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Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius : characteristic features of late ancient figurative poetics

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PUBLILIUS OPTATIANUS PORFYRIUS: CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF LATE ANCIENT FIGURATIVE POETICS

The genre of visual poetry with its typical literary-graphic nature has an age-old, widespread and strikingly colourful tradition including both European and Asian productions of sundry make-ups. The origins of the 'effective symbiosis' of two otherwise distinct arts can be traced back to ancient Greece of the sixth and fifth century BC. The lyric poems composed in that period were to be sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. Apart from music with poetry, the ancient Greeks were also most probably the first to explore the possible ways of 'integrating' poetry with visual arts. The earliest explicit reference to the relation between these two art forms was made by Simonides of Keos, a Greek lyric poet of the sixth century BC, who claimed that poetry is a speaking picture and painting a silent poetry.[1] The aural-pictorial amalgam exhibiting "an aesthetic correlation between the textual and the graphic levels" whose interaction is based on mimetic symbolism is then what Ernst[2] postulated as the very essence of the works referred to as *technopaegnia* or *carmina figurata*. Greek inscriptions dating back to the time of Simonides and imitative of the outer design of the artefacts on which they are engraved, possibly together with the much older Phaistos disc, one of the most significant relics of the Minoan Bronze Age, with a remarkably similar arrangement of the graphic signs, can consequently be seen as somewhat crude prototypes of the discussed class of poetry.[3]

The most ingenious 'fully fledged' visual poems – at least in the context of antiquity – were, however, composed only much later by the Hellenistic and late Roman men of letters, who both elaborated and modified the primordial no-

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[1] See Plut. *De gloria Ath.* III,346F. Cf. an analogous Latin comparison in *Rhet. Her.* IV,39: *poema loquens pictura, pictura tacitum poema debet esse*. All quotations of the original texts that are available in electronic form were taken from <http://litterae.phil.muni.cz>.

[2] ERNST 2002, 3. Cf. DEONNA 1926, 187.

[3] DENCKER 1972, 8ff.

tions of the figured text.[4] The definite correspondence between the Greek and the Roman literary development is in this respect clearly related to the significant deviation from the great Homeric and Vergilian heroic epic, accompanied by a particular interest in alternative, in the main, minor forms of poetry, marking the mentioned periods. One of the finest and most impressive examples of the Horatian well-known concept *ut pictura poesis*[5] put into practice is without doubt the verse collection of thirty one poems originated in the first half of the fourth century AD and extant under the name of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius,[6] a comparatively unknown late Roman author of African origin.[7] To what extent Optatian drew inspiration from his predecessors and in what terms his poetry can be seen as innovative and timeless will be the focus of our further analysis carried out from a number of perspectives, including several modernist and postmodernist literary theories.[8] Using particular examples, we will characterize the verses in question first rather descriptively and only then from the perspective of their general conceptual plan.

First, it is the form rather than the content of his poetry that appears to be Optatian's prime concern, which I am going to clearly demonstrate. As to their compositional properties, we can distinguish three more or less distinct types of the examined poems, i.e. the so-called outline poems, the intextual grid-poetry and the metrical toys.[9] The outline pieces which are three altogether – that is, poem XX, XXVI and XXVII[10] (see App. – Fig. 2), and the lines of which are arranged so that their contour imitates a particular object – to be more specific, an organ,

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[4]   A detailed description of the variety of classical as well as medieval figurative poetry is to be found in ERNST 1991.

[5]   Hor. *AP*. 361.

[6]   A comprehensive review of the manuscripts as well as an account of the chronology and authenticity of Optatian's poetry can be found in POLARA 1975, 282–301.

[7]   For further information about Optatian's life and career, see BARNES 1975; KLUGE 1924; SEECK 1908.

[8]   To my knowledge, within the scope of Czech scholarly literature Optatian's poetry or its contribution to the genre of *carmina figurata* has not been thoroughly examined yet.

[9]   Five pieces contained in Optatian's corpus – that is, poem I, IV, XVII, XXIX and XXX, cannot be identified as any of the above-listed types. In fact, they are all among the least elaborate of the author's works and none of them is, in contrast with the overwhelming majority of the rest of the analyzed poetry, accompanied with any scholiastic note commenting on its formal properties. The very first piece in the collection is full of references to the formal design of Optatian's compositions and serves as a proem to the poet's volume of intextual panegyric verses written in exile and dedicated to the emperor Constantine. Further, poem IV refers to poem V and elucidates the meaning of its figurative pattern. Poem XVII is generally recognized as an apocryphal metrical scholium to poem XVIII. Both *carmen* XXIX and XXX are then short epigrams, the latter of which includes a ridiculous play on words that is in line with the sportive spirit pervading the whole of Optatian's collection.

