

## THE DEVIL IN DISGUISE: THE END OF GEORGE OF PISIDIA'S *HEXAEMERON* RECONSIDERED\*

### I

In a recent article<sup>1</sup> which does much to enhance understanding of an important but neglected work, David M. Olster has drawn attention to the historical and political background against which George of Pisidia, panegyrist of the Emperor Heraclius (AD 610-641), composed his major surviving poem, the *Hexaemeron*.<sup>2</sup> Olster rightly casts doubt on the validity of the distinct categories of 'panegyric' and 'theological' into which George's poetry has traditionally been classified,<sup>3</sup> and illuminates the significance of the Creation theme as a metaphor for political renewal at a time when the Byzantines achieved great victories against Persia after a prolonged period of disaster in the first decades of the seventh century. These observations lead him to the view that all of George's poetry should be interpreted in political and panegyric rather than theological or religious terms.

On the basis of these ideas, and of a detailed analysis of the panegyric of the imperial family and the Patriarch Sergius contained in the closing lines of the *Hexaemeron* (1838-1910), Olster proposes a specific historical context for the composition of the poem, connecting it with the coronation as Augustus in July 638 of Heraclonas, son of Heraclius and his second (incestuous) wife Martina, and with the death of the Patriarch Sergius in December of the same year. The poem would thus belong rather later than has usually been assumed, and in a different political climate, since it would have been composed after the beginning of Arab attacks on Byzantium and the disastrous defeat at the Yarmuk in 636, rather than soon after Heraclius' triumphant victory over Persia in 628 which was sealed by his restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem on 21 March 630.<sup>4</sup>

In my view the arguments for this redating are based on misunderstanding of the text, details of which I set out below. But wider and more important issues for the interpretation of George's poetry are also at stake, and it is my purpose in what follows to explore these also.

First, my preference for the traditional dating of the poem to the period 628-30 is based upon the similarity between the thought, expression and atmosphere of the closing lines of the *Hexaemeron* and that of other poems securely dated to the period of Heraclius' Persian wars.

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<sup>1</sup> D.M. Olster, 'The Date of George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* xlv (1991) 159-72 (hereafter 'Olster').

<sup>2</sup> Ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* xcii (Paris 1865) cols. 1161-1754; an improved text in Aelian, *Varia Historia*, ed. R. Hercher (Leipzig 1866) ii 601-62. 'Panegyric' poems: A. Pertusi ed. (with Italian tr.), *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi, I: panegirici epici*, *Studia Patristica et Byzantina* vii (Ettal 1959). Other long poems: *PG* xcii. Epigrams and shorter poems: L. Sternbach ed., 'Georgii Pisidae carmina inedita', *WSI* xiii (1891) 1-62, and xiv (1892) 51-68. Prose encomium of St Anastasius the Persian: B. Flusin ed. (with French tr.), *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du vii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1992) i 189-259.

<sup>3</sup> Olster 159-61; cf. Mary Whitby, 'A new image for a new age: George of Pisidia on the emperor Heraclius' in E. Dabrowa ed., *The Roman and Byzantine army in the Near East* (Cracow 1994) 197-225; C. Ludwig, 'Kaiser Herakleios, Georgios Pisides und die Perserkriege' in P. Speck ed., *Poikila Byzantina* xi (Bonn 1991) 73-128 esp. 74, 104-28.

<sup>4</sup> For the date, see the meticulous discussion of Flusin (n. 2) ii 293-309.

George's style is allusive and metaphorical and his meaning often hard to pin down, but it is his habit to reiterate and vary similar ideas in a number of associated contexts, and the key to understanding his poetry lies in observation of this repetition and development throughout the poetic corpus. Hence the end of the *Hexaemeron* can only be interpreted against the wider background of his poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Second, I am unhappy with the view that political interests are always paramount in George: the *de Vanitate Vitae*, notably, is a personal spiritual autobiography (lines 6-9). Furthermore, the seventh century saw the increasing dominance of religion in all aspects of life, and in periods of respite between warfare, Heraclius concerned himself with the vexed problem of Church unity, an issue in which George himself became involved in the anti-monophysite *Contra Severum*.<sup>6</sup> The campaigns against Persia were presented, thanks to George, as a religious crusade.<sup>7</sup> Religion is here certainly the instrument of political propaganda, but it may also be its motivating force: I suggest that George's personal religious conviction inspires much of his political poetry in praise of Heraclius.<sup>8</sup> So, for example, the *Expeditio Persica*, which celebrates Heraclius' preliminary success against the Persians in 622 and looks forward to the decisive defeat of Khusro (iii 355-9), culminates in an elaborate invocation of God (iii 385-403) as 'general of the things above and the things below' (385): God's ordering of the cosmos and the whole of nature is detailed at length (386-95) as the basis for an appeal that He fulfil hopes in Him by directing His pious under-general Heraclius to accomplish His ordinances.<sup>9</sup> As for the *Hexaemeron*, the contemporary political implications of the Creation theme are undoubtedly developed at the end, but this passage (1838-1910) forms no more than a topical framework, parallel to the opening dedication to the Patriarch Sergius (1-56),<sup>10</sup> for the massive core of the poem, which is a powerful expression of personal religious feeling. The long epigram appended to the poem in two of the most ancient manuscripts indicates its underlying religious inspiration: George describes how he used the wondrous order of Creation as a mirror, like the apostle Paul, of the 'reality beyond mind' (τῆς ὑπὲρ νοῦν οὐσίας, line 8) to glorify the Creator through his poem and bring it to God as a garland.<sup>11</sup>

Olster advances four arguments for dating the *Hexaemeron* to AD 638, based on analysis of lines 1838-1907.<sup>12</sup> In order not to obscure the sequence of thought, I reproduce the text below,

<sup>5</sup> This is the approach of Ludwig (n. 3) who argues independently for association between the *Hexaemeron* and Heraclius' Persian wars on the basis of analysis of the *prooemium* and conclusion.

<sup>6</sup> See Flusin (n. 2) ii 312-327 for the period around 630. The polemical *Contra Severum* belongs after 630, see Pertusi (n. 2) 16.

<sup>7</sup> See Mary Whitby (n. 3), esp. 198 n. 4.

<sup>8</sup> In support of the view that George was no theologian, Olster (n. 1) 160 cites *Contra Severum* 695-9 (*PG* xcii 1673) where George disclaims any ability to present dogma. But lack of expertise in technical doctrinal issues does not preclude religious conviction.

<sup>9</sup> I argue below that the sequence of ideas developed in the following section of this poem (iii 404-61) provides an important parallel for the interpretation of the conclusion of the *Hexaemeron*.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig (n. 3) 104-14 argues that the prologue is addressed to Christ, David and Heraclius.

<sup>11</sup> No. cvii ed. Sternbach (n. 2) *WSt* xiv (1892) 66-8; 1.8 alludes to 1 Cor. 13.12. Cf. A. Pertusi, 'Dei poemii per diti di Giorgio di Pisidia', *Aevum* xxx (1956) 395-427 at 398-9, F. Gonnelli, 'Le parole del cosmo: osservazioni sull' *Esamerone* di Giorgio Pisida', *BZ* lxxxiii (1990) 411-22 at 411-12. Aspects of the scholarship and profundity of the *Hexaemeron* are illuminated by Gonnelli (*loc.cit.*) and G. Bianchi, 'Note sulla cultura a Bisanzio all' inizio del VII secolo in rapporto all' *Esamerone* di Giorgio di Pisidia', *RSBN* xii-xiii (1965-6) 137-43; id., 'Sulla cultura astronomica di Giorgio di Pisidia', *Aevum* xl (1966) 35-52. But Olster correctly observes (159) that much work remains to be done on the *Hex.*, not least the production of a modern critical edition: see Bianchi 'Note' at 137-8 for work in this field. Dr Joannis Vassilis is currently preparing an edition.

