Plato and the sympotic form in the *Symposium* of St Methodius of Olympus

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ἐγὼ δὲ ἐντετύχηκά τε πολλαῖς (sc. συνουσίαις συμποτικαῖς) καὶ πολλαχοῦ, καὶ προσέτι πάσας ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν διηρώτηκα, καὶ σχεδὸν ὅλην μὲν οὐδεμίαν ὀρθῶς γιγνομένην ἑώρακα οὐδέ ἀκήκοα, μόρια δ' εἴ που σμικρὰ καὶ ὀλίγα, τὰ πολλὰ δὲ σύμπανθ' ὡς εἰπεῖν διημαρτημένα.

Plato, lg. 639d-e

1. Introduction

The *Symposium* of St Methodius of Olympus (d. 311?)[1] purports to be a work written in imitation of Plato's work of the same name. The Christian author has given his work a twist: whereas the theme of Plato's work is *eros* (and initially, homosexual[2] *eros*) by which the theory of ideas is towards the end of the work introduced, that of Methodius' is chastity (ἁγνεία)

[1] The text of Gallandi in PG 18, 10-220 is now replaced by: G.N. Bonwetsch, Methodius, GCS 27, Leipzig 1917; V.-H. Debidour (traduction et notes) and H. Musurillo (introduction et texte critique), Méthode d'Olympe. Le Banquet, SC 95, Paris 1963. Translations: W.R. Clark, Methodius.The Banquet of the Ten Virgins, in: ANFa 6, Edinburgh 1869; repr. Buffalo 1886, 307-355; H. Musurillo, St. Methodius. The Symposium, ACW 27, London 1958; N. Antoniono, Metodio d'Olimpo. La verginità, Collana di testi patristici 152, Roma. Città nuova 2000. On the saint himself, see the life by the Bollandist Ioannes Stiltingk (Stiltingus), ASS Sept. 5, 1866, 768-773 (die 18 Sept.); see also H. Musurillo, Art. Methodius, NCE 9, 1966, 742; IX 1966, 742, as well as the respective introductions to the SC ed. (9-11) cited above and to the 1958 translation (3-5). Ancient testimonia on his life are collected by Bonwetsch, ix-xvii and PG 18, 18-26.

[2] The terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" as used in reference to classical Greek *Knabenliebe* are problematic; I have generally adopted them here only for want of better terms, since pederasty, pedophilia etc. usually have criminal associations in English and obviously cannot be used (in English at any rate) in reference to relationships where the younger one of the couple is not a boy, but a young man. For a critique of K. Dover's misleading use of "homosexuality", "homosexual" in his Greek Homosexuality, London 1978, see H. Patzer, Die griechische Knabenliebe, Wiesbaden 1982, 44-67; cf. also 125-128; but see also D. Halperin, Art. Homosexuality, OCD, ³1996, (720-723) 722: "It is not illegitimate to employ modern sexual terms and concepts when interrogating the ancient record, but particular caution must be exercised in order not to import modern, western sexual categories and ideologies into the interpretation of the ancient evidence".

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and virginity (παρθενία)[3], the latter of which appears to be "das christliche Gegenstück des Eros"[4], and the practitioners of which are said to be so removed from earthly concerns ὥστε δοκεῖν αὐτὰς ἐν κόσμῳ οὔσας μὴ εἶναι ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀλλὰ τῷ φρονήματι καὶ τῇ ὁρμῇ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας εἰς τὴν ἄγυριν ἤδη τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς τυγχάνειν[5]. To deliver encomia upon these themes he places in a *symposion* ten virgins and their host who speak each in her turn, after the manner of Plato's characters. In the intervening seven centuries that separate Plato from his Lycian imitator a good number of sympotic writers appear: Xenophon, Aristotle, Aristoxenus, Epicurus, Plutarch, Lucian, and above all, Athenaeus, author of the sympotic encyclopedia, the Δειπνοσοφισταί[6]. The influence of none of these is to be detected in Methodius' *Symposium*[7], and in fact it readily becomes apparent that there is for Methodius no sympotic model except Plato.

Long before an understanding of the true nature of Methodius' philosophical debt to Plato was attained, the formal similarities between the respective works of the two authors had, in the manner of an ignis fatuus, misled some classicizing Christian scholars to overlook the numerous artistic defects in Methodius' *Symposium*: for them, what mattered was that here was a rare example, so they thought, of an ancient Christian work steeped in classicism and classical form. The Jesuit Poussines (Possinus), for instance, was so excited by the contrived classical exterior of this work as to declare triumphantly Methodius' *Symposium* to be an "illustre monumentum ac veluti tropaeum ... victoriae ... a Christiana philosophia de Graeca gentilique reportatae ..."[8].

Methodius' use of Plato is not confined to that author's *Symposium*: the influence of a good number of the Athenian philosopher's other works (including spurious ones) is to be discerned in Methodius' writings[9]. A

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[3] See e.g., Meth., symp. prol. (GCS Methodius 3,6 Bonwetsch), prol. (7,1 B.) Other subjects, however, are also discussed: see below Section 3; also H. Musurillo, Meth. symp. (see note 1), 10-11.

[4] Critics are divided over the relationship of M.'s ἁγνεία (and παρθενία) to Platonic ἔρως: see M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità e generazione nel bello. L'eros nel Simposio di Metodio d'Olimpo, Mneme (on-line preprint), [30 agosto 2002: http://mondodomani.org/mneme/abz02.htm], Sect. 7.

[5] VIII 2 (83,4-6 B.). Henceforth, the bracketed numbers refer respectively to the page and line number of Bonwetsch's ed., even though, occasionally the Debidour/Musurillo text is preferred to that of Bonwetsch.

[6] On sympotic literature, see A. Hug, Art. Symposion-Literatur, PRE IV A 2, Stuttgart 1932, 1274-1276; O. Murray, Art. Symposium Literature, OCD, [3]1996, 1461.

[7] In describing Arete at prol. (5,6-12), M. appears to have imitated Xenophon's description of Arete in his account of The Choice of Heracles by Prodicus (Mem. II 1,22). Cf. Musurillo, Meth., symp. (see note 1), 185.

[8] Possin., praefat. ad Method. Conv., Paris 1657, cited by Gallandi in PG 18, 12.

[9] Genuine: The Republic, Timaeus, Phaedo, Protagoras, Phaedrus; spurious: Alcibiades I, Axiochus, Epinomis, Eryxias, Hippias Major; see Bonwetsch, 535-537, for *testimonia* of these; also H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 174-175, for a discussion.

curious observation that has been made is that the influence of Plato's *Symposium*, although more prevalent in Methodius than that of any other work in the Platonic corpus, seems prima facie to be limited largely to language, style and form[10]. I have taken this as the starting point of this study, for it is not my intention to examine the respective philosophies of Plato and Methodius; rather, what I wish to do is to examine Methodius' knowledge of the *symposion* as it existed as a social institution in classical antiquity and to assess his use of the *symposion* as literary genre. As far as I am aware, the genuineness of Methodius' *symposion* has not been questioned[11]. Even Zorzi, who has so brilliantly illuminated Methodius' reworking of the classical and Platonic tradition, at times speaks as though she is unaware in what respects Methodius' *symposion* is unclassical and unPlatonic[12]; and Hug could include Methodius in his article on sympotic authors, merely commenting that there is hardly any mention of the *symposion* in his work[13]. Realising that sympotic details are also relatively thinly spread throughout Plato's *Symposium*, I came to the conclusion that it was not frequency of sympotic occurrences that made or unmade a supposed sympotic work, but the actual quantity and type of sympotic detail selected, for the *symposion* can be established by a relatively small number of passages in which there is a high concentration of essential detail. Applying this rule to Methodius, I found that here was an author who really had little understanding of the *symposion*, and that what little he did grasp, he had imperfectly grasped from Plato. Close study of Methodius' text confirms this.

Because Plato's *symposion* is in many respects atypical, it will be expedient first to examine the form it takes and to see to what extent this conforms to the sympotic type of Plato's age. I shall then turn my attention to the form of Methodius' *symposion* and compare this with Plato's. Lastly, I shall look at the literary function of the *symposion* in Methodius' work and assess by comparison with the Platonic model how successfully the Christian author exploits the sympotic genre for his purposes.

I make no apology for referring throughout to the "real" *symposion*, as though there existed one type only; it is not my business to acknowledge

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[10] H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 17: "... despite the vast wealth of Platonic quotation and allusion ... he [sc. M.] was not really interested in its doctrinal content". For a collection of the most significant Platonic ideas borrowed and synthesized by M., see H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 175. M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, takes a different view (see note 4). For her, M. engages in "un continuo dialogo con, assunzione di, critica e trasformazione dei significati platonici". (Sect. 5).

[11] But see the critical comment of O. Murray, Art. Symp. Literature (see note 6), 1461.

[12] E.g., Sect. 5: "... la struttura stessa del testo metodiano, costruita ad arte ...". In Sect. 6, on "paralleli letterali e intenzionali divergenze con il Simposio di Platone", she fails to observe most of M.'s sympotic aberrations, some of which, as shall be shown, cannot have been intentional.

