

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF
CHRIST'S EXILE AND RETURN *FIGURÆ*
IN *ORMULUM'S* LATIN TEXT XIV¹

The style of *Ormulum* is diffuse and repetitive. This is the commonplace opinion when judging the stylistic attributes of this text. Baugh's illustrates well this claim: "He is a master of the art of writing without making the thought advance. He repeats himself shamelessly without so much varying the phrase" (1985: 159). Nonetheless, to approach *repetitio* as a technique of textual *compositio* may offer new insights. In fact, this rhetorical technique together with the *periodus* syntactic structure and numerology are evidenced to play an important role in the discourse construction of the text selected. Furthermore, the second *sententia* of the late 12th c. *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum*, i.e. "Dios es una esfera infinita cuyo centro se halla en todas partes y su circunferencia en ninguna" (Lucentini 2000: 47), may well justify the motivation of the discourse structure of the Ormian excerpt.

The Latin Text XIV in *Ormulum* covers leaves 209-219 of the original MS. In the 2nd modern edition this Latin Text extends to 531 lines² (Holt 1878: lxxxiv). The source of the biblical paraphrase is Mathew 2:19-23. Both MS. and Holt's edition provide the *incipit* of the original biblical passage for this text: "But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a

¹ This essay is a revised version of the paper entitled "Mirroring God's Word through allegory: repetition, circularity and Christian symbolism in the *Ormulum's* Latin Text XIV", presented at the SELIM Conference held at Jaen University in Oct. 2000. I thank Jesús Cora for his insightful comments.

² As it is customary, I have followed Holt's edition to quote verses from *Ormulum* (1878). I have omitted orthographic marks, such as the double acute accent for *ut*; and have considered the two hemistiches of the *septenarius* as a versual unit for the numerological analysis.

dream to Joseph in Egypt; saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel”¹ (Kalbfleisch 2000).

The *argumentum* for the *narratio* of this Latin Text is subsequently divided in nine pericopes: Ormin explains the meaning of (1) Jesus’ return to his own people after Herod died (ll. 8403-26); (2) the angel’s unsaid word to Joseph about the land of Israel they should travel (ll. 8427-44); (3) Joseph’s change of mind about settling in Jerusalem after he discovered that Archelaus had ascended king (ll. 8445-58); (4) the angel’s word to Joseph about the land they thence should seek (ll. 8459-78); (5) the town Christ came to live (ll. 8479-96); (6) the Holy Family’s Exile to Egypt and Return to Israel² (ll. 8497-752); (7) Christ’s seven years’ stay in Egypt (ll. 8753-844); (8) Christ’s attitude towards his mother and his *fosterrfaderr* after settling in Nazareth (ll. 8845-56); and (9) the reason why Christ complies the prophecy for the *Nazarisshe mann* (ll. 8857-72). Due to its length, the stylistic traits of the sixth pericope are of special relevance.

Ormin composes his text on rhetorical and numerological grounds. On the one hand, Ormin’s *verba* fit within the rhetorical structure of *repetitio*, provided *repetitio* is understood as the reiteration of the dichotomy *res-verba* both at the opening and closing textual passages. Additionally, Ormin seems to apply the classical notions of *rhetorical compositio* to his text, as his sentences may be described according to the classical syntactic types: *oratio perpetua* and *periodus*. Lausberg defines *oratio perpetua* in the following terms (1991: 305):

La *oratio perpetua*...consiste en la inserción paratáctica de las oraciones en la sucesión natural de sus contenidos. Se trata de la parataxis de las oraciones principales y, en todo caso, de la inserción de algunas oraciones secundarias continuativas... el pensamiento avanza rectilíneo sin que sea dable divisar un fin... La *oratio perpetua* lleva en sí algo de informe, pues le falta la redondez.

¹ This *incipit* reproduces the 19th and part of the 20th lines from the original biblical passage.

² The Holy Family’s Exile is the topic of the previous Latin Text XIII.