<sup>12</sup> Olster 168-72.

incorporating Hercher's improvements to the version in Migne;<sup>13</sup> it is translated section by section in the ensuing discussion:

ἀλλ' ὦ τοσούτων ἀρχιτέκτων θαυμάτων, ὁ πρὸς τὸ σὸν βούλημα τὰς ἄνω πύλας σφίγγων ὅτε χρῆ καὶ διευρύνων πάλιν,	1840
ὅταν παραστῆ καὶ ἀδοκῆ σοι συμφέρειν, καὶ νῦν παρῶν ἀνοιγε τὰς κάτω πύλας· πύλας γὰρ ἡμεῖς κοσμικῶν οἰκητόρων ταύτην καλοῦμεν ἦν ἐπύργωσας πόλιν·	1845
καὶ δὸς τὸν ἐκ σοῦ προσλαβόντα τὸ κράτος, τὸν κοσμορύστην, τὸν διώκτην Περσίδος, μᾶλλον δὲ τὸν σώσαντα καὶ τὴν Περσίδα, ὄλων κρατήσαι τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίον τόπων. δείξον δὲ τὴν γῆν οὐρανὸν μιμουμένην, ἐνὸς κρατούντος ἡλίου καὶ τῶν κάτω·	1850
τὸν γὰρ φανέντα Περσικὸν κοσμοκτόνον, πρέπει γενέσθαι κοσμικὸν καὶ δεσπότην. ποίησον αὐτῷ τοὺς ἰδρώτας τῶν πόνων λουτρὸν καθαρμοῦ, καὶ στολὴν ἀφθαρσίας. αὔξησον αὐτῷ τοῦ φόβου σου τὸ κράτος·	1855
οὕτω γὰρ ἔξει πιστὰ νικητήρια νίκης κατ' ἐχθρῶν ἀξιώθεις δευτέρας, ὡς τοὺς ἀδῆλους <sup>14</sup> πυρπολήσας βαρβάρους. ρίζωσον αὐτῷ τοὺς ἐπανθούοντας κλάδους, εἰς ζῶντα καρπὸν κοσμικῆς εὐκαρπίας.	1860
ποίησον αὐτοὺς πατρὸς εἰκονίσματα· οὕτω γὰρ αὐτοῖς διττὸν ἔσται τὸ κράτος. δξυνον αὐτοῖς τὰ ξίφη πρὸς βαρβάρους, ὅτε καθ' ἡμῶν βαρβαροῦνται τὰ ξίφη. ἔκτεινον αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ σώσαι τὰς φρένας,	1865
σύστειλον αὐτοῖς πᾶν ἐναντίον θράσος, πλάτυνον αὐτοῖς τὰς πρὸς εἰρήνην πύλας, στένωσον αὐτοῖς τὰς ἐπαχθεῖς φροντίδας. ὁ πατριάρχης ταῦτα κράζει καὶ λέγει, κἄν ἐστὶν ἰσχνόφωνος ἐξ ἀσιτίας,	1870
καὶ μὴ λαλῶν ἤχησεν ἔνδοθεν μέγα. τὴν γλώτταν ἐνθεῖς εἰς τὸ πῦρ τῆς καρδίας, ἔκρυψεν αὐτὴν, καὶ στομοῦται μειζόνως, βοᾷ δὲ σιγῶν, ὡς ὁ Μωσέως φάρυγξ. ἀκούεται δὲ μὴ σαλεύων τὸ στόμα·	1875
τέγει δὲ τὴν γῆν, καὶ δι' ὀμμάτων βρέχει, καὶ πυκνὰ νείφει τῇ φορᾷ τῶν δακρύων. ἔγνωμεν αὐτὸν, κἄν δοκῆ λεληθέναι· δήλος γὰρ ἦν τὸ βλέμμα χαυνώσας κάτω, καὶ τοὺς λογισμοὺς πάντας ἐκτείνας ἄνω.	1880
ἀλλ' ὦ φονευτὰ τῶν παθῶν τῶν βαρβάρων·	

<sup>13</sup> Migne differs at the following points: 1841 δοκεῖ, 1848 ὄλον τὸν τόπον, 1853 αὐτοῦ, 1864 πρὸς ἡμᾶς βαρβαροῦνται, 1865 αὐτοῖς, 1878 δοκεῖ, 1886 ἐκβαλῶν, 1890 ἡμῖν οὐκ ἐγείρεται ζόφος, 1892 εἰκόνας, 1896 ἠκονισμένα, 1898 δὲ omitted, πρὸς φύσων. (I adopt the reading suggested by the *JHS* referee).

<sup>14</sup> I here follow Olster 169 n. 79 in preferring the MS reading ἀδῆλους to the conjecture ἀδοῦλους ('unenslaved') printed in Migne and Hercher.



'But, O architect of such great wonders, who close fast at your will the upper gates, (1840) when it is necessary, and spread them wide again, whenever it comes to mind and it seems to you expedient: even now be present and open the lower gates.'<sup>16</sup> (*Hex.* 1838-42)

This appeal to God to open the gates of Constantinople is followed by an explicit parallel between the gates of heaven and those of the city (1843-4), and a prayer to God (1845-52):

'For we call this city which you protected the gates of the universe's inhabitants. (1845) And grant that he who received power from you, the deliverer of the world (*kosmorustes*), the pursuer of Persia, or rather the one who saved even Persia, should rule all the places under the sun. Show that the earth imitates heaven, (1850) with one sun ruling also the parts below.'<sup>17</sup> For it is fitting that the manifest Persian universe-slayer should also become universal master.' (*Hex.* 1843-52)

These sentiments are similar to, if more extravagant than, those expressed by George elsewhere in the aftermath of the victory over Persia. The term *kosmorustes*, for example, is first applied to Heraclius (on the analogy of Heracles) in the poem to Bonus (*Bon.* 7) written at the time of the 626 Avar siege of Constantinople. But it recurs twice more in contexts which, like the *Hexaemeron* passage, confidently celebrate victory, the *Heraclias* (i 70), which surveys Heraclius' achievements in the light of the defeat of Khusro, and the *Contra Severum* (452, *PG* xcii 1656).<sup>18</sup>

Parallelism between the gates of heaven and those of the imperial city is similarly combined with the theme of cosmic renewal in the climactic passage of the first canto of the *Heraclias* (i 192-218): Heraclius has succeeded in 'passing through the deserts like cities' because he has passed through 'the spiritual Gate'; his imperial purple has become radiant white through the blood and sweat of his toils, and he is hailed as 'general of the universal birthday', who has brought new life to the cities of the world (192-206). The emperor's triumphant return to Constantinople is then celebrated in semi-metaphorical terms, culminating in an image of God opening the gates of the city or of heaven: 'For he who is both arbitrator and master of contests opens up for you the universal gates, proceeding through which as victor in every sphere you hold the image from on high undefiled' (215-18 τὰς κοσμικὰς γὰρ ἐξανοίγει σοι θύρας | ὁ τῶν ἀγῶνων καὶ βραβεύς καὶ δεσπότης, | δι' ὧν προελθὼν παγενῆς νικηφόρος | ἔχεις ἄχραντον τὴν ἀφ' ὕψους εἰκόνα).<sup>19</sup>

The tone of the *Heraclias* passage is more confident than the *Hexaemeron*, since God's collab-

<sup>16</sup> My interpretation of these lines differs substantially from that of Olster. At 1841 παραστῆ is used metaphorically (LSJ s.v. B.IV, Lampe s.v. B.3), and ἄνοιγε (1842) is imperative; there is no reason to postulate a change of subject from God to Heraclius at 1841.