[13] A. Hug, Art. Symp.-Lit. (see note 6), 1281.

the development or regional variants of the *symposion* since Methodius (with whom we are here concerned) took it for granted that there was one kind only. It is simply a matter of convenience that I treat the classical, archaic, and regional symposia as a unified tradition, and indeed, further justification for this lies in the fact that there is a unifying thread running through all the variants of the *symposion*, and the things that these had in common are more numerous and more significant than the things that they did not[14].

2. *The symposion in Plato's Symposium*

The *symposion* depicted in Plato's *Symposium* differs substantially from the "real" *symposion*. This is in part due to the author's earlier, notorious rejection of the "real" *symposion* and of sympotic pleasures[15], and in part, to the author's literary and philosophical aims in the dialogue. On the other hand, Plato interweaves into the description of the *symposion* unobtrusively and in an entirely natural manner numerous sympotic details. Hence we are informed about the sympotic occasion (Agathon's theatrical victory celebration[16]); about sympotic ritual, ceremony and conventions including sympotic toilet and finery (174 a 3-4[17]); unshoeing and washing (175 a 6; 213 b 4); reclining (175 a 6, 176 a 1 etc.); libations and singing of hymns before the *symposion* proper (176 a 2-3); drinking (176 a 4); drinking rules (176 a 5-e 5; 213 e 8-10; 214 a 5-6). There are also direct references to the flute-girl (=sympotic entertainment: 176 e 7); to singing (the *skolia*? 181 a 1); to the servants (174 e 2; 175 a-c 1); to the complex "seating" (or rather reclining!) arrangement (175 c 6-8[18]; 177 d

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[14] The evidence for genuine *symposia* comes from a variety of sources, literary (e.g., Aristophanes and the other sympotic authors mentioned above) and archaeological (building sites, pottery etc.). See the modern standard works on the *symposion*, e.g., A. Hug, Art. Symposion, PRE IV A 1, Stuttgart 1931, 1266-1270; N. Eisher, Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs, in: Civilisation of the Ancient Mediterranean, ed. by M. Grant/R. Kitzinger, Vol. 42, New York 1988, 1167-1197; O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica. A Symposium on the Symposion, Oxford 1990; W.J. Slater (ed.), Dining in a Classical Context, Univ. Mich. Pr. 1991.

[15] Cf. M. Tecuşan, Logos sympotikos: Patterns of the Irrational in Philosophical Drinking: Plato outside the Symposium, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 238-260, esp. 239-244. Plato later mitigated his hostility to the *symposion* and accepted a "reformed" version of the custom as a legitimate and valuable educational institution, esp. in the lg. Bks 1-2; cf. M. Tecuşan, Logos, 244-260.

[16] Cf. Ath., 186 e; X., smp. 1,2; Plu., Phoc. 20; also E. Pellizer, Outlines of a Morphology of Sympotic Entertainment, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 178; A. Hug, Art. Symposion (see note 14), 1267.

[17] Cf. Ath., 186 e.

[18] Cf. R. Bury, The Symposium of Plato, Cambridge ^{2}1932, 13n.; K. Dover, Plato. Symposium, Cambridge 1980, 11.

3; 185 d 1; 222 e); to the garlands (212 e 1[19]); to the κλίνη upon which one reclines (217 b 6); to expensive sympotic vessels (223 c 5[20]); to the separate consumption of food and drink (174 e 4, 6; 175 b-c; 176 a 2, 4); to the ἐπὶ δεξιά order of proceedings (177 d 3; 222 e 11; 223 c 5[21]); and to the symposiarch or βασιλεύς (213 e 9-10[22]). There are also implicit references to the ἀνδρών, the men's apartment, (i.e., to the fact that the *symposion* takes place *indoors*: 174 e 1, 3; 175 c 3; 212 c 6-213 a 3, c 5; 223 b 2-4) and to the mixing of wine in the *krater*[23]. Furthermore the episodes of the two *komoi* which originate from other *symposia* and intrude into Agathon's (212 c 7-e 4; 223 b 2-6) and incidental details such as those about falling into a (semi-)intoxicated sleep at the close of the *symposion* (223 b 8-d 8) serve to add dramatic and authentic sympotic colouring to the dialogue.

How, then, does Plato's *symposion* differ from the "real" *symposion*? In the first place, one should distinguish between the many "accidental" omissions of sympotic minutiae (e.g., furniture, utensils, vessels, perfume etc.) which occur largely for artistic reasons and hence do not necessarily indicate omission of those features from the *symposion* itself[24], and other omissions which, being concerned with the activities of the symposiasts, are of a more serious kind. In Plato's *Symposium*, some of these omissions are explicitly stated: thus the symposiasts agree to abandon the customary imposition of intricate rules governing the assembly (176 a); they also

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[19] R. Bury, The Symposium (see note 18), 15 (cf. ibd., 85), rightly understands the highly suggestive, yet at the same time vague, phrase καὶ τἆλλα τὰ νομιζόμενα at 176 a 3 also to refer to customary and ritual acts (which include the removal of the tables and the distribution of the garlands) carried out before the *symposion* proper. On sympotic garlands, see Ath., 462 d (quoting Xenophanes); 464 f; 782 a.

[20] M. Vickers, Attic Symposia after the Persian Wars, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 107, 115-116, citing Ath., 192 a (cf. 461 c), believes that the large *phiale* from which Socrates was drinking was made of silver, for "large cups were proverbially known as 'silver wells'".

[21] Cf. Ath., 463 f.

[22] Note also the allusions to the functions and governance of the symposiarch at 176 and 214 b 6-8. While none of the symposiasts is "officially" designated as the bearer of this office (cf. Dover, Plato. Symposium [see note 18], 85: "the decision [sc. about the drinking rules] is taken in a manner which reflects Athenian democratic practice"), Erixymachus is probably meant to be regarded as the *de facto* symposiarch, since in some manner he performs the duties of that office: see esp. 214 b 6. Later, in the lg. 640 c 4-5, Plato recognises the necessity of an ἀρχων in a *symposion*: see M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 251-253.

[23] The *psykter* necessarily implies mixing since it was used to cool the wine before it was mixed: cf. Poll., VI 99: ὁ δὲ ψυκτὴρ πολυθρύλητος, ὃν καὶ δῖνον ἐκάλουν, ἐν ᾧ ἦν ὁ ἄκρατος. On the absence of explicit references to the mixing of wine – there are, however, two figurative allusions: R. 562 d 2; lg. 773 d 1 – in sympotic passages of Plato, see M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 244-245. On the *krater*, see E. Lissarrague, Around the *Krater*: an Aspect of Banquet Imagery, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 197.

[24] Cf. M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 251, on lg. I-II: "Almost all details which concern the real *symposion* are left aside".

agree to forgo music and the flute-girl (who might otherwise have rendered other services in addition to the performance of the music) and to give themselves up to philosophical discussion (176 e)[25]. The references to music and the flute-girl also point to the absence of other sympotic entertainments: the games, acrobats and other performers[26], and the recitation of (monodic) lyric poetry[27]. Other absent sympotic activities include the sexual encounters either with the hired women or with the adolescents or young boys who were invited to these events, or with all these groups; likewise, Plato's symposiasts do no initiate a ritualized *komos*[28], and yet, as we have seen, two *komoi* originating from other *symposia* force their way into Agathon's[29]. By pointing out these omissions, I do not of course mean to imply that all real *symposia* contained each and every one of these features, but it is made clear before the beginning of the individual discourses on *eros* that Plato's symposiasts intend to exclude some of these features from their *symposion*, and we are doubtless meant to infer from this that Plato meant to exclude the rest also.

2.1 Character of, and membership in, the Platonic symposion

The significant, exclusively male membership of Plato's *symposion* reflects not only authentic sympotic custom, according to which aristocratic women were excluded from the drinking-party[30], but also of course the

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[25] I am inclined to question the argument of T.B.L. Webster, Athenian Culture and Society, London 1973, 55, that "... Xenophon and Plato would not have chosen symposia as the scene for Socrates' operations unless philosophical discussions were known to take place in symposia"; it seems to me equally plausible (observe how casually and almost accidentally Plato's symposiasts hit upon the idea of restricting their amusements to conversation, which is clearly intended to impress upon the reader the novelty of the practice) that Xenophon and Plato finding the *symposion* to be an attractive and likely setting for philosophical discussion, turned what was previously merely a drinking-party, into something approaching more what moderns understand "symposium" to mean. A. Hug, Art. Symp.-Lit. (see note 6), 1273-1274, shows that the philosophical *symposion* really began as a literary form, and this with Plato, though he acknowledges that Plato was merely developing the *symposion*'s natural inclination for conversation: cf. also Plato's Prt. 347 c-e.

On Plato's abandonment of sympotic entertainments in favour of discussion, see also Pl., Prt. 347 d-e, where Socrates is made to attack the usual entertainments (ὅπου δὲ καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ συμπόται καὶ πεπαιδευμένοι εἰσί, οὐκ ἄν ἴδοις οὔτ' αὐλητρίδας οὔτε ὀρχηστρίδας οὔτε ψαλτρίας) and advocate that speeches made in turn be all the amusement that good men require (though he has nothing against liberal drinking).

[26] Such as Philippus the γελωτοποιὸς in X., smp. 1,11.

[27] Cf. E. Pellizer, Outlines (see note 16), 177, citing L.E. Rossi, Il simposio greco arcaico e classico come spettacolo a se stesso, in: Spettacoli conviviali dall' antichità classica alle corti italiane del' 400: Atti del VII convegno di studio, Viterbo 1983, 41-50.

