SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL OF BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES

9 *Elizabeth Zanghi*
Narratological Devices in Cappadocian Wall Paintings: The case of the infancy cycle at the El Nazar Kilise

49 *Byron MacDougall*
Joy of Division: John Doxapatres' Commentary on Hermognes' *On Issues* and the role of Porphyry's *Isagoge* in the Rhetorical Curriculum

81 *Konstantinos Chryssogelos*
Agathias' erotic *kylix*: A study of *AP* 5.261.

101 *Antonios Pontoropoulos*
Letters and representations of female voices in late antique Greek rewritings of the *Alexander Romance*

131 *Barbara Spinoula*
19th century Greek funeral eulogies and their relation to Pericles' Funeral Oration: the case of Georgios Markos Tertsetis

175 *George Terezakis*
The evolution of Byzantine historical Studies in Greece

231 *David Wills*
The 'conquest' of Greece's Mount Olympus by Anglophone travellers since 1900

251 **Book Reviews**

No 9 & 10 • 2023–2024

Agathias' erotic kylix: A study of AP 5.261*

Konstantinos Chryssogelos

1. Introduction

A Christian[1] with a profound understanding of theology,[2] a clandestine Neoplatonist,[3] a moralist,[4] but one with a knack for humor and satire;[5] an exponent of the Justinian moral code[6] or the tactful voice of the era's subversion.[7] There seem to be different ways to view Agathias' take on literature (history and/or poetry) and reality itself, which to a certain degree extends to his peers, who made up the *Cycle*, a group of poets who contributed to the compilation of the same name prepared by Agathias, presumably shortly after the end of

* I am grateful to Profs. Ioannis Konstantakos (University of Athens) and Anthony Kaldellis (University of Chicago), as well as Christopher Kontonikolis (MA, University of Athens), for their suggestions during the writing of the present article. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

[1] McCail 1969, 96; Cameron 1970, 16–17; McCail 1971, 225 (Agathias' poetry) and 247–249 (the *Histories*); Galli Calderini 1992, 120–127; Garland 2011, 153; Valerio 2014, 9–10.

[2] Pizzone 2013, esp. 97 and 101.

[3] Beck 1984, 73; Kaldellis 1999, 206 ("Agathias was not a Christian at all") and 240–248 (Agathias' Neoplatonic sympathies in the *Histories*), but slightly differently in Kaldellis 2003, 300: "The thorny question of Agathias' religion must involve his work as a whole. His use of myth as history does not itself prove much. Christians also used Greek mythology for similar purposes."

[4] McCail 1969, 95–96; Cameron 1970, 21 and 29 (on Agathias' erotic epigrams); Kaldellis 1999, 223 (Agathias' "moral" approach of History in the *Histories*, but not in Christian terms, in the scholar's opinion; on the moral aspect of the *Histories*, see also Smith 2022b, esp. 173 and 178–179).

[5] Ortega Villaro 2010, 287.

[6] McCail 1969.

[7] Smith 2015 and Smith 2022b, esp. 182–183.

Justinian's reign.[8] When it comes to the erotic output of the *Cycle* (the sixth book of the anthology, later incorporated into the fifth book of the *Anthologia Palatina*),[9] earlier studies deemed Agathias' poems as a tad conservative and moralistic, lacking the passion and the spiciness of his alter-ego, Paul Silentiarios,[10] whereas modern approaches take a different route: The poets of the *Cycle*, prominently represented by Agathias and Paul, were deliberately testing and eventually transgressing the boundaries of Justinian moral decorum, by producing verses teeming with overtly sexual innuendos, in which concepts of gender fluidity and homoerotic desire were integrated with facility.[11] Was then Agathias, the poet and historian, simply "performing Christianity," thus being attuned to the moral milieu of Justinian times, or was he using his rhetorical and poetical skills to undermine it covertly, while publicly faking conformity in order to advance his career or, more importantly, to keep himself safe from harm?[12] Then again, was Justinian Constantinople (where Agathias spent most of his professional life) *that* oppressive and regressive after all? Hans-Georg Beck begs to differ: The moral code was actually looser than generally assumed and therefore the daring erotic poetry of the *Cycle* would not have been under any serious threat.[13]

Such variety in scholarly opinion may lead to interestingly divergent results, when shared readings of different poets are undertaken. Take for instance Agathias in comparison to the chief hymnographer of Justinian's time, Romanos Melodos. In the early 1970s, Roland C. McCail saw in both poets the endorsement of the ascetic ideals of the Christian dogma;[14] in 2019 Steven D. Smith either juxtaposed the two poets –Ro-

[8] On the *Cycle*, see Cameron & Cameron 1966, McCail 1969; Cameron 1970, 12–29; Valerio 2014, 7–15.

[9] Cameron & Cameron 1966, 7.

[10] McCail 1969, 95–96; Cameron 1970, 21–22; McCail 1971, 206 and 209; Beck 1984, 68. Nonetheless, the latter does not see a moralist in Agathias, even though he thinks that Paul is more creative in his erotic epigrams.

[11] Smith 2015 and 2019.

[12] McCail 1969, 96; Cameron 1993, 156–158; Kaldellis 1999, 228 and 252; Smith 2015, 501–503.

[13] Beck 1984, 73–75.

[14] McCail 1971, 220.

manos submitting sin to the authority of Christ,[15] Agathias liberating it from it – or he made them "partners in crime," arguing that jewelry worn by the Virgin Mary in one *kontakion* of Romanos made the Mother of God look suspiciously earthly and desirable, not unlike some of the contemporary ladies who appear in the erotic epigrams of the *Cycle*.[16] In other words, here Romanos is not regarded as the purifying force that confirms Agathias' faith; on the contrary, Agathias and his peers are apparently capable of "defiling" aspects of the pious hymnographer's literary work.

