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SODOMA IN FIFTH CENTURY BIBLICAL EPIC*

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It is the purpose of this paper to trace the occurrence of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Latin Biblical epics of the fifth century, to compare these descriptions with the Biblical 'primary source' and with one another, and in passing to comment on their respective literary merits.

Whereas the first century AD saw the epic flourishing (at least quantitatively) with Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus and Statius, there is hardly any epic poem worth mentioning after them until the De Raptu Proserpinae of Claudianus (late 4th century), the Panegyrics of Apollinaris Sidonius (430-479) and the Iohannis of Corippus (6th century).

The Spanish priest Iuvencus of the early 4th century ‘should be reckoned the first Christian poet in the Latin tongue’¹ with his four Evangeliorum Libri. His remarkable reliance on Vergil, Lucretius and Statius set a trend for much of subsequent 5th century Christian poetry — to a possible reason for this imitatio of classical precursors by early Christian poets we shall return in due course. Other authors of New Testament-based epics during this period are Sedulius with his Carmen Paschale (ca. 490) and Arator (fl. 540) who composed a Historia Apostolica.

The most important poets of epics based on the Old Testament are (probably) all 5th century: they are the anonymous author of the pseudo-Cyprian Heptateuchos, Claudius Marius Victorius with his Alethia, Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus who composed a De spiritualis historiae gestis, the anonymous author of the two sister-poems De Sodoma and De Iona, and Blossius Aemilius Dracontius whose De Laudibus Dei is the only 5th century O.T. epic that does not deal with the Sodom story in any significant detail.²

The story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the vicissitudes of Lot is found in Genesis 18-19, but Lot is already introduced as the son of Abram’s brother Haran in Gen. 11.27. Although a good case can be made out for a symmetrical organisation in the narrative of Gen. 18-19 as
a whole, the part of the history that we shall be dealing with in the poems to be discussed will be limited to Gen. 18.16–19.38.

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Of the four poems to be considered, the Heptateuchos seems as good a point of departure as any, especially since it is the one that most closely follows the Biblical version and is 'in all likelihood the earliest of the Old Testament epics'. As its name indicates, it retells the first seven books of the Old Testament, mostly in dactylic hexameters, interspersed in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy with trochaic hendecasyllables. The provenance of the oldest manuscripts as well as the language point to a Southern Gallic origin of the poem, and it has therefore been ascribed to a Cyprianus Gallus, who is assumed to have composed it at some time between 397 and 430.5

Lines 621–679 of the Heptateuch Genesis relate the history covered in the Biblical Gen. 18.16–19.38. In comparing the two versions it is important to take into account certain basic techniques of paraphrase, such as abbreviation, amplification and — to a lesser extent — transposition, without necessarily going along with Roberts' view that the biblical poets' reliance on the paraphrase and its techniques is one aspect of the influence that the schools of rhetoric had on them.7

The fact that the poet of the Heptateuchos has great respect for the Biblical text makes a comparison between the poem and the Bible version fairly straightforward: the poet uses fewer than half the number of words to describe the same story that the Vulgate tells in Gen. 18.16–19.38. Clearly, then, he abbreviates far more than he amplifies. This he does by omitting details he apparently considers to be unimportant, by formulating far more succinctly than the original, and by telescoping (especially by eliminating dialogue, as in the reduction of the bargaining of Lot with the Lord from a dramatic dialogue of approximately 180 words to a simple indirect question of five verses — 30 words). The dramatic way in which Lot's elder daughter persuades her sister that they should have intercourse with their father (19.31–38) is delicately dealt with in eight hexameters.