The reference to the heavenly gates provides another link with the earlier part of the poem, since at *Hex.* 1749-65 (*PG* xcii 1568-9) George expresses the hope that, if he can understand the universe, he will aspire to approach the narrow gate of heaven which on opening terrifies those who enter. At *Her. Red.* 67-9 God is called opener of the gates to peace.

<sup>17</sup> For Heraclius as the sun, cf. *Exp. Pers.* iii 1-12 (he eclipses the heavenly bodies worshipped by the Persians); *Contra Sev.* 673-4, 691, 706-16 (*PG* xcii 1671-6; Heraclius the sun of religious enlightenment). For the Persian and Roman emperors described respectively as sun and moon in the language of diplomacy, see Michael Whitby, *The emperor Maurice and his historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan warfare* (Oxford 1988) 205 n. 15.

<sup>18</sup> At *Her.* i. 77 Khusro is called the 'universe-destroying lion' (*kosmophthoron*) in contrast to Heraclius the *kosmorustes*; the former term is also applied to Khusro by George's contemporary, the historian Theophylact Simocatta (viii. 15. 7); cf. *Hex.* 1851 Περσικὸν κοσμοκτόνον and see also n. 37. On *Contra Severum*, see n. 6.

<sup>19</sup> On the date of Heraclius' return, see n. 15. Descriptions in Theophanes (328. 2-10 de Boor) and Nicephorus (19.1-6 Mango) differ considerably, and may refer to distinct occasions (Mango on Nic. *loc. cit.*). George's references to charioteers (*Her.* i 207) and 'the theatre of life' (211) recall Nicephorus' account of a triumph. Neither of the historical sources refers to Heraclius holding the icon which he had carried with him on the Persian campaigns (*Exp. Pers.* i 139-51, with Pertusi's note, 142-3), but the detail is plausible, even though it is frequently uncertain how literally George should be understood.

oration in opening the gates is firmly asserted, not merely requested. It is possible that the more hesitant tone of the *Hexaemeron* is a response to the new Arab threat which Heraclius faced from the mid 630s, and which Olster suggests is explicitly alluded to at *Hexaemeron* 1858 (see further below). But it is the Persian victory with its associated vocabulary and imagery which is the focus of George's appeal in the *Hexaemeron*, and it will be argued below that the *Hexaemeron*'s note of uncertainty is explicable in the light of events of 628-30. The passage does not require the presence of Heraclius in Constantinople, and indeed the request to God to open the city gates suggests that he is outside, in contrast to the description of his triumphant entry in *Her.*

### III

Olster's second suggestion (p. 169) is that references to a 'second victory' and 'obscure (ἀδῆλους) barbarians'<sup>20</sup> at *Hexaemeron* 1855-8 constitute a wish for a victory by Heraclius over the Arabs. This would indicate a date after 633 when the seriousness of the Arab threat was first recognised, and hence, in view of the previous argument about Heraclius' presence, after 636 (since Heraclius was absent from Constantinople between 632 and 636). I prefer to interpret these lines as a reference to the conquest of spiritual foes (sin or the devil) through faith. This is suggested by lines 1853-4 (not included by Olster in his analysis):

'Make the sweat of toils a bath of purification for him and robe of immortality. (1855) Increase in him the power of your fear,<sup>21</sup> for thus he will have faith's victory-prizes, having been deemed worthy of a second victory against foes because he has burned to dust the unseen barbarians.' (*Hex.* 1853-8)<sup>22</sup>

That the second victory is spiritual rather than physical seems clear from the very similar, but more explicit, passage near the end of George's earlier poem, the *Expeditio Persica*.<sup>23</sup> George there appeals to God to make Heraclius strike terror into his enemies, so that anyone of another race who runs to confront the emperor will bend his neck in trembling before him (iii 404-6). He continues (iii 407-10): 'Make the sweat which he dripped a purification for him of past errors;<sup>24</sup> may he win double victory-prizes against foes, (410) may he set up trophies over both passions and barbarians.' (ποίησον αὐτῷ τῶν φθασάντων πταισμάτων | ἰδρώτας, οὗς ἔσταξεν, εἰς καθάρσιον· | λάβοι κατ' ἐχθρῶν διττὰ νικητήρια, | (410) στήσοι τρόπαια καὶ παθῶν καὶ βαρβάρων). There follows an impassioned and extended prayer that Heraclius be filled with warmth towards God like that of the Old Testament prophet Elijah and that he be a new Moses (411-25), which is suggestive of the powerful religious feeling underlying George's poems for Heraclius.<sup>25</sup> But the importance of this passage for understanding *Hexaemeron* 1853-8 is that the same sequence of sweat, purification and victory-prizes leads

<sup>20</sup> On the text, see n. 14.

<sup>21</sup> For 'your fear' in the sense 'fear of you', cf. *In Bon.* 78.

<sup>22</sup> Again I differ from Olster in details of translation. I would put greater emphasis on the adjective πιστῶ (1856): Heraclius' second victory will be a spiritual one achieved through faith. I interpret ὡς plus aorist participle πυρπολήσας (1858) as causal, giving the grounds for Heraclius' second victory (not future). Adjectival ἀδῆλος (1858) covers the range of meanings 'unseen', 'unknown', 'secret', 'not evident to sense', see LSJ s.v., and, for its use in George, cf. *Hex.* 44, 52, *de Van. Vit.* 119, *Contra Sev.* 364.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance of the end of *Exp. Pers.* for understanding the end of the *Hexaemeron*, see n. 9. The lines here discussed continue directly after the invocation to God at *Exp. Pers.* iii 385-403.

<sup>24</sup> A parallel may be intended with the purificatory shedding of Christ's blood to save sinful man. For analogy between Heraclius and Christ, see J. Trilling, 'Myth and metaphor at the Byzantine court: a literary approach to the David plates', *Byzantion* xlviii (1978) 249-63 at 259-60, Olster 161-4, Mary Whitby (n. 3) 214-15.

<sup>25</sup> On biblical imagery in George, see Mary Whitby (n. 3), and see further below p. 126 on the links between this passage and *Hex.* 1869-75.

on to an unambivalent statement that the trophies will be for victory over barbarians on the one hand and over the passions on the other. The ‘unseen barbarians’ of the *Hexaemeron* should also be such spiritual foes.

It is significant for the wider understanding of George’s poetry that analogous themes are to be found towards the end of the poem addressed to the patrician Bonus who, together with the Patriarch Sergius and Heraclius’ son, the young Heraclius Constantine, was entrusted with the care of Constantinople at the time of the 626 siege of the city, when Heraclius was absent on campaign in the east. Much of this poem is in fact an appeal to Heraclius to help the capital at this time of need, and it ends with a prayer that the divine Word may direct Heraclius’ thoughts (156-9), adding, ‘And may it show that the outpouring of sweat which you dripped on behalf of all is purification of your sins.’ (160-1 τῶν σῶν δὲ δείξοι σφαλμάτων καθάρσιον | ἦν ἀνθ’ ὄλων ἔσταξας ἰδρώτων χύσιν.) Here the notion of Heraclius’ purificatory sweat is very similar to that of the *Expeditio Persica* passage, but it is made more explicit that the sins to be atoned are the emperor’s own (160 σῶν), possibly a reference to Heraclius’ incestuous marriage to his niece Martina, which was publicly condemned by the factions and the Patriarch.<sup>26</sup> Further consideration of the nature of the second victory which it is hoped in the *Hexaemeron* that Heraclius will win will follow after examination of other aspects of the imagery of this passage.