[10] The order of the poems as well as all their quotations were adopted from the most recent edition of Optatian's poetry which also contains a valuable commentary in Latin: POLARA 1973.

an altar and a syrinx – can be recognized as the most direct 'descendants' not only of the above-mentioned archaic epigraphs, but also of the Hellenistic pattern compositions that were inspiring for Optatian in terms of their form as well as their content[11] (see Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the poet refined the formal design of the poems of his Greek precursors. Instead of the usual polymetry responsible for some imperfections in the graphic design of the Alexandrian poems, Optatian employed the more challenging isometry which guarantees that graphically equivalent lines always have the same number of characters. The underlying principle of the examined poetry thus becomes arithmetic progression, i.e. the series of letters that increase or decrease by the same amount each time, forming metrically consistent lines that are the component parts of the intended figure.

Further, the grid-poems, resembling crossword puzzles and sometimes aptly designated as *carmina quadrata* or *carmina cancellata*, represent Optatian's own brainchild[12] and, in my view, by far the most sophisticated and spectacular type of his poetry. The fabric of these 'verse mosaics' consists in the interweavement of several textual planes whose intersections form the so-called *versus intexti*. The highlighted intext inserted into a quadrate – square or rectangular – grid-frame is what makes these poems figured compositions. According to Ernst, the twenty grid-pieces included in Optatian's corpus can further be divided into three subcategories in relation to the nature of their figurative patterns, i.e. poems with predominantly geometrical configuration, verses with literal intexts composed of letters and Roman numerals, and pieces imitating real objects (see Fig. 3).[13] Moreover, we shall particularize three bilingual – Graeco-Roman – grid-pieces, poem XVI and XXIII – both with geometrical patterns, and poem XIX – the masterpiece whose *versus intexti* portray an almost real-life ship with the Christian monogram XP and letters VOT XX incorporated into its icon (see Fig. 3). The intertexture of the Latin base text and the Greek intext that can be found in these three pieces does not exist in the works of either Optatian's predecessors or his followers. Without any loss of meaning or coherence, the poet intertwined two seemingly disparate language systems, employing one and the same marks to stand for both Latin characters and visually similar or identical letters of the Greek alphabet with different phonemic values, though. The Latin A, for example, resembles and consequently becomes Greek *alpha* (A), *delta* (Δ) or *lambda* (Λ), Roman C turns into *sigma* (Σ), Roman X into *chi* (Σ), etc, etc.

Generally speaking, the artistry involved in Optatian's grid-poetry undoubtedly deserves great respect on the part of the readership. With a bit of exaggeration, unlike the one-dimensional outline pieces the 'crossword' poems, based on

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[11]   It seems probable that Optatian used "the *Ara* of Dosiada as the model of his *Ara*, and the *Fistula* of Theocritus for his *Fistula*" (HELM 1902, 43).

[12]   Nevertheless, Optatian might have drawn some inspiration from the acrostic integrated into the altar-shaped poem by the Alexandrian author Dosiadas (see Fig. 1) as well as from the acrostic poetry by Ennius and Commodianus (HELM 1902, 44).

[13]   ERNST 1991, 108–131.

multilevel intersections of lines running horizontally, vertically as well as cross-wise, can be seen as results of a carefully undertaken combinatorial analysis. It is therefore a kind of mathematical operation that the poet must have managed to develop in order to produce his intricate verse 'labyrinths'.

Exemplifications of the third and last class that can be differentiated in Optatian's corpus, i. e. the metrical *lusus*, include poem XIII, XV, XXV and XXVIII. All these pieces, except for *carmen* XIII written in the shape of an irregular rectangle, lack any pictorial configuration; their linearly organized text neither imitates an object nor creates an impressive intextual image. The question therefore arises whether these poems can actually be regarded as *technopaegnia*. Even though they are obviously not consistent either with the original meaning of the term used primarily for outline figured pieces or with the modern definition of the discussed genre in general (see above), I still propose to regard them as a subtype of figured poetry, which is in line with the standpoint of Ausonius, an eminent Roman poet of the fourth century AD.[14] It seems to be the case that in his lifetime the term *carmina figurata* referred to both graphic and metrical 'play' with a verse material or at least this is how Ausonius himself understood the designation.[15] At any rate, bearing in mind the playful nature of the two previously-mentioned types of Optatian's poetry, we have to admit that the metrical toys are perfectly 'compatible' with the fundamental character of his collection.

The ingenuity of the handled pieces resides in the employment of a whole set of sophisticated devices. I would especially like to note the repetitive use of the so-called *versus cancrini* which can be read forward as well as backward without any damage to their metrical integrity; the original metrical scheme is either retained or transmuted into a different one. Moreover, the poet frequently takes advantage of the metrical symmetry of his lines whose words can consequently be rearranged in almost endless permutations and combinations.[16] Whereas the prosodic features and the metre always stay the same, the syntactic and semantic structure of the verses obviously changes.

The most complex poem in terms of the use of an extraordinary variety of devices is undoubtedly *carmen* XV.[17] Apart from the above-listed purely metrical

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[14] The reason why Ausonius' opinion should be considered as the most authoritative is that he was Optatian's contemporary, and therefore one of the possible recipients of his poetry. Ausonius' views basically represent the literary tastes and criticism of the poet's times.

