Introduction

Among the narratives that appear in succession in the Gospels, the episode of the barren fig tree cursed¹ by the Lord has raised a wide set of different exegetic problems, both to ancient and modern critics, due to some peculiar features, which were already considered absurd by Theophylact². Leaving aside the analogies with the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard found in Luke 13.6–9, which must be placed in a completely different context and implicates a different symbolic significance³, the versions found in Mc 11.12–14 and Mt 21.17–22 are the only known biblical records of this miracle. In the version of Mark, the episode, which is split into two segments and frames the narrative of the cleansing of the temple (verses 15–19), closes with a parenetic speech of Christ about the power of faith and prayer, which may seem incongruous with the sequence of the events, or even cryptic, despite its internal logic and coherence. Although, in a more concise form and completely embedded in the main narrative, this dialogic addition is also found in Matthew, in the shape of an immediate back and forth between Jesus and the disciples.

¹ The denomination commonly used to designate the episode is only deduced from the words of Peter in Mc 11.21, where the verb καταραίομαι occurs conjugated in the second person singular. Cf. Pesch (1980–82) 295.
² Theophylact. enarr. in Euang. Marc. 232, PG 123, 614: ἰδώμεν δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν συκῆν· φαίνοντα γάρ ἄτοπα πολλά προκύπτοντα (“let us consider also the aspects related to the fig tree: many points actually emerge that seem to be absurd”). Modern scholars have critically commented especially on Jesus’ excessive strictness in punishing the tree and, in general, on the questions regarding the literary form of the evangelical passage, starting from the methodological approaches of the Formgeschichte and of the Redaktionsgeschichte. For one of the most interesting contributions on the topic see Biguzzi (1987) 55. Original and thoroughly conducted is the recent analysis of the pericope by Grosso (2004) 121–147.
³ In the field of the scriptures, the symbolic connotations assumed by the fig tree are varied: Nathanael is identified as an Israelite through a reference to the fig tree in Joh 1.48; elsewhere, its leaves forecast the summer (Mc 13.28); in the Old Testament tradition the fig tree is often associated with the concepts of peace and salvation (Mich 4.5; Zacch 3.10; I Macc 14.12). A broad discussion of the significance of the fig tree in classical and Christian sources, both biblical and patristic, can be found in Reichmann (1969) 640–689.

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about the immediate withering of the tree (verses 20–22). The overall structure of the narrative is summarised in the following diagram:

```plaintext
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ hunger</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>21.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He approaches the tree and does not find any fruits</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>21.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it was not the season for figs</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curses</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>21.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Inserted into this common structure, which is – taking also into account that the above-mentioned parallel of Luke’s narrative is based on the same plot outline – deeply rooted in tradition, are grafted elements that significantly differentiate the two versions. The most obvious among these elements is certainly the passage found in Mark which generally translates as follows: “for the time of figs was not yet”. This passage has been the object of botanical⁴ and allegorical conjectures since the time of the Church Fathers and is still the object of interpretative hypotheses of New Testament critics, who, however, tend to see in this paradoxical sentence the real expressive power of the narrative⁵. Thus, it is easy to understand its fruitful reception even among Christian poets, who rendered its plot in verses.

In the framework of the general debate about biblical paraphrasis that has taken place in the last 40 years⁶, the four most complete poetic *retractationes* of this New Testament passage⁷, realised in late antiquity by Juvencus, Sedulius, Avitus and Severus of Malaga⁸, will be discussed in this paper. Similarities and differences in comparison with the narratological characteristics of the original narrative will emerge, as well as possible exegetical and theological additions, comprehensible

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⁴ The pericope of Mark’s Gospel has recently been re-examined, with new methodological approaches, by Oakman (2008) 184–186, whose interpretative proposal is originated by socio-economic premises, concerning the expropriation of farmers’ lands through taxes and an accumulation of debts by the élites of the first-century Palestine, with subsequent repercussions on the agricultural production. The fig tree wood was specifically intended for sacrifices in the temple; thus, the barrenness of the fig tree would symbolically show the passage to this new agricultural and economic Palestinian system, condemned (cursed) by Jesus.

⁵ Some scholars have considered this aside a gloss, preceding or following the final redaction merged into the text: Hatch (1923) 6–12; Manson (1950–51) 271–281; Smith (1960) 326–327; some others, with grammatical stretches, have suggested to read the whole expression as an interrogative clause: Romaniuk (1975) 277–278. However, the sentence is unanimously attested by the tradition and with valid arguments defended by Grosso (2004) 123–124.


⁷ The passages from Mark and Matthew are cited according to the text of the *Vetus Latina*, which most probably Juvenecus, too, had at hand: Jülicher (1938) 150–151 and Jülicher (1940) 103–106. Possible comparisons with the *Vulgata*, which has been used by later authors, are made on the basis of the edition of Weber-Gryson (2007⁸).

⁸ The following critical editions have been consulted: Huemer (1891) 106–107; Huemer (1885) 94; Hecquet-Noti (2011) 168–170; Zwierlein (1994) 52–53.
in the light of the communicative purpose and function of each poetic work. An idea of the different compositional orientations in relation to the overall structure of the works can be gleaned from the following tables:

**Table 1: The Episode’s Position within the Compositional Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Preceding Section</th>
<th>Following Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avitus</td>
<td>ll. 379–416: list of the biblical books suitable to moral edification.</td>
<td>ll. 441–502: parable of the ten virgins and exegesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severus</td>
<td>ll. 40–92: healing of a paralysed man at the pool of Bethesda ~ Loh 5.2–18.</td>
<td>ll. 143–162: Jesus’ speech on the power of faith ~ Mt 21.21 + Lc 17.7–10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Alternation of Narrative Sections and Exegetical Asides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Verses in Total</th>
<th>Narrative Section</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Exegetical Aside</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenetus</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedulius</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avitus</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>66.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severus</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>79.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1 Spatio-Temporal Coordinates**

The retention of spatio-temporal coordinates reflects the need to guarantee that the episode is arranged as an organic narrative within the whole sequence of events, in accordance with the classical rhetoric, which prescribes starting a narrative *a per-

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9 Sedulius (IV.42: *talia ... post facta*) and Severus (IX.93 *post haec*) link the narrative *incipit* with the previous section of the text through temporal conjunctions referring to past events, in order to obtain a coherent narrative sequence. At III.653 Juvenetus prefers an opening formula that, though referring to the preceding narrative section, focuses on the words that Christ has just pronounced. It is a common device, through which the author generally links more diegetic sections, thus underlining the importance of the main character’s words. In Sedul. *carm. pasch.* IV.43 the neuter *uicina* can be intended to mean either the “neighbourhood” of Bethany or the “neighbour” Bethany.
sona or a re, and the principle of unity typical of epic poetry. Free from this compositional necessity, by contrast, is the choice of a single biblical unity expounded by Avitus, who introduces the episode by an unspecified quondam, an internal diegetic signal. Juvencus reprises the toponym Bethania (Bethaniam ... petit) and then accurately follows Matthew in referring to Jerusalem and its inhabitants (linguens cum ciuibus urbem)\textsuperscript{10}; he introduces, however, the epithet ingratam, which anticipates the possible identification of the city with the barren fig tree that has to be destroyed; this identification is suggested by the patristic sources and also on the basis of Ier 8.13. On an intertextual level, however, the possible reference to Vergil, ecl. 1.34 ingratae...urbi, which is nowhere else attested in Latin poetry, can be classified as a significant conceptual transposition: the ingratitude, which in the eclogue relates to the city dwellers, who, according to the interpretation of Servius, are guilty of scoffing the products of Tityrus and the farmers\textsuperscript{11}, is transferred in the paraphrasis to Jerusalem, which refuses the salvific gifts offered by God through his Son.

