



Beatitudes in Juvencus' Epic *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* – Philologically Analyzed and Poetically Translated

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Abstract: Gaius Vettius Aquilinus Iuvencus is the author of the first biblical epic which is known as *Evangeliorum libri quattuor*. It retells the Gospel story in classical hexameter in order to adapt its form to the literary aesthetics of the 4th century pagan society. Through the analysis of his poetic version of the beatitudes, this study aims to uncover and appraise the basic principles of his periphrastic technique, whether they apply to the form or content of the Matthean original. It shows that the author constantly tries to vary its syntax with the intention to disturb its monotonous regularity. He also promotes the value of heavenly rewards promised to Christians, providing them with sympathetic epithets and embellishes the original with stylistic figures such as alliteration or contrast. As for the content, the most significant change is the occasional insertion of author's comments, the purpose of which is to provide the Matthean text with additional theological information that he might find missing. The study concludes with our free translation of this passage into iambic heptameter or fourteeners.

Keywords: biblical epic; Juvencus; beatitudes; versification; translation

1. Introduction

Gaius Vettius Aquilinus Iuvencus, a priest of Hispanic origin who lived during the reign of Constantine the Great, is the author of the first biblical epic. Known as *Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, it retells the story of the four canonical gospels in classical hexameter in order to adapt its literary form to the requirements of the 4th century Roman society. The purpose of this paper is to analyze his versificational technique, revealing what mark the

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author's epicization left upon the form and content of the original biblical text. Considering the regularity of its structure and the richness of its eschatology, the Matthean passage devoted to the Beatitudes (Mt 5,1-12) offers us a great opportunity to scrutinize Juvencus' adaptation of the Gospel (I 452-471), both in terms of stylistics and theology. Our analysis discussing the syntax, vocabulary, stylistic figures and theological contributions of the poet is concluded with our free translation of this passage into iambic heptameter or fourteener.

2. Analysis

At the beginning it should be mentioned that Juvencus versifies the Matthean version of the Beatitudes only. Even though he harmonizes the narratives of all the canonical gospels, it is known that he usually prefers the selection and versification of one version of a particular event or speech to the combination of several versions² and so it is in the case of the Beatitudes³.

Mt 5,1-2

Videns autem turbam, ascendit in montem; et cum sedisset, accesserunt ad eum discipuli eius; et aperuit os suum et docebat eos dicens⁴:

ELQ I 452-453

Hos populos cernens praecelsa rupe resedit ac sic discipulis gremium cingentibus inquit:

The introductory verses have undergone significant syntactic modification. The original number of the verb forms was reduced from seven (vi-

² R. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator*, Oxford 2006, p. 29.

³ Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, p. 25.

⁴ Juvencus was writing before Jerome's translation of the Bible which is why we quote here the *Vetus latina Bible: Itala. Das Neue Testament in Altlateinischer Überlieferung. I. Matthäus-Evangelium*, ed. A. Jülicher, Berlin 1976, p. 20-21. As for the punctuation, however, we follow the Vulgate: *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. R. Gryson – R. Weber, Stuttgart 2007.

dens, ascendit, sedisset, accesserunt, aperuit, docebat and *dicens*) to four (*cernens, resedit, cingentibus* and *infit*), decreasing the number of clauses from five to two, which contain only one present participle (*cernens* and *cingentibus*), one present (*infit*) and one perfect indicative (*resedit*). The resulting syntactic structure is thus more balanced, less repetitive and stylistically more attractive for its readers⁵, who (whether they were Christians or not) must have belonged to the intellectual elite deeply familiarized with the language of epic poetry⁶.