But he does not only abbreviate: he also changes details, as in v. 641 'sopitaque dehinc componunt membra cubili', whereas according to the Vulgate the men arrive at Lot's house 'prius ... quam irent cubitum' (19.4).11 Small details are added, as in the description of the angels as 'parili fulgere decentes' (v. 621), of Sodom as 'toto subiectam lumine' (v. 622), or where the simple 'vespere' of Gen. 19.1 becomes 'hesperus umenti cum iam prorumperet igni' (v. 634), or the detailed description of the conflagration in 661–663.12 These embellishments are usually more 'poetic' than the bland version of the Vulgate, and often contain reminiscences of Classical authors.13
With it all, the poet's rendition is still amazingly faithful to what was for him Holy Scripture: this is seen not only in the close correspondence with the Biblical sequence of events, but also in quite striking literal similarities: so *consurgunt* (v. 621) recalls *surrexissent* in *Gen.* 18.16, *graves urbes* (v. 624) may have been suggested by 'Sodomorum et Gomorrhae ... peccatum *eggavatum* est' (18.20), 'clamore' (v. 625) echoes 'clamor' (18.20), 'pro foribus Lodus ... sedebat' (v. 636) renders 'sedente Loth in foribus' (19.1), 'pronus adoratos ... (duxit)' (v. 638) recalls 'adoravitque pronus' (19.1) and 'optantes media ... habitare platea' (v. 639) is the indirect statement for 'in platea manebimus' (19.2). *(The balance of evidence in our brief extract seems to indicate a greater familiarity with the Vulgate than with the Vetus Latina — pace Roberts*. 

The only instance of direct speech in our passage is the Lord's explanation in vv. 625-628, whereas the corresponding section of the Vulgate has at least fifteen 'direct speeches'.

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Probably later than the *Heptateuchos*, but of the same period, is the 'overtly didactic' *Alethia* in three books which Claudius Marius Victorius composed ca. 430. Our only ancient source, Gennadius, in his brief and rather garbled note claims that Victorius wrote a commentary on *Genesis* up to the death of Abraham. Since Book 3 ends with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen.* 20) leaving four and a half chapters of *Genesis* before Abraham's death, scholars have assumed that the extant three books are part of a larger work. There is, however, a decided possibility that the poem as we have it is complete, as has been argued by Homey, and that the Sodom-episode was intended to be the final climax of the poem.

Victorius takes up *Gen.* 8.16 at line 663 of Bk. 3, and the poem ends at line 789 with two rhetorical questions on the formation of the Dead Sea as a result of the conflagration of (i.a.) Sodom and Gomorrah: in other words, 126 vv. as against the 59 required by the poet of the *Heptateuchos* for this particular episode. This far more lengthy treatment of the same subject-matter is however not at all due to a closer or more literal retelling of the O.T. story. The clue to the poet's approach is perhaps to be found in the above-mentioned biographical note of Gennadius, in which he says that Victorius, as a devout Christian well-versed in pagan literature but without training in Holy Scripture, wrote a *commentary on Genesis* for the edification of his son Aetherius. This is why the *Alethia* can be described as a homiletic exposition of the first nineteen chapters of *Genesis*, rich in reminiscences of classical authors. The didactic purpose of the poem is also admitted in the *Praefatio*, where Victorius asks the Lord
Although Victorius follows the story-line of the relevant section of *Genesis* fairly closely in our passage (with even verbal echoes of the Vulgate) he embroiders on it by periphrasis, by describing the thoughts and feelings of Lot, by apostrophes, explanations and rhetorical questions (usually of a moralising nature) and above all by the detailed description of the conflagration (vv. 733-755a and 763-783a), which has many features in common with the conventional epic storm-scenes and could be the subject of a separate study.

It is interesting to note that the only instance of direct speech quoted in our passage is the Lord’s rather abrupt undertaking ‘non perdam’ (v. 676) in contrast to the dramatic dialogue in the parallel Biblical passage (*Gen.* 18.23-32). In the whole of *Aletheia* there are only eleven direct quotes (as against more than 60 in the corresponding section of the Vulgate) and nine of them are attributed to the Lord, whereas but a third of the speeches in *Gen.* 8.20-19.29 are by Him. This seems to indicate a greater piety towards the original on the part of the poet when the Lord is speaking, even if he does not repeat His words literally.

To some extent the poet compensates for the lack of direct speech (and succeeds in conveying some immediacy to his narrative) by his frequent use of the historic present tense — which the Vulgate never uses in the relevant chapters.

In spite of his didactic predisposition, Victorius clearly has loftier poetic pretensions than the poet of the *Heptateuchos*, in a rather laboured way: sentences of seven hexameters and more are quite common in Bk. 3, and in the passage under discussion there is one that runs to sixteen hexameters (vv. 765b-781a). This makes for rather difficult reading at times, and is, I think, very un-Vergilian.