On the other hand, completely free from negative implications is the epithet Da-
vitica, which Sedulius ascribes to Jerusalem, on the basis of some Old Testament formulations\textsuperscript{12}. Severus is the only one to mention the presence of the disciples, found in verse 11 of Mark’s writing, which is a necessary elucidation in the narrative framework built by the poet, who, underlining the role of the disciples as the first recipients of the symbolic explanation of the prodigy, makes them a projection of the reader who is to be instructed. In the very first verse, the final clause iustissimus auctor, already found in Ov. met. XV.833\textsuperscript{13} with reference to Augustus, represents a clear example of an ersetzende Übertragung\textsuperscript{14}; in a contamination of cultural models, however, the Ovidian reminiscence blends with the traditional messianic attribute of Christ, defined as auctor already in Hbr 2.10 and 5.9. The reference to justice, another biblical divine prerogative, discloses the reason behind the supernatural deed, carried out, as the poet points out in 1.136, “without injustice (sine crimen)”\textsuperscript{15}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} This expression allows the author to condense the expression of Matthew relictis illis abiit foras extra ciuitatem. For the locution cum ciuibus urbem see Lucr. VI.590: cum ciuibus urbes and 1140: ciuibus urbe (= Verg. Aen. V.631; VIII.571; Lucan. I.592).
  \item \textsuperscript{11} See the interpretation of Serv., ad buc. 1.34: ING RATAE VRBI quia cum alimenta ciuitatibus praestentur ex rusticorum labore, in his rustici et deridentur a ciuibus, et multa perdunt, et ad uectarum rerum pretia iniqua suscipiunt.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Cf. II reg 5.7: arcem Sion, haec est ciuitas Davi d e III reg 2.10: in ciuitate David.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Cf. also Ov. met. VIII.101 with reference to Minos.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Unlike Juvencus, the author of the In Euangelia amplifies with luci ... futura the temporal specification mane of Mt 21.18, varied by Sedulius (IV.44) with the poetic nexus clarescente die. The location of the tree is also significantly different in the four versions. Juvencus, consistent with the hypotext of Matthew, places it on the side of the street (II. 654 s.: in margine ... / stratae); Sedulius, who in the prose redaction (IV.5) refers to the scriptures with haud procula a semita, in the hexameter version opts for a more poetic mediis ... in aruis (IV.45). The particulars of the location are, by contrast, completely omitted by Avitus, who with the participle uianti, echoing the coradical uia of the Gospel, alludes to the fact that the tree was placed alongside the street travelled by Christ; the same happens in...
2 The Lord’s Hunger

In the biblical model, Jesus’ search for fruits points to a physiological need of his, which is not further specified or motivated, so someone who interprets the text from a historical point of view run could into difficulties and some exegetes have been forced to give a non-literal interpretation¹⁶. Thus, it is striking that only in Severus, the only one among the four to provide a detailed theological comment on the biblical passage, is a reference to this motivation completely lacking, to the detriment also of the logical sequence of the narrated events. Behind this omission lies maybe the necessity to avoid a possible exegetical difficulty by exclusively selecting material on which a comprehensive interpretation of the scriptural text can be built, more than a form of negligence in reproducing the narrative moves of the source.

The refined periphrasis cibi pertemptans corda uoluntas of Iuvenc. III.656 offers, instead, a subtle form of interpretatio, which indirectly stresses the human nature of Christ. The abstract subject uoluntas¹⁷ seems to personify a negative and hostile force¹⁸, whose action is explained through a particularly expressive verb, in the intensive form¹⁹, which recalls the concept of temptation. While pertemplo, attested only

the rendition of Severus who, noting the fact that the tree was isolated (IX.96: quae sola stbat), adds a detail that is not explicitly expressed in the model, unless one wants to understand in this sense unam of Mt 21.19, which, however, as is usual in biblical Latin, has the meaning of an article. Cf. Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr (1972) 193.

¹⁶ On these historical and theological implications, see Bartsch (1962) 256–260.
¹⁷ While the reading uoluntas is attested in the vast majority of the manuscripts, the codices T (=Turricensis C 68, saec. IX) and Bb (=Bobiensis [nunc Ambrosianus C 74], saec. IX-X) show the variant uoluptas, which would of course be much more typical and explicit with regard to the concept of desire, appetite expressed by the text. It must be stressed that in the Evangeliorum libri the term uoluptas is nowhere else attested, apart from I.418 as a minor variant and in III.333 as a conjecture of the 16th century editor Theodor Poelmann. On the other hand, there are in the whole text nine instances of uoluntas, all in the same metrical position. It cannot be excluded, however, that the authentic reading is, in fact, uoluptas and that this word, possibly perceived to be disrespectful if referring the Saviour, was later corrected by a medieval scribe into an semantically less expressive alternative.
¹⁸ According to a recurring use in Juvenec’s paraphrase, which in this way tends to give substance to certain spiritual or psychological phenomena, such as the malice of the scribes and Pharisees, the Devil’s tricks, etc. Thus, in this case, the use of the abstract noun fits into this series of examples and indirectly points to those negative forces that operate against Christ, hampering his actions. Hatfield (1890) 30, and Fichtner (1994) 158–167, have demonstrated how this preference for abstract nouns (which is a peculiar feature of Christian authors) must be ascribed to the canons of the poetry of late antiquity, especially of the Constantinian era.
¹⁹ While it is true that in the Evangeliorum libri these intensive and frequentative forms do not have meanings different from the corresponding simple ones, as is usual in late antique Latin, it is also true, however, that in some cases, since they are more substantial and forceful, they are more suitable to convey concepts that are particularly relevant or to underline incidents or actions that are crucial to the narrative structure. For a list of frequentatives in Juvenecus, see Hatfield (1890) 34.
here in the *Euangeliorum libri*
²⁰, possibly derives, in conjunction with *corda, recta via* from Stat. *Theb. V.445 f. tacitis corda aspera flammis / Lemniadum pertemptat Amor,* the cognate words *temptare* and *temptatio* are largely used in the poem to indicate the action of the Devil and of the enemies of Christ. This is the case, for example, and this detail is not unimportant, of the narrative of the temptations in the desert in the first book, in which we observe the Devil proposing to the starving Lord the possibility to turn stones into bread²¹. This interpretation, only roughly sketched out there, finds its complete form in the later patristic commentaries, as e.g. Jerome’s, in which, nonetheless, the allegorical and spiritual meaning of the hunger, which had already emerged at least as early as Origenes²², prevails.