As for the vocabulary of this passage, the phrase *praecelsa rupe* might be inspired by the words of Virgil *una in praecelsa consedit rupe Celaeno* (*Aen.* III 245) by which he introduces the speech of the Harpy who is cursing Aeneas and his men for attacking her and her sisters⁷. It is known that Juvencus, following his pagan predecessors, tries to depict the mountains in the epic way regularly, as we can see in many other instances where he never forgets to provide them with a proper epithet (I 364 – *umbrosos montes*, III 669 – *montis celsa* or III 318 – *abruptum conscendere montem*)⁸. The adjective *praecelsus*, however, he uses not only to describe the height of the mountains or other physical objects (like the walls of the Temple in IV 86 – *egreditur templo, cuius praecelsa notantes / moenia*), but also to accentuate the demands on the perfect life such as in the conversation between Jesus and the rich young man (III 514 – *Nunc si perfecta requiris / prendere praecelsis meritis fastigia vitae*) or to underline the authority of the title *magister* (IV 61 – *Sed vos noluerim praecelsi nominis arcem / adfectare*)⁹. Juvencus' predilection for emphasizing adjectives starting with the prefix *prae* is known too. He uses them much more often than any other of the preceding poets (even inventing ten words of his own e.g. *prae-blandus, praegratus, praepulcher* etc.) and for this he occupies a special

⁵ It is known that even though parataxis is not alien to classical epic, it was not desirable that it dominate the epic discourse. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, p. 74.

⁶ Otherwise, they would not have been able to recognize author's intertextual references. See M. Müller, *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu Christi bei Iuvencus (IV 570-812): Untersuchungen zu Dichtkunst, Theologie und Zweck der Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, Stuttgart 2016, p. 379.

⁷ H. Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, Groningen 1940, p. 119.

⁸ K. Thraede, *Juvencus: Der Übergang zur Bergpredigt des Matthäusevangeliums*, in: *Alvarium: Festschrift für Christian Gnika*, ed. W. Blümer – R. Henke – M. Mulke, JbAC Ergänzungsband 33, Münster 2002, p. 380.

⁹ The word "praecelsus" can be found six times in ELQ. See M. Wacht, *Concordantia in Iuvenci Evangeliorum libros*, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1990, p. 230.

place in the history of Roman literature¹⁰. Finally, the Matthean passage is embellished by the alliteration of the letter ‘r’ in the phrase *rupe resedit* which might have been inspired by the Vergilian line *summa petit scopuli siccaque in rupe resedit* (*Aen.* 5, 180)¹¹.

Mt 5,3

Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.

ELQ I 454-455

Felices humiles, pauper quos spiritus ambit, illos nam caeli regnum sublime receptat.

The syntax of the first beatitude of Juvenius’ basically copies the subordinate syntactic structure of the original with only one but notable exception, i.e. the insertion of the subordinate clause *pauper quos spiritus ambit*. Its content is fully in accordance with the content of the Gospel itself, but its insertion into the original narrative is the result of the author’s decision to interpret the *pauperes spiritu* by the adjective *humiles*. His purpose might have been to specify the meaning of the matthean phrase which could be, in fact, interpreted in a number of different ways. Does Matthew mean those who live in misery, disappointment and despair?¹² Does he mean those who do not cleave to wealth, power and glory?¹³ Or, is he just speaking about some good-hearted but simple-minded people who are willing to believe in everything which is presented to them uncritically?¹⁴ It is known, after all, that the critics of Christianity used to (mis)interpret this verse in a similar way¹⁵, so it is probable that Juvenius tried to set things right by underlining that the blessed ones have been chosen because of their humility, not because of the simplicity of their souls. Such an interpretation would be

¹⁰ Thraede, *Juvenius: Der Übergang zur Bergpredigt des Matthäusevangeliums*, p. 381-382.

¹¹ Kievits, *Ad Iuvenii Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 119.

¹² J. Mrázek, *Kázání na hoře*, Jihlava 2017, p. 32.

¹³ M. Limbeck – P. Müller – F. Porsch, *Stuttgarter kleiner Kommentar zu den Evangelien*, Stuttgart 2009, p. 58.

¹⁴ Mrázek, *Kázání na hoře*, p. 31.

¹⁵ L. Majtán, *Ježíšova zVRCHovaná řeč: Evanjelium podľa Matúša, 5. – 7. kapitola*, Dol’any 2021, p. 20.

in accordance with his younger contemporaries Hilary¹⁶ and Jerome¹⁷ both of whom, in their commentaries on Matthew, emphasize the same quality.