In turn, *periodus* “es la unión más perfecta de varios pensamientos en una oración...el período es una formación circular...de suerte que los elementos conceptuales, incompletos al principio y necesitados de integración, no se completan ni se integran en el conjunto del pensamiento hasta la conclusión del período...la conclusión se hace esperar” (*op. cit.*: 306).

On the other hand, Ormin seems to subject his compositio to a numerological pattern, a practice brought about on the grounds of the coincidence of the number of verses and what this number symbolizes; this metaphor becomes, then, the topic of the numerologically delimited text. This compositive technique may be viewed from the modern notion of iconicity, which studies “the natural resemblance or analogy between the form of a sign...and the object or concept...it refers to in the world or in our perception of the world” (Fischer 2000). The source for the numerological approach can be traced to St Augustine, as he states that “many...numbers and combinations of numbers are used in the sacred writings, to convey instruction under a figurative guise, and ignorance of numbers often shuts out the reader from this instruction” (*De doctrina christiana* 2, 16).

Repetitio abounds in this sixth pericope. The sixth pericope opens and ends mentioning the biblical *figurae* (*cf.* Auerbach’s figural interpretation 1998) (ll. 8497-506; ll. 8741-52):

? att Josæp barr pe Laferrd Crist / Wipp Sannte MarƷe hiss moderr,
/ Firsst ut off Issraeless land / Inntill hæpene Egippte, / 7 tatt he
barr himm efft onnƷæn / Inntill hiss aƷhenn birde, / Inntill
Judisskenn peode land / Ut off hæpene Egippte, / ?att wass don
purh pe Laferrd Crist / Forr mikell ping to tacnenn.....All puss
shall pa beon filledd all / ?att uss wass ær bitacnedd, / ?ær Josæp
barr pe laferrd Crist / Ut off hiss aƷhenn birde / Ut off Judisskenn
follkess land / ?att he wass borenn inne, / 7barr himm inntill
hæpenn land, / Inntill hæpene Egippte, / 7 sippenn barr himm efft
onnƷæn / Inntill hiss aƷhenn birde, / Inntill Judisskenn follkess
land, / Swa summ icc habbe shæwedd.

The closing paragraph repeats the same idea as the opening paragraph with little variation: that is, that Joseph took Jesus out of his people and brought him to Egypt—*i.e.* Exile—, and took him back again to Israel—*i. e.* Return—signify many a thing.

Repetitio and *periodi* structure Ormin's interpretation of the Holy Family's Exile to Egipte (ll. 8507-8534). Ormin divided this section in three sentences, according to the number of *paragraphus* written. The first one follows the pattern of an *oratio perpetua*. In fact, *Josæp* himself is presented as the *figura* of both the Apostles' missionary preaching (ll. 8508-12) and the taking of Christ out of his people to heathen lands (ll. 8513-17). This second consummation closes with the reproduction of the actual *figura*, that is, *Josæpess bisne* (l. 8519).

The second sentence of this Exile *figura* follows a two-member *periodus* pattern. Ormin expounds that: "Forr affterr patt tatt Jesu Crist / Wass stiʒhenn upp till heoffne [P] / [A] ?att lape Judewisshe folc / All masst forrwarpp to lefenn" (ll. 8519-8522). The *periodus* is of a temporal nature, as the *protasis* (P¹) establishes a temporal frame, with *affterr*, for the *apodosis* (A); that is to say, Christ's Ascension succeeded to the Jews' rejection of Christianity.

The third sentence underlies a three member *periodus* pattern. He writes: "7 forr patt teʒʒ forrwurppenn pa / To lefenn uppo Criste [P], / [A] ?e posstless forenn sone anan / Till hæpenn folc to spellen / [a] 7 bærenn swa pe Laferrd Crist / Ut off hiss aʒhenn birde / Utt off Judisskenn follkess..." (ll. 8525-30). In this example, the *periodus* is of a causal nature, as the *protasis* provides the reason for the resulting *apodosis*: that is, the Jews' rejection to follow Christianity resulted in both the Apostle's missionary preaching, and bringing Christ out from his people to the heathen.