### 3 The Description of the Plant

The biblical sources alternate the synonymic variants *ficulnea* and *ficus* (appearing alone or, in the genitive, dependent on the substantive *arbor*). According to his desire for *variatio*, Juvencus uses a wider set of synonyms, starting from *ficus* (III.655) found in the model and meaningfully used only in the *exordium* of the narrative to define its thematic core, to *arbor* (III.660.661.668) and *lignum* (III.663). The choice of these two terms, and particularly of *lignum*, which indicates an already withered plant, seems to be anything but haphazard, if we take into account that, according to the subsequent patristic tradition, in the narrative of the Passion, the synecdoches “tree” and “wood” are equivalent to Cross. The term *lignum*, like its Greek equivalent *ξύλον*, hints at the instrument of Christ’s torture, in a form intrinsically pregnant with Old and New Testament significances, e.g. the tree of the Genesis, the curse of Dt 21.23 and, indeed, the barren fig tree²³. The detail of the shadow cast by the tree (l.655 *tendentem diffusa umbracula ficum*) recalls, on an intertextual level, Tibullus’ verbiage (II.5.97) about an old tree that shelters the farmers during the Palilia²⁴; on an intratextual level, it recalls, with slight modifications, the expressions through which in II.115–17 *cum te diffusae tegerentumbracula ficus,/ ante etiam quam te uocitarent uerba Philippi,/ uident* Juvencus amplified Ioh 1.48 *priusquam te Philippus uo-

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²⁰ The passage of Juvencus is noted in *ThL X* 1778, 48 under the rubric “c. notione afficiendi (in relation to animated beings)”.

²¹ Cf. I.368; 374; 383; 396; see also I.599; II.476; 586; III.222; 464; IV.2.

²² Cf. Hier. in Matth. III.21.18: *esurit, uel veritatem humanae carnis ostendens uel esuriens salutem credentium et aestuans ad incredulitatem Israelis.* This spiritual interpretation, on which also the parallel passage of Mc 11.13c (Luz [1997] 199–200 and n. 16) could have had an influence, is largely developed in Greek and Latin patristic literature; cf. Ioh. Crys. hom. 67.1 (= *PG 58,634*); Aug. *serm. 98.3;* also the anonymous author of the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum* 844 focuses on the hunger not of food but of justice and salvation.


Sedulius’ description tends to focus the attention on the aesthetic of the tree, through a rich usage of adjectives and metrical-rhetorical devices. The first hemistich 46, emphasised by the alliteration frondea ficus, closes the metrical period started in the preceding verse by the formula ecce autem, which introduces the new, surprising event. The participle astans, framed between the penthemimeres and the hepthemimeres, and especially the adjective sublimis, picture the tree towering in the middle of the countryside. If astans in conjunction with syntagmata formed by in+abl. is common in epic poetry, the possible reminiscence of patristic commentaries ad loc. must not be underestimated. Jerome, e.g., in the traditional analogy between the fig tree and the synagogue, defines the planta as stantem scilicet et immobilem et non habentem evangelli pedes (in Matth. III.21.18). In this case, too, the epic dictio requires a lexical diversity that places robore, stipite and arboreis comis beside the biblical ficus and ficulnea. Of great interest is the restoration of this last term, which enters the poetic dictionary thanks to Sedulius²⁵. It is a typically biblical word picked up then by the ecclesiastic writers, like Ambrose²⁶ and Augustine²⁷, mainly in negative contexts, often related to the Jews.

Avitus talks about delicate and extended fronds. The adjective diffusa (l. 418), although largely used in poetry with reference to the width of plants, might bring to mind at this precise point of the description, the text of Juvencus, recurring in the same metrical position. It also activates the intratextual identification with the luxuriant fig tree in Paradise, from whose cortex Adam cuts a strip to cover himself, which is described by the poet in III.12–15 (umbrosis propter stbat ficulnea ramis / frondentes diffusa comas, quas protenus Adam / uementem capiens raso de cortice librum / adsuit et uiridi solatur ueste ruborem). This is a simple mnemonic reuse, to be sure, but probably also a clue to a tacit parallelism between the two plants, suggested, as we will fully see in Severus, in patristic thought. The chiastic structure of l. 421 indutam tantum foliis, sed germine nudam, divided into two parts by the coincidence of the hepthemimeres and the syntactic pause, emphasises the opposition between the two antithetic characterisations, with homoeoteleuton, underlining the contrast between the luxuriant foliage and the absence of fruits. In the following depiction of the withering, Avitus stresses, with greater emphasis than his predecessors, the biblical reference to the presence of leaves only, also through a web of characterisations and a verbal accumulation aimed to reflect the meaning (l. 422 ... inane uirens ornatus inutilis ...). This may show the influence of the previous and contemporary patristic interpretation, which, in an overlapping of symbolic levels, built the allegorical comparison between Israel and the pharisaic traditions precisely on the

²⁵ Apart from the passages of Avitus discussed below, the term is found in poetry also in Ven. Fort. carm. V.2.33; Columba hymn. I.256; Inscr. chr. Rossi II.247.10.1.
²⁶ Iac. I.1.4: de infructuosa ficulnea dicere, hoc est malitia ludaeorum.
foliage. According to Hilary, the Synagogue is covered in leaves, i.e. empty words, but lacking fruits, i.e. good actions (in Matth. III.21.6 *Inveniet infecundam, foliis tantummodo uestitam, id est, uerbis inanibus gloriament, sed fructibus uacuam, operibus quippe bonis sterilem, et expectatis proventibus nudam*); similarly, Jerome insists on the empty orotundity of the Pharisees’ speeches, which do not bear any truthful fruit (in Matth. III.21.19 nihil ... inuenit in ea nisi folia tantum, promissionum strepitum, *traditiones Pharisicaes et iactationem legis et ornamenta uerborum absque ullis fructibus ueritatis*). The terminological and conceptual coincidences might suggest a direct or indirect use of these commentaries by the poet.

Completely isolated remains the uncommon form *caricem* (maybe derived from a nominative *carice* or *carix* mentioned only in the *Corpus glossariorum Latinorum*) used by Severus, who also uses the more common *ficus* at l. 108. At VIII.157, in the episode of Zacchaeus, this word replaces the biblical *sycomorus*, which is found in the vast majority of the *Vetus Latina* manuscripts. In that case, unless a gloss read by Severus in some obscure source is conjecturable, the substitution might have been introduced for metrical reasons, with the aim of replacing the Greek calque of the model with a term more appropriate to the hexameter, the alternative and more common form of *carice*, namely *carica*, being already attested in poetic language since Ovid. However, the problem of the choice of such a rare morphological variant remains. Apart from a possible mistake in the textual transmission, i.e. the change of *caricam* to *caricem*, which for paleographic reasons is not so unbelievable, we could take this form as a hint at the Greek cultural roots of the author, who elsewhere flaunts unusual lexemes, as is observed by Zwierlein in his prefatory words.