As for the vocabulary of this passage, there are two more notes to be made. The introductory word *beati*, which is typical of the beatitudes as such was replaced by the adjective *felices*. The possible semantic shift arising out of this replacement does not need to be over-analyzed given the fact that the original word with the length of its second and the third syllable cannot be used in dactylic hexameter without much difficulty. This modification of the original can be, therefore, interpreted in terms of metrical adaptation. The same tendency will be encountered in the following verses too, where it also applies to the promotion of rewards waiting for those who are deemed worthy as we can see in the phrase *caeli regnum sublime*, i.e. 'the lofty kingdom of heaven'¹⁸.

Mt. 5,5

Beati mites, quoniam ipsi possidebunt terram.

ELQ I 456-457

His similes mites, quos mansuetudo coronat, quorum debetur iuri pulcherri-
ma tellus.

In the following lines, the original order of the beatitudes is changed, the second and the third being swapped. This change of the Matthean narrative structure might be the result of Juvencus' attempt for harmonization. He puts together these lines, which speak about some character quality described by an adjective like the *pauperes spiritu* and the *mites* in the first and third beatitude, in contrast to the those depicting certain psychological activity described by verbs such as the *lugentes* and *qui requirunt* from the second and the fourth beatitude. Whatever his true purpose, once again, he modifies the original syntax by the insertion of one subordinate clause, into which, in this case, he puts additional information specifying the me-

¹⁶ Hilarius Pictaviensis, *In Evangelium Matthaei Commentarius* 4, 2: "Igitur humilia spirantes, id est, esse se homines recordantes, in coelestis regni possessione constituti".

¹⁷ Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei Libri Quattuor* 5, 3: "[...] adiunxit, spiritu: ut humilitatem intelligeres, non penuriam".

¹⁸ S. McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, London – New York 2016, p. 139.

aning of the Matthean beatitude. As it seems, the inserted clause which reads *quos mansuetudo coronat* aims at the interpretation that ‘the meekness’ of the blessed denotes the calmness of the soul freed from anger and hatred towards those who do an injustice, the interpretation of Origen¹⁹, who is usually regarded as one of Juvencus’ main theological sources²⁰. The word *mansuetudo* can also be found in the commentary of Hilary, who presents it as one of the indispensable moral qualities for accepting Christ²¹ and in Jerome who contrasts the *superbiam* of the men who gain the earthly lands by force with those who enter the holy land *per mansuetudinem*²². Given that Vetus Latina mentions its adjective form *mansueti* (f g¹ h q)²³, the pre-hieronymian Bible might have been Juvencus’ main source in this case.

In comparison to the original, this line does not begin with the traditional introductory adjective denoting those who are blessed; instead the anticipated word *felices* is paraphrased as *his similes* whereby Juvencus eliminates the repetitive structure of the original, trying to accommodate the Gospel narrative to the literary taste of his well-educated contemporaries. This attempt for *variatio* is fundamental to Juvencus’ versificational technique as such²⁴. As before, we can see that he promotes the rewards for the blessed, who are going to inherit ‘the most beautiful land’ using the superlative of the adjective *pulcherrima*, perhaps, also to stress that the beatitude does not mean just some earthly land but heaven itself – a distinction which Jerome finds useful too, as we have seen. Finally, the claim of the meek is further promoted by the insertion of the word *iuri*, emphasizing its rightfulness.

¹⁹ R. Heine, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, v. 1, Oxford 2018, p. 331.

²⁰ E. Colombi, *Paene ad verbum: Gli Evangeliorum libri di Giovenco tra parafrasi e commento*, “Cassiodorus” 3 (1997) p. 11.

²¹ Hilarius Pictaviensis, *In Evangelium Matthaei Commentarius* 4, 3: “Quia per mansuetudinem mentis nostrae habitaverit Christus in nos”.

²² Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei Libri Quattuor* 5, 4: “Non terram Iudae, nec terram istius mundi [...] quam crudelissimus quisque et bellator magis possidet; sed terram quam Psalmista desiderat, dicens: ‘Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium’ (Ps. 26,13)”.

²³ A. Orban, *Juvencus als Bibelexeget und als Zeuge der “Afrikanischen” Vetus-Latina-Tradition: Untersuchungen der Bergpredigt (Mt. 5,1-48) in der Vetus Latina und in der Versification des Juvencus (I 452-572)*, VigCh 49 (1995) p. 336.

²⁴ S. Rollins, *The Parables in Juvencus’ Evangeliorum libri IV*, Liverpool 1984, p. 63.

Mt 5,4

Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur.

ELQ I 458

Hoc modo lugentes solacia magna sequentur.

Contrary to the Juvencinian adaptation of the preceding beatitudes, the syntactic structure of the following one is much simplified. Whereas the original sentence consisted of three clauses, two of which were subordinate, Juvencus' paraphrase contains only one clause which is the result of the transformation of the verb *lugent* into present participle followed by the omission of the causative adverb *quoniam*. The alternative structure would, however, not be grammatically functional without the replacement of the adjective *beati* with the phrase *hoc modo*. As we can see, the beatitude on mourning is thus two times shorter than the preceding ones, but that might have been the very purpose of the poet and paraphraser – to smooth the original sentence and to distinguish it from the preceding beatitudes applying the principle of *variatio* also in the field of syntax.

The relative shortness of the passage is also caused by the fact that, this time, Juvencus does not insert any further interpretation into the original by keeping the object of the word *lugere* as general as Matthew himself. The subsequent interpreters of the line, Hilary and Jerome would, on the other hand, try to specify it claiming that it describes either these who are mourning their own sins²⁵ or those mourning the sins of the others²⁶. The Matthean verb *consolabuntur* was, probably due to its metrical qualities²⁷, replaced by the phrase *solacia magna sequentur* which is, as can be seen, equivalent to the original both semantically and morphologically. Moreover, Juvencus embellished these words with the figure of alliteration (the repetition of the letter 's') and, as before, emphasized the value of the reward waiting for the blessed (*solacia magna*).

²⁵ Hilarius Pictaviensis, *In Evangelium Matthaei Commentarius* 4, 4: "Lugentibus aeternae consolationis solatia repromittit [...] peccata vetera flentibus".

²⁶ Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei Libri Quattuor* 5, 5: "Lucus hic non mortuorum ponitor communi lege naturae, sed peccatis et vitiis mortuorum".

²⁷ Absent in Juvencus totally, see Wacht, *Concordantia in Iuvenci Evangeliorum libros*, p. 46.

Mt 5,6

Beati, qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.

ELQ I 459-460

Pabula iustitiae qui nunc potusque requirunt, illos plena manet satiandos copia mensae.

Another kind of syntactic reduction can be seen in the beatitude number four where the final subordinate clause turns into the main clause through the (re)omission of the word *beati (sunt)* and causal conjunction *quoniam*. The resulting sentence is twice as long as the preceding one, but despite matching the length of the first two beatitudes, it has a unique syntactic structure of its own (i.e. two clauses compared to the three of the first and the second beatitude). The verbs of the original *esuriunt* and *sitiunt* are paraphrased as *pabula... potusque requirunt* the result of which is the alliteration of the letter ‘p’ phonetically unifying the couple ‘food and drink’ separated by the words *iustitiae qui nunc*²⁸. As we can notice too, the motif of justice, the constitutive element of the Matthew’s gospel²⁹, is fully preserved. The same applies to the motif of satiation in the main clause of this beatitude, which is amplified to such an extent that it occupies the whole verse presenting the poetic picture of a table laden with food. Thus, the reward awaiting the righteous is stressed once again and even in much more elaborated way than before.

Mt 5,7

Beati misericordes, quoniam ipsi miserabuntur.