By taking into account all the above, we may wonder how a six-verse epigram, namely *AP* 5.261 by Agathias,[17] which builds on the relatively popular "cup-motif" of the previous Greek and Latin erotic literature, where the secret lovers kiss symbolically by drinking from the same spot of a cup during a banquet, fits into the aforementioned discussions. The answer is that hitherto it does not. Truly, with the exception of some brief mentions of the epigram, mainly with regard to its *Quellenforschung* or its relation to a couple of similar epigrams in the *Cycle* (5.281 and 9.770 by Paul; 5.295 by Leontios Scholastikos),[18] past and present scholarship has not dealt with it in depth. For Christian readings of Agathias this epigram seems rather unexciting, namely somewhat moralistic,[19] whilst it may also give the impression of merely recycling an ancient motif by means of *mimesis*. As for "iconoclasts," such as Smith, it may look like a "harmless" lyrical confession of a heterosexual male and nothing more – or else how are we to explain its absence from the scholar's detailed and fruitful gender-centered analysis of the

[15] Smith 2019, 7–8.

[16] Smith 2019, 45–46.

[17] All references to the *Anthologia Palatina* are to the edition of Hermann Beckby (Munich, 1957). The epigrams of Agathias have been edited separately by Viansino 1967 and Valerio 2014. Those of Paul have been edited by Viansino 1963.

[18] Mattsson 1942, 48; Viansino 1963, 30–31 and 83.

[19] Volpe Cacciatore 1981, 470. Cf. the assessment of Cameron 1970, 21, where the epigram falls under the category of those that are "reflective and clever rather than passionate." This could be seen as a favorable take, if the poem in question were not an erotic one.

"banquet-poetics" in the epigrammatic poetry of the *Cycle*?[20] With these premises in mind, the aim of the present paper is twofold: first to engage in a close reading of the sources that transmit the "cup-motif" up to the time of Agathias, with the purpose of determining which comes closer, in content and form, to Agathias' epigram; second to explore the poem's poetics in the light of previous scholarship and the different approaches that have been taken to the study of Agathias' artistry. Among others, I will try to answer one crucial question: After detecting the source of 5.261, namely after defining the act of *mimesis* by Agathias at a first level, what else is there to say about the poem? Hopefully, some interesting things will surface that are worthy of our attention.

2. The motif of the erotic cup and Agathias

The text of Agathias' epigram is as follows:

> Εἰμὶ μὲν οὐ φιλόοινος· ὅταν δ' ἐθέλῃς με μεθύσσαι,
> πρῶτα σὺ γευομένη πρόσφερε, καὶ δέχομαι.
> εἰ γὰρ ἐπιψαύσεις τοῖς χείλεσιν, οὐκέτι νήφειν
> εὐμαρὲς οὐδὲ φυγεῖν τὸν γλυκὺν οἰνοχόον·
> πορθμεύει γὰρ ἔμοιγε κύλιξ παρὰ σοῦ τὸ φίλημα
> καί μοι ἀπαγγέλλει τὴν χάριν, ἣν ἔλαβεν.

I am not fond of wine. On the other hand, when you want to make me drunk, taste it first,[21] then offer the cup to me and I shall accept it. For if you touch the surface with your lips, it will not be easy (for me) either to stay sober anymore or to avoid the sweet cupbearer; for the cup carries over your kiss, announcing to me the grace it received.

[20] Smith 2019, 33–71. The scholar takes a slightly different approach in Smith 2020, 132 and 141–142: Here he acknowledges the confrontation between asceticism and carnality in the poetry of the *Cycle*, with a focus on Agathias, which causes internal tension.

[21] The use of three forms in the present tense in the third verse conveys a sense of simultaneity as if the imaginary kiss is happening as soon as she touches the cup with her lips. However, the very last word of the epigram (ἔλαβεν) shows that there is a chronological sequence in the events: First she drinks from the cup, then she offers it to the cupbearer, who then hands it over to the poetic I.

As we can see, Agathias follows the long tradition of the "cup-motif," by showing two lovers exchanging a kiss via a ploy: Instead of actually touching each other's lips, they both drink from the same cup (κύλιξ), which functions as a mediator. It is important to note that in Agathias' version the recipient (the poetic voice) drinks from the same spot touched by the lips of the desired person (εἰ γὰρ ἐπιψαύσεις τοῖς χείλεσιν… πορθμεύει παρὰ σοῦ το φίλημα). The setting is a banquet, for there is also a cupbearer who carries the cup from one banqueter to the next. It should also be stressed that the object of the poet's desire is a girl, as attested by γευομένη, whereas the gender of the poetic "I" is not specified – simply identifying it with the historical person of "Agathias" would mean ignoring the basic rules of narrative analysis, not to mention that in the *Cycle* there are epigrams in which the narrative voice is explicitly female.[22] Finally, it should be noted that the style of the epigram is that of a first-person lyrical confession. With all this in mind, it is time to see how the "cup-motif" appears in previous literature.