The theme of the sweat of Heraclius’ toils (*Hex.* 1853) receives a slightly different and more optimistic treatment in the *Heraclias* (i 140-7). Starting from the reflection that Heraclius’ once golden hair has turned white from his cares and his white limbs have been burned by exposure to the sun,<sup>27</sup> George surmises that ‘as the sweat of toils was poured forth, the whiteness passed over to the heart’ (146-7 ἐν τῷ διαχεῖσθαι τοὺς ἰδρώτας τῶν πόνων | ἡ λευκότης μετέηλθεν εἰς τὴν καρδίαν). Here the image of whiteness, rather than purification, is combined with the sweat theme to suggest that Heraclius’ Persian campaigns have exonerated spiritual blemishes.

A variant on the notion of whiteness in combination with sweat a little later in the *Heraclias* links it with the reference at *Hexaemeron* 1854 to the emperor’s ‘robe of immortality’. At *Heraclias* i 195-201 (part of the passage summarised above in the context of the opening of gates) George declares: ‘O now you show the purple true: for it is reddened in immortal dye, piously bloodied by your sweat. But although it is purple it remains white and glittering with the new fair achievement: the more it is worn, the more greatly it gleams—Hail, general of the universal birthday.’ (195 ὦ νῦν ἀληθῆ δεικνύων τὴν πορφύραν — | πορφύρεται γὰρ εἰς βαφὴν αἰωνίαν | ἰδρώσι τοῖς σοῖς εὐσεβῶς ἡμαγμένη· | μένει δὲ λευκὴ, καίπερ οὐσα πορφύρα, | καὶ τῇ νεᾷ στίλβουσα καλλιεργία, | 200 ὅσον φορεῖται, μειζόνως λαμπρύνεται — | χαίρε, στρατηγὲ κοσμικοῦ γενεθλίου.) Here the emperor’s sweat is considered to have enhanced the imperial purple, but as well as being the most exalted of terrestrial colours (purple), Heraclius’ clothing is also the pure white of a perfect Christian, and its brilliance increases with use. In this *Heraclias* passage the garment imagery illustrates the emperor’s achievement of personal and cosmic salvation, while in the *Hexaemeron* the comparable image of garments suggests that Heraclius’ labours may win him immortal life.

Similar play on the imperial purple and white robes appears in the description of Heraclius at *Contra Severum* 446-9 (*PG* xcii 1656): ‘The one clad in the crimson purple, but making white the robe of the heart,<sup>28</sup> who barricaded the channels of ever-flowing bloodshed with the fingers of his own hand.’ (ὁ τὴν ἀλουργὸν πορφύραν ἐνειμένως, | ποιῶν δὲ λευκὴν τὴν

<sup>26</sup> So Pertusi (p. 173), who sees the same allusion at *Exp. Pers.* iii 343-6, 407, *Her.* i 145-7 and *Hex.* 1853-8. But the sins are identified as Heraclius’ own only in the poem to Bonus, and Ludwig (n. 3) 117-18 rightly doubts allusion to Heraclius’ incest even there.

<sup>27</sup> Heraclius’ premature ageing is also mentioned at *In Bon.* 144.

<sup>28</sup> For this idea, cf. *In Christi Res.* 39-41 (*PG* xcii 1377).

στολήν τῆς καρδίας, | ὁ τοὺς ἀγωγούς τῶν ἀειρρύτων φόνων | ἐξ αὐτοχείρων ἀντιφράξας δακτύλων.) The passage goes on (450-5) to describe how Heraclius has educated the cruel barbarians and delivered the universe (*kosmorustes*) by slaying Khusro, ‘charming first with weapons and second with words all the beasts of minds’ (like Orpheus). The defeat of Persia is thus seen as both physical and mental.

These parallels illustrate how George regularly reshapes and develops particular images to fit similar but slightly different contexts, and adapts them to express hope or confident assertion according to current mood. The *Hexaemeron*’s use of garment imagery (1854) and its clear reference to the victory over Persia (1845-52) link it with the *Heraclias* and *Contra Severum* passages, but the themes of purificatory sweat, and victory over the passions can be traced back as far as the *Expeditio Persica* (AD 622/3). Only *In Bonum* specifies explicitly that it is the emperor’s own errors which are exonerated by his achievements (160). *Heraclias* i 140-7 implies a personal reference, but *Heraclias* i 195-200 and the *Contra Severum* passage suggest a much wider purification, resulting respectively in cosmic renewal and the elimination of the alien Persian religion. George typically prefers to leave the application of the imagery nebulous, and it is against the spirit of his poetry to press its interpretation too precisely.<sup>29</sup> This point is made clearer by consideration of the metaphorical language of *Hexaemeron* 1858.

In the light of the above investigation of George’s poetic practice, there can be no doubt that *Hexaemeron* 1853-8 refers not to a second victory by Heraclius against physical foes, but to a spiritual one.<sup>30</sup> Hence in 1858 πυρπολήσας (‘burned to dust’) and βαρβάρους are used not literally but metaphorically, of the defeat of sin. That the expression ‘the unseen barbarians’ should denote sin is made more plausible by comparison with an earlier passage of the *Hexaemeron*, which explicitly likens the attack of the devil on the human mind to that of a barbarian:

‘Or how he has such great power, even when fallen, (795) that not only the body, like a barbarian, does he array in battle against the spirit; but now he touches even the very heart, and makes the free nature a slave, and perverts the autonomous thoughts in us (800) in captive misfortune.’ (*Hex.* 794-800)<sup>31</sup>

The metaphorical use of πυρπολήσας, on the other hand, is paralleled (for example) in George’s reference to the twofold attack of Khusro at *Contra Severum* 47-50 (*PG* xcii 1625): ‘For it was not, it was not for the unholy Chosroes to move against us weapons limited to our bodies; but he wished rather to wound our hearts, by burning to dust (πυρπολῶν) our faith, like the cities.’ (οὐκ ἦν γὰρ, οὐκ ἦν τῷ βεβήλω Χοσρόῃ | κινεῖν καθ’ ἡμῶν ὄπλα μέχρι σωμάτων· | τρῶσαι δὲ μᾶλλον ἠθελε τὰς καρδίας, | (50) τὴν πιστὴν ἡμῶν πυρπολῶν, ὡς τὰς πόλεις).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Olster argues (161-7) that Heraclius’ purification of sin is twofold, the elimination of Khusro who personifies the world’s evil, and the purification of the Byzantines from the consequences of their own sins.

<sup>30</sup> For the same contrast between physical and spiritual barbarians, cf. Eus. *Laus Const.* 7, esp. secs. 1-2. (I am indebted to Professor Aldo Corcella for this reference.) For similar parallelism between barbarian invasion and the attacks of Satan in the context of fifth-century Gaul, see M. Roberts, ‘Barbarians in Gaul: the response of the poets’ in J.F. Drinkwater and H. Elton ed., *Fifth-century Gaul: a crisis of identity?* (Cambridge 1992) 97-106, esp. 104-6.

<sup>31</sup> ἢ πῶς τοσοῦτον καὶ πεσὼν ἔχει κράτος, | (795) ὡς μὴ μόνον τὸ σῶμα, βαρβάρου δίκην, | ἀντιστρατεύειν πρὸς μάχην τοῦ πνεύματος· | ἤδη δὲ καυτῆς ἀπτεται τῆς καρδίας, | καὶ δουλαγωγεῖ τὴν ἐλευθέραν φύσιν, | καὶ τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοδεσπότους φρένας | (800) ἐν αἰχμαλώτῳ συμφορᾷ περιτρέπει. The passage is translated (somewhat differently) and discussed by Olster (165-6), who postulates a contrast between Satan (who attacks the mind) and a barbarian (who attacks the body), where I see an analogy.