[15] In fact, Ausonius used the term *technopaegnion* to designate a series of non-figurative metrical toys consisting solely of verses ending with a monosyllabic word, which indicates a certain shift in the meaning of the examined label (LEVITAN 1985, 246). Further, according to Radová, Ausonius viewed even *centones* – that is, non-figurative literary works made up of quotations from other works, as a form of figurative poetry (RADOVÁ 2001, 68).

[16] This feature of Optatian's poetry is what Ernst calls "permutative Versartistik" (ERNST 1991, 131). Cf. an inspiring article on the role of permutation in lyric poetry by ERNST 1992.

[17] For a coherent account of all the compositional intricacies of the examined poem, see, for example, LEVITAN 1985, 246–250.

subtleties,[18] the piece also comprises several in essence grammatical subtleties such as the *versus rhopalius*[19] composed of a succession of one-, two-, three-, four- and five-syllable words and the *teleion* verse[20] in which all word classes except for a numeral can be found. Moreover, in line 8,[21] both a metrical play and a kind of wordplay can be detected. The verse in question is made up of a sequence of words – all in accusative – that retains its hexametric form whichever of the Latin cases is used. Further, concerning the application of the *ars permutandi*, the masterpiece is without doubt poem XXV. Polara's edition of Optatian's poetry lists twenty metrically homologous permutations of the original tetrastich.[22] Although Optatian was neither the first nor the only one to apply the debated means of composing poetry,[23] the formal perfection and complexity of his productions, as demonstrated above, is unique. One more fact to be underlined at this point is that Optatian's ingenious metrical and language toys are products of particular mathematical rules by which they are also bound.

Judged from the standpoint of its content and literary merit, Optatian's poetry, providing the reader with not exceptionally innovative handling of various rather common topics, defies a clear-cut classification. One of the key motives one can recognize in the examined collection is the laud of the emperor Constantine whom the poet beseeches to call him back from exile where the monarch sent him under obscure circumstances.[24] Further, the recurrent themes of Optatian's verse incorporate religious subject matters, both pagan[25] and Christian,[26] frolicsome

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[18]   See, for example, Opt. *Carm*. XV,9: *alme pater patriae, nobis te, maxime Caesar*; the quoted line is a hexameter, read forward or backward. The following verse has four identical permutations of itself because of the metrical symmetry of its first four words (dactyl/molossus/molossus/dactyl) – Opt. *Carm*. XV,6: *aurea Romanis propagans saecula nato*.

[19]   Opt. *Carm*. XV,5: *quem divus genuit Constantius induperator*.

[20]   Opt. *Carm*. XV,7: *heu nimis ad caelum properans, ni liquerit ille*.

[21]   Opt. *Carm*. XV,8: *aeternum auxilium invictum iustumque piumque*.

[22]   In an exhaustive study of the discussed poem Flores and Polara calculate the astonishing number of 784 possible permutations of the model stanza, i.e. 3136 lines (FLORES – POLARA 1969, 129). Cf. a more recent article on the same subject by GONZÁLES IGLESIAS 2000.

[23]   In fact, Optatian's metrical scheme – spondee/amphibrach/anapaest/amphibrach/spondee or trochee – used in the reversible verses of his intextual poem XIII and later adopted by Sedulius Scottus, a poet of the ninth century AD, is a novel invention of his own (DÜCHTING 1968, 26).

[24]   Many scholars assume that the so-called *Panegyricus Constantini*, i.e. the cycle of eulogistic poetry dedicated to the emperor Constantine on the occasion of his *vicennalia*, consists of the first twenty poems included in Optatian's corpus, against which Polara convincingly argues; he emphasizes that there is no compelling evidence for the existence of the symbolic number of twenty panegyric poems addressed to the monarch and that the chronological order of the poet's pieces is also ambiguous (see POLARA 1975, 283).

[25]   See Opt. *Carm*. VI, XVI, XX, XXVI, XXVII.

[26]   See Opt. *Carm.* VIII, XIV, XIX, XXIV. Cf. an interesting article dealing with Optatian's ideas of the Trinity as they are formulated in his poem XXIV (POLARA 1983).

and slightly mischievous strain,[27] the leitmotif of love[28] and last but not least, assorted mythological stories.[29]

Moreover, there are two common threads running through a substantial part of the discussed poetry, i.e. several brief autobiographical allusions, references especially to Optatian's banishment,[30] and plentiful revealing remarks on the poet's ambitious literary novelty, together with unique verse observations on the modes of composing individual pieces of his figured poetry. While the former cannot be seen as anything outstanding, not even within the scope of classical literary output,[31] the latter betrays Optatian's preoccupation with the formal side of his verses and adds a whole new dimension to his works. Self-analytical literature, let alone introspective visual poetry, was not 'on a daily basis' in the literary circles of late ancient Rome. On the whole, in terms of its thematic range, the debated collection may not seem exciting at first sight. The point is that the relative plainness of Optatian's productions is to a considerable extent determined by the very complexity and precision of their form.[32] Still, as suggested above, there is indisputably something pioneering about Optatian's style, namely his 'meta-poetics'.