Another striking divergence from Vergilian practice is Victorius’ predilection for enjambment and hence fewer end-stopped lines.

Although I would hesitate to accept all Hovingh’s parallels as true ‘loans’ from classical authors, Victorius indeed borrows quite frequently, especially from Ovid, Statius and of course Vergil: as a rule, however, he takes over little more than *callidas iuncturae*, and not the substantial phrases found in the more artificial cento’s.

The first three lines of our section illustrate not only our poet’s use of his predecessors but also his originality:

`inde movens lateri comes haeret euntum
dolores ovans dulcique quatit concussa pavore`
pectora et attonitum venerabilis attrahit horror
(vv. 663–5)

Although Statius has ‘movent gressus’ (Ach. 1. 827, cp. Theb. 1. 433), while the rest of v. 663 recalls Theb. 11. 35 ‘comes haeret eunti’ and Vergil’s ‘haeret lateri’ (Aen. 4. 73), and although Victorius’ ‘concussa pa-vore/pectora’ is reminiscent of Vergil’s ‘concussaque vulgi/pectora’ (Aen. 11. 451–2a), the striking phrase ‘attonitum venerabilis attrahit horror’ is to my knowledge original. The standard word figures of assonance, alliteration and homoioteleuton are employed regularly but quite unobtrusively.

Of interest is the omission of the incest-episode related at the end of Gen. 19. It may be argued that the poet was following a tradition in which Lot was highly regarded as a just man, and that this scene would not have been in keeping with such a portrayal of the main protagonist, but there is not much in the text to support such a view. Granted that when he is assailed by the Sodomites he suddenly becomes ‘auctorem fidei, morum iustique magistrum’ (v. 704), but six lines later he is again a confused man, ‘trepidum vix mente recepta.’ The first reference to him in the poem is as the ‘pignus’ of Abram’s ‘carus frater’, without any indication that he himself was ‘carus’; he is not spared in vv. 397–402 where he chooses the fertile land of Canaan and the Lord has to console Abraham with the promise of innumerable descendants; his conduct in receiving the two angels (vv. 684ff.) is indeed as pious as that of his uncle under similar circumstances (vv. 646ff., 663–5, cp. also vv. 588–9) but this is simply in accordance with the Biblical original which does not otherwise give evidence of any great admiration for Lot; he is tardy in obeying the angels and has to be pulled away from Sodom forcibly (vv. 721ff.). The fact that the inhabitants of Segar are saved through his inability to reach the hills is not due to any merit on his part: after his wife’s unfortunate demise, fear banishes his sorrow (v. 761). It would therefore seem more probable that the incest scene was omitted not so much in order to save Lot’s reputation but rather because Victorius had planned his poem to culminate in the great conflagration to which the final long excursus is devoted.

To sum up: Victorius is clearly more of a conscious poet than his putative predecessor, the author of the Heptateuchos. This is apparent in his lengthy and laboured periodic structures and in his digressions (of which Bk. 3 provides two singular examples in vv. 109–209 and 733–789). But that he is primarily a preacher who wants ‘teneros formare animas’ in the Christian faith (Precatio 104) is clear from his reference in vv. 490 and 660 to Christ, to Christ’s baptism (or baptism by Christ) in the River Jordan (vv. 788–9) and to his moralising pronouncements. He also clearly wants to convey a warning that God will not allow the wicked to go unpunished.
That the good bishop of Vienne, Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus (460–518) was, as Schanz-Hosius\textsuperscript{28} has it, a far greater poet than the versifier of the Hephateuchos or the 'Nacherzähler' Victorius, is immediately clear when one starts reading his De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis.\textsuperscript{29} This poem of 2552 verses is divided into five books with the subtitles De Mundi Initio, De Originali Peccato, De Sententia Dei, De Diluvio Mundi and De Transitu Maris Rubri. Our theme is dealt with only by way of a digression in 2. 326–407, but it is quite a substantial digression, being 23 lines longer than the Hephateuchos-version of the Sodom episode.