4 The Curse

The retention, in three cases out of four, of the direct speech, which draws attention to the passage in question, confirms the general tendency of the biblical epic poets to literally reproduce Christ’s words or those about the relationship between Christ and God, especially in those episodes about miracles and healings. At ll. 659 f., Juven- cucus specifies the recipient of the curse, but he substitutes *illi* of the VL with an archaic and more solemn *olli*, expressing the implied subject *Christus* with a common transitional formula in the *Euangeliorum libri*. The lexical choice is effective, playing on the ambivalence of the word *copia*, employed here in the figurative sense of “potestas, facultas” (ThIL IV 909, 20 ff.) – which is actually attested in the poem only here

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28 Gloss. III.538.49; 546.13 and Zwierlein *ad loc*. Noticeable is the correptio of the first syllable metri causa.
29 Cf. Ov. met. VIII.674: *hic nux, hic mixta est rugosis carica palmis; fast. I.185: “Quid uult palma sibi rugosaque carica” dixi; Seren. med. 974: *carica uel betis lento cum melle iuge tur.*
–, yet at the same time allusively connected to the original meaning of “abundance” (in relation to the fruits), in which sense it normally occurs in the poem. The restricted space of the second *hemiepes* 660 palpably works on the sense, conveying the idea of the immediateness of the drying.

In Sedulius, the recipient of the curse is the foliage, which is more than a simple *synecdoche*; we can observe here the author’s intention to polemically emphasise how such a prosperous exterior, the implicit cause of the barrenness, will in future correspond a lack of fruits. The author is the only one to maintain the temporal annotation *in sempiternum* (l. 49 *reliquum ... in aeuum*)33, which Juvencus and Severus completely omit. Also remarkable in the Sedulian version is the insertion of *ex germine vestro* (“from your stock”). In the narrow sense, the expression denotes the tree’s sprouts but, according to the recurring allegorical reading of the Fathers34, it also figuratively points to Israel’s offspring. The abundance of descriptive details that portray the fig tree as drained of its lymph, dead and with dry branches, is an example of synonymic amplification, as noted by Roberts35; according to traditional rhetoric, this figure of speech conveys to the reader the importance of the passage, thus allowing the poet to display his stylistic abilities and refined lexical repertoire.

Frame by frame, like an Ovidian metamorphosis, Avitus describes each phase of the wilting, which gradually involves the entire plant, starting from the verdant crown, which by now has stiffened, to the roots, which have been overwhelmed by a sudden heat, to the trunk, which is dried and devoid of branches. The clause of l. 423, *adflata calore*, is a borrowing from Sidon. *carm.* 11.126 *proxima quin etiam festorum afflata calore*, from the epithalamium for Ruricius and Iberia, where it indicates the heat that floods the nuptial room, whichever season it is. The Sidonian reminiscence then blends with another one, of Stat. *Theb.* X.674 *fulminis haud citius radiis adflata cupressus*, where the poet talks about a cypress hit by lightnings. A lexical similarity is found also between l. 424 *ramorum tegmine* and l. 26 of the pseudo-Cyprianic *De Pascha*, where the author refers to the shadow cast by the branches, in a depiction of Heaven according to the *locus amoenus* topos. Apart from a taste for descriptive preciosity, widespread at the time, the emphasis on the transformation exalts the grandiosity of the miracle, causing the barren beauty of the fig tree to appear more inconsistent and fragile.

Severus underlines the centrality of the curse by insisting on the notion of “word”. While the “*iunctura* siccauit verbo” finds an immediate parallel in Eusebius

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32 Cf. I.344: *horreaque inplebit secreti copia farris*; I.460: *illos plena manet satiandos copia mensae*; I.653 *crastina nec uobis curetur copia rerum*; II.753: *incrementa sui centeno copia fetu*.
33 Luz (1997) 201, n. 26, commenting on the passage, notes that “das feierliche εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα legt keine zeitliche Begrenzung nahe”.
34 Cf., e.g., Hilary’s commentary on the passage in question (*in Matth.* 21,7 *infidelitatis ludaicae sterilitatem aeternae damnationis sententia consequetur*).
of Emesa, a comparison must also be made with a passage of Commodian (instr. II.10.9–11):

... sterelis Christianos uos esse designo.
Maledicta fuit arbor sine fructu ficulna
in uerbo Domini et statim exaruit illa.

The allusion to the parable of the barren fig tree, which complements the allusion to the parable of the chaff rewritten in the previous portion of text, clarifies in which precise sense the Pauline exhortation of Eph 6.8, evoked in l. 5 Lex ager nobis est: qui fecerit bonum in illa, must be understood. With a metaphorical language of Cyprianic origin, Commodian defines as “barren” those Christians who are incapable of performing charitable acts, thus proposing a spiritual explanation of the evangelical passage that is not so different from the one given by Sedulius and Avitus, despite the specificity of the relative contexts. But it is the reference ex novo to the power of the word that performs the miracle that brings into contact the text of Severus with the one of Commodius, and thus with the one of Eusebius. I find this parallel noteworthy, given that, in his recent commentary on the Instructiones, Poinsotte traces for the expression in uerbo Domini only a single possible formal model in Syracides 48.5. Apart from an indemonstrable interdependence between Commodian and Eusebius, whose speeches were translated into Latin between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, or the influence of a common patristic source, the conceptual coincidence shows the strong influence wielded by the immediate effect of the curse on the Christian writers.

5 The Reaction of the Disciples

Juvenetus emphasises the disciples’ astonishment not only over the miracle, but also over its immediate realisation, and stresses this feeling with a crescendo of psychological remarks, from mirantur to the figura etymologica stupidis ... /... stupuistis (ll. 662–663). In comparison with the Gospel, the insertion of the participle adsistens, which introduces the following answer of Christ, also appears significant; intention-
ally ambiguous, this verb alludes both to the fact that the protagonist is physically close to the disciples or witnesses their astonishment, and to the fact that, with a shift in sense, he offers them assistance, instructing them by his explanatory answer. In a swerve from the hypotext, ‘Severus’ the fear more than the astonishment, transferring onto the disciples’ emotions and their behaviour what elsewhere in the Gospels characterises the reaction of the crowds towards Christ’s miracles (Mt 9.8 uientes autem turbae timuerunt et glorificauerunt Deum and Lc 7.16 accepit autem omnes timor, et magnificabant Deum). This variation, which emphasises the importance of the event, acquires especially a theological and catechetical significance, thanks to the parenthesis on the omnipotence of God’s word. If, as the editors believe, the work was composed in the strong anti-Arian atmosphere that characterised the Visigothic Spain of the second half of the 6th century, the formulation carries a Christological substance, aimed to reaffirm, in an indirectly polemic way, the divine nature of Christ and his consubstantiality with the Father. The absence of this fundamental biblical aside in Sedulius and Avitus, apart from their respective poetic intentions, aims to uncouple the event from the temporal coordinates of the incident of the Gospel, with a view towards actualisation. In other words, the disciples are replaced by the recipients of the work, who are offered the subsequent interpretation with a parenetic purpose.