The explicatory 'digressions' are, for example, included in all three Optatian's outline pieces. As a matter of fact, the poet departed from the Alexandrian tradition of the pattern poems in two particular ways and the insertion of the noteworthy theoretical – or rather meta-poetical – passages into his outline poetry constitutes one of them.[33] A particularly extensive descriptive part that comments on the poem's figured form and its mode of production can be found in Optatian's tripartite organ-shaped piece XX, to be more specific, XXb. In the first thirteen lines, the poet talks about the isometry of his verses and defines the function of their varying number of letters to imitate the musical instrument in question.[34]

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27   See Opt. *Carm.* XXIII, XXX.

28   See Opt. *Carm.* XXIII, XXVIII.

29   See Opt. *Carm.* XXVII, XVIII.

30   See Opt. *Carm.* I,7–8; 11: pallida *nunc, atro chartam suffusa colore, / paupere vix minio carmina dissocians*; *Hos habitus vatis praesentia fata merentur*; II,5–6: *nam tristis cura recusat / egregios actus: iam sedent crimina Parcae*; II,11–12: *fata tristia*; XXa,22: *sors iniqua.*

31   Actually, several autobiographical hints can be noticed, for example, in the work entitled *Works and Days* by Hesiod, a Greek poet of the eigth century BC and the earliest author of didactic verse.

32   Cf. Helm 1902, 43; Levitan 1985, 246.

33   The other way Optatian refined the Hellenistic *technopaegnia* is the introduction of isometry in his outline poems (see above). Cf. Polara 1987, 163–7.

34   Opt. *Carm.* XXb,1–13: *O si diviso metiri limite Clio / una lege sui, uno manantia fonte / Aonio, versus heroi iure manente, / ausuro donet metri felicia texta, / augeri longo patiens exordia fine, / exiguo cursu, parvo crescentia motu, / ultima postremo donec fastigia tota / ascensu iugi cumulato limite claudat, / uno bis spatio versus elementa prioris / dinumerans, cogens aequari lege retenta / parva nimis longis et visu dissona multum / tempore sub parili, metri rationibus isdem, / dimidium numero Musis tamen aequiperantem.*

The rest of poem XXb then comprises the delineation of the pipe organ itself.[35] Optatian basically implies that the design of the organ echoes the structure of his poem, being in fact its literary-graphic copy, and vice versa. Further, somewhat shorter theoretical notes are observable in many of the intextual pieces. The poet typically announces his artistic aspirations and emphasizes the originality of his works,[36] sometimes referring explicitly to the so-called *versus intexti*.[37] As seen above, the exceptional form of the examined poetry as if 'permeates' even its very content, which confirms the expressed supposition that the formal precision of his verses represents the poet's paramount concern.

Having defined three specific types of Optatian's poetry in terms of their formal characteristics and having commented on the content side of the poet's compositions, let us consider the dominant qualities and underlying principles of the collection as a whole, as well as some of the implications of the author's verse play for his readers. First of all, as several times implied, the discussed poetry can be seen as an efficient exhaustion of various mathematical rules, whether those of simple arithmetic or those of combination and permutation. Optatian basically seems to treat individual letters as elementary number-like particles, each having a unique position in a series which is functional not only from the standpoint of syntax and semantics, i.e. it conveys a distinct meaning, but also as far as the graphic design of the poem is concerned, i.e. it represents a constituent part of the intended figure. The inherent modus operandi of the examined poetry, especially of the metrical *lusus*, can therefore be recognized as calculus and ratio.[38]

Another feature closely related to the mathematical essence of Optatian's compositions is the expansiveness, common to the grid-pieces and the metrical toys.

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[35]   Opt. Carm. XXb,14–19: *Haec erit in varios species aptissima cantus, / perque modos gradibus surget fecunda sonoris / aere cavo et tereti, calamis crescentibus aucta, / quis bene suppositis quadratis ordine plectris / artificis manus in numeros claudit aperitque / spiramenta, ...* . Cf. the other two outline pieces in which the description of the imitated objects goes hand in hand with the explanation of the designs of the poems – Opt. Carm. XXVII,3: *disparibus compacta modis totidemque cicutis*; XXVI,1–22: *Vides ut ara stem dicata Pythio, / ... / ... / non caesa duro nec coacta spiculo / artare primos eminentes angulos / et mox secundos propagare latius / eosque caute singulos subducere / gradu minuto per recurvas lineas, / normata ubique sic deinde regula, / ut ora quadrae sit rigente limite, / vel inde ad imum fusa rursum linea / tendatur arte latior per ordinem. / Me metra pangunt de Camenarum modis, / mutato numquam numero dumtaxat pedum; /quae docta servat dum praeceptis regula, / elementa crescunt et decrescunt carminum.*

[36]   See Opt. *Carm.* VIII,1: *Accipe picta novis elegis*; X,17–19: *Nec dictis laesa Camena / audet magnanimo vati nova vincula mentis / iussa dare*; XIX,19: *retito quoque texta novo cane laurea plectro.*

[37]   See Opt. *Carm.* III,28–29: *Mentis opus mirum metris intexere carmen / ad varios cursus*; IX, *versus intextus* 4–5: *Limite sub parili crescentis undique ramos. / Reddat ut intextus Musarum carmine versus.*

[38]   The same conclusion was arrived at by González Iglesias, who, however, focused on and thoroughly analyzed solely Optatian's metrical toys, his poem XXV above all, claiming that apart from *numerus* it is a sheer chance that dominates the poet's pieces and makes them similar to the game known as *alea* in ancient times (González Iglesias 2000, 364).