These eighty-two lines form the second of two lengthy digressions in Bk. 2 in which the fall of man is described and Eve is blamed for Adam’s transgression: in our passage Lot’s wife is introduced as an example of another Eve, although her ‘Adam’ (i.e. Lot) did not fall with her, perhaps not only because he was such a just man (vv. 340–2; 400–401) but also because the swiftness of his wife’s demise made it impossible for her to persuade him to follow her example (vv. 402–7).

Avitus’ first concern is clearly not simply to retell the Biblical story: his work is rather a poetical elaboration of the five themes with which he is concerned, and his purpose is clearly didactic.

In our passage Lot’s wife is introduced as a second ‘scutatrix malorum’ like Eve (vv. 326–9); then the sins besetting the cities (sc. of the Jordan valley) which require hardly two verses to be described in the Vulgate (Gen. 18.20–21), take up nine hexameters in which the unbridled civica crimina are described, namely incestus, libido and voluptas, culminating in the sententia.

\begin{quote}
abstinuisse nefas et non pecasse pudendum
\[\text{credebant omnes}, \text{facinus quos iunxerat omne}\]
\end{quote}

Next the Lord addresses Lot in a set speech of twenty lines\textsuperscript{31} detailing the coming punishment and instructing him to flee (taking his wife with him) and warning them not to look back, since they must not ‘know the catastrophe’ (vv. 343–362). The bargaining of Abraham with God is not mentioned, and also not the visit of the two angels or the attack on Lot’s house by the Sodomites; there is no reference to his two daughters, nor to his request to be allowed to enter Segor.

The Lord’s speech is followed by a description of the conflagration (vv. 365–370) and a two line transition on the obedient flight of Lot and his wife. The remaining 35 lines of the passage (vv. 373–407) are devoted to a rather rhetorical description of the latter’s disobedience and punishment, closing with a moralising tongue-in-cheek reflection on the fortunate circumstance that Lot did not become a second Adam.

If we look at our extract (i.e. vv. 326–407) in the context of Bk. 2 as a whole, it is not difficult to understand why nearly half of it is devoted to

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the wife and the effects of her punishment. This book ‘On the Origin of Sin’ first tells of the abundance that Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden, and of their innocence. Then Satan’s banishment from heaven is described (vv. 35–59), also his ability to take on the form of a man, an animal, a fish, a bird, an attractive girl, even money or, finally, a saint: but it is as a serpent that he cajoles Eve into eating of the forbidden fruit (vv. 118–235), after which Adam easily succumbs (vv. 236–260) and they discover their nakedness (vv. 261–275).

With the exception of the final sixteen lines in which Satan again addresses Adam and Eve, the rest of Bk. 2 (vv. 277–423) is devoted to two digressions that primo obtutu seem to be rather tenuously linked, namely an excursus on man’s sinful urge to know things that he is not intended to know (as was the case with Eve), either by means of astrology, magic, snake-charming or necromancy, which leads to the second digression on a second Eve who was also a ‘scutatrix malorum’, viz. the wife of Lot.

The Sodoma-episode in Bk. 2 of Avitus therefore leaves out all the previously-mentioned details of the Biblical tale because it is intended first and foremost as an exemplum of the dire consequences for man of trying to know that which he is not supposed to know. This is demonstrated by the frequent use of words of knowing or understanding, e.g. ‘vos nescite malum’ is how the Lord formulates his instruction not to look back, and the serpent inspires the desire in Mrs. Lot ‘ut nesse ruinas vellet’ (the serpent ‘qui mala cognovit’) and the poet hopes that she will serve as an exemplum and that after her

pereat secreti dira cupido.
inlicitum quod scire fuit vetitumque tueri,
respiciens tantum nec narratura videbis
(vv. 382b–384)

— lines which clearly recall the poet’s reference in v. 325 to ‘quisquis vetitum cognoscere temptat’.

Linked with this, bishop Avitus is also providing his flock with an example of the dire consequences of disobeying the Lord. This strong didactic intent does not, however, preclude a truly poetic treatment of his theme, and scholars generally agree on the high literary merit of his poem.