[28] Cf. O. Murray, Sympotic History, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 7.

[29] Cf. N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1182.

[30] Cf. J.P. Lynch, The Athenian Symposium as an Institution: Social Drinking and Educational Issues in Eifth Century Athens, Laetaberis 4, 1986, 6-7; E Cooper/S. Morris, Dining in Round Buildings, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 80. The inclusion of

male-dominated society in which the dialogue is set. In 4th-century Athens respectable women were not free to pursue activities outside the home on the assumption (among others) that they had no function outside that home. Deprived of most of the legal rights enjoyed by men and excluded from the extra-domestic social interaction and entertainments in which their menfolk indulged, Athenian women were also not permitted to take part in politics[31]. Furthermore, because there was no need to prepare girls for this participation in the important affairs of the *polis*, formal education was – so it appears – ordinarily denied to girls, and few of even the wealthiest appear to have attained any significant level of education[32]. Plato of course takes a higher view of women and their capacity for, and their "right" to, the same education received by men – one thinks of the quasi-feminist programme in the fifth book of the *Republic*. But here in the *Symposium*, irrespective of any subtle implications that may be extrapolated from Diotima's gender[33], the male dominance of Athenian society informs the whole setting of the dialogue[34].

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prostitutes, who as paid entertainment and mere aids to men's pleasures, are not properly speaking invited guests or equal participants in the drinking-party, does not of course diminish the essentially male character of the *symposion*. On the unlikelihood of female *symposia*, see C.G. Starr, An Evening with the Elute-Girls, ParPass 33, 1978, (401-410) 405, who speculates that one depiction of a *symposion* in which the symposiasts are all naked women is not an accurate historical document but rather the product of male erotic fantasy.

31 The literature on the disadvantaged social, political and economic status of Athenian women in the classical period is vast. Two reliable accounts may be found in S. Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, and Slaves, New York 1975, 57-86; and S. Blundell, Women in Ancient Greece, Cambridge Mass. 1995, 113-144. See also on the repressive seclusion of Athenian women, R. Elacelière, Daily Life in Greece (La Vie Quotidienne en Grèce au Siècle de Périclès), trans. by Peter Green, New York 1966, 66; K. Dover, Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle, Berkeley 1974, 95-98. 209-213.

32 Cf. On the generally inferior education or lack of education afforded free-born Athenian girls, see C.C. Starr, Evening (see note 30), 404; S. Pomeroy, Goddesses (see previous note), 74; W.V. Harris, Ancient Literacy, Cambridge Mass. 1989, 96. The question of female literacy at Athens is somewhat more vexed. Although the written evidence is meagre and often of dubious value, numerous fifth-century vases depict women with book-rolls or writing-tablets (cf. S.G. Cole, Could Greek Women Read and Write?, in: Reflections of Women in Antiquity, ed. by H.P. Foley, New York 1981, 223-224). On the other hand, scholars have been reluctant to set great store by the allegedly domestic scenes in which these reading women are depicted, pointing out that "there are no clear indicators ... that these [women] are to be interpreted as citizen women, and the viewer may have been intended to see them as educated courtesans or Muses" (S. Blundell, Women in Ancient Greece [see note 31], 206 n. 4; cf. also W.V. Harris, Ancient Literacy [see above], 107 who also observes that most of the "identifiable female characters who appear on vases are mainly the Muses and Sappho". In any event, scholarly consensus is that female literacy at Athens in the classical period was extremely rare, and perhaps, as in the case of Ischomachus' wife in X., oec. 9,10, did not extend beyond literacy for domestic administrative purposes: cf. W.V. Harris, Ancient Eiteracy [see above], 67).

33 On the implications of Diotima's gender, see C. Seltman, Women in Antiquity, Eondon 1956, 110; Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18), 137-138; and D. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, London/New York 1990, 113-151.

34 Cf. D. Halperin, One Hundred Years (see previous note), 128: "One might even argue

In connection with this sympotic male-exclusivity, one might also point to the military origins of the *symposion* and the remote relation the latter has to the warrior associations of archaic Greece[35]. Plato's *symposion* retains some vestiges of the real *symposion*'s earlier military associations when Alcibiades like a veteran in a beer-hall recounts his memoirs of "Socrates' feats in the barracks" (219 e 6-221 c 1).

Again, the classical *symposion* of Athens is thought to have retained something of the educative and initiatory ritual character of the archaic common meals[36] in which pederasty and education were closely associated with the initiation of adolescents into adult male society[37]. In Plato's *Symposium* one can detect this educational aspect of the *symposion* in the various passages in which the functions of the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος bond are touched upon[38]. Pausanias, for example, declares the servitude of the ἐρώμενος to be acceptable where it is ἡ περὶ τὴν ἀρετήν and it is directed τῷ ποιοῦντι αὐτόν σοφόν τε καὶ ἀγαθόν (184 c-e). When Alcibiades tries to seduce Socrates in bed (218 c-219 d), he says to him: ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστι πρεσβύτερον τοῦ ὡς ὅτι βέλτιστον ἐμὲ γενέσθαι, τούτου δὲ οἶμαί μοι συλλήπτορα οὐδένα κυριώτερον εἶναι σοῦ (218 d 1–3). Hence the *symposion* was still educative to the extent that classical pederasty, which invariably revolved around the *symposion*, still discharged an educative function through the services (ὑπηρεσία) rendered by the ἐραστής to his ἐρώμενος[39].

There is also a distinctly political aspect of the *symposion* that is intimately related to the male-exclusiveness of the drinking-party: apart from the fact that Greek politics were of course strictly the business of men only, the politically-involved *hetaireiai* grew out of the sympotic environment[40]. Manuela Tecuşan cites as further proof of this relationship between politics

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... that it very nearly *doesn't* suit Plato's purposes to introduce a woman [sc. Diotima] into the *Symposium* ... Plato has gone out of his way, after all, from the very outset of the narrative, to make Agathon's drinking-party an unusually masculine affair. Greek symposia, of course, were by definition men's parties ...".

35 Cf. O. Murray, Early Greece, Cambridge Mass. ²1993, 53-54, 207-208; cf. also J.N. Bremmer, Adolescents, Symposion, and Pederasty, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 136, 142-144; also O. Murray, The Greek Symposion in History, in: Tria Corda: Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano, ed. by E. Gabba, Como 1983, 257-272; and War and the Symposium, in: W.J. Slater (ed.), Dining (see note 14), 83-103.

36 Cf. J.N. Bremmer, Adolescents (see previous note), 142-143; H. Patzer, Knabenliebe (see note 2), 106-107; D. Halperin, One Hundred Years, 56-61, however, who criticises Patzer, is sceptical about the initiatory ritual character of classical pederasty.

37 On the archaic Cretan and Spartan common meals and initiatory and pederastic rituals attested by Str. X 4,21 = Ephoros (F149), Plu., Lyc. 12,15-18 etc., see J.N. Bremmer, Adolescents (see note 35), 136-137; N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1177-1178; K. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 185-186, 189, 192-193.

38 Cf. H. Patzer, Knabenliebe (see note 2), 106.

39 Cf. K. Dover, Greek Popular Morality (see note 31), 214-215; K. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 91, 159; J.N. Bremmer, Adolescents (see note 35), 142.

40 Cf. O. Murray, The Affair of the Mysteries: Democracy and the Drinking Group, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 150-151.

and the *symposion* Socrates' speech in the *Theatetus* (172 c-176 d)[41], in which he argues that the aims and activities of philosophers differ from those of men of political ambitions. To philosophers, he says, it does not even occur in their dreams to have anything to do with the affairs of the *polis*: σπουδαὶ δὲ ἑταιριῶν ἐπ' ἀρχὰς καὶ σύνοδοι καὶ δεῖπνα καὶ σὺν αὐλητρίσι κῶμοι (173 d 4-5). Pausanias in the *Symposium*, in discussing the link between the male (homosexual) intimacy engendered in the *symposion* and in the *palaestrae*, and the sharing of political power among the body of (male) citizens (182 a 7-d 4), states that the barbarians (i.e. the Persians) condemn τὸ χαρίζεσθαι ἐρασταῖς ... τοῦτό γε, καὶ ἡ γε φιλοσοφία καὶ ἡ φιλογυμναστία (182 b 3, 8, c 1) on account of the despotic nature of their polity (διὰ τὰς τυραννίδας)[42]. Admittedly the *symposion* is not explicitly mentioned, but Pausanias is undoubtedly referring to the sympotic lifestyle in which men are free to gather in private groups and form intimate relationships. Lastly, Alcibiades confirms the view that "in Plato's judgement, political involvement and *symposia* were akin"[43] in his encomium of Socrates not only by showing the latter's disinterest in the *symposion* (he is reluctant to accept Alcibiades' invitation; is not affected by wine; disdains sympotic wooing and the ordinary, sympotic understanding of love, and displays no fondness for sensual pleasures – except in pretence), but also by indicating Socrates' aversion to politics as seen in his exhortation to Alcibiades to abandon politics: ἀνάγκαζει γὰρ με ὁμολογεῖν ὅτι πολλοῦ ἐνδεὴς ὢν αὐτὸς ἔτι ἐμαυτοῦ μὲν ἀμελῶ, τὰ δ' Ἀθηναίων πράττω (216 a 4-6).