With the aid of remarks made by previous scholars, either on Agathias' poem or on other texts where the motif of the erotic cup appears,[23] we come up with the following list – with the word used for the drinking cup at the end of the reference:

-Meleager, *PA* 5.171 (1st-c. BC) – σκύφος
-Ovid, *Amores* 1.4.30-32; *Ars amatoria*, 1.575-576; *Heroides* 17.80-82 (1st-c. BC-1st-c. AD) – poculum (all cases)
-Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.9 (2nd-c. AD) – ἔκπωμα
-Lucian, *Dialogues of the gods*, 8.2; *Dialogues of the courtesans*, 12.1 (2nd-c. AD) – κύλιξ and ἔκπωμα respectively
-Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.16 (2nd-c. AD) – poculum
-[Lucian], *Lucius or The ass*, 8 (2nd-c. AD?) – not mentioned
-Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 3.8 (2nd/3rd-c. AD) – κρατὴρ
-Philostratus, *Letters*, n. 33 (2nd/3rd-c. AD) – ἔκπωμα
-Aristaenetus, *Erotic letters*, 1.25 (first half of 6th-c. AD?) – ἔκπωμα

[22] Smith 2015, 507–510. The scholar sees homoerotic implications in such instances. On the significance of creating different personae in the *Cycle*, see Smith 2019, 195–196.
[23] Mattsson 1942, 48, Viansino 1967, 128; McCail 1971, 208, n. 3; Whitmarsh 2010, 333.

To all these we could add Theocritus' *Idyll* 7, where, according to Vassilios Vertoudakis, the "cup-motif" is implied.24 There, the goatherd Lycidas sings a song for a boy named Ageanax, with whom he is in love, and then says that he will be in fond memory of the boy as he sits in his cabin, drinking wine from his cups (και πίομαι μαλακῶς μεμναμένος Ἀγεάνακτος | αὐταῖς ἐν κυλίκεσσι καὶ ἐς τρύγα χεῖλος ἐρείδων, vv. 69–70). The passage does not involve two lovers drinking from the same cup, but the overall spirit of what in later centuries became the "cup-motif" is indeed here: Erotic desire and thinking about one's lover, while drinking from a cup filled with wine. One final text that needs to be added to the list, to my best knowledge hitherto not taken into account by scholars with regard to Agathias' poem, is the ninth dialogue from Lucian's *Dialogues of the gods*.

Certainly, since scholars have stressed repeatedly Agathias' impressive knowledge of previous literature, which leads to an elaborate intertextuality, both implicitly and explicitly, in his poetic, as well as his historical work,[25] it would not be fanciful to assume that he was aware of every single work that makes up the above list. However, "being aware of" and "conversing with" a specific work of the past on a given occasion are two different things, and so it is important to engage in a comparative study of our primary sources, in order to specify which is closer to the epigram in question. Within this framework, we should reiterate that the dramatic qualities of the poem include a specific *mise-en-scène* (a banquet / symposium) involving three people (the poetic "I", the female object of desire and the male cupbearer),[26] whereas the poetic diction is that of a lyrical confession. Therefore, there is a dramaturgical and a lyrical aspect to Agathias' poem, which need to be explored in relation to past exemplars.

[24] Vertoudakis 2018, 300.

[25] Mattsson 1942, 103–171; Cameron 1970, 19–21; Galli Calderini 1992, 114; Kaldellis 1999, esp. 228–230.

[26] In 5.266 Paul uses οἰνοχόον as an adjective: δέπας οἰνοχόον (v. 6). The noun κύλιξ employed by Agathias is feminine and the *TLG* comprises no more than five cases, where its grammatical gender is masculine. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that Agathias is referring to anything else than to an actual cupbearer.

Let us begin with the first aspect. Among the primary sources, the ones that have three *dramatis personae* acting in a scene with an erotic cup are Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (2.9), Lucian's *Dialogues of the courtesans* (12.1) and the *Dialogues of the gods* (9.2). In Tatius, a slave called Satyrus swaps the cups of the two in love without being asked to do so, but both protagonists comply and thus engage in symbolic kisses multiple times, with the cup as a mediator between their lips. In the *Courtesans*, jealous Joessa complains to her beloved Lysias that during the symposium he hands his cup over to the cupbearer and orders him to give it to no one except a girl by the name of Pyrallis, whom Joessa loathes.[27] Finally, in the *Gods*, Hera accuses Ixion, a mortal who has been granted permission to ascend to Olympus and attend the symposia of the gods, of sexual harassment. More specifically, she says to Zeus that Ixion would ask Ganymede, the cupbearer of Olympus, for Hera's cup after she has drunk from it and then he would interrupt his drinking and start kissing the cup, all this followed by his fixed gazes at her.[28] It is obvious, that this third case is the closest to Agathias, for both in Lucian and the Byzantine poet we have a female object of desire, a male cup-bearer and a love-struck person who fulfills his/her desire by using the drinking cup as a substitute for the lips of the erotic Other. In addition, we may notice that there is no sign in Agathias' epigram that the desire of the poetic "I" is reciprocated, thus it is possible that, as with Ixion, we are dealing with a case of unrequited love.

So much for the "dramatic" setting of the epigram. Now let us move to the lyrical aspect of the epigram. The poetic "I" in Agathias is burning with desire for the girl. Although not fond of wine, he/she will gladly receive the cup and drink from it, for it was first touched by her lips. It should be mentioned beforehand that Ovid's exempla are relevant to our discussion, especially the two verses from *Heroides* (17.80-81: Helen of Troy describes the sexual ploys of Paris during a banquet, including

[27] Aristaenetus (1.25) relies heavily on Lucian's *Courtesans*, 12.1, but the roles have been reversed: The girl is now leading the game with the cup.