In consequence of the use of several 'generative mechanisms', namely the intextual, the reversible and the permutable verses, each poem can be read in several ways – that is, there is a number of possible configurations and transpositions inherent in it. As Levitan points out, a mere line-count is typically much lower than the number of verses to be actually found in Optatian's poetry.[39]

At this point, let us focus on the recipients of the examined thought-provoking compositions. In order to 'cope with' the discussed works, readers have to become Optatian's 'partners' in his poetics sui generis; they are supposed to actively participate in the 'reproduction' of his poems. If they want to find a way out of the poet's verse maze, they simply cannot be just passive consumers of literature, which was the case with the recipients of the majority of classical works; on the contrary, their reading has to be productive or they will get lost in the labyrinth of the intersected lines. Readers' active participation in Optatian's 'games' with verses then presents them with an exceptional chance of glimpsing his workshop and his tools, i.e. they can see what precedes and underlies his 'manufactured products'. Further, this expository or even 'exhibitionistic' character of Optatian's poems is remarkably consistent with their above-mentioned meta-poetical character that distinguishes the poet's style from a literary perspective. Essentially, the author avails himself of every opportunity to draw readers' attention to the process of production of his formally exquisite poetry. By the way, Barthes, a French writer and critic, who applied the structuralist theory to literature, draws a distinction between the readerly (*lisible*) classic realist text which presents itself as a literary creation to be consumed by the reader and the writerly (*scriptible*) text which displays its modes of production and whose reader becomes an active producer of meaning.[40] The former was the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century and the latter includes modern and post-modern works such as those by Brecht. Keeping in mind Optatian's preoccupation with the modes of production of his poetry and the great challenge his pieces constitute for the readers, we have to admit that his new poetics is recognizable as the writable rather than the readable text, and therefore can be understood as the precursor of the literary output of the post-modern era.[41]

Furthermore, the analyzed collection can in several respects be seen as one of the most glaring examples of intertextuality in the broadest sense of this term associated above all with structuralist and post-structuralist literary theory. First, the figurative composition of the grid-poems is founded on the intersections of individual lines, or rather, textual planes. The pieces in question are thus intertextual in the literal sense of the word. Second, not only does Optatian, as mentioned above, handle rather commonplace themes in his lines, but he also uses a rather derivative style. The poet's phrasing simply echoes many of the classical models, including Ovid, Vergil and Horace as well as Catullus, Statius, Lucan and Colu-

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39   Levitan 1985, 249.
40   Barthes 1974, 4ff. Cf. Belsey 1988, 125–7.
41   Cf. González Iglesias 2000, 366.

mella. One can consequently view his productions as intertextual 'mosaics' or montages composed of miscellaneous elements, i.e. multiple allusions to various great writers preceding him. Moreover, the poet's metrical toys with their reversible and permutable verses are intertextual in the sense that the numerous variants of each piece's base text are essentially only potential dispositions of one and the same component parts, namely the original word units. In general, the discussed pieces are combinations, re-combinations and permutations of Optatian's own verses that are, however, 'amalgams' of previous authors. This peculiarity of the poet's texts was examined especially by González Iglesias, who says that the verses are the embodiment of absolute intertextuality.[42]

Last but not least, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the general plan of the collection can also be analyzed from the standpoint of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language. The poet's work with the verse material basically betrays his notion of the atomistic structure and differential nature of language. Since these theories were introduced only much later by F. de Saussure and C. S. Peirce, and afterwards developed especially by J. Lacan, Optatian's pieces must once again be seen as pioneering. This issue will, however, not be discussed here any further because it has already been examined elsewhere.[43]

Having analyzed the corpus of Optatian's poetry from several perspectives, we would like to emphasize its significance and interpret its message to future generations. As a matter of fact, the discussed works constitute an integral part of the tradition of figured poetry, or rather, the culmination of its development in antiquity. Despite the fact that Optatian drew inspiration from his Greek as well as Latin predecessors, his collection makes interesting, highly original and challenging 'reading'. The author's contribution to the genre of visual poetry consists especially in the extraordinary formal precision and refinement of his playful pieces, most of which capture one's attention primarily as visual and not literary works of art. Optatian's formal innovations include the introduction of isometrical outline poems, the technique of *versus intexti* and last but not least, the artistry known as *ars permutandi* in which Optatian approached absolute perfection. The last two of the above-listed sophisticated devices, together with the so-called *versus cancrini*, improve the quality and increase the quantity of the poet's verses. Contrariwise, as far as Optatian's literary style is concerned, the poet borrowed heavily from many great classical authors, which makes his writings an embodiment of intertextuality. Nevertheless, the author's recurring meta-poeti-