ELQ I 461-462

Felix, qui miseri doluit de pectore sortem, illum nam Domini miseratio larga manebit.

²⁸ Juvencus’ poem is, in fact, very rich in this stylistic figure as it even contains the examples of three (I 551; II 237 or IV 234) or four consecutive alliterate words (III 400 or III 443). See A. Thor, *Studies on Juvencus’ Language and Style*, Uppsala 2013, p. 234-238.

²⁹ Majtán, *Ježišova zVrchovaná reč: Evanjelium podľa Matúša*, 5. – 7. kapitola, p. 24.

The syntactic structure of the fifth beatitude goes back to the first one starting with the main clause containing the introductory adjective *felix*, which is followed by one subordinate and one coordinate clause. As can be seen, Juvencus continues varying the syntax of the original from verse to verse trying to make the structure of every beatitude somewhat different and thus stylistically less monotonous. The usage of the introductory adjective *felix* is to be considered a part of this process as it reappears after being absent from three beatitudes straight and even now it is used in a slightly different way from the original, i.e. in the nominative singular. The compound adjective *miser cordes* had to be replaced because of its metric qualities and Juvencus, trying to preserve its constituent parts partially, at least (*miserum-cors/miseri... de pectore*), paraphrased it by adding a new clause to the original text. The phrase *de pectore* can be of some interest on its own, as the usage of the preposition *de* instead of *ex*, *ab* or ablative absolute is one of the features of Juvencus' post-classical Latin³⁰. As before, a proper epithet highlights the heavenly reward (*miseratio larga*). The phrase is, however, preceded by the word *Domini* specifying or confirming the originator of the mercy promised to the merciful which, though absent in Vulgate, can be found in the several codices of Vetus Itala Bible, probably read by Juvencus³¹. The couplet concludes with the alliteration of the letter 'm' in the words *miseratio (...) manebit*.

Mt 5,8

Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt.

ELQ I 463-464

Felices, puro qui corde caelum tuentur, visibilis Deus his per saecula cuncta patebit.

Beatitude number six is also equipped with an introductory adjective imitating the Matthean expression *beati* and, this time, its original plural form *felices* is preserved too, distinguishing the beginning of this beatitude from the preceding one stylistically. The syntactic structure of the Gospel version was modified once again by the insertion of the subordinate clause

³⁰ Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 121.

³¹ Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 121.

qui (...) *tuentur* and by the omission of the subordinating conjunction *quoniam*, turning the originally subordinate clause into coordinate one. The final syntactic structure of this sentence is thus similar to the structure of the preceding beatitude except for the fact that, as for the second line, Juvencus, keeping the principle of the syntactic variation, does not use any conjunction at all.

The reason for the aforementioned addition of the subordinate clause starting with *qui* is Juvencus' effort to elaborate upon the Matthean phrase *mundo corde* by supplementing it with the words *caelum tuentur*, thus creating the poetic image of the men who look up to the skies seeking their Lord. This modification can be regarded as a kind of narrative improvement binding both parts of the original beatitude with the motif of looking and seeing, which is absent in the original phrase *mundo corde*. Patristic commentators also found it necessary to stress the connection between the purity of heart and the sight of God, Origen, for instance, explaining that a heart is to be understood as an eye³², Hilary adding that only those with pure heart are allowed to see God in His immortality³³ and Jerome saying that 'the Pure one is to be observed with pure heart'³⁴. Even today in Jewish culture, the heart was regarded as the centre of thoughts, will and other cognitive functions³⁵ so it is right to assume that Juvencus was trying to fill a certain gap in Matthew's narrative that he might have found a bit disturbing.

Unsurprisingly enough, this passage also confirms Juvencus' tendency to highlight the excellence of the heavenly rewards, for the men with pure hearts are promised to look upon their Lord *per saecula cuncta*, i.e. for an eternity.

Mt 5,9

Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur.

ELQ I 465

Pacificos Deus in numerum sibi prolis adoptat.

³² Heine, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, v. 1, p. 332.