<sup>32</sup> This passage is cited by Olster (162), who later (165-6) posits two models of barbarian in order to reconcile it with *Hex.* 794-6 where he sees a contrast between Satan and a barbarian (see previous note); if, as I believe, Satan is likened to a barbarian, this explanation is unnecessary.

For metaphorical πυρπολέω, cf. also *Bell. Avar.* 142 where Sergius’ armed tears are said to burn to dust the barbarian courage (discussed below, p. 126); *In Christi Res.* 18 (*PG* xcii 1376) καὶ πυρπολεῖται τῶν παθῶν ἡ

This *Contra Severum* passage is concerned with the threat presented to Byzantine Christianity by Persian Zoroastrianism, while *Hexaemeron* 794-800 deals with the onslaught of sin upon the mind, which is like that of a physical enemy. In George's vocabulary the imagery of hostile assault is equally applicable to both. It is natural to interpret in similar terms the reference at 1855-8 to 'faith's victory-prizes' and a second victory over unseen barbarians. Khusro is now defeated, but the devil remains, over whom Heraclius' faith can secure a further victory. In keeping with the tentative tone of this whole section,<sup>33</sup> George does not specify the precise nature of this second victory: it is left unclear whether he alludes to the continuing threat of Persian religion, to collective Byzantine sin or to Heraclius' personal error.

Such presentation of the contests and victories of Heraclius and his family as both physical and spiritual is characteristic of George. So, for example, his poem *In Christi Resurrectionem* 100-23 (*PG* xcii 1381-4) details the spiritual exertions of Heraclius' son, Heraclius Constantine, before reminding him of the need to contend alongside his father in battle against Persians and Avars. The young prince is first praised for the mental discipline which has enabled him repeatedly to cut off the monstrous spiritual serpents which, like the hydra-head, constantly reappear; this has won him the Golden Apples, or wise words, by which he is a true Heracles (106-11). A few lines later (119-23) the imagery of Herculean labours recurs in a more literal context, as the youth is urged to fight beside his father like a Heraclid, so as to check the poison of the Persian viper and crush the stings of the scorpions by the Danube. Conversely, at *Heraclias* ii 5-33 a sequence of images which draws on the myths of Perseus and Heracles offers a parallel for the movement of thought in the *Hexaemeron* from victory over physical foes to the spiritual reward of immortality. In *Heraclias* this is interpreted both as the perpetuation of the imperial line through Heraclius' dynasty, and as the promise of heavenly immortality.<sup>34</sup> The *Hexaemeron* similarly continues with a prayer for the imperial dynasty (1859-68).

#### IV

Olster's third dating argument (p. 170) is concerned with this prayer, which may be rendered as follows:

'Root for him flowering branches as living fruit of universal fruitfulness. Make them images of their father, for thus will power be doubled for them. Sharpen their swords against barbarians, when against us the swords become barbarous. Stretch out their thoughts toward salvation; draw in all hostile arrogance in them; widen for them the doors to peace; straiten for them burdensome cares.' (*Hex.* 1859-68)

In Olster's view the prayer is distinctive on two counts. First, it uses standard rhetorical clichés to refer to the children not simply as Heraclius' offspring, but as his imperial successors,<sup>35</sup> and second, it makes clear reference to a dual succession: only after the coronation of Heraclonas as Augustus in July 638 did Heraclius have two successors.

Reference to the children as imperial successors is not, however, unprecedented. The notion that the son inherits and shares his father's responsibilities is already present in the closing lines of *Bellum Avaricum* (537-41) where Heraclius Constantine is described as 'the younger power' (τῷ νεωτέρῳ κράτει), Victory is invoked to appear and the 'slaughter of the barbarians' is

σφοδρότης (at the Resurrection).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. p. 119-20 on the contrasting tone of *Heraclias* i 192-218.

<sup>34</sup> For more detailed discussion of these passages in the context of George's use of Heracles imagery, see Mary Whitby (n. 3) 207-9.

<sup>35</sup> The clichés associated with imperial rule are identified as the repeated calls for victory against the barbarians, the role of the children as creators of peace, and their weighty anxieties.

described as marriage-gifts for his impending wedding to his cousin Gregoria.<sup>36</sup> The theme is developed at greater length in the *In Christi Resurrectionem* passage (100-23) discussed above, which belongs to the period when the Avar threat still loomed (line 123), and it is also implied in a brief poem, written after the death of Khusro, which George offers to Heraclius Constantine in gratitude to God for divine collaboration in securing Heraclius' victory.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast with these poems, the *Hexaemeron* does speak of more than one child, but it is less certain that the passage specifically ties the poem to the context of Heraclonas' elevation as Augustus. Olster indeed concedes that, but for the supposed reference to the Arab threat in line 1858, the coronation of Heraclonas as Caesar in 632 might justify this allusion. He sees reference to a dual succession in 1862, which he renders 'for thus in them will his [Heraclius'] power be doubled,' but I prefer to follow Querci's rendering: *sic enim illis inerit duplex potentia*. On the latter view, the line suggests, not that Heraclius will have two successors, but that imitation of Heraclius will double the strength of his heirs. According to the rules for imperial panegyric, such a general prayer for the imperial succession might be made even before an emperor had produced progeny.<sup>38</sup> At most it implies that Heraclius now had more than one son.<sup>39</sup>

This interpretation of the passage as a more general prayer for the imperial dynasty is substantiated by comparison with the much longer but very similar prayer which concludes the third canto of the *Expeditio Persica*, a prayer which follows shortly after the references to Heraclius' sweat, purification and victory-prizes (iii 407-10) which helped elucidate the similar references at *Hexaemeron* 1853-4.<sup>40</sup> In the earlier poem a general prayer that Heraclius' line may rule the fields of Rome for ever (iii 428-30) is expanded with sentiments comparable with those of *Hexaemeron* 1861-8:

'Stamp on them truly the fair-faced likenesses of paternal form, so that they may be images of their father, faithful mirrors of paternal characteristics, (435) whole in mind, free in manners, gentle in spirit, sympathetic in heart, kindly to us and irascible against enemies,—enemies who worship new-fangled gods,—giving them hands piously outspread, (440) but clenched against the profit of error, feet which in no way move toward bloodshed, but in turn swift-running everywhere toward salvation. (*Exp. Pers.* iii. 431-42)<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Olster (170 n. 83).

<sup>37</sup> No. xlvi (ed. Sternbach *WSI* xiv [1892] 56). Lines 9-10 describe Heraclius as 'slayer of Chosroes' and 'universal slaughterer' (κοσμικὸν φονοκτόνον); for the latter, cf. *Hex.* 1851 and n. 18. Olster mentions this poem and the *In Christi Res.* passage (170), but in order to stress the distinction between their praise of Heraclius Constantine alone and the two successors mentioned in *Hex.* Pertusi (n. 2) 16 n. 1 argues that *In Christi Res.* belongs about 630, but the reference to 'the stings of the scorpions by the Danube' (123) suggests the Avars, and hence a date in the mid 620s (I owe this observation to Dr Howard-Johnston.) For another reference to Heraclius acting in concert with his son Constantine on a building project, cf. *A.P.* ix 655.

<sup>38</sup> Menander Rhetor 377.28-30 (p. 94 Russell and Wilson) recommends such a prayer for the conclusion of the *basilikos logos*.