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[42] González Iglesias 2000, 345, 355, 364–6. The same scholar also lends support to the above-presented theory about the 'exhibitionistic' nature of Optatian's poetry: "La *imitatio*, la *interpretatio*, la *aemulatio,* (procedimientos básicos en la poética clásica) se ejercen secundariamente sobre otros autores, porque ante todo las ejerce el texto sobre sí mismo, sobre sus propias palabras: cada estrofa sobre la anterior, y todas sobre la estrofa *cero*. Una especie de autoerotismo masturbatorio ejemplifica la fecundidad plena del ejercicio literario (tan propio de la época). Referirse a sí mismo es la única alternativa para el gran admirador de Virgilio que es Optaciano Porfirio, ... " (González Iglesias 2000, 362).

[43] See Okáčová 2006.

cal comments on the modes of composing his own figurative pieces are unique. A complete understanding of this type of poetry demands a constructive approach on the part of the readers. In essence, Optatian's poetics, which established a novel trend in the genre of *carmina figurata*, can in many respects be seen as a precursor of post-modern literature whose formal intricacies have more or less the same implications for contemporary readers. The art of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius has thus proved to be imperishable and the message of his poetry timeless.

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RESUMÉ

Cílem předkládaného článku je představit a blíže charakterizovat jedinečnou sbírku figurální poezie relativně málo známého pozdně antického autora Publilia Optatiana Porfyria. Po stručném nástinu vlastních počátků a ideové koncepce vizuálního básnictví jako takového následuje formální a obsahová analýza, resp. klasifikace dotyčného souboru skladeb, jejímž cílem je stanovit míru návaznosti Optatianova díla na předchozí řeckou i římskou tradici a zhodnotit jeho přínos danému literárnímu žánru. Nalezené význačné rysy zkoumaného veršového korpusu přitom poukazují zejména na jeho novátorskou a neobvykle sofistikovanou formální koncepci. Z hlediska obsahu a literárního stylu představují pak unikum sbírky především autorovy občasné teoreticky laděné komentáře, jimiž objasňuje důmyslnou kompozici některých svých skladeb, což nám jen potvrzuje, že to byla právě forma, která v rámci básníkových uměleckých aspirací zaujímala primární postavení. Při rozboru Optatianových skladeb je dále věnována jistá pozornost také jejich čtenáři, resp. nárokům, jež na něj básník svými rafinovanými hříčkami klade. Daná tvorba, které se v článku pod vlivem moderních literárních teorií dostává označení intertextuální meta-poetika a jež se ve své podstatě zakládá na ryze matematických principech, je nakonec vyhodnocena jako poezie vysoce originální a nadčasová.

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**Appendix: Figured Poetry of Publilius OPTATINUS Porfyrius and the Greek Models.**

Figure 1:

ΣΙΜΙΟΥ ΠΤΕΡΥΓΕΣ

Λεῦσσέ με τὸν Γᾶς τε βαθυστέρνου ἄνακτ' Ἀκμονίδαν τ' ἄλλυδις ἐδράσαντα·
μηδὲ τρέσῃς, εἰ τόσος ὢν δάσκια βέβριθα λάχνᾳ γένεια.
τᾶμος ἐγὼ γὰρ γενόμαν, ἁνίκ' ἔκραιν' Ἀνάγκα
πάντα δὲ Γᾶς εἶκε φραδαῖσι λυγραῖς
ἑρπετά, πάνθ', ὅσ' ἕρπει   5
δι' αἴθρας.
Χάους δέ,
οὔτι γε Κύπριδος παῖς
ὠκυπέτας οὐδ' Ἄρεος καλεῦμαι·
οὔτι γὰρ ἔκρανα βίᾳ, πραΰνόῳ δὲ πειθοῖ·   10
εἶκε δέ μοι Γαῖα Θαλάσσας τε μυχοὶ χάλκεος Οὐρανός τε·
τῶν δ' ἐγὼ ἐκνοσφισάμαν ὠγύγιον σκᾶπτρον, ἔκριναν δὲ θεοῖς θέμιστας.

Simias: The Wings.

ΣΙΜΙΟΥ ὬΙΟΝ

Simias: The Egg.

ΣΙΜΙΟΥ ΠΕΛΕΚΥΣ
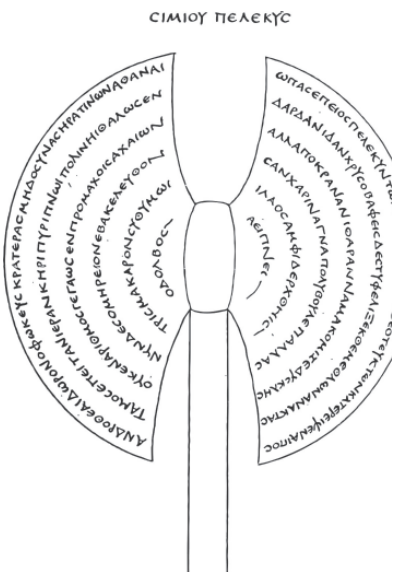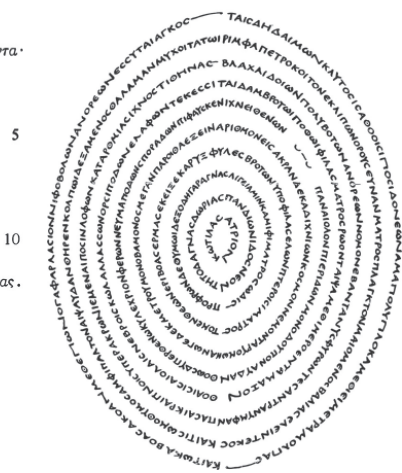
Simias: The Axe.