[28] καὶ εἴ ποτε πιοῦσα παραδοίην τῷ Γανυμήδει τὸ ἔκπωμα, ὁ δὲ ᾖτει ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ πιεῖν καὶ λαβὼν ἐφίλει μεταξὺ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς προσῆγε καὶ αὖθις ἀφεώρα ἐς ἐμέ.

having a sip from her cup, from the exact same spot as she drank) and those from *Ars amatoria* (1.575-576: The lover must seize the girl's cup and drink from the spot touched by her lips),[29] all the more since scholars surmise that the poets of the *Cycle*, especially Paul, were familiar with Latin elegy.[30] Interestingly enough, Ovid's specific mention of the girl's lips in *Ars amatoria* (labellis) is also found in Agathias' epigram (εἰ γὰρ ἐπιψαύσεις τοῖς χείλεσιν), although the words uttered by the vulnerable poet could have hardly been those of the self-assured Paris, who is gazing boldly at Helen (17.78-79). Even so, it cannot be ruled out that Agathias was aware of those parallels, all the more since scholars have noted a direct Ovidian influence on at least one occasion in Agathias' *Histories*.[31]

Moving on to the Greek tradition, the expression of erotic desire in association with a drinking cup that has been touched by the lips of the beloved person can be found as early as in the epigram of Meleager (5.171), but here the motif (which in Greek literature had not yet been properly developed – see the list for chronology) is somewhat reversed: Instead of having a drink from it, the poet simply wishes that he will have the same luck as the cup, namely of tasting the lips of the girl. An epigram (5.295) by Leontios Scholastikos, another member of the *Cycle*, was clearly inspired by Meleager,[32] but the same cannot be said about Agathias, who takes a distinctly different approach. In other words, it could hardly be argued that the epigram by Meleager formed the basis of the one by Agathias.

The next text that is of interest, namely Lucian's *Dialogues of the gods* (8.2), does not actually contain a lyrical confession, but it is highly

[29] The two verses from the *Amores* (1.4.30–32) differ slightly: The whole game with the cup takes place in the presence of the girl's husband.

[30] See Smith 2019, 28–29 and 226, with bibliography; for Agathias, see also Alexakis 2008.

[31] Alexakis 2008; cf. Smith 2022b, 179, n. 14. See also Kaldellis 2003, 298, for yet another similar suggestion regarding the *Histories*, but this time it seems that, if there is indeed a direct influence, Agathias adapted more freely the Ovidian exemplar (cf. the remarks of Alexakis 2008, 615, n. 30).

[32] Ψαῦε μελισταγέων στομάτων, δέπας· εὖρες, ἄμελγε· | οὐ φθονέω, τὴν σὴν δ' ἤθελον αἶσαν ἔχειν.

relevant to Agathias' epigram, as we shall see. In this dialogue, Hera is once again complaining to Zeus, only this time regarding his mischievous behavior during the symposia: Sometimes, says Hera, the father of gods takes a sip from the cup and then offers it to his cupbearer, the young Ganymede. The lad also drinks from it and then returns it to Zeus. Then, the god drinks from the spot touched by Ganymede's lips, so that, according to Hera, he gets the feeling that he is both drinking and kissing the desired boy.[33] What we have here is the narration of an action, however there are two key elements that bring this passage close to Agathias. The first is the employment of the word κύλιξ for the drinking cup (although the Byzantine poet could have well written δέπας, which is fine metrically), which constitutes the sole such instance in the Greek tradition of the "cup-motif" before Agathias. The second is the explicit mention of drinking from the same spot (not merely from the same cup), so as to taste the lips of the desired person.[34] In this respect, although the "setting" of Agathias' poem comes from dialogue no. 9, the words uttered seem almost like an *ethopoiia* that resulted from a shared reading of both Lucianic dialogues: "What would Zeus / Ixion say during the symposium, as he is burning with desire for Ganymede / Hera?"

I think that with the passages from the two Lucianic dialogues we have found the texts with which Agathias was first and foremost conversing, his "main sources", so to speak. If he had knowledge of the Latin tradition as well, then the verses derived from Ovid could be regarded as "subsidiary sources." There is one more such source, namely

[33] σὺ δὲ καὶ τὴν κύλικα οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως λάβοις παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ ἢ φιλήσας πρότερον αὐτὸν ἁπάντων ὁρώντων, καὶ τὸ φίλημά σοι ἥδιον τοῦ νέκταρος, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲ διψῶν πολλάκις αἰτεῖς πιεῖν· ὁτὲ δὲ καὶ ἀπογευσάμενος μόνον ἔδωκας ἐκείνῳ, καὶ πιόντος ἀπολαβὼν τὴν κύλικα ὅσον ὑπόλοιπον ἐν αὐτῇ πίνεις, ὅθεν καὶ ὁ παῖς ἔπιε καὶ ἔνθα προσήρμοσε τὰ χείλη, ἵνα καὶ πίνῃς ἅμα καὶ φιλῇς.

[34] Whitmarsh (2010, 333), discussing the motif of the erotic cup in Achilles Tatius, argues that "the motif of exchanging kisses by secretly drinking from the same part of the cup is Ovidian". However, he also claims (*op. cit*., n. 30) that in Lucian's *Dialogue of the gods*, 8,2 "the parallel is much less exact (Zeus drinking from the same cup as his cupbearer, Ganymede)." As can be seen (see the previous note), Hera says explicitly that Zeus wants to drink from the same spot, so as to taste the boy's lips. On the connection between Tatius and Lucian regarding the erotic cup, see also Schwartz 1967, 546.

