This article offers a formal and linguistic commentary on an epigram by Gregory of Nazianzus (*AP* 8.170). The poem belongs to the series of epigrams dealing with tomb profaners, whose thematic repertoire it shares. A survey of lexical occurrences allows us to identify some elements common to the less well-known genre of hexametric poetry, such as the *Sibylline Oracles*, which grants us greater insight into Gregory's poetic laboratory and strong links with the Homeric tradition, evident in individual learned references. Finally, on a philological level, the testimony of Pachomius Rhusanus, which has generally been neglected, is useful for the *vexata quaestio* regarding the constitution and interpretation of the text, which is limited to just a few verses.

Gregory of Nazianzus’ epigrammatic production has been at the centre of renewed scholarly interest for some years.

On the curses against the profaners of graves found in many epitaphs across Asia Minor, see Strubbe 1997.

ἀνάγνων: the adjective ἀναγνός, “impure”, composed of ἀγνός, “pure”, is attested in literature going back to a lyric fragment by Lasus (PMG 1), and it has a prevalent poetic quality used by a number of Greek authors (Aeschylus 2x, Sophocles 3x, Euripides 1x, Lycophron 2x) with a notable concentration in the *Sibylline Oracles* (13x) and among Christian authors, such as Clement of Alexandria (2x), Eusebius (5x) and Gregory of Nazianzus himself (12x, 9 in poetry). In late antiquity, the adjective was given new meaning by the Christians, especially in reference to those who were considered to be the quintessential “impure” – that is, pagans. In the *Sibylline Oracles* it constituted a convenient hexametric clause; Gregory, on the other hand, varies its use by extending it to other positions (e.g. *carm*. 2.2.7.222) and other metres, such as the trimetre (e.g. *carm*. 1.1.6.71).

In his *Oratio funebris* the grammarian Pachomius Rhusanus, who lived in the sixteenth century, seemingly provides us with a useful paraphrase that is consistent with this interpretation: καὶ οὕτως οἱ τάφοι τῶν βεβήλων ἱερέα περιέχουσι (“so the tombs of the pagans contain a priest”) .

**1. 3 αὖτε**: “again”, “furthermore”, “on the other hand”, a typical Homeric and epic particle, preserved in Hellenistic and late antique hexametric poetry,[[1]](#footnote-1) albeit with some differences. It appears in the *Sibylline Oracles* (14x), Quintus of Smyrna ( 28x), Gregory of Nazianzus (20x), Eudocia (31x), but it is no longer visible in Nonnus’ hexameter.

An indication of its lexical preciousness comes from Hesychius, who glosses the form διέπερσας · ἐπόρθησας (δ 1616 Latte-Cunningham).

Pachomius Rhusanus added a further interpretive possibility, that is, that those who are stained with such serious faults are likely to be authors of other shameful actions, such as those attributed to the inhabitants of Sodom, but I feel that it is rather unlikely: ἢ σοδομίτιδας πηγὰς τοὺς τοιαοτο , ὡς ὅτι οἱ τοιαῦτα τολμῶντες εἰκὸς καὶ τἆλλ 'ἀθέμιτα πράσσειν.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In conclusion, a close reading of *AP* 8.170 offers readers a very rich example of many of Gregory Nazianzen's expressive possibilities. If the common Callimachean component, which was dear to Gregory,[[3]](#footnote-3) is missing, what is apparent is the author's relationship with the less well-known genre of hexametric poetry, represented for example by the *Sibylline Oracles*: ἀθέσμως and ἄναγνος, placed in a reverse clause, are samples of this link. The epic dimension, which was suited to the Homeric hexameter, reappears, however, in a series of other more sought-after choices, such as τρισθανής, διαπέρθω, ἀμφὶς ἔχω, which blend into the Christian inspiration evident in the use of ancient terms that are given new meaning, such as ἀθλοφόροι. In other cases, then, as with the particle αὖτε, it is difficult to distinguish between the preference given to the Homeric hexameter and the use of elements borrowed from more widely-circulated poetry such as that of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Finally, from the explicit moralizing message, which results in a strong condemnation of the τυμβωρύχοι, it is clear that the epigram was not actually meant to be engraved, but rather was intended to be published in a book with a didactic and moralistic aim.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Therefore, Gregory once again reveals his soul as a *poeta doctus*, open to formal suggestions from different backgrounds but capable at the same time, thanks to his vast cultural knowledge and complete dominance of the hexameter, to lead them into a peculiar stylistic harmony.

1. See also LSJ *s.v.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Karmires 1936: 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Poulos 2019. For an example of Callimacheanism on the epigrammatic level in *AP* 8.21, see Cerroni 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Floridi 2013: 78-79, despite Waltz’s (1944: 25) simple explanation, by which he justifies the high number of epigrams on the theme of τυμβωρυχία by referring to the high demand of customers interested in such texts. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)