ΘΕΟΚΡΙΤΟΥ ΣΥΡΙΓΞ

ΟΥΔΕΝΟΣΕΥΝΑΤΕΙΡΑΜΑΚΡΟΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΙΟΔΕΜΑΤΗΡ
ΟΥΧΙΚΕΡΑΣΤΑΝΟΝΠΟΤΕΘΡΕΨΑΤΟΤΑΥΡΟΠΑΤΩΡ
ΟΥΝΟΜΟΛΟΝΔΙΙΩΝΟΣΤΑΣΜΕΡΟΠΟΣΠΟΘΟΝ
ΟΣΜΟΙΣΑΙΑΙΓΥΠΑΖΕΝΙΟΣΤΕΦΑΝΩΙ
ΟΣΣΒΕΣΕΝΑΝΟΡΕΑΝΙΣΑΥΔΕΑ
ωΙΤΟΔΕΤΥΦΛΟΦΟΡΩΝΕΡΑΤΟΝ
ΨΥΧΑΝΑΙΒΡΟΤΟΒΑΜΩΝ
ΚΛΩΠΟΠΑΤΩΡΑΠΑΤΩΡ
ΑΔΥΜΕΛΙΣΔΟΙΣ
ΚΑΛΛΙΟΠΑΙ

ΘΕΟΚΡΙΤΟΥ ΣΥΡΙΓΞ

ΜΑΙΑΣΑΝΤΙΠΕΤΡΟΙΣΘΟΘΟΝΤΕΚΕΝΙΘΥΝΤΗΡΑ
ΑΜΟΥΠΕΙΛΙΠΕΣΑΙΘΕΠΑΡΟΣφΡΕΝΑΤΕΡΜΑΣΑΚΟΥΣ
ΚΟΥΡΑΣΓΗΡΥΓΟΝΑΣΕΧΕΤΑΣΑΝΕΜΩΔΕΟΣ
ΕΛΚΟΣΑΓΑΛΜΑΠΟΘΟΙΟΠΥΡΙΣΜΑΡΑΓΟΥ
ΠΑΠΠΟΦΟΝΟΥΤΥΡΙΑΣΤΕΞΕΗΛΑΣΕΝ
ΠΗΜΑΠΑΡΙΣΘΕΤΟΣΙΜΙΧΙΔΑΣ
ΣΤΗΤΑΣΟΙΣΤΡΕΣΑΕΤΤΑΣ
ΛΑΡΝΑΚΟΓΥΙΕΧΑΡΕΙΣ
ΕΛΛΟΠΙΚΟΥΡΑΙ
ΝΗΛΕΥΣΤΩΙ

Theocritus: The Syrinx.

26

ΔΩΣΙΑΔΑ ΒΩΜΟΣ

Εἱμάρσενός με στήτας
πόσις, μέροψ δίσαβος,
τεῦξ', οὐ σποδεύνας ἵνις Ἐμπούσας, μόρος
Τεύκροιο βούτα καὶ κυνὸς τεκνώματος,
Χρύσας δ᾽ ἄίτας, ἆμος ἐψάνδρα
τὸν γυιόχαλκον οὖρον ἔρραισεν,
ὃν ἀπάτωρ δίσευνος
μόγησε ματρόριπτος·
ἐμὸν δὲ τεῦγμ᾽ ἀθρήσας
Θεοκρίτοιο κτάντας
τριεσπέροιο καύστας
θώυξεν αἶν᾽ λύξας·
χάλεψε γάρ νιν ἰῷ
σύργαστρος ἐκδυγήρας·
τὸν δ᾽ αἰλινεῦντ᾽ ἐν ἀμφικλύστῳ
Πανός τε ματρὸς εὐνέτας φὼρ
δίζφος, ἵνίς τ᾽ ἀνδροβρῶτος Ἰλιορραιστᾶν
ἦρ᾽ ἀρδίων ἐς Τευκρίδ᾽ ἄγαγον τριπόρθητον.

Dosiadas: The Iason Altar.

ΒΗΣΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΒΩΜΟΣ

Ὀλὸς οὔ με λιβρὸς ἱρῶν
Λιβάδεσσιν οἷα κάλχη
Ὑπορροιῆσι τέγγει·
Μαύλιες δ᾽ ὕπερθε πέτρης Ναξίης θοούμεναι
Παμάτων φείδοντο Πανός· οὐ στροβίλῳ λιγνύι
Ἰξὸς εὐώδης μελαίνει τρεχνέων με Νυσίων.
Ἐς γὰρ βωμὸν ὁρῇς με μήτε γλούρου
Πλίνθοις μήτ᾽ Ἀλύβης παγέντα βώλοις,
Οὐδ᾽ ὃν Κυνθογενὴς ἔτευξε φύτλη
Λαβόντε μηκάδων κέρα,
Λισσαῖσιν ἀμφὶ δειράσιν
Ὅσσαι νέμονται Κυνθίαις.
Ἰσόρροπος πέλοιτό μοι·
Σὺν οὐρανοῦ γὰρ ἐκγόνοις
Εἰνάς μ᾽ ἔτευξε γηγενής,
Τάων ἀείζωον τέχνην
Ἔνευσε πάλμυς ἀφθίτων.
Σὺ δ᾽, ὦ πιὼν κρήνηθεν, ἣν
Ἴνις κόλαψε Γοργόνος,
Θύοις τ᾽ ἐπισπένδοις τ᾽ ἐμοὶ
Ὑμηττιάδων πολὺ λαροτέρην
Σπονδὴν ἄδην. Ἴθι δὴ θαρσέων
Ἐς ἐμὴν τεῦξιν· καθαρὸς γὰρ ἐγὼ
Ἰὸν ἱέντων τεράων, οἷα κέκευθ᾽ ἐκεῖνος·
Ἀμφὶ Νέαις Θρηικίαις ὃν σχεδόθεν Μυρίνης
Σοί, Τριπάτωρ, πορφυρέου φὼρ ἀνέθηκε κριοῦ.

Besantinos: The Muse Altar.

Figure 2:
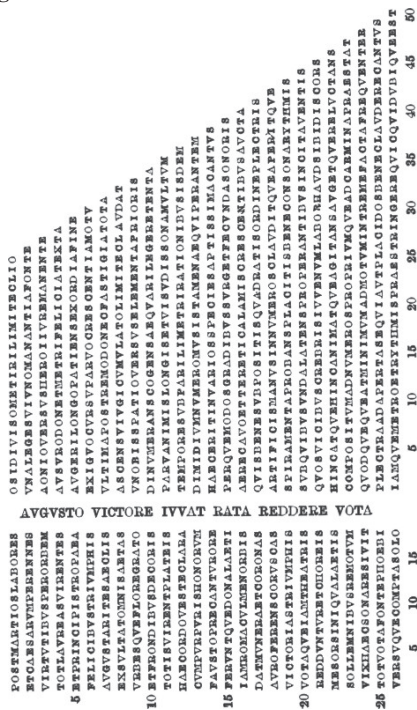


Optatianus Porfyrius: outline poem in the shape
of an organ (Carmen XX).

Optatianus Porfyrius: outline poem in the form
of an altar (Carmen XXVI).
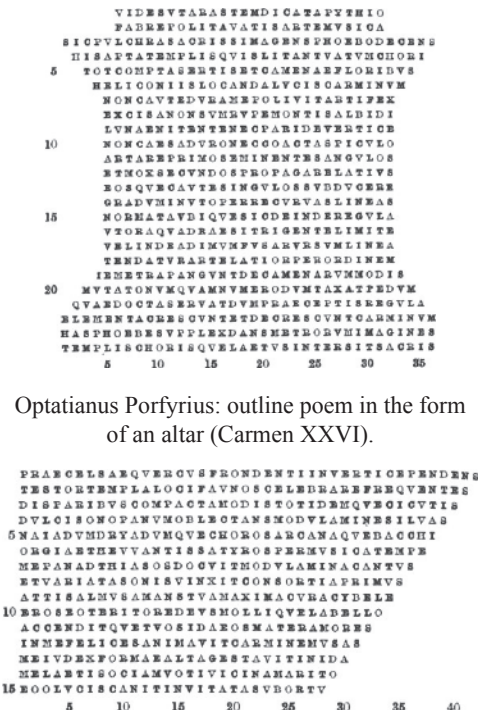
Optatianus Porfyrius: outline poem arranged as
a syrinx (Carmen XXVII).

Figure 3:

Optatianus Porfyrius: grid-poem with a geometrical pattern (Carmen III).

Optatianus Porfyrius: grid-poem with a literal intext (Carmen V).

Optatianus Porfyrius: grid-poem whose *versus intexti* form the figure of a palm (Carmen IX).

Greek and Latin intext:

Τὴν ναῦν δεῖ κόσμον, σὲ δὲ ἄρμενον εἰνὶ νομίζιν.

Θούροις τεινόμενον σῆς ἀρετῆς ἀνέμοις.

Navita nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas.

Nigras nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas.

Tutus contemnat summis cumulata tropaeis.

Pulsa mente mala contemnat, summe, procellas.

Spe quoque Roma bona contemnat, summe, procellas.

Roma felix floret semper votis tuis.

Optatianus Porfyrius: bilingual intextual poem in the shape of an oared vessel (Carmen XIX).