Philostratus' love letter, no. 33. The author engages here in the most fully fledged confession we have encountered thus far, which even includes a mention of Zeus' desire for his cupbearer, Ganymede[35] – perhaps Lucian's eighth *Dialogue of the gods* is hiding behind this reference. The "cup-motif" appears at the end of the letter, in a way strongly reminiscent of Agathias' diction: The woman is asked to touch the cup with her lips and fill it with kisses, and then hand it over to those who crave it.[36] Despite the fact that, as shown, the word κύλιξ, the setting with the three "actors" (the desired female, the male cupbearer and the poet), and the fixation on the lips and the symbolic kissing, all point towards Lucian, it is quite possible that Agathias took heed of Philostratus' letter, which may have provided him with the idea for a lyrical expression in the first person. Within this context, Agathias' characterization of the cupbearer as γλυκύς, which could be construed as latently erotic, meaning that a *ménage à trois* is actually implied, relates both to Lucian's Ganymede and Philostratus' female wine server.

One more remark that should be made on the possible connection between Philostratus and Agathias is the former's assertion that the cup does not need to be filled with wine for the erotic game to happen – water is fine.[37] Could that be the inspiration for Agathias' claim of not being φιλόοινος?[38] Were it true, then perhaps this οὐ φιλόοινος should be understood somewhat differently, not so much: "I am not fond of wine", but rather: "It is not the wine I am interested in (but you)." In this way, instead of "moralizing" the overall meaning of the poem, this second reading would actually accentuate its erotic qualities and also highlight Agathias' impressive subtlety, already apparent in the ingenious treatment of the literature he had at his disposal regarding the "cup-motif." Still, we should not overlook the possible allusion to Lucian as well: In the ninth *Dialogue of the gods* (9.1), before Hera informs Zeus about

[35] ἐμοὶ δὲ μόνοις πρόπινε τοῖς ὄμμασιν, ὧν καὶ ὁ Ζεὺς γευσάμενος καλὸν οἰνοχόον παρεστήσατο.

[36] καὶ τοῖς χείλεσι προσφέρουσα πλήρου φιλημάτων τὸ ἔκπωμα καὶ οὕτως δίδου τοῖς δεομένοις.

[37] εἰ δὲ βούλει, τὸν μὲν οἶνον μὴ παραπόλλυε, μόνου δὲ ἐμβαλοῦσα ὕδατος…

[38] Mattsson (1942, 48) regards the statement Εἰμὶ μὲν οὐ φιλόοινος as an "original and elegant expression."

Ixion's inappropriate behavior, her husband hastens to underline that this mortal is χρηστὸς καὶ συμποτικός, i.e. a good person and an excellent drinking-companion. What Zeus does not know of course is that Ixion is after his wife and, as we saw previously, this man did not shy away from demonstrating his lust; to the contrary he kept kissing the cup from where the goddess had drunk, in her presence. It would not be farfetched to contend that Agathias took notice of the joke and then, with the aid of Philostratus, came up with the idea of someone who attends the symposia without being φιλόοινος.

However, the case of φιλόοινος cannot be considered closed, without paying a visit to the Greek epigrammatic tradition. The form φιλόοινος is an extremely rare variation of φίλοινος,[39] the latter found twice in the *Anthologia Palatina*, in two epigrams preceding the era of Agathias (6.248 by Marcus Argentarius, and 7.455 by Leonidas of Tarentum). That of Argentarius is a dedicatory epigram referring to a pitcher (λάγυνος, as a feminine noun), which is characterized as φίλοινος, but also as the "sister of kylix" (κασιγνήτη… κύλικος, v. 2). Later on it is described as "the sweetest confidant of lovers" (μύστι φιλούντων | ἠδίστη, v. 5-6), which means that we are once again dealing with a variation of the "cup-motif." In Leonidas' sepulchral, but essentially scoptic, epigram, we learn that on the tomb of a deceased old φίλοινος woman (v. 1) a kylix was placed, and that she was distressed because the kylix was empty (v. 6). In these two epigrams φίλοινος and κύλιξ go together, yet it is more important to stress that in Leonidas the adjective pertains to a woman, a fact that urges us to return to an issue mentioned earlier in this section: Since the gender of the speaker in Agathias' epigram is not specified, and the sole other use of the adjective φίλοινος in the *Anthologia* is about a woman, it would not be far stretched to assume that the gender of the voice of the poetic "I" in the Byzantine poem is feminine. This would mean that the epigram has homoerotic connotations, which is really anything but implausible, inasmuch as one half of Agathias' Lu-

[39] Apart from Agathias, the *TLG* gives solely one more result for φιλόοινος, appearing in an obscure astrological text.

cianic exemplar (Zeus in love with Ganymede) does exactly the same.[40] Of course, Agathias' homoeroticism in 5.261 would concern lesbian love, a rather uncommon motif in the *Anthologia*, but Lucian happens to be useful even in this case, for in the fifth *Dialogue of the courtesans*, a girl named Leaena (Λέαινα) relates to her friend how she had intercourse with two affluent women, who had invited her to play cithara at their drinking party. The narration of the episode evokes a striking erotic scene involving female homoeroticism, against the backdrop of heavy drinking, thus resembling the scenery of Agathias' epigram. Finally, beyond Lucian, let us remind ourselves that in the seventh idyll of Theocritus, where an "embryonic" version of the "cup-motif" appears, the cup being again a κύλιξ, the goatherd is singing about a boy, and so the topic is once again homoerotic. It is certainly worth mentioning that Agathias was familiar with Theocritus, and with this idyll in particular, as attested by several relevant borrowings in the epigram 5.292, which is bucolic in nature.[41]