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The poem De Sodoma differs from the previous three extracts in the important respect that it is a complete, full-length poem devoted exclusively to the tribulations of Lot and the destruction of the cities of the Jordan valley. It is also far longer (167 lines) than any of the other three pieces.

The manuscripts ascribed the Sodoma and its sister-piece De Iona variously to Tertullianus or Cyprianus, i.e. either ‘Cyprianus Gallus’, the poet
of the *Heptateuchos*, or his better-known namesake of Carthage, all three of whom can be effectively ruled out on grounds of style and language. Dando’s argument that the two sister-poems were among the lost works of Avitus to which he refers in his prologue to his fellow-bishop Apollinaris,\(^{36}\) and that when they were recovered he mined them for Bk. 4 of his poem, is ingenious but unconvincing, and the only justifiable conclusion seems to be that the author of *De Sodoma* is (and will probably remain) *Incertus*.

Similarly the date of composition cannot be determined with any precision. Peiper thought that the anonymous author must have been a contemporary of the author of the *Heptateuchos* (*eiusdem aetatis et patriae*),\(^ {37}\) but Ralph Hexter has recently suggested that *de Sodoma* ‘was not composed before the second quarter of the sixth century’.\(^ {38}\) He argues that the reappearance of the pillar of salt in sixth century literature, after *Egeria* had at the end of the fourth century emphatically denied that it still existed, could serve as a *terminus post quem*. But would her denial have meant the end of the myth? And could one not argue that the very fact that our earnest nun was so insistent on refuting the story shows that it must still have enjoyed wide circulation shortly before the fifth century and was probably generally accepted?

Although the first 26 lines of the poem (with the exception of the mythological allusions in 16–20) are loosely based on Biblical material (e.g. vv. 1–8 reflect *Gen.* 9.11–17, while vv. 9–15 and vv. 18–26 recall the gist of *Gen.* 13.13 and 18.20) from v. 27 to v. 126, the order of events closely follows that of the Old Testament, and there are even some striking verbal similarities, such as ‘duo ... missi/angelica forma iuvenes: ... succedunt Sodomis’ (vv. 27–8) and ‘veneruntque duo Angeli Sodomam’ (*Gen.* 19.1). ‘Serva, Loth, animam. Ne visum in terga retrorsum/verte velis ... /in montem propera!’ (vv. 89–91a) and ‘salva animam tuam; noli respicere post tergum ... in montem te salvum fac’ (*Gen.* 19.17); ‘tunc Loth ingreditur Segor; simul exurit sol’ (v. 98) and ‘Sol egressus est super terram, et Loth ingressus est Segor’ (*Gen.* 19.23).\(^ {39}\)

Nonetheless, the poet is not afraid of omitting details, such as the dialogue between Abraham and God in *Gen.* 18.23–33, the Sodomites’ conduct in *Gen.* 19.4–5a is compressed to ‘Sodoma in foribus strepitat’ and their very explicit demand to have intercourse in *Gen.* 19.5b is merely ‘lege pudenda’, vv. 95–6 are ‘a drastic compression of a windy original’, as Hexter puts it,\(^ {40}\) and the incest scene is omitted (understandably, as we shall see). The poet intersperses his narrative with classical allusions (vv. 8 and 107–113) and poetic amplifications;\(^ {41}\) there are two similes in both of which Lot is likened to a tree, and an excursus on the effects of the conflagration on the valley and the Dead Sea. The final four hexameters point the moral that this punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah must serve as a warning to unrighteous nations in future ages and will teach them to fear the Lord and
place their trust in Him alone, and vv. 164-5a ‘Hae Sodomum et Gomorum signatae in saecula poenas/gentibus iniustis’ call to mind the reference to the Last Judgement near the beginning of the poem ‘Sic Sodomum meruit ... finis portendere signa futuri’ (vv. 12-13).