Not only are Plato's symposiasts exclusively men, but they are, to be precise, exclusively aristocratic men[44]. This is reflected firstly in the selection of individuals gathered at his drinking-party, secondly, and more importantly, in the genteel behaviour, manners, and sophistication which Plato attributes to the characters of those individuals[45]. For these are πλούσιοι, men of leisure: they go to banquets all dandified (174 a-b, 212 e)[46], have slaves to wash their feet and prepare their dinners (175 a-

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[41] M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 241.

[42] Cf. M. Vickers, Attic Symposia (see note 20), 114; Flacelière, Daily Life (see note 31), 109-110. On homosexual *eros* as an incentive to civic and political excellence praised in Aristophanes' speech: see P.W. Ludwig, Politics and Eros in Aristophanes' Speech: *Symposium* 191e-192a and the Comedies, AJP 117, 1996, 537-562.

[43] M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 241.

[44] N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1171, shows that the male, aristocratic character of the *symposion* goes back to archaic times.

[45] Although the lower classes also are known to have occasionally indulged in *symposia* (cf. Webster, Athenian Culture [see note 16], 56-57, E. Pellizer, Outlines [see note 16], 181), "full-scale sympotic behaviour was felt to be characteristic of the upper class and the political 'establishment' of top people" (N. Fisher, Greek Associations [see note 14], 1181; cf. M. Vickers, Attic Symposia [see note 20], 106): see esp. Ar., v. 1208-1264, where Philocleon has to be taught how to act at a *symposion* like the aristocratic smart set.

[46] Cf. Ar., v. 1122-1173; Pl., smp. 174.

b), go to parties frequently (176 a), indulge in cultivated and often idle talk (one would not expect to hear abstract discussions about love in the company of fish-mongers, however intelligent), have money to spend on flute-girls[47] whether or not they perform (176 e, 212 d), and engage in that most decadent and aristocratic of activities, the *komos*[48] (212 d-e, 223 b). One might also see a philosophical motive in Plato's acceptance of the aristocratic membership of the symposion: the philosophical man, in Plato's view, is like the aristocrat in the sense that he belongs to the élite and thus has nothing in common with ordinary men such as those upon whom he pours scorns in the *Protagoras* (347 c) as οἱ φαῦλοι καὶ ἀγοραῖοι ἄνθρωποι.

Also connected with the male-exclusivity of the *symposion* are the homosexuality and pederasty which are promoted and cultivated therein. Plato's *symposion* largely conforms to this model[49]: not only are the discourses of Plato's symposiasts all (excepting that of Aristophanes which is heterosexual at the same time) homosexual in their understanding of *eros*[50], but some of the pairs of the symposiasts are depicted or were known at the time as homosexual lovers in ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationships: Pausanias was Agathon's ἐραστής (193 b 7; Prt. 315 e), and Socrates Alcibiades' (216 d; 217 a-b; note also that much of the humour of Alcibiades' account in the *Symposium* of his attempts to seduce Socrates depends on a complete reversal of rôles in this ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship: see especially 217 c 7-8)[51]. Aristodemus is also described half tongue-in-cheek as Socrates' ἐραστής (173 b 3). Socrates himself declares that the only thing he understands is τὰ ἐρωτικά (177 d 8), which must mean, in the context of the dialogue, not only the lofty conception of love as a systematic education of ascending gradations leading ultimately to the eternal form of beauty, but also the lowest rungs in this ascent, the homosexual *eros* praised by the other symposiasts. And while Socrates in this dialogue is depicted as an individual of great purity who remains impervious to the sensual passions – Alcibiades claims that Socrates'

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[47] C.G. Starr, Evening (see note 30), 405-407, discusses the expenses involved in hiring flute-girls and the fact that these performers were generally associated with the social life of the aristocracy.

[48] See O. Murray, Affair of the Mysteries (see note 40), 150.

[49] H. Patzer, Knabenliebe (see note 2), 114; K.J. Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18), 3-5, gives a condensed survey of the homosexuality of the smp. The tenor of the erotic passages in X.'s smp. is also, for the most part, homosexual (and pederastic): e.g., 1,8-10; 2,15; 4,9-29 etc.

[50] So rightly N. Fisher, Greek Associations, 1182. Phaedrus (178 e), Pausanias (181 c-182 d), and Aristophanes (191 e-192 a) regard the homosexual as superior to the heterosexual *eros* for political reasons: see P.W. Ludwig, Politics (see note 42), 538-539.

[51] On this episode and its depiction, see K. Dover, Greek Popular Morality (see note 31), 215; K. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 157-158; W.M. Ellis, Alcibiades, London/New York 1989, 20-23.

homosexual interests are only a pretence (216 d 2-e 5) – elsewhere his behaviour is described in overtly homosexual terms[52].

2.2 Attitude to drunkenness, eros and sex

In the real *symposion*, heavy drinking of wine, the prima facie *raison-d'être* of the meeting, appears to have been more or less obligatory[53], regularly leading to drunkenness[54], and (though not always) to sexual intercourse in various forms, and to the riotous *komos* through the streets. In contrast to this, Plato's symposiasts, as we have seen, abandon the usual regimen of drinking under the governance of the symposiarch (176 a-e) and, without embracing teetotalism, take a cautious attitude to heavy drinking.

Now, while it is out of the question that any of the symposiasts, apart perhaps from Socrates, morally objects to drunkenness, there seems to be implicit, authorial censure of drunkenness which is strikingly at variance with the values of the real *symposion*. This is implied not only through the hesitancy of Plato's symposiasts to indulge in heavy drinking, but also through the accounts of Socrates' astonishing immunity to the effects of alcohol (176 c; 214 a; 220 a). The Platonic hostility toward drunkenness is attested elsewhere more explicitly (e.g., R. 398 e where sympotic music is also condemned!), and although Plato later reformed his ideas about the *symposion* in Books I and II of the *Leges*[55] and developed a theory about the educational value of heavy drinking (lg. 641-650; 671-672)[56], there is little or no trace of these newer ideas in the *Symposium*. On the contrary, despite the pleasing and charming accounts of Alcibiades' drunken behaviour, the *Symposium* retains implicitly an attitude that is censorious toward drunkenness and, at best, ambivalent toward heavy drinking (cf. smp. 181 a)[57].

The real *symposion* was the natural refuge of ἔρως in a society whose rigid and segregated structure tended to drive the amorous in search of romance within the cliquish and homosexual milieu of the private, exclusively-male, drinking party[58]. Moreover, love/lust and wine are often

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[52] E.g., Chrm. 155 c; Ly. 206 a. Cf. K. Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18), 4; Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 154-156.

[53] Pl., smp. 213 e 7-8; cf. Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18) on smp. 176 e 3.

[54] Cf. Arist., pol. 1336 b 20; Ath., 430 b-c quoting Alcaeus.

[55] Cf. M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 244: "These books strive at a complete restoration of the sympotic custom ...".

[56] Cf. M. Tecuşan, Logos (see note 15), 248-251.

[57] Cf. also Prt. 347 c-d, where Plato distinguishes between the bad and the good *symposia*: the symposiasts at the latter can drink great quantities of wine while remaining sufficiently sober to engage in intellectual discussion.

[58] K. Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18), 3-4; Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 149-150.

bedfellows[59]. Hence ἔρως is typically a subject of the *logos sympotikos*[60], and the decision of Plato's symposiasts to praise, each in his turn, *eros* appears entirely natural and plausible even if the discourses themselves, or at least some of them, are quite unlike anything that might have been heard in a real *symposion*. Of course, the discourses are not uniform in their attitude toward *eros* – on the contrary, each is distinguished by a strong individualism in its understanding and praise of the god – but it is nevertheless true to say that they all start from the same premise, namely, that *eros*, in the usual classical acceptation of the word, *eros* as "intense desire for a particular individual as a sexual partner"[61], is good and laudable. On the other hand, Plato's *symposion* is, as we have seen earlier, free of the sexual activity usually associated with the real *symposion*, and this relative sexual abstinence conforms with the intellectual ethos of the Platonic assembly, and is at the same time to be explained by the literary and aesthetic aims of the dialogue. Towards the end of the dialogue, Alcibiades' drunken and uninvited *komos* interruption and his humorous accounts of his unsuccessful attempts to engage Socrates in sexual adventures reinforce the contrast between the "real" and the Platonic *symposion* (i.e., before Alcibiades' arrival).

3. *The symposion in Methodius' Symposium*

It will be expedient here to review the general plot and structure Methodius' *Symposium* before we turn to an examination of the form of the *symposion* in the work. Arete, daughter of Philosophia, has organised a party in her garden for a select group of virgins who are of the leisured class of society. Neither decked out with any ornaments nor done up with paint, she goes to receive her guests outside her property, and from here she escorts them into her garden. The party lies down under the shade of a chaste-tree (ἄγνος δένδρον): some have already commenced to dine before the last guests arrive. They have a rich dinner and drink wine. After their feasting, Arete invites her virgin guests each in her turn to deliver an encomium upon virginity and in this way to compete for the prize of a garland. Marcella goes first because she is the eldest and πρώτη ἀνάκειται. The speeches which are delivered by each of the guests standing before her companions are not all on virginity, but other subjects are treated as well: the excellence of marriage (Theophila), St Paul's style (Thalia), astrology, and none of the virgins is by any means adverse to biblical exegesis, especially of the allegorist style favoured by Origenists. At the conclusion of the

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[59] Cf. Pl., lg. 645 d; Ath., 463 c; 782 a; observe also how Meth., (symp. I 3 [11,11-13]) juxtaposes texts of Ecclus (18,30; 19,2) thereby connecting lust, women and wine!