6 The Vocabulary of the Miracle

The vocabulary used to denote the miracle is indicative of the poetic purposes and the times of composition. Thus, it is not surprising to find, in the Euangeliorum libri, a term like honor (III.663 nunc ligni istius nostro stupeistis honore), which is not characterised as Christian, but culturally compatible with the feelings of the

41 Canali (2011) 183; McGill (2016) 90.
42 Galli (2012) 211.
43 On this meaning of adsisto cf. the entry by Münsscher in ThIL II 901, 82ff.
44 I think that the conjecture uerbum proposed by the editor Thomas Klein (as is inferable from the critical apparatus) to fill the gap of l. 102 must be preferred to the addition regem suggested by Willy Schetter. In this specific context, in fact, the reference to the word, which must be understood metonymically here, as relating to God or to his Son, according to the New Testament definition of Ioh 1.1–3 (in principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum. Hoc erat in principio apud Deum. Omnia per ipsum facta sunt), acquires a particular relevance and helps to emphasise the greatness of the miracle just realised only through the word pronounced by Christ, the incarnate verb. The conjecture, which would acquire greater effectiveness also on a stylistic level thanks to the polyptoton with uerbo of ll. 98 and 100, seems to be supported also by a series of intratextual parallel passages noted by Zwierlein (1994) 111. Furthermore, in the text of Severus, on the basis of the aforementioned passage of John, the clause cuncta peregit has a gnomic value, through which the author intends to underline God’s power over nature, an aside, which in this case, with a reference to the specific prodigy narrated, aims to recall the fact that He, who has created everything, has also got the power to regulate and dominate the natural cycle of things.
Roman audience. The same term recurs in IV.400 *pars credens sequitur tantae uirtutis honorem*, but in a syntagma with *uirtus*, periphrastically formulating a miracle that has already happened, namely the resurrection of Lazarus. This word, which covers a wide semantic range, denotes in the Latin world, in sacral contexts, the religious devotion or the concrete demonstration of *pietas* towards the gods (sacrifices, libations, votive offers; cf. *ThIL* VI 2921, 74 ff.; 2924, 61 ff.). For the benefit of the audience, the miracle is represented, according to epic modes of expression, as an act of submission and deference of the natural elements, in this case the plant (*ligni* is here a subjective genitive) towards the superior will of the God-man. In the later compositions of Avitus (VI.425 *instruimur tali legem cognoscere signo*) and Severus (IX.104 *quod signo fecit*), the technical term *signum* easily finds its place, a typical lexeme of the Christian Sondersprache, where it occurs in its double meaning of “signe, préfiguration, symbole (*τύπος*)” and “prodige”, like its Greek equivalent *σήμεων*. However, especially noteworthy, as a witness to the changes in times and circumstances, is the fact that in both cases, in spite of, as we will see, the difference of the contexts and of the subsequent exegetical implications, the substantive precedes a more or less ample section of commentary. The *signum*, in fact, being anticipation or a symbol of something else, must be explained, contextualised and interpreted.

### 7 Exegesis

The lack of an exegesis is compensated in Juvencus by a thick web of intertextual references. In the final passage about rocks and animals, in which Green sees a touch of humour⁴⁶, an allusiveness can be observed that acquires its own value as an exegetical amplification. At III.671, in the sequence *siluis ... saxisque ferisque*, the commentators⁴⁷ point out echoes of Ov. *met.* XI.1–2 *carmine dum tali siluas animosque ferarum / Threicius uates et saxa sequentia ducit* (of Orpheus) and XIV.338–40 *siluas et saxa mouere / et mulcere feras et flumina longa morari / ore suo volucresque uagas r etineres olebat* (of Canens). The Ovidian reminiscences, especially the one of the Thracian *cantor*, obtain an allusive power that has not yet been adequately stressed by critics. The poet seems to suggest, in fact, an implicit analogy between Orpheus and Christ. This analogy characterised early Christian iconography and was decoded on a typological level in the patristic witnesses, starting at least from Clemens of Alexandria, who emphasises how the real Orpheus is the *Logos*, able to wield his power not only over animals but over natural elements and men’s hearts, too⁴⁸.

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⁴⁵ Blaise-Chirat (1954) 759.
⁴⁸ Clem. Alex. *protr.* 1.2–5. The Christianisation of the Orpheus myth, starting especially from the analysis of passages from Clemens of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea, has recently been dis-
The text of Sedulius is established on a different level that develops a minimal interpretation of the parable in the form of a moral exegesis. With the allegorical deepening of the literal foundation, focusing on a triple botanical similitude distinguished by the usage of comparative tags (ceu, aequabitur, similis, tamquam), the poet gives to the narrative detail a theological depth, or at least a spiritual one, open, even on a poetic level, to different reading possibilities. In this case, the allegory makes use of intra-biblical references both in the comparison between the barren faith and a dry trunk, comparable with passages of Matthew\(^49\) and Luke\(^50\), and in the comparison between the upright people and the Cedar of Lebanon, found in Psalm 91(92).13, which is quoted literally in the prose version (iustus ut palma florebit et sicut cedrus, quae in Libano est, multiplicabitur). The ideological fundament of this exegetical insertion must be sought in the Opus Paschale, where, with a programmatic declaration, the interpretation of the narrative is shifted from the literal sense (ad litteram) to the allegoric-spiritual one (spiritales causae), more appropriate to the lex divina\(^51\). The greater thoroughness of the prose rewriting allows greater clarity, necessary in the field of faith, which is diluted by poetic polysemy. This is further confirmation that the Opus, more complete and exhaustive on the level of content, is conceived by the author as an instrument for a better understanding of the poetic composition, which was published before\(^52\).

In Avitus a notable double exegetical level goes from the general to the particular. First, the biblical exemplum is, in fact, explained on an ethical-moral level, suitable for the parenetic-pastoral purposes of the poem. In the light of this first level, it is possible to catch the sense of the subsequent link with chastity, expressed as a similitude, otherwise not so perspicuous (ll. 430–40):

\(^{49}\) Cf. Mt3.10: iam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est; omnis ergo arbor quae non facit fructum bonum exciditur et in ignem mittitur.\(^{50}\) Cf. Lc 13.6–9: dicebat autem hanc similitudinem: arborem fici habebat quidam plantatam in uinea sua et uenit quaerens fructum in illa et non inuenit. Dixit autem ad cultorem uineae: ecce anni tres sunt ex quo uenio quae fercutum in ficulnea hac et non inuenio; succide ergo illam ut quid etiam terram occupat. At ille respondens dixit illi: domine dimitte illam et hoc anno usque dum fodiad circa illam et mittam stercora et si quidem fercut fructum, sin autem in futurum succides eam.\(^{51}\) Cf. op. pasch. IV.5: Non tamen haec accipiamus ad litteram, licet manifesto credantur impleta, quoniam spiritualibus causis conuenit lex divina. Quid enim materies sine sensu peccauerat? Praesertim quae fructum, sicut Marcus euangelista commemorat, incongrui ratione temporis non habebat: nisi ad instructionem Dominus nostrae utilitatis hoc ageret, qui factorum sermonumque parabolis utale nobis iter ostendit.\(^{52}\) The linguistic and rhetoric analogies and differences, as well as the ones related to content, between the poetic rendition and the prose have recently been discussed by Mori (2013), who underlines how the prose version aims to clarify the author’s literary purposes.