Far more than the other poems discussed, de Sodoma emphasises the piety of Lot. He is introduced as ‘... de stirpe piorum/transvena Lot aderat, sapiens iustique colonus;/unus erat meminisse deum’ (vv. 30b-32a), and in vv. 75–76a it is said of him that ‘ipsum meruisse salutem/iustitiae titulo’; his home is referred to as a ‘iustam domum’ in v. 84, his speech to the Sodomites (vv. 42b–55) reflects his conservative moral standards, and his offer that his virgin daughters take the place of his guests in order to satisfy the lust of the attackers is presented as a great sacrifice due to his piety, when he closes with ‘dedo pater proque hospitibus pensabo dolorem’ (v. 55). Still more striking, however, are the two similes comparing him firstly to a lone fruit-bearing tree in a forest (vv. 32b–33), and later to a tree clinging to its roots while the torrent tries to tear it away (vv. 62–8). It is also significant that the poem stops short of the scene in the cave with his daughters, possibly because the episode reflects poorly on Lot and also presents him as the forefather of Israel’s enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites.

One reason for this very favourable portrayal of Lot — to some extent in contrast with the impression one has of him from the Bible and from Biblical epic — may be that Abraham does not feature in de Sodoma and that Lot is therefore the only protagonist of the Just versus the Evil, and must be portrayed accordingly.

Peiper’s rather short list of parallels contains seven references to Ovid, and in a recent thought-provoking article Hexter argues that ‘the author (of de Sodoma) explicitly directs the reader to the story of Phaethon as told by Ovid and thereby specifies the text with which and against which one must read De Sodoma: the Metamorphoses’. In his opinion the line ‘Circaea novas per pocula formas/sumere’ (vv. 19–20a) introduces the theme of metamorphosis and unmistakably recalls Ovid Met. 1. 1–2 ‘In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas/corpora’, and the Phaethon-episode ‘serves ... as the key to the entire Sodom poem’.

To my mind one of the most interesting aspects of reading the poem against the Ovidian ‘subtext’ is the solution it offers for the unwieldy final digression on the remarkable phenomena of the Red Sea, as a typically Ovidian ‘addition of aitia to the Biblical account’ (p. 19). The classification of all the natural phenomena in vv. 127–163 as aitia is, however, in my opinion open to doubt: the descriptions smack more of the traditional learned digressions in Silver Age epic, e.g. in Lucan 1. 392–465 (on Gaul), 6. 333–412 (on Thessaly), 9. 303–318 (on the Syrtes), 9. 700–733 (on snakes) and many, many more. In other words, the phenomena are mostly described
without specific reference to what caused them — the last few, especially, are not presented as direct results of the Sodom-cataclysm.

What do we make of the author as a poet? If the transmitted text had been more reliable, a verdict might have been easier: the countless cruces make it difficult to pronounce with any certainty on his poetic language, and even allowing for Ovidian influence and the typically Biblical epic ‘division of descriptions into discrete sections’ which are extensively elaborated in themselves but not always clearly interrelated, the structure remains problematical. I find it difficult to agree with Hexter’s judgement that the poem is ‘a virtuoso performance, an attempt to clear a place for itself in the traditions of both Biblical exegesis and Latin epic,’ but I may still be converted.

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Since I have not followed exactly the same pattern in discussing the four versions of the Sodom episode, it seems advisable to make a few general remarks in closing, not only on these extracts but also on 5th Century Biblical epic in general.

Firstly, one can speculate on the reasons for rendering the Bible story in poetic form. With reference to the early Christian ‘versifiers’ of the Old Testament, de Labriolle says ‘...we must understand the ideas which they obeyed. It was a question with them, in the first place, of being helpful to young minds by instilling into them sacred teaching transposed in an attractive form... Then...they hoped to conquer the intellectual and learned élite by the charm of their poetry... Lastly, a commentary of the Bible in verse enabled them to develop certain dogmatic and moral interpretations.’ To this we may add that these metrical versions could also have had the practical advantage that they could be memorised more easily than prose.

Secondly, the constant echoes of classical poets (which I have not listed since they are pretty well covered by the Indices of the latest editions of the four texts) could also have served to charm the ‘intellectual and learned élite’, especially since the earlier Latin translations of the Bible were frowned upon as being rather uncouth. It would certainly not have harmed these poets’ cause if they could show that they were well-versed in classical literature, and no less erudite than their audiences or readers.