[60] So rightly E. Pellizer, Outlines (see note 16), 180; cf. X., smp. 8,1-41; Ath., 463 a.

[61] Dover, Plato. Symposium (see note 18), 1.

speeches Thecla is awarded first prize; she is encircled by the other virgins and sings a hymn celebrating the symbolical marriage between Christ and virgins. A discussion in Platonic dialectic manner about concupiscence is represented as taking place between the narrator and the one inquiring about the *symposion* and serves as an epilogue to the whole work.

3.1 Genuine and παράκοπα *sympotica in Methodius*

Nearly all of the sympotic elements derived from Plato's *Symposium* are, as one would expect, genuinely sympotic, or at any rate are inspired by genuinely sympotic customs: 1) the aristocratic status of the symposiasts[62]; 2) the employment of slaves/servants[63]; 3) the drinking of wine (prol. [4,13])[64]; 4) the observance of order and succession in the deliverance of the speeches (prol. [7,1]); 5) the reclining posture of the symposiasts (prol. [5,24]); 6) the singing of a hymn (XI [131,16-137,2]). Some of Methodius' *sympotica* which are derived from the Platonic model are perhaps less sympotic in spirit, but only because the Platonic *symposion* itself is, as we have seen, on many points atypical. Thus Methodius imitates the general sobriety of the Platonic *symposion* and the restricting of entertainment to intellectual conversation.

Some of the sympotic minutiae in Methodius are naturally altered to suit the new Christian context: the hymn just mentioned, for example, is sung τῷ κυρίῳ, not to Apollo and it is not connected with the pouring of libations to the *agathos daimon* or to any of the Olympian gods or Greek heroes[65]. On the other hand, the Christian hymn in Methodius' *symposion* clearly has no ritual purpose related to the *symposion* and it takes place

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[62] Notice their free activity, Arete's estate and bounteous hospitality (prol. [5,1-2]; prol. [6,14-21]); also Thecla's white complexion (VIII 17 [112,4-5]) which in Athens, as elsewhere, was a sign of wealth since only the rich, who were not compelled to go out into the sun, were able to preserve fairness of skin: see S. Pomeroy, Goddesses (see note 31), 83.

[63] M. is inconsistent in his depiction of Gregorion. At prol. (4,12-13) he represents her as pouring the wine and serving the food, yet at prol. (5,1) he represents her as one of the invited guests, but one who like Aristodemus is not asked to give a speech. This discrepancy is again another example of Meth.'s careless composition. Notice also that in imitation of the opening scene of Plato's smp. Meth. makes Gregorion give a second-hand account of the *symposion* (i.e. from the account that Theopatra gave her), even though Gregorion herself was present! For this inconsistency Gallandi in Migne's ed. (28) proposed the following, ingenious but entirely unnecessary solution: "... *mulier ... quae quod ministerii attentione avocata, verisimiliter nequivisset orationes convivantium virginum, praesertim sublatis ferculis, et post ministrarum recessum habitas cognoscere ...*"; equally unnecessary is Debidour's note (Debidour/Musurillo, 44 n.1): "En fait, Grégorion n'assistait pas au banquet. Dans l'antiquité classique [!], ce sont toujours des serviteurs qui versent à boire: cette seule mention d'une femme dans un tel rôle situe la scène dans un cadre imaginé ou sur un plan allégorique".

[64] But see below, on Meth.'s attitude to wine.

[65] Cf. N. Eisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1173.

at the end of the *symposion*, not before, as was usual in the case of hymn of the real *symposion*.

Another instance of pseudo-classical sympotic convention is the introduction of the garlands at the end of the discourses (XI [131,7-8]). At this point in the dialogue, Arete passes judgement over the discourses, as if they were delivered in an *agon* – thus does Methodius apparently attempt to endow his *symposion* with a sympotic competitive spirit[66]. Somewhat illogically, Arete declares all the symposiasts winners, but to Thecla, because she "shone forth more brilliantly" than the rest, she awards a bigger and thicker garland. The phrase στεφάνῳ ... δασυτέρῳ at XI (131,8) clearly is inspired by Plato's description of Alcibiades as being garlanded with a στεφάνῳ δασεῖ (212 e). In the latter passage, Alcibiades is depicted as wanting to crown Agathon for his dramatic victory (celebrations) the day before. But it is not his στέφανος with which Alcibiades wishes to crown Agathon, but the victory ribbons or headband, the ταινίαι, which he wears hanging from his head (212 e 2, 7; 213 a 6)[67]. Hence, Methodius appears to have confused the victory ταινίαι with the ordinary sympotic garland and to have been unaware that the sympotic garland was not given as a prize *at the end* of the *symposion*, but was worn for the duration of the party.

Furthermore, it is clear from prol. (4,12-13):

> πρῶτον εἰσήγησαι τὴν συνέλευσιν ἔνθα ἐγενήθη καὶ τῶν ἐδεσμάτων τὰς παρασκευάς, σεαυτήν τε πῶς ᾠνοχόησας ...

from prol. (6,15-16):

> ὡς οὖν δαιτός τε παντοδαπῆς ἤδη καὶ εὐφροσύνης ποικίλης ἐτυγχάνομεν ...

and from the fact that after the feasting Arete makes no reference to a special part of the evening devoted to the consumption of wine or of beverages but simply declares that the virgins are to indulge in conversation for the rest of the proceedings, that Methodius does not make the distinction between food and drink which was so peculiar to the classical, and indeed to the Platonic, *symposion*. No ἐπὶ δεξιά succession operates, but rather the symposiasts appear to take their turns according to age (prol. [7,2])[68], and some of the symposiasts take their turns standing (VI 1 [63,20]; VII 1

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[66] Cf. N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 65), 1182. For other references to this competitiveness in M.'s smp., see prol. (7,3); II 1 (15,5); II 7 (26,14-27,1); VII 1 (64,1-5); VIII 17 (111,15) etc.

[67] Cf. X., smp. 5,9.

[68] Note also that prol. (7,2) is not evidence of the sympotic complex "seating" arrangement: M. was merely copying Pl., smp. 177 d 4, but even here he shows that he did not understand the seat-of-honour system (προνομή) by adding that age determines the order in which the symposiasts take their turns.

[70,15]). The location of the scene is a garden (prol. [5,1]) and probably a country garden[69], features absent from the very urban *symposion* of classical Athens. To be sure, the fact that Methodius has chosen a garden for the scene of his *symposion* tells us much about his knowledge, or rather ignorance, of Attic convention. The idea of placing the interlocutors under a chaste-tree comes from Plato's *Phaedrus* (230 b). Methodius doubtless was charmed by the depiction of Socrates and Phaedrus chatting under the shade of a plane tree, almost as it were, *more pastorum*, and wished to have his virgins doing the same. But as we have seen above, the Athenian *symposion* was an indoor activity, conducted in the ἀνδρῶν, and at evening when one would not be looking for shade (cf. Meth., symp. prol. [6,11-12]). Again, we can hardly imagine the κλίνη being placed around the chaste-tree: apart from the fact that it was a piece of furniture used indoors, its height and size[70] would have made it impossible to use under such a tree[71]. The omission of a few "ethically innocuous" sympotic features mentioned or alluded to in the Platonic account (e.g., washing, unshoeing, the complex "seating arrangement", drinking vessels, the ἐπὶ δεξιά etc.), again points to Methodius' sympotic ignorance since details about these could have been incorporated without undermining the Christian ethics propounded in the work.

3.2 Membership in Methodius' symposion

Let us now examine more closely some of Methodius' more significant sympotic aberrations. Chief among these must be reckoned his introduction of female symposiasts. Of course, as Methodius' theme was virginity, the gender and number of his characters were suggested to him by the parable from Matt 25,1-13. The contrast between the real symposion, an institution which for Greeks and for Plato alike belonged to men and found its home in the ἀνδρῶν, the men's chamber, and in which, as we have seen, sexuality was openly expressed and sexual activity frequently took place[72], and Methodius' chaste, female *symposion* could not be more extreme. One should think that Methodius' decision in this matter was not the result of ignorance of genuine sympotic custom, since in antiquity even non-Greeks well educated in Greek culture and traditions knew that it was

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[69] Cf. the references to the rough, difficult and uphill path (prol. [5,4]); to Arete's description of the estate as "meadow of immortality" (prol. [5,14] λειμών τῆς ἀφθαρσίας); to cliffs (prol. [5,18]); to the spring and streams (prol. [6,4-5]); and to the orchard and meadows (prol. [6,7-9]).

[70] J. Boardman, Symposion Furniture, in: Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 122-127.

[71] H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 187, points out that the chaste-tree was a shrub which would hardly have been "big enough to provide shade for the ten virgin ...".

[72] For classical examples, see E. Pellizer, Outlines (see note 16), 181-182.

not *moris ... Græcorum ut in convivio virorum accumberent mulieres*[73]. This Ciceronian utterance refers of course to the fact that respectable, aristocratic women at Athens did not appear at the *symposion*, the very opposite of the situation presented to us by Methodius.