The Exile theme may also be connected to the Sarepta episode but no explicit mention is given thereof (ll. 8619-8696). The source for Elijah's episode with the Sarepta widow can be read in 1 Kings 17: 8-16. Furthermore, the mentioning of this same passage by Christ seems to be the reason for the uprising in Nazareth and his expulsion from the city, as is recorded by Luke 4: 25-26. Hence, these New Testament verses may justify Ormin's relation between Christ' Exile to Egypt and the Sarepta episode.

This passage is structured on a *repetitio* basis, as this technique is employed to open and close it: on the one hand, the passage begins explaining that Elijah prayed God that it should not rain, and that yearning

¹ I follow Garavelli's notation system for the members of the *periodus* (1991: 314).

was fulfilled (ll. 8619-22). On the other hand, the episode ends with the fulfillment of Elijah's petition that it should rain again because "Helyas pe prophete / Att Drihhtin mihhte winnenn wel / All whattse he wolld e Yeornenn" (ll. 8689-91). Furthermore, the whole Sarepta episode may show traces of an *exemplum*. Mosher indicates its basic elements: "a brief narrative; human characters" (1966: 6). He also argues the absence of *exempla* in *Ormulum* because any *bisne* Ormin mentions serves the purpose of thematic introduction for further exposition—a practice to be traced to the collection of *Old English Homilies*—(*op. cit.*: 51). But, one should not forget the *exemplum*'s moralizing and edifying intention for the audience. Hence, the Sarepta passage qualifies well for an *exemplum*-candidate because its contents are not further explained; its 39 lines bear the stamp of a narrative—that is the passage follows a time-line succession of events—and the characters, Elijah and the widow, are human. Moreover, the moralizing element is manifest in the topological sense as an act of charity (Sayre 2000), confirmed by the numerological interpretation of its total number of lines: 39, a number which, according to Allendy, represents "l'organisation et la solidarité du Cosmos, s'exprimant par l'harmonie des relations entre les parties ($3 + 9 = 12$)" (1948: 385). So to practice the virtue of charity, or solidarity, seems to be the underlying message of this *exemplum*.

The Holy Family's *Return* is a figure of the Conversion of the Jews by Enoch and Elijah's preaching, the consummation of which will take place in the 2nd Advent of Christ. This figural prophecy appears in the text twice: in ll. 8535-618 and ll. 8697-740. Given that Enoch and Elijah's Return and the Conversion of the Jews are each signs of the Antichrist (McHugh 2000), each figural prophecy is composed with the aid of these two signs. The confirmation of this textual division derives from the coincidence of the number of lines for each individual Apocalyptic sign: both signs in the first section extend to 21 lines each, while the second one has 11 lines each. However, the selection of these numbers is not arbitrary.

Number 21, according to Allendy, "est le nombre de destruction ou plutôt de terminaison universelle, parce que, comme 2 s'est séparé de 1, il faut qu'il ait un moyen de s'y réunir s'il le veut" (1948: 368). In turn, number 11 "[est] le nombre de la transgression de la loi, parce qu'il dépasse d'un le nombre dix,

qui est celui du Décalogue. Il [St. Augustine] en fait ‘l’armoire du péche’” (*op. cit.*: 322). These are definitions which fit well into the depiction of *Conversion of the Jews* and *Return of Enoch and Elijah* as the consummation of the end of times with the Arrival of the Antichrist.

In addition, each one of these four resulting textual divisions is composed by means of a circular structure. This is true as the central verse mentions the Apocalyptic sign, which is the theme of the divided text. The central verses are the following: for (1) “? att mann shall spellenn to patt folc [Judisskenn], / 7 turrnenn hemm to Criste” (ll. 8555-6); for (2) “?ær Drihhtin Godd himm [EYÿnoc] hafepp don / To libbenn pære i blisse” (ll. 8597-8); for (3) “7 i patt karte wass he [Helyas] brohht / Till - pær he wunenn sholde” (ll. 8697-8); and for (4) “7 ta shall patt Judisskenn folc / ?urh peYÿre spell beon turredd” (ll. 8707-8). The central verses for the divisions (1) and (4) picture the Conversion of the Jews, whereas for (2) and (3) represent the Kidnapping of Enoch and Elijah, respectively. Therefore, it could be claimed that Ormin employs numerologically iconic language to create circular structures.