<sup>39</sup> Heraclius had a daughter Epiphania (born 611) and a son Heraclius Constantine (born 612) by his first marriage to Eudocia (*Chron. Pasch.* 702.10-703.2). The marriage to Martina produced many children, several of whom died in infancy, but their dates of birth and death, like the date of the marriage itself, are uncertain. Heraclonas was probably born in Lazica in 626 (*Nic.* 12.14-16) and Theodosius was married to Nike daughter of Shahrbaraz in 629/30 (*Nic.* 17.16-19). The problem is discussed by P. Speck, *Das geteilte Dossier, Poikila Byzantina* ix (Bonn 1988) 33-40, whose date for the birth of David (627) is, however, too early.

<sup>40</sup> See p. 120-1. As stressed above (n. 9), the *Expeditio Persica* parallel is important not only for its similarity of content, but for the analogous sequence of thought. The prayer that Heraclius be filled with warmth towards God like that of Moses and Elijah intervenes between the two passages under discussion, but this is an expansion of the earlier theme of Heraclius as God's faithful shield-bearer (iii 402-3), and is partially paralleled in the *Hexaemeron* in the comments made about Sergius (1869-75; see further p. 126).

<sup>41</sup> τῶπων αὐτοῖς πατρικῶν μορφωμάτων | τὰς εὐπροσώπους ὡς ἀληθῶς εἰκόνας, | ὅπως ἔσονται πατρὸς εἰκονίσματα, | κάτοπτρα πιστὰ πατρικῶν γνωρισμάτων, | (435) τὸν νοῦν τέλειοι, τοῦς τρόπους ἐλεύθεροι, | πραεῖς τὸ πνεῦμα, συμπαθεῖς τὴν καρδίαν, | ἡμῖν προσηνεῖς καὶ κατ' ἐχθρῶν ὄργιλοι, | ἐχθρῶν σεβόντων τοὺς θεοὺς τοὺς προσφάτους, | χεῖρας νέμοντες εὐσεβῶς ἠπλωμένας, | (440)

The poem concludes with an extended appeal that the children be protected from the destructive effects of the envy that entwines brothers in hostilities (iii 443-61), which looks like an allusion to the dynastic problems caused by Heraclius' second marriage to Martina.<sup>42</sup> The allusion to envy is absent from the *Hexaemeron* passage, although a reference in the *Expeditio Persica* (iii 456) to the imperial children as 'scions' or 'branches' (κλάδους) anticipates the expression of *Hexaemeron* 1859.<sup>43</sup> But the *Hexaemeron*'s themes of the children as images of the father, their hostility to barbarians, eagerness for salvation, and virtuous qualities, as well as the stylistic pairing of expressions through the use of contrasting verbs in particular, are all paralleled in the *Expeditio Persica*. These themes have been adapted to fit the changed political situation of the defeat of Persia, but the association of the children with their imperial heritage is very similar in the two poems. It is clear from the *Expeditio Persica* that reference to plural imperial successors, as opposed to Heraclius Constantine alone, cannot be linked with the career of Heraclonas (unborn in 622/3), and hence cannot be used as a dating criterion for the *Hexaemeron*.

## V

Only at line 1869 does it become clear that the series of appeals to God on behalf of the emperor and his family which began at 1839 are put into the mouth of George's patron, the Patriarch Sergius. Olster's final dating argument (pp. 170-1) is based on the description of the patriarch which follows:

'The patriarch cries aloud and says these things, (1870) even if he is weak-voiced<sup>44</sup> from fasting; although not speaking, he resounded loudly from within. Putting his tongue into the fire of his heart, he hid it, and his mouth is steeled more greatly.<sup>45</sup> He shouts silently, like Moses' throat, (1875) and he is heard, although not stirring his mouth. He moistens the earth, he rains through his eyes, and snows thickly with the issue of tears. We perceived him, even though he thinks he had passed unnoticed; for he had manifestly dimmed his lower vision, (1880) and extended all his thoughts above.' (*Hex.* 1869-80)

Olster suggests that this description of the patriarch is unusual, and in particular that the reference to Sergius' weak voice has no parallel in George's poetry. He argues that, if the composition of the *Hexaemeron* postdates the elevation of Heraclonas to Augustus, the reference to Sergius' weak voice (1870-1) may be explained by the patriarch's illness or old age, since he died in December 638,<sup>46</sup> or indeed that the concluding references to the patriarch's detachment from the world (1878-80) may indicate that the poem was not completed until after his death.

I suggest that these lines refer not to the failing health or death of Sergius, but to a profound religious experience, induced by fasting (probably in Lent, a traditional time for the delivery of

ἔσταλμένος δὲ πρὸς τὸ λήμμα τῆς πλάνης, | πόδας πρὸς αἶμα μηδαμῶς κινουμένους, | εἰς δ' αὐτὸ σφῶζειν πανταχοῦ ταχυδρόμους.

<sup>42</sup> So Pertusi (n. 2) 162; cf. n. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also *In Bon.* 116, *Bell. Avar.* 531-2.

<sup>44</sup> The adjective ἰσχνόφωνος initiates the comparison between Sergius and Moses (made explicit at 1874), since it is the term used of Moses' speech impediment at Exodus 4.10 and 6.30. (I am indebted to Mr Peter Coxon, Mr Andrew Mein, Dr Jim Martin and Professor L.G. Whitby for drawing my attention to these passages.) In a linguistically similar but contrasting statement at *Contra Sev.* 589 (*PG* xcii 1665) τὸν νοῦν γὰρ ἰσχνὸν ἐξ ἀσιτίας ἔχεις, fasting is regarded as having a beneficial effect on the mind of Ephraem the Syrian.

<sup>45</sup> A pun on two senses of στομόω, which can mean both 'provide with a mouth' (LSJ s.v. II) and 'harden', 'steel' (LSJ s.v. III). At *Hex.* 1891 στομόω is used in the Euripidean sense 'fence' (LSJ s.v. IV). Lines 1872-3 allude to the biblical story of the burning bush (Exodus 3. 1-6), and thus continue the comparison between Sergius and Moses.

<sup>46</sup> Nic. 26. 1-2 with Mango's note (p. 190). His funeral is described in Const. Porph. *de caer.* ii. 30 (630.12-631.4 Reiske).

homilies on the *Hexaemeron*).<sup>47</sup> But the elaborate account of how Sergius cries out without speaking is also an indication that the preceding speech attributed to him is in fact the invention of George, a view supported by the implication of line 1878 that the patriarch's words and emotions were perceptible only to the poet.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, this description of the patriarch is less singular than Olster suggests. George elsewhere describes Sergius (as well as Heraclius) as Moses,<sup>49</sup> and, in the context of Sergius' exertions in the defence of Constantinople at the time of the 626 Avar siege, an elaborate passage of the *Bellum Avaricum* uses a variant of the opening of *Hexaemeron* 1871 in describing how the patriarch stood and through his ready heart was eloquent without speech (138-9 σὺ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὼς ἐξ ἐτοίμου καρδίας | μηδὲν λαλῶν ἔφραζες), so that his standing immediately caused the fall of the barbarians; he is invoked as 'general of the armed tears', which are represented as burning to dust (πυρπολέω) the barbarian courage, stopping the streams of blood (141-4), and producing fruitfulness in barren hearts (145-61).<sup>50</sup> A similar comparison between the silent cry of Sergius and that of Moses is made by Theodore Syncellus in the same context: 'with silent voice like the first Moses he shouted to the Lord, when he made the ark go before the people.'<sup>51</sup> In both Theodore and George the reference to Moses in this connection derives from the analogy between Sergius' role in the repulse of the Avars and that of Moses in the defeat of Amalek.<sup>52</sup> The stories of Amalek and of the crossing of the Red Sea are favourite Mosaic allusions in George's work.<sup>53</sup> Amalek is referred to more clearly at *Expeditio Persica* iii 415-17, part of the prayer for Heraclius discussed above (pp. 120, 124-5), together with the story of the burning bush (418-20). The close links between the end of the *Expeditio Persica* and the end of the *Hexaemeron* may have helped to inspire the similar biblical allusions which develop the theme of Sergius' silent voice in the *Hexaemeron* passage. The amalgamation of several different allusions in a single composite image is characteristic of George's style.