Methodius' symposiast women are "sympotically" anomalous in other significant respects. They are unlike classical Athenian dames in every way: they go about unattended like male citizens (prol. [5,1-21]), lead a life outside the home[74], are educated, evidently devoting much of their time to books of various kinds (probably an unAthenian activity for respectable women)[75]; they do not wear jewellery, or other kinds of bodily adornments (V 6 [60,15-18]; VI 4 [69,12]) such as cosmetics (prol. [5,8])[76]; they attend symposia at which they recline (prol. [5,24])[77] and drink wine[78]. On the other hand, they are unlike Athenian *demi-mondaines* in respect of their virginity and in respect of the fact that they do not appear at the *symposion* for the purpose of satisfying men's pleasures. Hence Methodius' women are completely out of place in a classical setting, for the resemblance of which, at the very least, Methodius strives. His characters fit into none of the accepted classical female categories. As an Athenian orator once declared: τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἑταίρας ἡδονᾶς ἕνεκ' ἔχομεν τὰς δὲ παλλακὰς τῆς καθ' ἡμέραν θεραπείας τοῦ σώματος, τὰς δὲ γυναῖκας τοῦ παιδοποιεῖσθαι γνησίως καὶ τῶν ἔνδον φύλακα πιστὴν ἔχειν[79].

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[73] Cic., Ver. II 1,66. By *convivio virorum* Philodamus of course, merely wished to distinguish the Greek *symposion* from the Roman at which respectable women were allowed to be present. Cf. O. Murray, Symposium and Genre in the Poetry of Horace, JRS 75, 1985, 40, 48-9; N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1172.

[74] Cf. X., Oec. 7,30: τῇ μὲν γὰρ γυναικὶ κάλλιον ἔνδον μένειν ἢ θυραυλεῖν ... .

[75] See above, note 32.

[76] Cf. S. Pomeroy, Goddesses (see note 31), 83.

[77] Cf. Boardman, Furniture (see note 70), 124. I cannot see where H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 185, finds evidence to support his startling claim in his commentary that "the ten virgins sat at table" (though he makes this concession: "in general women did not recline"). Meth. unequivocally says at prol. (5,23-24) that they lie down: Δεῦτε δὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς ... ἐνθάδε κατακλιθῆναι, which is incorrectly turned by Musurillo ("Come now and sit down here ...") and by Clark ("Do you also come hither, and sit down here ..."), but better by Debidour ("Venez donc aussi vous attabler ici ...") and best by the Latin translator in Migne ("Venite et vos, ut hic ... discumbatis"); cf. prol. (7,2). Plato customarily uses two verbs with which to indicate the act of reclining, κατακλίνεσθαι and κατακεῖσθαι, and a third, καθίζεσθαι, with which to distinguish the act of sitting from that denoted by the two former verbs and which Meth. could have used had he desired us to imagine his virgins to be in a sitting posture. Thus Socrates, when he first enters καθίζεται (175 d 2), and afterwards, κατακλίνεται (176 a 1). Cf. also Phdr. 229 b: καθίζεσθαι ἢ ἂν βουλώμεθα κατακλινῆναι and X., smp. 1,8 where the young (hence inferior) Autolycus sits (ἐκαθέζετο) next to his father, while the rest of the guests recline (κατεκλίθησαν).

[78] S. Pomeroy, Goddesses (see note 31), 43, 143, illustrates well from the burial of Greek men with their drinking cups that drinking was an activity reserved for males; wine-drinking was also prohibited by law to women in a few Greek cities: Ath., 429; 440-441; N. Fisher, Greek Associations (see note 14), 1173.

[79] Apollodorus = [Dem.] 59,122.

3.3 Attitude to ἔρως *and* κάλλος

Two key sympotic values, ἔρως and κάλλος, the former of which is aroused by and is the natural response to, the latter[80], are rejected by Methodius' virgin symposiasts[81] – hardly surprising given the Christian viewpoint of the author. Ἔρως and its cognates usually bear negative connotations (approximating English "lust", "to lust", "those who lust after"), as for example at V 5 (59,21); X 1 (122,9); XI (132,7); VI 1 (64,21) (ἐρῶσιν); VI 1 (65,2-3)[82]. Homosexuality (together with love of war) is condemned as being a fruitless lust παρὰ φύσιν, aroused in men by the devil's wine driving them like a gad-fly (V 5 [59,7-14])[83]. Indeed, ἔρως of all sexual persuasions is condemned, and the constant theme is that all sensual gratification is evil[84]. And if the fact is unremarkable that there are great differences between the Methodian/Christian and the pagan concepts of virginity[85], what *is* striking is the avowed devotion to chastity in the sympotic setting with its many and various sexual associations.

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[80] Cf. Pl., smp. 180 a 5; 183 e 1-3; 186 a 4; 196 a 8; 197 b 5,8; 201 a 9; 203 c 4, d 4; 204 b 3; 216 d 2 (concerning Socrates: ... ἐρωτικῶς διάκειται τῶν καλῶν ...) X., smp. 1,8-10; 4,15; 8,17. Though κάλλος can also refer to other excellent qualities, it always refers in the first place to corporal beauty: cf. H. Patzer, Knabenliebe (see note 2), 106-109.

[81] One should not be misled by passages such as I 1 (9,7) χρὴ οὖν τὴν παρθένον ἀεὶ τῶν καλῶν ἐρᾶν and VII 1 (72,1-2) ἐρᾶσθαι τοῦ κάλλους. As the reference in the latter passage to Cant (4,9-12) suggests, the use of these words here is analogous to the erotic, allegorical style of the biblical poem (and its interpretation! cf. the prol. to Origen's Comm. on Cant). On ἔρως (and ἀγάπη) in Meth.'s symp., see A. Nygren, Agape and Eros [orig. Eros och Agape], trans. by P.S. Watson, London 1953, 415-421, criticized by M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 7 (see note 4). Meth.'s transformation of Platonic ἔρως (as ἀγνεία) and his Platonic-inspired concept of κάλλος (see M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, esp. Sect. 8-9 [see note 4]), have nothing to do with the genuine sympotic values with which Plato begins and with which we are here concerned.

[82] Occasionally, however, ἔρως and its cognates are used by Meth. with positive connotations (e.g., VII 1 [71,20]; VII 5 [77,1]; IX 1 [113,1]; XI [136,6] and see preceding note also).

[83] οἱ Σοδόμων οἰκήτορες εἰς ἄκαρπον ἀρσένων ὄρεξιν οἰστρηλατήθησαν τραπῆναι «παρὰ φύσιν» (the last phrase agreeably rendered in the Latin of Migne's edition thus: "... *oestro* furiosæ libidinis contra naturam versi sunt"). This is a most extraordinary passage, condemning in a few lines homosexuality, war and the intoxicating effect of wine, three central concerns of the real *symposion*, and employing a verb which reminds one of Socrates' gad-fly, although doubtless the original meaning of οἶστρος in the verb compound is partially, if not entirely, obscured, by the transferred meaning (the noun is used by M. only in the sense of "lust", or "passion", see e.g., I 1 [8,22]), and the insect denoted by it is not exactly Plato's μύωψ (Ap. 30e). On the distinction between the οἶστρος and the μύωψ, see Ael., NA 4,51; 6,37.

[84] M. does not seem explicitly to condemn sexual pleasure in marriage, but he advocates the Pauline doctrine that virginity is the most exalted state (in Thalia's speech); and holds that abstinence in marriage or infrequent use of the marital act is better than frequent use (III 13 [43,4-6]; IX 4 [119,21-23]).

[85] Cf. G. Sissa, Greek Virginity (orig. Le corps virginal, Vrin 1987), trans. by A. Goldhammer, Cambridge Mass. 1990, 73-77, for a discussion of some of these differences.

Likewise bodily beauty, κάλλος, for which Methodius occasionally has ὥρα/ὧραι as a synonym, is despised (V 4 [57,19]), καλλωπισμοί of the body is condemned (V 6 [60,16-17]), and simplicity of dress and grooming preferred (prol. [5,7. 11-12]). True κάλλος is spiritual (VII 1 [72,15-18])[86], a reflection in the soul of the divine beauty of God, in whose image man's soul was created (prol. [5,8]; VI 1-2 [64,8-65,17])[87]. It is this beauty of the chaste and virgin soul with which Christ is not ashamed to admit that he is in love (VII 1 [72,1-2]). Physical beauty is good only if, and in so far as, it mirrors the divine beauty (prol. [5,8]; VIII 17 [112,2-5]: τῆς μορφῆς ἐπανθούσης τοῖς λόγοις ... ὅλη γὰρ εἶναι πέφυκε λευκὴ καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχήν).