Finally we can summarise the aims of the four passages we have discussed. The Heptateuchos clearly has no more elevated purpose than simply to render the main facts of the Bible story in hexameters, omitting and amplifying as the poet deemed necessary; Claudius Marius Victorius stresses one particular aspect of the Sodom theme, namely the tremendous cataclysm which brings the episode, the third book and the whole Alethia
to a thundering close; Avitus retells the Sodom episode purely in order to bring in the exemplum of Lot’s wife as a second Eve, who also succumbs to the temptation of wanting to know more than she ought to; the anonymous author of de Sodoma, again, uses the episode inter alia to emphasise the vengeance that God wreaks on unrepentant sinners (just as the poem’s counterpart de lana stresses His mercy over those who do repent), but the metamorphosis theme also plays a significant role: the fact is that de Sodoma has until very recently been much neglected by scholars 49 and that it deserves to be better known and studied.

NOTES

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2. Although he describes mankind’s relapse into sin after the Flood (2.397–409), as also the destruction of the five cities in the Jordan valley ‘ignibus aetheriis’ (410–423) and compares Lot with Noah (424–434), these thirty lines do not quite qualify as a treatment of the Sodom theme for the purposes of this paper.


5. But see Roberts, op. cit. 94–95; also Jacques Fontaine, Naissance de la Poesie dans l’Occident Chretien, Paris 1981, 246–7; Herzog, op. cit. 53ff. (whose projected new edition of the Heptateuchos has also to my knowledge not yet been published — see n. 22 on p. 54); Otto Bardehewer, Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur, vol. 3, Freiburg 1923, 432–435; L. Krestan, RAC 3 (1957), col. 477–478; the basic spade-work for most of the above was done by R. Peiper in his edition of Cypriani Galli Poetae Heptateuchos, C.S.E.L. 23 (1891) xxiii–xxvii; also the introduction to his earlier edition of Alcimi Bedicici Aviti Vienensis Episcopi, (1883, now available in M.G.H., Auctorum antiquissimorum VI pars posterior 1961, LXX ff.)

6. Roberts (op. cit.) also deals with conflation, modal variation and handling of speech, periphrasis, synonymic amplification and interpretatio.


8. Among others Gen. 18.16 (Abraham accompanying the angels), 19.6 (the intention of the Sodomites), 19.9 (their reproach that Lot is an adversus and self-appointed judge), 19.10, 11 etc.

9. Among others ‘direxerunt oculos contra Sodomam’ in 18.16 becomes ‘Sodomam visunt’ (v. 522), ‘cum sim pulvis et cinis’ in 18.27 is simply ‘famulo sermoni’ (v. 629) etc.
10. Cf. also the Lord’s soliloquy (50 words) in Gen. 19.17–19, which is reduced to 16 words in indirect speech (vv. 623–4); ch. 19 vv. 13–23, where 38 lines of the Vulgate are rendered in 8 hexameters, and 30–38.

11. Also adding the moralising vv. 647–8 to Gen. 19.8.

12. Also the addition of the names of the angels (v. 634); ‘cumque viros simili lustrasset corpore claros’ (v. 637) for ‘cum vidisset eos’ in Gen. 19.1.


14. As the statement ‘eduxit nataes’ recalls both ‘educ eos’ (19.13) and ‘eduxeruntque’ (19.17).

15. Op. cit. 93–4. E.g. in Gen. 19.1 the Vetus Latina reads ‘ad portam’, ‘iuuxta ostium’ or ‘super ostium’ (ed. Fischer), where the Vulgate has ‘in foribus’ and our poem ‘pro foribus’; V.L. reads ‘in faciem’ but the Vulgate ‘pronus’ (as in v. 638); the ‘azyma’ of the Vulgate (19.3) and our poem v. 640 is not attested in the V.L. But it must be conceded that VL has ‘circumdederunt’ in v. 4 (cp. ‘cirumdans’ in v. 643) whereas the Vulgate has ‘vallaverunt’.


18. Furthermore, Victorius covers a shorter section of the O.T. since his poem ends before the episode of Lot’s daughters in Gen. 19.30–38. On average his treatment of Gen. 1–19 is three times the length of the Heptateuchos version.

