the Christus patiens (at 2045 and 2253); 4 times in Sozomenus — of which only one occurrence, ἐκκυλισθας τε τοῦ ἐνθάδε φρέατος τὸν λίθον, nearly matches the context in question. On the other hand, forms of the verb ἄκοκυλλιδω (or ἄκοκυλλιον) occur mostly in the context of the resurrection (either of Lazarus or of Jesus) — e.g. in John Chrysostom (12 times), in Eusebius of Caesarea (14), in Amphilochius of Iconium (9), and in Gregory of Nyssa (7).

It may be noted, also, that ἄκοκυλλιδω is never used in Attic tragedy; but ἔκκυλλιδω occurs — in Aeschylus (Prom. 87) and in Sophocles (Oedipus Tyrannus 812).

2. In the kontakion On the Resurrection, the term τάφος is used most frequently when referring to the tomb of Christ. It occurs 18 times, and ταφή 3 times, whereas the terms μνημεῖον and μνήμα occur only 4 and 11
times, respectively. Compare to these statistics the situation in the Gospels, where μνημεῖον is used most frequently (e.g. Mt 27.52, 53, 60 (twice), 28.8; Mk 15.46 (twice), 16.2, 3, 5, 8; Lk 23.55, 24.2, 9, 12, 22, 24; Jn 19.41, 42, and several times in chapter 20), while the term τάφος occurs only in Matthew (27.61, 64, 66, 28.1). This reveals that the term which Romanos prefers, differs from the one usually occurring in the Gospels, while agreeing with the general usage in the Christus patiens. (In the third part of the play, commencing at line 1906, τάφος occurs 42 times, but μνημεῖον twice only.)

3. When Magdalene reports the absence of the guards from the tomb, according to Romanos (3.12), she uses the term φρούροι. Later — in 19.11 — it is said of the guards (οἱ φυλάσσοντες) that they kept watch over the Lord, but had no power over Him (φρούρουσιν, ἀλλ᾿ οὐ κρατοῦσιν). These terms do not reflect the language of the Gospels, for guards are mentioned only by Matthew, who uses either the term κουστωδία (Mt 27.65, 66) or a participle of τηρέω (Mt 28.4). In the Christus patiens, the term φρούροι (2072) is used to signify the guards — notably, in a context parallel to that of strophe 19 of the kontakion, and which is also a literary innovation based upon Mt 28.2–7.

In terminology — as in other respects — significant parallels thus exist between the Christus patiens and this kontakion of Romanos. But again, who borrowed from whom?

Since both authors use the term φρούροι — which they have not taken over from the New Testament, nor, it seems, from any other Patristic source — in parallel contexts, it seems quite likely that one of them has borrowed it from the other. If we assume that the author of the Christus patiens borrowed the term φρούροι from Romanos, a further question, concerning the origin of this term in Romanos, still remains unanswered. If, however, the opposite sequence is assumed — that Romanos borrowed the term from the Christus patiens — then it is not any problem to account for the occurrence of this term in the play. The verb φρούρεω — and the correlate noun φρούρος — is quite common in Euripides; and at this stage, the Euripidean influence on the Christus patiens is beyond dispute. That the author was aware of the presence and the specific meaning of φρούρος in Euripides, is illustrated by Christus patiens 1737 — a line taken verbatim from the Rhesus (506).

In terms of the interrelation between the Christus patiens and the kontakion, these observations support the conclusion that Romanos is dependent upon the play, and not vice versa.

When the phrase ὁ λέγει ὁ Θεολόγος is regarded in the light of all the evidence discussed, there can hardly be any doubt about its reference. Romanos explicitly indicates the version of these events which he attributes to Gregory of Nazianzus; and the verdict to which diverse bits of evidence
unanimously point, is that this version is the one found in the Christus patiens.

Is Tuilier’s conclusion (viz. that the kontakion confirms the authenticity of the Christus patiens) thus verified? Only in part. All the evidence cited by Tuilier (op. cit., 39–47) is confirmed by the arguments expounded in this study; but it proves only the following two points:

1. Romanos was aware of the Christus patiens.
2. He regarded it as the work of Gregory of Nazianzus.

The only safe conclusion which can be drawn from these facts, is that both the existence of the Christus patiens, and its attribution to Gregory of Nazianzus, antedate the early sixth century — the era of Romanos the Melodist.

NOTES

1. Grégoire de Nazianze, La Passion du Christ. ’Tragédie (ed. A. Tuilier), Paris 1969. This volume was published as no. 149 of the Sources Chrétiennes series. All quotations from the Christus patiens occurring in this study follow Tuilier.

2. The original title of the kontakion in question reads Κοντάκιον ἐπ' ὑπὲρ τῆς μεγάλης παρασκευῆς ἐκ τοῦ Πάσχα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ εἰς τὸν θρόνον τῆς Θεοτόκου. It is referred to by Pitra as De Virgine iuxta crucem. Although this is a misleading title — the contents actually concern the vita dolorosa — the example of Pitra is followed by Cammelli (Maria alla Croce), Grosdidier de Matons (Marie à la Croix), and Maas-Trypanis (On Mary at the Cross). In this study, references to the kontakia will include both the Maas-Trypanis (Oxford ed.) and the Sources Chrétiennes numbering, e.g. Oxford 19/SC 35.

3. Cf. the remark of P. Maas, Byzantinische Zeitschrift 32 (1932) 396: ‘... in V.454–460 (ist) die im Triodion erhaltene erste Strophe eines Charfreitagsliedes von Romanos schlecht nachgebildet (454 ὡς ἁπαλόλημνης άντιγόνος, 458 δός, δός λόγου μοι, τοῦ θεοῦ πατρός λόγες ganz flau neben Romanos δός μοι λόγον, λόγε)’.