³³ Hilarius Pictaviensis, *In Evangelium Matthaei Commentarius* 4, 7: "[...] quod solis mundis corde dispositum est, hoc quod in Deo est immortale cernemus".

³⁴ Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei Libri Quattuor* 5, 8: "Mundus mundo corde conspicitur".

³⁵ Majtán, *Ježišova zVRCHovaná reč: Evanjelium podľa Matúša*, 5. – 7. kapitola, p. 27.

Contrary to the preceding verses, the Juvencinian beatitude devoted to the peacemakers does not begin with the usual introductory adjective of Matthew and given the absence of the subordinating conjunction *quoniam*, it reminds us of the 'one-clause' syntactic structure of beatitude number three (*Hoc modo lugentes solacia magna sequentur*). Juvencus' beatitude of the peaceful, however, lacks any stylistic connection to the preceding verses (like the phrase *hoc modo*, for instance) which make it seem rather isolated. On the other hand, considering the evidence of the syntactic variation which we have encountered until now, we can also regard it as the intentional continuation of the same periphrastic tendency.

In comparison with the original text, Juvencus seems to put a greater emphasis upon the kinship between God and the peacemakers, the latter not only 'being about to be called His sons' (*filius Dei vocabuntur*), but literally 'adopted'. Thus, as Matthew indicates, Juvencus pronounces openly. The usage of the active instead of the passive voice to stress the closeness of this relation seems to support this claim in the same way as author's common praxis of promoting heavenly rewards with the aim of motivating his readers to take the path of the Christian faith. The word 'adoption' is also used by Hilary, who says: *Pacificorum beatitudo adoptionis est merces, ut filii Dei maneant*³⁶. Possibly, the repetition of 'p' in the words *pacificos* and *prole* tries to stress the position of the peacemakers as Lord's posterity.

Mt 5,10

Beati, qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iustitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.

ELQ I 466-467

Felices nimium, quos insectatio frendens propter iustitiam premit; his mox regia caeli pandetur.

The following Juvencinian beatitude seemingly copies the syntactic structure of the original, starting with the coordinate clause headed by the adjective *felices*, which is even corresponding to Matthew's plural. The last clause, however, is not introduced by the conjunction *quoniam*. In fact, Juvencus uses no conjunction at all, changing the clause into a coordinate

³⁶ Hilarius Pictaviensis, *In Evangelium Matthaei Commentarius* 4, 7.

one and forestalling the succession of two subordinate clauses. As we can see, the introductory adjective *felices* is followed by the adverb *nimum*, which is to be understood together as *felices valde* with a possible relation to the Virgil's Georgics praising the life of peasants³⁷ and which could be translated as 'most blessed'³⁸. The reason for Juvencus' promotion of the men who face persecution is probably the fact that he, living in the times of the Diocletian's Great persecution (301-311 AD), might have experienced it on his own, which is why he describes it with the expressive epithet *frendens* underscoring its cruelty³⁹. The heroic clausula *regia caeli* closing the second verse of the beatitude (and also reappearing in I 482 and II 513) might have been inspired by Virgil, who used the same phrase while speaking about Zeus' son and Aeneas's ancestor Dardanos, who was said to have ascended to the skies⁴⁰. There are, however, some other possible sources of inspiration too⁴¹. Looking, at last, upon the final word of the beatitude *pandetur* isolated at the beginning of the following verse, we can see that, though rarely, Juvencus does not hesitate to use enjambment, the need of which probably arose here out of his aim to get more space in order to portray the image of the royal palace opening its gates to the righteous, varying the recurrent Matthean phrase *regnum caelorum*.

Mt 5,11-12

Beati estis cum exprobaverint vobis homines et persecuti fuerint et dixerint omne malum adversum vos propter iustitiam. Gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in caelo; sic enim persecuti sunt et prophetas, qui erant ante vos.

³⁷ Vergilius, *Georgica* II 458: "O fortunatos nimium, sua bona si norint, / agricolas". See Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 122.

³⁸ McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, p. 46: "Most blessed they whom grinding persecution / afflicts due to the justice of their lives".