The *Hexaemeron*'s description of Sergius is further anticipated in George's *Bellum Avaricum*. Following another reference to his use of the icon in the defeat of the enemy (370-9), George

<sup>47</sup> For example, those of Basil of Caesarea and Ambrose of Milan.

<sup>48</sup> So God delegates Aaron to speak on behalf of the stammering Moses at Exodus 4.14-17 and 7.1-2 (cf. n. 44; I am indebted to Dr Susanna Philippo for this point). George's privileged vision perhaps suggests his own enhanced state of grace, achieved by his spiritual endeavours to reach God through understanding of the universe, cf. esp. *Hex.* 1760-5.

<sup>49</sup> *Bell. Avar.* 495-501, *Laud. S. Anast.* 2; cf. L. Sternbach, 'Analecta Avarica', *Rozprawy Akademii Umiejetnosci, Wydział Filologiczny* ii 15 (Cracow 1900) 326 n. 1. For the image used of Heraclius, cf. (for example) *Exp. Pers.* iii 415-25 (mentioned above, p. 120), and see further Mary Whitby (n. 3) 213.

<sup>50</sup> *Bell. Avar.* 130-44 are discussed by Trilling (n. 24) 257-8. Lines 145-61 are elaborated with New Testament imagery of the fruitful vine.

<sup>51</sup> Theod. Sync. 305.6-7 (Sternbach) σιωπῶση δὲ τῆ φωνῆ καθὰ Μωσῆς ὁ πρῶτος ἐβόα πρὸς κύριον, ἠνίκα τὴν κιβωτὸν ἐποίησε τοῦ λαοῦ προπορεύεσθαι. The passage alludes to Numbers 10.33-4 which does not, however, explicitly mention Moses' silent voice. For this, Querci (on *Hex.* 1874) cited Exodus 14.15 as an example of Moses calling upon God silently. But see next note.

<sup>52</sup> Theodore introduces the Moses image with a reference to the defeat of Amalek (Exodus 17.8-16): whereas Moses held out his arms against Amalek, Sergius held out the icon 'not made with hands', and ran round the walls weeping as he exhibited it to the barbarians (304.36-305.6). Similarly George's reference to Sergius' stand (on the walls of Constantinople), which brings about the enemy's fall, recalls Moses' words to Joshua (Exod. 17.9) καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ βουνοῦ, καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ μου: like Moses, Sergius stands high above the enemy, who are miraculously defeated. This suggests that it is Moses' silent prayer to God for the defeat of Amalek which inspired the reference to his 'silent voice' in the context of the Avar assault. (The link between George's reference to Moses' silent prayer and the story of Amalek was suggested to me by the late Dr Margaret Gibson.)

<sup>53</sup> They are mentioned together at *Laud. Anast.* 2 in connection with Sergius: cf. Flusin (n. 2) ii 382-4. For the crossing of the Red Sea, cf. also *Exp. Pers.* i 135-8 (of Heraclius) and *Bell. Avar.* 495-501 (of Sergius).

includes tears and fasting among the techniques by which Sergius secured the Virgin's assistance (380-5), and earlier alludes in passing to the patriarch's self-effacing modesty (227).<sup>54</sup> Sergius' tears and modesty are also mentioned in connection with the compliment paid to his inspiration in the opening section of the *Hexaemeron*: George appeals to Sergius to inspire him using the imagery of agriculture, 'water us with the stream of tears' (45 ἄρδουσιν ἡμᾶς τῆ ῥοῆ τῶν δακρύων), but adds that he will turn to his task, 'since you shun praise and blame' (48). Finally, the sentiments of *Hexaemeron* 1879-80 are paralleled by the emphasis on Sergius' spirituality in the preface to Theophylact Simocatta's *History* (dial. 11-12), a theme touched on more briefly by George in his reflective poem *de Vanitate Vitae* (231-4, *PG* xcii 1598). Similar qualities had earlier been attributed by Paul the Silentiary to the Patriarch Eutychius (*Descr. S. Soph.* 1005-9, 1014-17), suggesting that the theme of a patriarch's detachment from terrestrial preoccupations is a standard *topos*. But references to Sergius' eloquent silence, tears, fasting and modesty in works of the 620s cast doubt on the view that their combination in the *Hexaemeron* is indicative of the patriarch's declining years a decade later.

In connection with his argument about Sergius, Olster suggests (pp. 170-1) that a likely context for the patriarch's prayer to God for Heraclius' heirs might be a liturgy in which Heraclius and his sons received his blessing, perhaps the coronation of Heraclonas as Augustus which took place only a few months before Sergius' death.<sup>55</sup> But even though the prayer is probably a fiction, the reference to Sergius' fasting and the hexaemeral theme suggest a Lenten context. Prayer for the longevity of the ruler and for the imperial line is standard at the conclusion of the *basilikos logos*,<sup>56</sup> and several of George's earlier poems end in a similar way, most notably the *Expeditio Persica* (whose concluding section has significant similarities of language and thought with the end of the *Hexaemeron*), but also the poem to Bonus and the *Bellum Avaricum*.<sup>57</sup> The device of putting praise of Heraclius and his family into Sergius' mouth also serves another literary purpose. At the end of his *ekphrasis* of the church of St Sophia, Paul the Silentiary makes an elaborate apology so as to avoid causing offence in turning from praise of the emperor to that of the patriarch (lines 963-77). George's tactic of using his patron the patriarch to articulate the imperial panegyric neatly sidesteps a comparable difficulty.

## VI

Hence I believe that there is no evidence for dating the *Hexaemeron* to 638. Lines 1845-52 contain unambivalent references to the victory over Persia, and use terminology found in other works of the later 620s and early 630s.<sup>58</sup> The epilogue refers to Heraclius' children in the plural as opposed to a number of allusions elsewhere to the eldest son Heraclius Constantine alone, but the *Expeditio Persica* of 622/3 sets a close precedent for this.<sup>59</sup> There is no reference to the declining years of the patriarch, to Arabs, or to the presence of Heraclius in Constantinople.

The mood of the epilogue combines the certainty of victory over Persia (1845-52) with an element of doubt. Physical victory has been won, but the spiritual one is less sure: Heraclius

<sup>54</sup> The verb λαθεῖν is used, as at *Hex.* 1878. For the expression with δοκέω + λεληθέναι, cf. *Contra Sev.* 211, 303.

<sup>55</sup> The ceremony is described in Const. Porph. *de caer.* ii 27 (627.12-628.20 Reiske).

<sup>56</sup> See n. 38 and cf. also Menander Rhetor 376.28-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Exp. Pers.* iii 428-61, discussed above pp. 124-5; *In Bon.* 162-4 (longevity), *Bell. Avar.* 535-41.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. also *Hex.* 1900. The claim that Heraclius' victory over Persia has won him the right to world rule is unlikely to have been made after the decisive Byzantine defeat by the Arabs at the Yarmuk in 636, although Olster (169 n. 81, cf. 172) argues that omission of unpleasant events is characteristic of George's panegyric of Heraclius.