3.4 Attitude to wine

Wine occupies a strange place in Methodius' work. Firstly, it is mentioned surprisingly only once as being present at the *symposion*: prol. (4,11). Remove this line and it would be impossible to know that the symposiasts are drinking wine. Nothing is mentioned regarding the use, quantity, or mixture of the alcohol in the *symposion*. Intoxication and drunkenness are of course condemned (V 5 [58,21]; V 6 [60,10]; X 5 [126,28])[88] and allegorically are explained as the corrupt influence of the devil who instills "madness, poison and wrath" (V 5 [59,8]). Wine is itself indeed spoken of in the speeches only allegorically; never is the use of real wine commended. Thus Thallusa, in the fifth discourse (V 5 [59,3-8]), falsely interpreting the Nazarite legislation (Num 6:2-4) against the use of *sikera* and wine, claims that the Scriptures distinguish between the wine of the good vine (the Lord Jesus Christ), and that of the bad vine (the devil)[89]. Hence Musurillo's conjecture "that Methodius does not wish his virgins to forego all wine – surely this would appear strange and unhealthy in an Asiatic Greek community – but rather merely to avoid excess and to abstain from stronger intoxicants"[90] is unsubstantiated by the text. It seems to me impossible to ascertain on the basis of the text the attitude of the Methodius' virgins to real wine. The Homeric verb ᾠνοχόησας (borrowed from Il. 4,3) at prol. (4,13) implies little, which, belonging as it does to the highly poetical and rather enigmatic *mise en scène*, is perhaps used, as

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[86] ἐρᾷ γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὐδενός τῶν σαρκός, ὅτι μὴ πέφυκεν ἀποδέχεσθαί τι τῶν φθειρομένων, οἷον χεῖρας ἢ πρόσωπον ἢ πόδας, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ ἄϋλον καὶ πνευματικόν βλέπων εὐφραίνεται κάλλος, μὴ ἁπτόμενος τοῦ σώματος τῆς ὥρας.

[87] Cf. M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 9 (see note 4).

[88] Cf. also the pejorative use of μεθύσκειν at V 5 (59,20) (juxtaposed with παραφρονεῖν) and V 6 (60,18).

[89] Cf. Domnina's speech (X 5 [127,31-32]) where the reference to wine ἡ εὐφροσύνη τῶν ἀνθρώπων at Judg 9:13 is interpreted as referring to the Lord.

[90] H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 209.

other sympotic details in that part of the work, merely to lend picturesque and classical colouring to the description.

4. Sympotic genre: Methodius and Plato compared

We have seen that Plato's *symposion* as depicted in the *Symposium* is in many respects atypical. The reasons for the Platonic aberrations from genuine sympotic custom are intimately connected with the literary, artistic, and philosophical aims of the work[91]. Ironically, however, those same aims in different ways also account for Plato's creation and employment of the philosophical sympotic genre. Thus, on the one hand, it is obvious that it could not have been Plato's intention merely to provide an account of the usual sympotic entertainments and pleasures which did not interest him and which would have been completely incompatible with the intellectual and philosophical discourses of the symposiasts. Hence he omits such entertainments and pleasures, although their rejection by Plato is implied only subtly (in order to preserve the light-hearted atmosphere of the scene and to avoid overt moral didacticism) through the symposiasts' universal decision to forgo them. On the other hand, the work derives several significant advantages from the sympotic genre. First, the use of the *symposion* setting places at the author's disposal a great wealth of possibilities for dramatic action, characterisation and lively dialogue. And that Plato has perfectly realised these possibilities, is indicated partly by the fact that in respect of dramatic interest and vivacity of characterisation, the *Symposium*, by common consent, surpasses all the other Platonic works. The brilliant and sharply delineated characterisations emerge naturally in the *Symposium* as idiosyncratic reactions to the sympotic setting: Socrates' toilet and grooming, his aversion to parties, his distraction en route to the celebrations, Eryximachus' irritating officiousness about the convivial proceedings, Aristophanes' hiccup, Alcibiades' rowdy behaviour in the *komos*, Phaedrus' hasty retreat from the gatecrashers, and Socrates' remarkably unperturbed and sober departure. Plato also includes other incidents rich in dramatic interest and developed organically out of the sympotic genre: the invitation on the spur of the moment, Aristodemus' awkward arrival at the *symposion*, the preparatory discussion about the evening's entertainments and drinking rules, the delivery of some of the discourses themselves, the urbane banter in the interludes, the flirtatious

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[91] Plato's refusal to integrate fully the real *symposion* into his dialogue is throughout the work represented for us graphically by Socrates: the ordinarily ἀνυπόδητος philosopher, comes bathed and all dressed up (with shoes!) to the party, but comes late and is indifferent to the sympotic pleasures. He thus initially observes the outward forms, but as soon as there is a suggestion from Eryximachus to abandon the heavy drinking and entertainments of the usual symposia, he readily agrees (Pl., Erx. 177 d). So too Plato in his sympotic composition observes only some of the outward forms of the *symposion*.

exchanges and mock amorous tiffs, the ending of the orderly proceedings hastened on by the arrival of another party of gatecrashers, the succumbing of some of the guests to drunken sleep[92]. Furthermore, the festive atmosphere, the pleasing admixture of relaxed and cheerful conversation with a slight but distinct competitiveness among the guests, and "that perfect blend of discipline and freedom which guides the course of conversations, and which always leaves an opening for something unexpected or spontaneous to happen"[93] reflect the sympotic background against which those conversations are set. Hence Bury rightly remarked: "This [i.e. the fact that an account is given of the whole *symposion*, and not merely of the discourses] may be taken to indicate that for estimating the effect of the dialogue as a whole we are meant to pay regard not only to the series of encomia but also to the framework of incident and conversation in which they are set"[94].

In the second place, the *Symposium* achieves from a philosophical perspective a remarkably perfect unity of form, content and technique. For it is natural and fitting that a classical Greek philosophical discussion which begins with ἔρως and leads to κάλλος and in particular to that deathless, absolute κάλλος, should be set in a *symposion*, since ἔρως and κάλλος are typically two concerns of the real *symposion*. Furthermore, given the widely-accepted 4th-century Athenian homosexual conception of ἔρως, it is also entirely natural that the inquiry into homosexual ἔρως as an initiation into the world of Being should occur within the homosexual ambience of the *symposion*: there is thus, as Dover argues, an "exploitation of the Athenian homosexual ethos as a basis of metaphysical doctrine and philosophical method"[95]. Another example of this Platonic exploitation of the homosexual ethos of the *symposion* may be found in the portrayal of Socrates. He is described by Alcibiades as possessing to an astonishing degree, manliness and self-control, ἀνδρεία and καρτερία (219 d 5, 7), qualities that Socrates displays within the sympotic environment itself through his sexual disinterest (or restraint?), his robust imperviousness to the effects of alcohol and his ability to get by on little sleep. These qualities paradoxically make him (for Alcibiades at any rate) sexually more fascinating on the one hand, and on the other, show him to be the truly wise man, the metaphysical man who has transcended sensual pleasures[96] and is thus better able to apprehend reality.

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[92] The dramatic qualities of some of the Platonic dialogues was already recognised in antiquity: cf. D.L., III 50.

[93] Cf. A. Lukinovich, The Play of Reflections between Literary Form and the Sympotic Theme in the Deipnosophistae of Athenaeus, in: O. Murray (ed.), Sympotica (see note 14), 264.

[94] R. Bury, The Symposium (see note 18), xvii. This is also borne out by the fact that when his friend asks only for an account of the speeches (173 e 6), Apollodorus proceeds to relate the whole *symposion*.

[95] K. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (see note 2), 154.

Again, the typically sympotic competitive spirit with which the discourses are severally delivered, each progressing (more or less) towards an increasingly sublime view of ἔρως, suits the Platonic philosophical technique according to which the speakers by means of increasingly stronger positions, abandon, or correct and refine, inferior positions, and thus arrive at the truth of a matter only by degrees. Obviously, the use of this technique is less explicit in the *Symposium* than the usual Platonic dialectic through ἔλεγχος employed elsewhere (ἔλεγχος-dialectical technique, however, does make a brief appearance in the *Symposium* at 199 b 8-201 c 7), but this restriction is dictated by the nature of the sympotic setting: "the Greek *symposion*," as Oswyn Murray has reminded us, "was essentially a meeting of equals"[97]. Plato reflects this somewhat in the *Symposium* by the depiction of strong, individual personalities who make themselves felt through very individual, and stylistically very different, discourses[98]. Socrates is thus not permitted entirely to dominate the proceedings, nor to point out explicitly that the other symposiasts praise ἔρως for the wrong reasons, or that they are ignorant of its true nature.

When we turn from a consideration of the Platonic handling of the sympotic genre to Methodius', the absolute failure of the latter author in artistic and literary terms is painfully obvious. The reasons for this failure are to be sought both in the author's meagre literary talents and in his ignorance of genuine sympotic custom. For example, despite the genre's potential for action, lively dialogue and brilliant characterisation, Methodius' *symposion* is remarkably and dramatically static and void of colourful incident; the personalities of the symposiast virgins are virtually indistinguishable from one another; the exchanges humourless and flat, and the discourses themselves, by digressing excessively from the main subject into others, tend to destroy the cohesion of the whole discussion and genuine engagement of the one with the others. As Hug rightly pointed out, Methodius also fails to produce "einen lebensfrischen Dialog" by placing the speeches one after another without interludes[99]. Thus the very dramatic qualities that distinguish Plato's *Symposium* from a mere dialogue are almost entirely absent from Methodius' work.

In examining the Platonic *symposion*, we saw that it reflected or referred to some historical characteristics of the real *symposion* as a social institution (e.g., educative functions, military and political associations etc.). From a literary perspective, not only do such historically accurate socio-cultural

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[96] Cf. 196 c 5 σωφροσύνη τὸ κρατεῖν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν.