³⁹ In addition to this, Juvencus regularly provides those who suffer from persecution with the adjective *iusti* emphasizing the innocence of those who were sentenced to death for committing no other crime than confessing their faith. See Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator*, p. 120-121.

⁴⁰ Vergilius, *Aeneis* VII 210. See Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 122.

⁴¹ Cf. Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* I 257 / II 298; Lucanus, *Bellum civile* I 46 or Statius, *Thebais* XI 218. See McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, p. 140.

ELQ I 468-471

Gaudete operum quos iusta tenentes urgebit praeceps stimulis iniuria saevis;
 plurima nam merces vobis servatur in aethra, namque prophetarum fuit insectatio talis.

The last lines of the Matthean text are combined together making the longest of the Juvencinian beatitudes, which is, in fact, in accordance with the content of the gospel as these two lines belong together the first saying 'who is to rejoice' and the second explaining 'why'⁴². Juvencus' adaptation of the beatitude consists of four clauses three of which are coordinate and one subordinate compared to the nine clauses of the original (four coordinate and five subordinate ones). This passage is a very good demonstration of the author's effort to smooth the syntax of the Matthean text by removing all of its repetitive structures such as the three clauses in perfect subjunctive *cum expronaverint (...) et persecuti fuerint et dixerint* or the pleonastic expression *gaudete et exultate*, which, though typical of biblical stylistics, were not desirable among the readers of the pagan classics⁴³.

As for the vocabulary of the passage, it can be noticed that the author keeps up his tradition of varying the beginning of every beatitude, this time, replacing the original *beati* with the introductory word of the twelfth line, *gaudete*. The list of the transgressions against the righteous is totally omitted and substituted by Juvencus's own poetic paraphrase of the line *urgebit praeceps stimulis iniuria saevis*⁴⁴ containing both the figure of alliteration (*stimulis... saevis*) and contrast (*iniuria* in relation to the *iusta* from the preceding line)⁴⁵. This line is obviously Juvencus' most free-thinking poetic adaptation of the beatitudes. The last couplet will show us his variation technique once again. The repetition of the same conjunction is eliminated by the alternation of *nam* and *namque*. The Matthean phrase *in*

⁴² Mrázek, *Kázání na hoře*, p. 61.

⁴³ Rollins, *The Parables in Juvencus' Evangeliorum libri IV*, p. 164.

⁴⁴ Which can be translated as 'Gioite, se una violenta offesa / vi affliggerà con feroci torture perché agite guistamente' (F. Galli, *Giovenco: I libri dei Vangeli*, Roma 2012, p. 92.) 'Gioite voi, che pur operando secondo equità / sarete incalzati e sferzati da una crudele violenza' (L. Canali – P. Santorelli, *Aquilino Giovenco: Il poema dei Vangeli*, Milano 2011, p. 71) or simply as 'Rejoice just men, who suffer cruel abuse' (McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, p. 46).

⁴⁵ Juvencus probably used some of the Itala codices (a, b, c, d, g¹), which read *propter iustitiam* instead of the Vulgate's *propter me*. See Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 122.

caelo standing for *regnum caelorum* is replaced with the more classical words in *aethra*, the expression *aether* being traditionally associated with the divinity as can be seen, for instance, in Statius, who uses the phrase *aethrae rector Iuppiter* (I 2, 135)⁴⁶. The word *persecutio* is substituted by *insectatio*, the first being metrically incompatible with dactylic hexameter and, finally, the value of the rewards waiting for the persecuted is elevated by the superlative *plurima*, which can be translated by the adjective ‘im-mense’⁴⁷.