5. A. Momigliano, ‘Un termine post quem per il Christus patiens’, Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica 10(1932)47–51.


7. The choice of the term φρούρος instead of an equivalent like φύλαξ or κοινωνία may be due to an attempt at achieving a better sound effect: φρούροι τ’ ἄνδρος (2072) sounds closest to φρουρδος δος της two lines earlier.

8. For the discussion of a different opinion, the reader is referred to Appendix 1 (pp. 63–4).

9. The noun φρούρος does not occur in the New Testament, while the verb φρουρέω is rare, occurring only three times in the Pauline epistles, and once in I Peter (1.5). Chrysostom uses the verb φρουρέω 45 times, though only 4 of these times he uses it in connection with guards, or the powers of Hades.
APPENDIX

EXCURSION ON THE ALLEGED SOURCES OF ROMANOS

The harmonizing of the canonical Gospels occurring in the First Hymn on the Resurrection by Romanos (Oxford 29/SC 40) is discussed also by W.L. Petersen (1985), who asserts that the Diatessaron of Tatian, and Ephrem Syrus, are the sources for many of the readings in Romanos which run parallel to the canonical gospel text, but do not reproduce that source in a verbatim manner. Petersen identifies Ephrem’s Commentary (21.22) as the source for Romanos’ assertion that Mary Magdalene was sent ahead to the tomb by the other women. After quoting the relevant passages, he remarks (pp. 189–90):

In contrast to the utterances of Ephrem and Romanos, the “Theologian” John (Jn.XX.1) says that Mary ἐρχεται to the tomb; she does not “precede” the rest of the women or anyone else. This same reading, “precede”, is also found in one Diatessaronic witness, Vanden Levene ons Heren; therefore, it would be attractive to view it as a Diatessaronic reading. Although it is found in the Commentary of Ephrem, and now in Romanos, it is lacking from all the other Diatessaronic witnesses; therefore, we hesitate to call it Diatessaronic. What is clear, however, is that Romanos’ most likely source for this view of the chronology of the women’s trip(s) to the tomb was Ephrem.

In his concluding chapter on the parallels between Romanos and the Syriac works of Ephrem, Petersen (p. 195) says that the list of twenty-one parallels which he has presented and discussed, ‘could be extended, but then one would begin to encounter parallels which Romanos might have acquired from other sources’. This implies that he regards all parallels included in this list as decisively due to influence exerted on Romanos by Ephrem Syrus, while excluding the possibility of derivation from any other source.

Regarding the possible sources of the readings in the First Hymn on the Resurrection, however, it should be noted that the ‘parallel’ between Romanos and the Syriac Commentary of Ephrem is not as close as the parallel between Romanos and the Christus patiens. The notion of Magdalene ‘preceding’ the other women, does not necessarily imply that she has been ‘sent ahead’, as both Romanos and the author of the Christus patiens explicitly state.

The matter is complicated (though Petersen does not seem to realize it) by Romanos’ statement ὄς λέγει ὁ θεολόγος. The ‘Theologian’ is understood by Petersen to be the evangelist, John, who merely says that Magdalene ‘goes’ (ἐρχεται) to the tomb. When Romanos, however, asserts that she is ‘sent ahead’ to the tomb, ‘as the Theologian says’, the following question arises: Why would the Melodist include a reference to the author
of the fourth Gospel, in the very passage where he abandons this source in favour of a divergent tradition? Is it not more reasonable to expect that the phrase ὁς λέγει would introduce a reference to the source with which he agrees? If this source were Ephrem, the reference would be enigmatic, since the Syrian was not generally known as ‘the Theologian’ per se; and if Romanos intended not to provide an unambiguous reference to his source, what need was there then to include any reference at all? The Melodist was simply too careful and sensitive a poet, to fill out the strophes of his kontakia with empty phrases.

A second possibility seems to be that Romanos is referring to the Diatessaron — Petersen says it would be attractive to view ‘precede’ as a Diatessaronic reading — and identifies the author as John, whose Gospel provided the chronological framework of this well known harmony of the four Gospels. But this hypothesis must also be rejected, for two reasons: 1. It is not likely that the Diatessaron was still in use, especially at Constantinople, in the 6th century. Theodoret of Cyrrhus witnesses to the existence of numerous (about 200) copies of the Gospel harmony in his diocese circa 430, but these — and no doubt many more — were deliberately destroyed, because Tatian was in his later years considered a heretic. 2. If Romanos did regard the Diatessaron as close enough to the canonical version to be an acceptable alternative source, he would probably feel no need to defend his use of it in this particular instance. The fact that he adds the reference ὁς λέγει ὁ θεολόγος testifies to his awareness of digressing, at this point, from the tradition which he normally follows.

However, if we assume the ‘Theologian’ on whose authority Romanos here deviates from the Joannine tradition, to be the Nazianzen, we will find the reference ὁς λέγει ὁ θεολόγος both functional and unambiguous, and at the same time locate in the Christus patiens a direct parallel to the notion of Mary Magdalene being ‘sent ahead’ to the tomb.

It seems obvious that Petersen did not even consider this possibility, since (1) his primary concern is to illustrate the Syriac influence on the kontakia of Romanos, and (2) he evidently follows in the footsteps of scholars who regard the Christus patiens as a product of the 11th or 12th century.

NOTE

W.L. Petersen, The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as sources of Romanos the Melodist, Lovanii 1985 (Published as vol. 475 of the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Subsidia, tomus 74).
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