[97] O. Murray, Symposium and Genre (see note 73), 40.

[98] R. Bury, The Symposium (see note 18), xxiv-xxxvi discusses the style and characteristics of each of the first five speeches. Cf. Ath., 187 c.

[99] A. Hug, Art. Symp.-Lit. (see note 6), 1281; the three interludes which occur at III 14 (45,8-20), VIII 17 (111,15-112,17), and IX 5 (120,29-121,9) occur outside the *symposion*, and consist merely of comments on the speeches and the speakers by the narrator and the one to whom the *symposion* is being related.

data serve to contribute to the dramatic verisimilitude of the fictitious occasion, but they also give added meaning to the dialogue by establishing a social context. Since Methodius for the most part slavishly follows Plato in sympotic details, one cannot expect to learn much at all about the contemporary society in which he lived. Even where Methodius corrupts authentic sympotic details for various reasons (e.g., through ignorance, or for religious or other motives), perhaps the only thing we can learn about that society is that women enjoyed – in theory at least – a somewhat higher status[100]. Methodius' dialogue thus has little more than a vague and largely elusive social context and in this respect it somewhat resembles an allegory, a circumstance highlighted by the use of conspicuously allegorical names (Arete, Philosophia, Gregorion, Eubulion etc.)[101]. Here again Methodius' literary aims seem to be in conflict: for while he wishes to impress upon his readers classical features (e.g., *symposion*, philosophical dialogue form etc.), on the other hand, the whole work has a distinctly allegorical aspect which does not belong to the classical tradition. Classical Greek writers, and in particular classical Greek philosophers, of course often employ allegory (e.g., Xenophon, Memorabilia II 1,21 and Plato's myths in the Phaedo, Phaedrus, and Republic), but the interlocutors and the dialogues themselves do not as a rule form part of the allegory.

It was suggested above that Methodius' radical innovation of the all-female *symposion* was most probably not based on ignorance. As a literary fantasy or as a Christian reversal of a pagan custom and literary genre, it seems startlingly bold, perhaps even brilliant – certainly at any rate, in consideration of the contemporary patristic vogue for works composed on or for women, apposite[102]. Yet, on the other hand, one cannot help thinking that the innovation was not entirely successful: the virginal interlocutors and their chaste discussions, being set as they are in the context of an institution and genre with which explicit sexuality was ordinarily associated, appear – and must have so appeared to at least some of Methodius' original readers who were emersed in the classical tradition – rather absurdly incongruous. Something akin to this would happen if a modern writer were to set a religious convention not of magdalens, but of sexually naïve Carmelite nuns in a brothel or a gay bar.

But if Methodius was not ignorant of the masculinity of the real symposion, we have seen that on numerous points of genuine sympotic custom, he was ignorant, and he betrayed this ignorance through numerous un-

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[100] Cf. M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 6 (see note 4).

[101] On the use and meaning of Meth.'s allegorical names, see M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 6 (see note 4).

[102] Cf. M. Alexandre, Early Christian Women, in: A History of Women in the West (orig. Storia delle donne in Occidente, Roma-Bari 1990), ed. by G. Duby/M. Perrott/R Schmitt Pantel, trans. by A. Goldhammer, Vol. 1, Cambridge Mass./London 1992, 412.

necessary omissions, contaminations and alterations of genuine sympotic features. Moreover, his ignorance of the true nature of the *symposion* seems to me to be evident in his failure to recognise the fact that the classical sympotic setting was, as we have seen, in every respect unsuitable for his characters and for the subject of their discussions. Of course, an author may transform a genre and adapt it to his own purposes[103], but that does not apply in Methodius' case, whose failure in this regard is illuminated among other things by the largely irrelevant rôle the *symposion* plays in the dialogue: not only could the discussions that take place there have taken place almost anywhere else, but there is hardly any reference at all in the work to the *symposion*: a few sentences and phrases at the beginning of the work, followed by some token references towards the end of the work, constitute the meagre sum total of sympotica. Equally important is the fact that Methodius does not even attempt to relate the development of his doctrines, in particular the concepts of ἁγνεία – his Christianized transformation of Platonic ἔρως – and spiritual κάλλος to the sympotic setting. If the dead literary genre is one that survives "as artistic form, without context, as memory pattern"[104], not only is Methodius' sympotic genre dead, but, because of his imperfect understanding of the *symposion*, the exhumed cadaver has missing bits, hence the resulting monstrosity.

With regard to the philosophical technique suggested by the genre, Zorzi has argued that in Methodius' *Symposium* "come nei dialoghi platonici, le diverse prospettive apportano maggiore luce alla verità senza necessariamente doversi escludere a vicenda"[105]. Actually, this technique is not a prominent feature of Methodius' work, and Zorzi herself can point to one example only.

The principal function of the *symposion* in Methodius' work thus seems to me to be that of literary allusion. This leads us to the more interesting question why Methodius chose to set his theological, ascetical and exegetical expositions in a sympotic dialogue that appears prima facie, despite its being in form so manifestly a Platonic pastiche, to have little to do with Platonic concepts. Undoubtedly, part of the explanation must lie in the contemporary vogue that the genre of the philosophical dialogue enjoyed among the Fathers[106]. Moreover, Musurillo was of the view that Methodius, the adversary of the Neoplatonist Porphyry and the allegorist Origen, in making extensive use of both Platonism and allegorism, was perhaps "invading the adversary's armoury for weapons to turn against

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[103] O. Murray, Symposium and Genre (see note 73), 39-50, has shown in the sympotic poetry of Horace examples of successful transformation and adaptation of the classical Greek sympotic genre to new purposes.

[104] Murray, Symposium and Genre (see note 73), 39.

[105] M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 4 (see note 4).

[106] As M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 4, points out, Origen himself had composed a work in this genre.

him"[107]. Zorzi's highly original thesis that Methodius' ἁγνεία was an attempt to synthesize heavenly Platonic ἔρως, New Testament ἀγάπη, chastity, and virginity also points to a similar conclusion, namely, that Methodius was, contrary to what has been previously thought, genuinely interested in Platonic doctrine, and in particular in Platonic ἔρως. Zorzi's thesis may also help to explain Methodius' choice of genre: in this matter, it appears, he was guided by his models, the Platonic works on ἔρως, that is to say, chiefly the *Symposium*, but also the *Phaedrus* (hence the contamination of settings). On the other hand, one should by no means rule out the possibility that Methodius' mere fascination with Platonic form and language also contributed to this decision. Accordingly, it appears to have been a combination of factors that led Methodius to create a work that remains, despite its grotesque incongruities and artistic infelicities[108], unique and unparalleled among the writings of the Greek Fathers, not only in respect of its impressive reworking and synthesis of ideas from classical philosophy and the Scriptures[109], but also in respect of its contrived Platonic form, suffused with classical and Platonic quotation and allusion.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Formal ist das Symposion des Methodios von Olympos ein Flickwerk, dessen Gestalt hauptsächlich auf dem Symposion Platons beruht. Sein Autor hat zwar Platon sehr viele Worte, Redensarten und Motive unmittelbar entnommen, aber er verrät in vielen Punkten seine Unkenntnis der echten Symposionkonventionen. Wenn man die platonische und methodianische Behandlung der sympotischen literarischen Gattung vergleicht, sieht man, daß diese Gattung zu Inhalt und Personen des Dialogs des Methodios nicht paßte, und daß es diesem Autor mißlang, die Entwicklung seiner theologisch-philosophischen Begriffe zu dem sympotischen Hintergrund in Beziehung zu setzen. Aus diesem Grund (und auch aus anderen Gründen) ist das Stück dramatisch und künstlerisch gänzlich erfolglos. Vielleicht durch seine Polemik gegen die Neoplatoniker, durch sein Interesse für die platonische Lehren (besonders über den ἔρως) und durch seine tiefe Liebe zu platonischer Sprache und Stil ist Methodios bewogen worden, die sympotische literarische Gattung anzunehmen.

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[107] H. Musurillo, Methodius. Symposium (see note 1), 17. Cf. M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 4, who sees in the work "un forte sottofondo polemico antiencratita"; also P.F. Beatrice, Art. Dialogo, DPAC 1, Casale Monferrato 1983, 940.

[108] A particularly amusing example is Theophila's (II 2 [16,12-22]) rather *too* graphic description of the pleasurable ἔκστασις of copulation, which culminates in the marrow-like, generative part of the blood becoming "frothy and curdled" (τὸ μυελώδες τοῦ αἵματος καὶ γονιμώτατον ... ἀφροποιῆσαν καὶ θρομβωθὲν). Perhaps lest anyone should wonder how a virgin should know all this, she hastens to add: "This is what we've been told by those who've done it ..." (ὡς οἱ τετελεσμένοι τὴν γαμήλιον ἡμᾶς διδασκουσι τελετήν ...).

[109] Cf. M. Benedetta Zorzi, Castità, Sect. 3 (see note 4): "Con il Simposio metodiano ... ci troviamo di fronte ad uno dei primi esempi, forse tra i più geniali – sicuramente tra i più evidenti – di come i padri abbiano utilizzato con grande libertà i dati biblici, filosofici (platonici e aristotelici) e dell'ascesi stoica, ai fini dell'espressione della loro fede cristiana".