<sup>59</sup> See above pp. 124-5.

still has to win a second victory over the unseen barbarians (1856-8). This ambivalence recurs in the concluding lines of the poem where the hope is expressed that through humility before God redemption, as well as peace, will be won:

‘Bend on their [the cities’] account your neck to God (1900) and all Persia bends in turn her feet.<sup>60</sup> Incline on their account your legs at the sanctuary, and they utterly trample all barbarians. Bow down your back to the earth below, and all the universe straightway arises. (1905) For thus may the channels poured forth from sin be stopped, and with peace may we all pass beyond the hateful clouds of the earth. And with one voice every mouth shall cry aloud:

‘How is (1910) the whole creative and wise production of God’s creatures magnified!’ (Hex. 1899-1910)

This passage forms the climax of an appeal which begins at 1881, immediately following the description of Sergius:

‘But O slayer of the barbarian passions—for you slaughter them with the sword of the word—show that our wall is fortified, for the cities found your children a wall. (1885) Raise up for them battlements from stones, putting in Christ as the corner-stone, entwine for them imperishable pearls, set from tears, not from shells. Speak on their account to God each day, (1890) for the darkness of night is black for you. Fence them with mystic javelins, frame for them cruciform shields. Extend bows by the outstretching of fingers. Wing for them a dart moved by psalms, (1895) make for them a sling from sighing, forge for them whetted swords, grasping the fire with intellectual tongs, and with the Spirit of God blowing on it.’<sup>61</sup> (Hex. 1881-98)

It is not immediately clear to whom this appeal is addressed. The references to children (1884; cf. 1859-68) and to the submission of Persia (1900) might suggest that the passage refers to the emperor and is to be interpreted as a continuation of Sergius’ appeal (1838-68). But the theme of the spiritual armoury (1881-98) develops an allusion to Sergius in the preface (50 τοῖς σοῖς πεποιθῶς μυστικοῖς ἀκοντίοις; cf. 1891), and is paralleled by a similar passage in the *Bellum Avaricum* (238-45) which describes how, in the absence of Heraclius in 626, Sergius defeated the Avar besiegers of Constantinople with spiritual weapons. In the context of his own spiritual exertions explored in *de Vanitate Vitae*, George similarly describes Sergius (but using sea imagery) as operating against the passions (36 καὶ τῶν κλύδωνι τῶν παθῶν ἀντιπνέων; cf. Hex. 1881). The closing lines of the *Hexaemeron* thus return to the theme from which the poem began—compliment to George’s patron, culminating in a paraphrase of Psalm 103. 24 (cf. Hex. 55-6). But the contemporary political themes introduced at 1838 add a new dimension to the personal debt to Sergius acknowledged in the preface: Heraclius’ victory over Persia, whether physical or spiritual, and hence the New Creation, is now seen to depend upon the intercession of the Patriarch.<sup>62</sup>

Hence the concluding passage of the *Hexaemeron* must be interpreted in the light of the preceding poem, which is predominantly religious. The political events of the late 620s and hopes for a New Creation aroused by the victory over Persia are subsumed into the larger theme of the work, the individual’s personal endeavour to reach God through contemplation of His universe. A substantial section (767-882) deals with the operation of the devil on man: he brings

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Exp. Pers.* iii. 404-6 where Heraclius is invoked to strike terror into the enemy, ‘and every foreigner who runs towards bloodshed will bend his neck in trembling before this man’ (405-6 καὶ πᾶς τις ἀλλόφυλος εἰς αἷμα τρέγων | τούτῳ προκίμνυει σὺν τρόμῳ τῶν ἀρχέων; see p. 120). The parallel reinforces the change of emphasis from the situation in 622: barbarian submission is now certain.

<sup>61</sup> On the text, see n. 13.

<sup>62</sup> The preface refers to George’s dumbness in past times of adversity (5-7), which balances the epilogue’s reference to Sergius’ dumbness (1870-75). If the closing lines refer to Sergius, then the children (1884) are the clergy or people of Constantinople; the preface alludes (46) to George’s poem as a metaphorical child of Sergius. I am indebted to Dr Paul Magdalino for discussion of the reference of Hex. 1881 ff. See further Ludwig (n. 3) 119-28.

out bestial elements, like a barbarian he sets the body at war with the spirit (794-6) and generates sin, an onslaught with which George himself is familiar (810-11, 823-6); but those who succeed in rebuffing his attacks gain the power to overcome human limitations and come nearer to God. George's preoccupation with the problem of sin earlier in the poem (as also in the *de Vanitate Vitae*) goes some way towards explaining his return to this theme at the end. Heraclius has won one great victory which ranks as a supreme earthly achievement, but victory over the spiritual foe is necessary to complete his accolade. We need not be unduly surprised at the intrusion of this theme in a work where political considerations are secondary to religious thought.

But it is true that the *Hexaemeron* theme does also have a political aspect. The religious theme of creation is also a metaphor for imperial renewal, and Heraclius' achievement in saving the world from the threat of Persia is analogous to its redemption through Christ.<sup>63</sup> Heraclius had campaigned against Persia for six years and returned to Constantinople in triumph in the seventh, as God had created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.<sup>64</sup> Hence the poem ends with the hope that the victory over Persia, won through submission to God, may have greater significance than a mere temporal victory, but may constitute a redemption and new beginning for the world, in which the great enemy sin will be rooted out, and man will pass beyond 'the hateful clouds of the earth' (1907). George was not alone in associating such eschatological hopes with the victory over Persia.<sup>65</sup>

It is possible that the prayer for a second spiritual victory at the end of the *Hexaemeron* can be linked more precisely with political events of 628-30, in particular hopes for the conversion of Persia to Christianity which were founded on Heraclius' alliance with the Christian Shahrbaraz,<sup>66</sup> and Heraclius' subsequent policy of seeking reconciliation among Christians, which in 630-1 saw him receiving communion from the Nestorian catholicus Ishoyahb II, delegate of the new Persian queen Boran, and meeting the monophysite Patriarch Athanasius.<sup>67</sup> In the event neither seed bore fruit, but the political and religious diplomacy of this period would account for the uncertain hopes expressed by George, and Lent 630 might be a plausible date for the poem. My present purpose, however, is not to enter upon fascinating but hazardous speculation as to the precise political context of George's poem, but rather to highlight the dangers of such an approach, and to suggest a more general methodology of internal comparison for the interpretation of this rewarding but under-valued poet.

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<sup>63</sup> The metaphor is explored in detail by Olster (161-8).

<sup>64</sup> Theophanes 327.24-328. 2, which is probably based on a lost part of George's poetry, cf. Olster 161; L. Stembach, 'De Georgii Pisidae apud Theophanem aliosque historicos reliquiis', *Rozprawy Akademii Umiejetnosci, Wydzial Filologiczny* ii 15 (Cracow 1900) 35-7; Pertusi (n. 2) 292, 307; J. Howard-Johnston, 'The official history of Heraclius' Persian campaigns' in E. Dabrowa ed., *The Roman and Byzantine army in the East* (Cracow 1994) 57-87 at 74 n. 35, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. esp. Theoph. *Sim. Hist.* v 15.3-7, with C. Mango, 'Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse sassanide. II. Héraclius, Sahrvaraz et la Vraie Croix', *Travaux et Mémoires* ix (1985) 105-17 at 117, and Michael Whitby, 'Greek historical writing after Procopius: variety and vitality', in Averil Cameron and L.I. Conrad ed., *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East I: problems in the literary source material* (Princeton 1992) 25-80 at 73.

<sup>66</sup> Mango (n. 65).

<sup>67</sup> Flusin (n. 2) ii 312-27, cf. Mango on Nicephorus 19, p. 186. I intend to explore these ideas in detail elsewhere.