Sic et virginitas sacro deuta pudori
indiget adiunctis uirtutibus et, nisi mentem
intactam seruans casto cum corpore iungat,
concumbit uitiis nec castam dicere carnem
uire potest, animus quam sic corrumpit adulter.
Ira, furor, maeror, liuor, discordia, luxus
lingua duplex, constricta manus, laxata uoluntas
moechantur cum corde hominis, tum semine turpi
fetus mortis alunt. En quo perducitur omnis,
nomine virgineo quae se dum iactitat, intus
criminibus grauidam nescit turgescere mentem53.

What has generally been said about those who proclaim themselves Christians (l. 426 Christi famulum solo sermone fatenti), namely that they must match this self-proclamation with a uiuens operatio (l. 427), and that they must testify to their faith through acts of charity, is now applied specifically to the behaviour of the virgins. The under-

53 This is not the place to discuss this passage at length; it seems nonetheless necessary to highlight a few devices used by the poet to express effectively the moral teaching. In the first section, the accumulation of strongly positive adjectives, denoting the concepts of pureness and modesty, together with their respective substantives (l. 430 sacro ... pudori; ll. 431ff. mentem / intactam; l. 432 casto ... corpore; l. 433 castam ... carnem), anticipates the following contrast with the vocabulary of both the second and the last section, which focuses on the concepts of immodesty and adultery (l. 433 concumbit uitiis; l. 434 animus ... corrumpit adulter; l. 437 moechantur ... semine turpi). The vocabulary, which also through different communicative levels and different linguistic and stylistic registers conveys the antithesis between the two opposite realities that are represented, consists of verbs as concumbere, absent from Vergil and Horace, but frequent in the elegiac poets (ThIL IV 102, 18ff.), and moechari, which is chiefly used by Catullus and Martial, but also found in the Latin Bible, both in its literal and its metaphorical sense. These verbs belonging to the sexual sphere play a functional role in the formulation of a critic of the lack of spiritual purity. This highly allusive sexual lexicon culminates in the peculiar metaphor of the impure soul’s pregnancy (l. 440 grauidam ... turgescere mentem), which, having fornicated with vices and sins, gives birth to deadly fetuses (l. 438 fetus mortis), that is to say bad actions. The sins that commit adultery with the hearts of human beings are listed in a long congeries at ll. 435f., according to the traditional form of the Lasterkatalog, which is already used by the poet in carm. II.31f. (cessabit gemitus, luxus, metus, ira, voluptas, / fraud, dolor atque dolus, maeror, discordia, liuor) with regard to the eschatological vision of the freedom from sins, and which finds immediate parallels in Prud. ham. 395–397: ira superstition maeror discordia luctus / sanguinis atra sitis, uini sitiis et sitis auri / liuor adulterium dolus obtrectatio furtum (about the Devil’s army) and psych. 629f. Metus et Labor et Vis / et Scelus et placitae fidei Fraus (Operatio has just gained victory over Cupiditas); on this imitation of Prudentius, see Arweiler (1998), 48. What is missing in the previous catalogues is a reference to furo (to be understood here in the double meaning of “anger” and “uncontrolled lust”, “passion”, which the virgin may nourish in her soul) and the three pairs of noun+adjective, which at l. 435 follow the nominative-only list of l. 434. On a stylistic level, the chias tic disposition of the nouns and the relating adjectives at ll. 431f. (mentem ... intactam ... casto ... corpore) and the alliterative sequence of c at ll. 432–434 are noticeable. The contrast between a positive exterior and an interior dirtied by sins must recall Christ’s condemnation of the formalism of the Pharisees, which is compared to whitewashed tombs, which, behind a pleasant appearance, hide the decomposition of corpses.
lying reference to 1 Cor 7.34 (et mulier inupta et virgo cogitat quae Domini sunt ut sit sancta et corpore et spiritu) summarises the ideal according to which true virginity combines pureness of the body with that of a soul that is kept free from sins and impure thoughts. On a literary level, the equation (leafy but barren fig tree = Christians solo sermone = virgins chaste in their body but impure in their spirit) responds to the lack of epic similitudes within Avitus’ work, supplying biblical-moral terms for comparison. Thus, the poet imparts to his main readers, namely his sister Fuscina and those Christians who adopted an ascetic life following the Lerinian example, those biblical passages that are connected to chastity or, as in this case, to be read with regard to chastity, applying a kind of moral exegesis for his parenetical purposes.

In comparison with a mere ten verses used for the poetic retractatio of the Gospel passage, we can count in the In Euangelia of Severus 38 verses of exegetical aside (ll. 103–140). The centrality of the exegetical component is especially demonstrated by the plurality of interpretational suggestions made by the author. Like Avitus, who, however, does not follow up with the theological implications, Severus, following the hypotext of Mark, notes the fact that Christ’s search for fruits happens tempore non apto (l. 105), a parenthesis remark, which imposes on the reader the need to investigate further and go beyond the simple thaumaturgical deed. The Lord’s gesture, otherwise incomprehensible, displays the divine soteriological perspective (l. 107 quo cunctos doceat clementia numina sancta). The poet proposes at this point three different interpretational readings of the evangelical passage:

a. ll. 108–118. The fig tree recalls the tree of life, under which the original parents found shelter after eating the forbidden fruit, and with the leaves of which they covered their nudity. In the context of this figural reading, the drying of the tree represents the deliverance brought by Christ, who burdens himself with men’s sins, thus regenerating their hearts. This interpretation, widespread in the exegetis of the Fathers, is found, among others, also in Augustine; in serm. 122, commenting on the episode of Nathanael, the bishop of Hippo makes a comparison between the fig tree and the sin committed by Adam and Eve, identifying the tree as symbol of the sin⁵⁴.