3. Agathias' erotic cup: A moral, a romantic or something else?

In the previous section we laid particular emphasis on words and vocabulary. This is justified by the very nature of *mimesis*. If the presence of κισσύβιον, denoting a rustic cup, justifies the assumption that Agathias is in dialogue with the *Aetia* of Callimachus,[42] then we are permitted to apply the same logic when we encounter a non-rustic drinking cup, namely κύλιξ, in an epigram of Agathias, in this way making a connection between this poet, Lucian and Theocritus – this would not be the first time someone would make the suggestion that the Byzantine poet either drew from these two ancient authors or that he "confronted" their

[40] On how rich intertextuality may conceal strong homoerotic connotations, not apparent on a first reading, in a funerary epigram of Paul, see Smith 2022, 1157–1158.

[41] Mattsson 1942, 110 and Viansino 1967, 43–46.

[42] Valerio 2013, 94–96 and 101. For further connections between Agathias and Callimachus, see Smith 2022b, 175 and 179–180.

work.[43] Of course, *mimesis* is a demanding affair, which can become quite complex when the poet in question is skillful and inventive, like Agathias. As regards the poem under discussion, its topic may be related to the tradition of the "cup-motif," but the analysis of several keywords, such as φιλόοινος, χείλη and, of course, κύλιξ, brought forth an impressive variety of poetic and prose works that have something to say about the literary method of Agathias. Nonetheless, after the close study of the epigram's elaborated intertextuality, the question arises: What exactly did Agathias want to say? Moreover, how does this epigram function within the boundaries of the *Cycle*?

We have already said that the epigram in question has elicited more or less the same kind of response on behalf of scholars. It is generally assumed that it confirms Agathias' moralistic or romantic nature.[44] On the other hand, more radical readings of his poetry tend to ignore it altogether.[45] With the knowledge we now have of the epigram's debt to Lucian, but also to Leonidas' epigram, we start to realize that it owes as much to satire as it does to the erotic tradition.[46] This, in conjunction with the possible homoerotic aspects of the epigram, makes us suspicious about whether Agathias actually wanted to convey a moral message. Certainly, the reader's point of view plays a role, and therefore some would be willing to argue that Agathias is "purging" the motif of the erotic cup, thus creating an epigram based on controversial topics, but with the purpose of offering a Christian counterpart. My reading aims at exploring

[43] On Theocritus, see n. 41 in the present study. On Lucian, see Kaldellis 1997 (Agathias refuting some arguments in Lucian's *How to write history*) Ortega Villaro 2010 (Lucianic influence both on Agathias' poetry and the *Histories*).

[44] On the moral reading, see n. 19 in the present study. On the romantic reading, see Mattsson 1942, 55–56.

[45] Beck 1984 and Smith 2015 and 2019. It is also absent from Smith 2020, where the scholar discerns in the poetry of the *Cycle* a tension between Christian morality and the carnal pleasures of this world.

[46] Agathias' debt to Aristophanes and the ancient comedy, especially in the preface of the *Cycle* (*PA* 4.3), has been noted many times: Mattsson 1942, 106–109; Viansino 1967, 24–25; Cameron 1970, 25; Ortega Villaro 2010, 268; Smith 2019, 35–37, 42–44 and 54–63. The Lucianic influence on Agathias is mainly stressed by Ortega Villaro 2010, where the Byzantine learned man is seen as an author "with a moral and didactic intention, which he very frequently expresses through humour, caricature and contrast" (p. 287).

other possibilities, without denying that Christian attitudes might have influenced the final product to some extent. However, for the purpose of the present study, I would like to turn the spotlight on Agathias the learned poet, who is being deliberately cunning, evasive and witty; if anything, we should not forget whom he was writing for. Such a refined epigram demands an audience of peers, who would be able and willing to decipher it and ultimately to appreciate the skillful way its author made use of the available sources, be it Lucian, Theocritus, Philostratus or the epigrammatic tradition.[47]

However, the peers of Agathias were not only poetry buffs; they were poets themselves, who communicated with each other via their verses. In this respect, we cannot look past Paul's 5.281, where the poet is burning with erotic desire after a girl poured water on his hair from a kylix that had been touched by her "sweet mouth" (γλυκερῶν στομάτων, v. 6) during the rowdy symposium that had just taken place. Paul is typically more flamboyant than Agathias when it comes to erotic poetry, but the sensible thing would be to assume that Agathias' and Paul's κύλικες are conversing with each other.[48] Both lines of interpretation would be valid: Agathias wrote his epigram first and Paul responded, or vice versa. Whatever the case, both poems involve a fetishistic attitude towards the erotic cup, a fact that eventually leads us to 5.285 written by Agathias, where the poet shows a peculiar fascination with a girl's girdle, which, as in 5.261, transmits the kisses between the lips that never touch.[49] McCail, keeping in line with his Christian reading of Agathias' erotic poetry (emphasizing the absence from it of consummated love), although acknowledging the "fetishistic element" in 5.585, sees "no ex-

[47] Cf. Kaldellis 2003, 297: The mythological allusions in the *Histories* are written for the initiated few who were able to understand what Agathias was doing. Cf. Alexakis 2008, 611 and 615.

[48] Cf. Smith 2015, 511 on the "poetic correspondence" between Agathias and Paul: "It is as if the two poets are speaking their own special language." The scholar had just noted that the verb περικίδναμαι appears solely once before the sixth-century and then only three times, all in the poetry of Agathias and Paul. One of these is in 5.292.9, which is addressed to Paul.