In all, it is more than obvious that *repetitio* creates a circular structure, as the end of the sentence or passage finishes with the same *res-verba* as that in the opening parts. Moreover, agreeing with Lausberg’s claims about the circular nature of the *periodus* (*cf. supra*), it is possible to claim that Ormin employs the *repetitio* and *periodus* rhetorical techniques to organize some sections of his texts on a circular superstructure basis. In the other sections, though these rhetorical techniques are noticeable, the structure of the discourse is created by means of numerology. In sum, Ormin’s *repetitio*, *periodi* and numerologically divided texts are all techniques employed to construct circular superstructures. So long as Ormin’s circular discourse is a metaphor of a given symbol it could be claimed that Ormin’s discourse is iconic. So, it should not surprise to find Ormin’s motivation to use language iconically if the divine *sphaera infinitia* is taken into consideration.

Though Lucentini recently edited the medieval text *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum* (2000), it seems that Allain de Lille is the first author to gather together the first two *sententiae* of the *Liber...* in his *Summa Quoniam Homines* and the *Regula Caelestis Iuris* around 1160-65 (*op. cit.*: 35). This book comprises twenty-four definitions of God together with a commentary. For the purpose of this paper, the second definition is of relevance: “Dios es

una esfera infinita cuyo centro se halla en todas partes y su circunferencia en ninguna” (2000: 47). This *sententia* helps explain Ormin’s resulting text. On the one hand, the *sententia* claims the non-existence of limits to the divine sphere, the circumference. But, for the case of a human *auctor* the textual beginning and end do not prevent the text from limits. Ormin overcomes this difficulty by means of creating a circular structure within these textual limits, as it has been shown. On the other hand, the *sententia* proposes that the spherical center is everywhere. Ormin’s continuous composition of circular structures in the encircled exegesis may be interpreted as the will to write a text without an identified center. Hence Ormin’s multiple circular texts can be interpreted as a metaphor of this center-less divine sphere. It may be claimed that Ormin textually accommodates this three-dimensional definition into his two-dimensional textual support.

It is pretty venturous to claim that Ormin had access to this technical literature, as little is known about his sources¹—Morrison (1984) lists the possible bibliographic references in Orm’s library (e.g. the *Glossa*, the pseudo-Anselm *Enarrationes in Matthæi Evangelium*, Beda’s *In Lucae Expositio Evangelium*) and the probable ones (e.g. Jerome’s *De Nominibus Hebraicis* and Isidore’s *De natura Rerum* and *Etymologiae*)—. But the time of Allain de Lille’s publication of the *Liber...* and the period of Ormin’s education seems to coincide². Additionally, the multicircularity of this sixth pericope makes hypothetically possible the influence of the *sententia* of the *Liber...* on the structure of this excerpt. At any rate, the presence of circular superstructures in the Ormian homiletic discourse still awaits to be researched on.

A close reading to the sixth pericope of the XIV Latin Text of the Ormulum may shed some light on the stylistic traits of the Ormian discourse. Ormin seems to employ classical rhetorical techniques and patristic techniques to compose his text. A rhetorical and numerological analysis of this text has proved that Ormin composes his text with circular structures in mind. This method of composition may be accounted for with the aid of the intellectual

¹ Additionally, Lucentini writes that the *Liber...*: “parece haber sido compuesto... en la zona de influencia de la escuela de Chartres y de Gilbert de la Porrée [en la Francia medieval]” (2000: 13).

² This idea derives from Parkes’ argumentation about the writing of the *Ormulum* based on paleographic evidence: the 1170s and early 1180s (1985: 122).

and theological context contemporary to Ormin. This way, his *repetitio* may seem more justified.

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