b. To the first one, Severus adds a second exegetical suggestion introduced in l. 119 by ast alii credunt. According to others, in fact, in an eschatological sense, the

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⁵⁴ Cf. Aug. serm. 122.1: quod dictum audiuimus a Domino Iesu Christo Nathanaeli, si bene intellegamus, non ad ipsum pertinet solum. Ipse quippe Dominus Iesus sub ficu uidit omne genus humanum. Isto enim loco intelligitur per arborem fici significasse peccatum. Non ubique hoc significat, sed hoc loco, ut dixi, ea scilicet significandi congruentia, qua nostis primum hominem, quando peccavit, foliiis ficaliensis fuisseta substantia. His foliis enim pudenda texerunt, quando de peccato suo erubuerant; et quae Deus illis membra, ipsi sibi pudenda fecerunt [...] Hoc autem dixi, quare? Ut per ficum intellegamus significatum esse peccatum. Quid est ergo: Cum esses sub ficu, uidi te? Cum esses sub peccato, uidi te. Et ad rem gestam quidem respiciens, recordatus est Nathanael se fuisset sub ficu, ubi non erat Christus. Also in Kontakion 54.3 of Roman the Melodist the tree of the terrestrial paradise, origin of Adam’s sin, becomes the barren fig tree of the Gospel; cf. Catafygiotu Topping (1978) 22–35.
unexpected gesture of Christ would serve as a warning of future punishment that is in store for evil people at the end of times. This argument reflects the one proposed by Isidore of Pelusium in epistle 1,51 addressed to the tribune Theopompus (PG 78,213): The anti-Arian polemist, who participated in the council of Chalcedon, but was barely known in the West (except for Facundus of Hermiane and Rusticus Deacon), had probably been read by Severus in a Latin translation of Greek chains.

c. ll. 124–136. With an implicit allusion to Judas' treason, a warning to the apostle takes place, in order to deflect him from his intentions and to redeem him. This unusual link might imply an underlying reference to the words of Juvenecus, according to which Judas hangs himself from a fig tree. Whether this is an invention by Juvenecus or a popular legend is hard to say; the legend may actually have arisen from the curse of the fig tree, although already in antiquity this plant, for its wild nature, was considered the symbol of the φαρμακός, the cursed man who lives on the margins of society. However, the possibility must not be ruled out that Severus derived the detail of the fig tree linked with suicide from Juvenecus, in order to then create a link with the narrative of the cursed fig tree. The poet, anyway, clarifies in the statement of l. 137 diximus haec nostros sensus proferre volentes that this is a completely personal interpretation, not derived directly from any other source. In support of his own interpretation, the poet then builds a complex similitude (ll. 128–136) in which he compares Christ to a doctor who, in order to save the life of his dying patients, sacrifices some animals to extract from them the necessary medicine. The worthy purpose, then, justifies the otherwise unintelligible action, which happens sine crimen (l. 136). The refined similitude, which makes use of Greek medical sources, which the author may have read in Latin translation, also retrieves the traditional theme of the Christus medicus, widespread in Christian literature, especially Augustine, in connection with its soteriological and Christological doctrine. Nevertheless, on a literary level, the similitude, through which the poet enlarges and gives substance to his explanation, also matches the compositional characteristics of the epic genre.


56 The author is however the most ancient source of this version of the death of Judas.

57 See Colombi (1997) 32, who conjectures that Juvenecus followos popular legend in identifying the fig tree as the site of the suicide of Judas; Leone (2004) 92 refers vaguely to some apocryphal legends in which Judas hanged himself from a fig tree; McGill (2016) 264 quotes the Brescia Casket (ca. 394), which features a figure, probably Judas, hanging from an oak tree.


In any case, the exegetical effort of the author does not exhaust the multiple interpretative possibilities offered by the biblical text. And other interpretations will be given by other authors (ll. 138–139 *ast alias, quo quisque modo perquirere temptat, inueniet*). With the concluding picture, which compares the actions of Christ to precious gems, Severus not only recalls a biblical-patristic metaphor related to the Holy Scripture but also alludes to that preciosity typical of late antique artistic and literary aesthetic.

The usage of technical terminology related to the interpretational activity (“teach”, “research” or “study”) and the reutilisation of Lucretian expressions at ll. 137–140 confirm the didactic character of Severus’ poem. The didactic function, associated in the Gospels with Christ, is in the metaliterary play associated with the poet, who gives his readers a doctrinal and religious lesson. As Michele Cutino has poignantly pointed out in his recent work, the final link between the *gesta superna* (l. 139), which are an echo of the *Christi vitalia gesta* (l. 19) found in the preface of Juvenccus’ *Euanegeliarum libri*, and the need to interpret the actions of Christ in order to extrapolate a teaching from them symbolically marks the transition of the biblical paraphrasis from an epic-narrative modality to a fusion of epic and exegesis. With regard to Severus’ readers, what is conceivable is not exclusively a scholastic purpose, a context of monastic-presbyterial education, but also a larger audience, constituted by culturally elevated classes that are pressed by the doctrinal questions that emerged from the growth in theological thinking, which took place in the Latin west at that time.

## Conclusions

The poetic versions of the pericope, which reflect different literary sensitivities due to the changes in the socio-cultural contexts and the constantly new requirements of the readers, exemplify the evolution in the relationship between poetic expression and theological research and their reciprocal influence on each other. The initial phase of acquisition of the epic mode of expression having been overcome, which, due to the propagandistic need to spread the biblical text in palatable linguistic forms, imposed on Juvenccus a more literal paraphrasis, the poetic approach to the scriptures that starts with Sedulius offers a new form, characterised by metaliterary interventions aimed at an intra-scriptural, allegorical or spiritual exegesis. The biblical text, then, assumes a new context and a new function also in works that belong to literary genres different from the *Bibelepos*, as in the case of the *De Virginitate* of Avitus, or undergoes a strict exegetical analysis with additions that are no longer

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60 E.g., l. 137 *nostros sensus*: cf. Lucr. IV.111–112: *quoniam primordia tantum/ sunt infra nostros sensus*; l. 140 *quocumque modo*: cf. Lucr. II.774: *nam quocumque modo perturbes caerula, quae sint.*


only narrative, but tend to convey theological messages and to explain specific doctrinal aspects.

Appendix: Texts and Translations


17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany and stayed there. 18 Early in the morning, as Jesus was returning to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “Let there be no fruit from you henceforward forever!” Immediately the tree withered. 20 When the disciples saw this, they marveled and said: “How did [the fig tree] wither so quickly?”


12 And on the morrow, when he came out from Bethany, he hungered. 13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he went to see if anything was thereon; and he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season of figs. 14 And he said to it: “No man eat fruit from you henceforward forever”. And his disciples heard it [...]. 20 And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him: “Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which you cursed is withered away. 22 And Jesus answering said to them: “Have faith in God. 23 Verily I say to you, whoever shall say to this mountain: ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea’, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he said will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you: All things whatever you pray and ask for, believe2e that you will receive them, and they will be yours.