[49] Some textual remarks on this epigram by Tueller 2016, 750–751.

plicit obscenity here."[50] Conversely, Smith, discerns Agathias' (sexual) phantasies with domination and submission, providing as evidence this epigram, as well as two more, where the belt / girdle makes an appearance.[51]

Regardless of whose analysis is more convincing, it becomes apparent that 5.261 is more relevant to the literary milieu and the learned sensibilities of the *Cycle*, and specifically to Agathias' overall poetic output, than hitherto noticed. First and foremost, it is anything but just another learned epigram which simply belongs to the long tradition of a given erotic motif, with a harmless personal touch by the romantic or ascetic concerns of the Byzantine poet. Inevitably, if Agathias' peers chose to delve into it (and the poet had left the leads for them: the scenery and words, such as φιλόοινος and κύλιξ), they would be faced with an exciting body of ancient passages, brimful of themes of strong erotic desire, but also with humor and fun. They would have certainly joined in the literary game one way or another, even if 5.261 had not yet been written, for they produced some epigrams with the "cup-motif" on their own, all erotically charged (even 9.770, written by Paul on the occasion of his daughter's wedding),[52] and as we saw, not necessarily influenced by the same texts that inspired Agathias (e.g. Leontios' 5.295 follows Meleager's 5.171, which is less relevant to Agathias' 5.261 than other sources). Without a doubt, this practice of passionate reading, writing and sharing with one's peers constituted the "sociolect" of the members of the *Cycle*, meaning that they had formed their own code of enjoying literature, in this way reinforcing the bonds that tied them together.[53]

On the other hand, the question of conscious "subversion" against the tyrannical oppression of Justinian, i.e. the reading of these epigrams in terms of implicit, yet conscious, social commentary and criticism, merits our attention. Even if we do not fully endorse this theory, there are some remarks made by its exponent, Steven Smith, which seem to

[50] McCail 1971, 210.

[51] Smith 2019, 75–79.

[52] The χρύσεον χεῖλος (golden lip) of the girl is mentioned in the first verse. Viansino (1963, 30–31), aptly correlates this epigram with the erotic tradition. Garland (2011, 154, n. 105) sees a clear reference to the material culture of the era.

[53] Cf. Smith 2019, 54–63.

be pertinent to 5.261, and I would like to close this section by focusing on one of them. As we have seen, Agathias' epigram may be considered a poem that stretches the boundaries of accepted gender perceptions, by enabling possible homoerotic interpretations. Keeping this line of reasoning (but not commenting on this epigram in particular), Smith argues that the concept of *eromania*, namely erotic frenzy, is central to the love epigrams of the *Cycle*, one aspect of which is the act of "role-playing" by constructing "erotic personae."[54] Based on this approach, we could first contend that "Agathias, the romantic poet who eschews intercourse" is one such persona, present in one of the possible readings of 5.261. Moreover, if we associate the "role-playing" of *eromania* with *ethopoiia*, the par excellence rhetorical genre of speaking while pretending to be someone else, then the love-struck poetic "I" in Agathias' epigram may well be adopting the attributes of Lucian's Zeus and Ixion, as well as Lycidas, the goatherd from the Theocritus' idyll. From this perspective, the *eromanic* reading of the epigram becomes more intriguing: The poetic "I" could be someone attracted by people of the same sex, like Lucian's Zeus or Theocritus' Lycidas (not a problem today, but definitely one back then), whereas his / her behavior could be regarded, like Ixion's, as indecent and lewd. Be that as it may, it is striking that Smith bases his argument of "role-playing" on three texts that contain the "cup-motif", namely Philostratus' *Letters*, Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, and Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*. This is yet another strong indication that 5.261 deserves the special attention it has not received to this day.

4. Final remarks

From the lore of ancient literature, to discussions pertaining to the poetic and social function of the *Cycle's* literary production, 5.261 proves to be an epigram worthy of scholarly attention. Here we have six verses that have been crafted with great subtlety, so that a superficial reading will not reveal the complicated intertextual games that lie behind its composition. Beyond intertextuality, it is an epigram that needs to be strongly affiliated with Agathias' oeuvre overall, as well as with the poetry of

[54] Smith 2019, 195–196.

his peers. In any event, the present diachronic and synchronic analysis of the poem, which could be described as anything but exhaustive, has hopefully revealed the many virtues of Agathias' poetic artistry. In the end, we cannot help but ask ourselves, by paraphrasing the famous words of Lady Macbeth: "Who would have thought a Byzantine kylix to have had so much wine in it?"[55]

[55] *Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 1: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him".

Bibliography

Primary sources

Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*. Ed. J. van der Vliet, *Lucii Apulei, Metamorphoseon libri XI*. Leipzig 1897.

Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Ed. E. Vilborg, *Achilles Tatius, Leucippe and Clitophon*. Stockholm 1955.

Anthologia Palatina. Ed. H. Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca* (4 vols.). Munich 1957–1958.

Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*. Ed. G. Dalmeyda, *Longus, Pastorales (Daphnis et Chloé)*. Paris 1934 (repr. 1971).

Lucian, *Dialogues of the courtesans*, n. 5 & 12. Ed. M. D. Macleod, *Lucian*. Vol. 7. Cambridge, Mass., 1961, 378–385 & 432–445.

Lucian, *Dialogues of the gods*, n. 8 & 9. Ed. M. D. Macleod, *Lucian*. Vol. 7. Cambridge, Mass., 1961, 268–281.