19. ‘ad filii sui Aetherii personam commentatus est in Genesim ... christiana quidem et pio sensu, sed utpote saeculari litteratura occupatus homo et nullius magistri in divinis scripturis exercitatus’


with Gen. 19.1 ‘Veneruntque duo angeli Sodomam... sedente Loth in foribus civitatis’.

So, too, v. 687 ‘prostratus adorat’ (cp. 19.1), 689 ‘convivere suadet’ (cp. 19.3 ‘feci convivium’), v. 727 ‘ne quis’ pos [sic!] se respiciat’ (cp. 19.17 ‘noli respicere post tegum’), v. 761–2 ‘Segor ingreditur Loth’ (cp. 19.23 ‘Loth ingressus est in Segor’).

22. i.a. vv. 668 ‘emissos famulos pacisque iraeque ministris,...’ v. 691 ‘sub occasum utcque noctisque recursum’, v. 699 ‘natas quibus inlibata manebat/virginitas’.

23. e.g. vv. 686–7, 701a, 713, 761.

24. e.g. 695b–6, 719b–21a, 743, 783a, 783b–789.


26. Hovingh, loc. cit. (n. 20) cites (i.a.) Ovid Am. 1. 15. 36 ‘pocula... plena ministret aqua’ for v. 690b ‘pocula parca ministret’, ib. 2. 6. 39 ‘optima prima fere manibus rapiantur avaris’ for v. 723 ‘manibus cum coniuge raptum’, Vergil Aen. 4. 74 ‘per moenia ducit’ for v. 742b ‘extra moenia ducant’ — and so there are many other instances where the word correspondence is not really significant.


29. Ed. Peiper, *op. cit.* (n. 4). Also in Migne, *P.L.* 59, col. 63ff. The work as a whole did not have a title: the present one is based on Avitus' own remark 'libellos quos... de spiritualis historiae gestis... lusi' in ep. 51 (Peiper p. 80, l. 21).

30. Cp. Victorius Al. 3. 701b — '... sed corda profana vile putant quodcumque licet gaudentque vetari, ut sit quod cupiant'. Also Dracontius *De Laudibus Dei* 2. 405-7.

31. For the speeches in Avitus see M. Roberts, 'The prologue to Avitus' "de spiritualis historiae gestis" — Christian poetry and poetic licence', *Traditio* 39 (1983) 30-42.

32. Milton must surely have been influenced inter alios by Avitus in his description of the various external shapes that Satan assumes in *P.L.*: a dragon with flaming paws (1. 225-6), a prowling wolf (4. 183), a cormorant (4. 166-7), a lion and a tiger (4. 402-3), a wolf (4. 800), 'a proud Steed rein'd' (4. 858), and then a serpent, as a 'Fit Vessel, fittest Imp. of fraud in whom/to eater' (9. 89-90). So, too, the serpent's flirting with Eve in v. 145ff. and her infatuation with him in v. 169 ('Suavibus o pollens coluber dulcissime dictis') are echoed in *P.L.* 9, 498-510 and 524-6.

33. Cp. the prediction of the Day of Judgement in Bk. 2 vv. 48b-56.


35. The feminine singular *Sodoma* is preferred in the titles of three of the four codices cited by Peiper, but in the poem itself none of the ten references to the city use the neuter plural (as in τὰ Σόνεα) although in v. 41 it may be metonymy (city for citizens). Forcellini has the n. pl. in the lemma, but concedes 'forma varia est' and cites the fem. sing., n. sing. and m. pl. Of the Bible translations the *Vetus Latina* has a clear preference for the n. pl. form, while the Vulgate has 17 instances of the plural, 15 of the singular and 8 which could be either plural or singular.


38. Also compare v. 34 and Gen. 19.1; vv. 55-7 and Gen. 19.9; vv. 71-3 and Gen. 19.10-11; vv. 76b-78a and Gen. 19.12; vv. 85 and Gen. 19.15.

39. *op. cit.* 8


42. *op. cit.* (n. 37) 5.

43. Hexter, *op. cit.* (n. 37) 5.

44. *op. cit.* 18.


46. *op. cit.* 34.


49. Hexter, *op. cit.* 2: ‘Not the least of the poem’s mysteries... is that (it) has received so little scholarly attention’.
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