3. Conclusion

The biblical version of the Matthew’s beatitudes underwent numerous changes the most significant of which we are going to summarize. Firstly, the somewhat rigid structure of the original (*Beati... quoniam...*) was modified by the declension or omission of the introductory adjective *felix*, by the prolongation (*Felices humiles... or His similes mites...*) or reduction (*Hoc modo lugentes... and Pacificos...*) of the original sentence, by the occasional change of order (*His similes mites...* instead of *Hoc modo lugentes...*) and by the connection of two originally separate parts (*Gaudete operum...*), all of this done in order to free the original text of its monotony and repetitiveness. Secondly, the Matthean beatitudes were embellished with a number of stylistic figures including contrast (*iusta – iniuria*), alliteration (*rupe resedit, solacia (...) sequentur or pabula... potusque*)⁴⁸ or poetic images like the one of the table filled with food⁴⁹ or the pricks of injustice⁵⁰. Finally, it is well-known that Juvencus provides the original text with numerous adjectives in order to intensify the emotions of his readers and to fill his hexameters⁵¹. In the beatitudes, however, he also does it with certain theological purpose, i.e. to motivate his readers to take the

⁴⁶ Kievits, *Ad Iuvenci Evangeliorum librum primum commentarius exegeticus*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ “[...] for your immense reward is kept on high” (McGill, *Juvencus’ Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, p. 46.) and “[...] immensa ricompensa infatti vi attende in cielo” (Galli, *Giovenco: I libri dei Vangeli*, p. 92).

⁴⁸ Due to his prolific use of alliteration, Juvencus belongs to the archaically inclined author such as Apuleius, Fronto and Tertullianus. See Thor, *Studies on Juvencus’ Language and Style*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ “Illos plena manet satiandos copia mensae”.

⁵⁰ “Urgebit praeceps stimulis iniuria saevis”.

⁵¹ Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator*, p. 42.

path of the Christian faith because the rewards waiting for them in heaven will be generous. This is why he supplements the Matthean narrative with additional adjectives like *sublime*, *pulcherrima*, *magna*, *larga* and many others. The promotion of the heavenly rewards goes hand in hand with the prioritization of the persecuted Christians (*nimium*), which is justified by the cruelty of their persecution (*insectatio frendens*, *quos... urgebit praeeceps stimulis iniuria saevis*). The original narrative is also supplemented with Juvencus' own short theological commentaries (*Felices humiles* or *quos mansuetudo coronat*), which, in accordance with the contemporary interpretation, specify the meaning of the passages that the poet might have found unclear or prone to misrepresentation. Their incorporation into the original narrative is, however, so natural and unobtrusive that it clearly supports the claim that Juvencus does not try to be a commentator on the Bible but the Bible itself⁵². In general, Juvencus' poetic versification of the beatitudes is a formally enhanced but theologically faithful version of its Matthean counterpart.

Juvencinian Beatitudes Translated⁵³

Beholding crowds he sat upon a tow'ring mount and then
 surrounded by disciples thus his sermon he began:
 'The humble ones are blessed, though their spirits are so poor,
 because for them the realm of heav'n will op'n its golden door.
 The meek are blessed too as tameness crowns their hearts and so
 they are the men on whom the Lord will heav'nly lands bestow.
 The mourning ones will also find great comforts such as these
 whom God adopts as children for they strived to keep the peace.
 The ones who crave the food of justice should not be afraid
 because for them great tables piled with dishes will be laid.
 The men who pity others from the bottom of their hearts
 will get the lavish gift of pity which the Lord imparts

⁵² R. Herzog, *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike: Geschichte einer erbauichen Gattung*, München 1975, p. 115.

⁵³ Our choice of meter derives from the classical translation of *Iliad* by George Chapman (1611) accessible via <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51355/51355-h/51355-h.htm> (accessed: 15.01.2023). The beatitudes of the mourning and the peacemakers had to be put together to make a couplet as they are the only ones which do not occupy two verses in Juvencus' text.

and those whose hearts immaculate look up to heav'nly height
 are blessed as His face will always gratify their sight.
 The greatest are, however, those who persecuted were
 for seeking righteousness. The lot of angels they will share.
 Rejoice, then, you, the people who, for doing what is just,
 were fighting grave injustice the same way the prophets must
 have done when they were facing brutal persecution, so
 rejoice, because a great reward awaits you for your woe'.

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