[Lucian], *Lucius or The ass*. Ed. M.D. Macleod, *Lucian*. Vol. 8. Cambridge, Mass., 1967, 52–145.

Ovid, *Amores*, n. 1.4, Ed. I.-P. Postgate, *Corpus poetarum Latinorum*. Vol. 1. London 1894, 355.

Ovid, *Ars* amatoria, Book 1. Ed. I.-P. Postgate, *Corpus poetarum Latinorum*. Vol. 1. London 1894, 376–381.

Ovid, *Heroides*, n. 17, Ed. I.-P. Postgate, *Corpus poetarum Latinorum*. Vol. 1. London 1894, 344–346.

Philostratus, *Letters*, n. 33. Ed. C.L. Kayser, *Flavii Philostrati opera*. Vol. 2. Leipzig 1871 (repr. Olms, 1964), 242–244.

Theocritus, *Idylls*, n. 7. Ed. A. S. F. Gow, *Bucolici Graeci*. Oxford 1966, 29–35.

Secondary sources

Alexakis, A. 2008. “Two Verses of Ovid Liberally Translated by Agathias of Myrina (*Metamorphoses* 8.877-878 and *Historiae* 2.3.7) *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101/2, 609–616.

Beck, H.-G. 1984, *Byzantinisches Erotikon. Orthodoxie – Literatur – Gesellschaft*, Munich.

Cameron, A. & A. Cameron 1966. “The *Cycle* of Agathias” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86, 6–25.

Cameron, A(veril) 1970, *Agathias*, Oxford.

Cameron, A(lan) 1993. *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes*. Oxford.

Galli Calderini, I. G. 1992. “Retorica e realtà negli Epigrammi di Agazia Scolastico” *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana* 41, 113–127.

Garland, L. 2011. “Public Lavatories, Mosquito Nets and Agathias’ Cat: The Sixth-century Epigram in its Justinianic Context,” in G. Nathan & L. Garland (eds), *Basileia. Essays on Imperium and Culture in Honour of E.M. and M.J. Jeffreys*. Brisbane, 141–158.

Kaldellis, A. 1997. “Agathias on History and Poetry” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 38, 295–305.

— 1999. “The Historical and Religious Views of Agathias: A Reinterpretation” *Byzantion* 69/1, 206–252.

— 2003. “Things are not what they are: Agathias *Mythihistoricus* and the Last Laugh of Classical Culture” *The Classical Quarterly* 53/1, 295–300.

Mattsson, A. 1942. *Untersuchungen zur Epigrammsammlung des Agathias*. Lund.

McCail, R. C. 1969. “The *Cycle* of Agathias: New Identifications Scrutinised” The *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 89, 87–96.

— 1971. “The Erotic and Ascetic Poetry of Agathias Scholasticus” *Byzantion* 41, 205–267.

Ortega Villaro, B. 2010. “Some Characteristics of the Works of Agathias: Morality and Satire” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 50, 267–287.

Pizzone, A. 2013. “Toward a Self-determined and Emotional Gaze: Agathias and the Icon of the Archangel Michael,” in S. Mariev & W. M. Stock (eds), *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*. Boston and Berlin, 75–103.

Smith, S. D. 2015. “Agathias and Paul the Silentiary. Erotic Epigram and the Sublimation of Same-sex Desire in the Age of Justinian,” in M. Masterson, N. Sorkin Rabinowitz & J. Robson (eds), *Sex in Antiquity. Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*. Oxon and New York, 500–516.

— 2019. *Greek Epigram and Byzantine Culture. Gender, Desire, and Denial in the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge, New York and Port Melbourne.
— 2020. "The Chaste Bee and the Promiscuous Bee: Poetic Self-reflexivity in John of Gaza's *Ekphrasis* and the *Cycle* of Agathias," in J. Hernández Lobato & O. Prieto Domínguez (eds.), *Literature Squared. Self-Reflexivity in Late Antique Literature*. Turnhout, 131–147.
— 2022. "Elegy for an *erōmenos*: Paul Silentiarios, Queer Desire, and Funerary Epigram (*AP* 7.560)" *Етноантрополошки проблеми* 17/4, 1151–1166.
— 2022b. "Epigrammatic Commemoration in the *Histories* of Agathias" *Aevum Antiquum* 22, 173–184.
Tueller, M. A. 2016. "Notes on the *Greek Anthology*, Books 1-5" *The Classical Quarterly* 66/2, 742–751.
Valerio, F. 2014. *Agazia Scolastico, Epigrammi. Introduzione, testo critico e traduzione*. Venice 2014 (Doctoral Dissertation).
Vertoudakis, V. 2018. *Ἀρισταίνετος, Ἐρωτικαὶ Ἐπιστολαί.* Εἰσαγωγή, κείμενο, μετάφραση, σχόλια*:* Βασίλειος Π. Βερτουδάκης. Athens.
Viansino, G. 1963. *Paolo Silenziario, Epigrammi. Testo, traduzione e commento a cura di Giovanni Viansino*. Torino.
— 1967. *Agazia Scolastico, Epigrammi. Testo, traduzione e commento a cura di Giovanni Viansino*. Milano.
Volpe Cacciatore, P. 1981. "Rielaborazione tematica e ricerca stilistica negli epigrammi erotici di Agazia" in *Studi salernitani in memoria di Raffaele Cantarella*. Salerno, 461–473.
Whitmarsh, T. 2010. "Domestic Poetics: Hippias' House in Achilles Tatius" *Classical Antiquity* 29/2, 327–348.