Talia Dauiticam post facta reliquerat urbem Bethanieae uicina petens, eademque reuersus clarescente die properabat usiere tecta. Ecce autem mediis astans sublimis in aruis frondea ficus erat, cuius in robore nullum reperit esuriens lustrato stipite pomum; arboreisque comis “iam nunc ex germine uesto nullus” ait “fructus reliquam generetur in aeuum”. Confestim uiduata suis ficulnea sucis aruit et siccis permansit mortis ramis. Omnis enim quicumque Deo nil fertile nutrit, ceu sterilis truncus lignis aequabtur ustis. At iustus palme similiis foerbit amoenae, semper habens frondes et tamquam Libana cedrus multiplicandus adest et uertice sidera tagnet. After such deeds, he left the city of David and headed for neighbouring Bethany. At daybreak, heading back to Jerusalem, he was hastening to look at the buildings. But, behold, towering in the middle of a field stood a leafy fig tree: hungry, he searched the branches of the tree, but he did not find any fruit. To the tree’s foliage he said: “Now, may never grow a fruit from your stock for all time”. Devoid of its sap, the fig tree suddenly withered and remained there, dead, with dried branches. For everyone who produces nothing fruitful for God, in fact, like a barren trunk, will be compared to wood that is burnt. But the righteous man will flourish like a luxuriant palm tree always in leaf and will grow tall like a cedar of Lebanon and touch the stars with his crown.
Esuriit quondam dominus, cum forte uianti conspicitur diffusa leui ficulnea fronde, nec iam maturum praedicta ex arbore fructum carpere tempus erat. Quam mox ut repperit ille indutam tantum foliis, sed germine nudam, prorsus inane uiens ornatus inutilis horret, percutitur subito radix adflata calore aruit et posito ramorum tegmine truncus. Instruimus tali legem cognoscere signo: ne Christi famulums olo sermone fatenti nomine conicto uius operatio desit. Nam si Christicolas nosmet sanctosque pute-mus, adgrauat hoc etiam, ni dictum facta sequantur. Sic et uirginitas sacro deuota pudori indigit adiunctis uirtutibus et, nisi mentem intactam seruans casto cum corpore iungat, concumbit uitiis nec castam dicere carnem iure test, animus quam sic corrumpit adul-ter.

Ira, furor, maeror, liuor, discordia, luxus, linguæ duplex, consticta manus, laxata uoluntas moechantur cum corde hominis, tum sem-ine turpi fetus mortis alunt. En quo perducitur omnis, nomine uirginæ quæ se dum iactitat, intus criminibus grauidam nescit turgescerem intem.

One day the Lord was hungry, when, by chance, he glimpsed on his way a wide fig tree with delicate foliage, but it was not yet the time to gather ripe fruits of the tree. As soon as he noticed that the tree was covered only in leaves but devoid of seeds, the worthless ornament, uselessly flourishing, stiffens, the roots are flooded and hit by a sudden warmth, the trunk, having lost the protection of the branches, dries out. From such a sign we learn the rule: The man who proclaims himself Christ’s disciple only in words, after having given himself such a name, must carry out good deeds in his life. For if we consider ourselves Christians and pious, it is even more unjustifiable if our deeds do not follow our words. Thus, chastity, too, devoted to holy demureness, needs other virtues to be added and, if it does not preserve a pure spirit to join it to a chaste body, it lies with the vices and cannot rightfully call chaste the flesh thus corrupted by an adulterous soul. Wrath, insanity, affliction, envy, discord, lust, a duplicitous tongue, a chained hand, an uncontrolled will fornicate with men’s hearts and then, with their shameful seed, feed deadly fetuses. Behold, where every woman is conducted who, while boasting about her virginity, does not know that inside herself a sinful spirit is growing.

The righteous creator then arrived in Bethany and stayed there with the disciples; the following day, heading to the city, he began to look for food. He moved close to an isolated fig tree, and, not finding any fruit there (it was not the right time!), with his word made the branches, which flourished on the tree, wither, saying these words: “You will not grow any fruit ever again!” The tree withered even faster than the words. Seeing this deed, the disciples, frightened, began to praise the eternal word, which accomplishes everything. This action, too, carried out through a miracle by the one who knows all past events, offers ex-
Hoc quoque tractanti praebet documenta decora, quod signo fecit, qui scitum cuncta priora. Tempore non apto fructum perquirere coepit ostendens maius sese perficiere ulle, quo cunctos doceat clementia numina sancta. Nam ficus fuit ista, prius quae stabat in horto regis iussa gerens, ne sumatp rimus; et illum forma repens quoniam legi succumbere fecit et foliis caelare sua iam turpia membra, haec post porrectum supero querente peremptum, nunc ideo damnata suum dimisit honorem. Quae male praestiterat fructum et docebat a Christo siccata docet, quod cuncta reformat primitias scelerum sumens (quae fecit iniquus sic suadens homini legem calculare supernam) euoluens sceleri mortalia corda subacta. Ast alii credunt Christum siccasse, suapte ut doceat se posse feros damnare, quod illi credebant Christum solum perficere, nolle et punire malos: “hominem non perdit, eo quod ipse deus dixit semet concedere cuncta.” Atque ideo fecit: uoluit cohibere apacem, ne se perdat amens prodens per lucram cognoscens ipsum posse et damnare nefandos ex ipsis rebus sesque recollisat ardens. Ast medicus, hominum custos, sanare uoluit occulta quos pestis agit, perosse praetemptat membrorum positus, solitamque adhiberem e-delam vestigat pecudum quidquid sic possidet artus ceu mortale genus, et uscera uiua recludens porcorum morte uitam languentibus affert: debile sic Christus proprii cum cepit inopsque discipuli, uoluit damnata sub arboe firmum efficere ramosque ideo sine crimine siccat. Diximus haec nostris sensus proferre uolentes; ast alios, quo quisque modo perquirere temp-tat, inueniet, gemmae quoniam sunt gesta superna, quae, quocumque modo tractantur, pulchra uidentur. cellent teachings to those who investigate. He started to look for fruits at an unseasonable time, showing his will to accomplish an even greater deed, with the purpose to certify in front of everyone the mercy of the holy numen. This was, in fact, the fig tree that once stood in the garden and carried the King’s order that the protoplast might not take anything from it; and, since a sudden figure made him yield to the law and led him to cover his limbs, by then shameful, with its leaves, it tore him down and killed him for divine complaint; therefore, it has now, damned, lost its crown. This fig tree, which in the past had carried bad fruits and leaves, made barren by Christ, teaches that He renews everything taking the first fruits of sin (which the devil produced, thus persuading man to trample on divine law) and freeing the mortals’ hearts subjugated to it. On the other hand, others believe that Christ made the tree wither to teach that he could by himself damn those who are evil, because they thought that Christ wanted to perfect those who are evil and not to punish them: “He does not annihilate man, because God himself says that He forgives everything”. And he did it also for this reason: He wanted to discourage the greedy so that he, mad, would not lose himself betraying his master for money and so that he, being aware that He can also punish the sacrilegious, would, terrified, give up on this purpose. Like a doctor, guardian of men, intending to heal whoever is afflicted by an internal disease, tries at first to recognize the position of the limbs and to use the usual healing method, namely investigating every animal that has similar limbs to the human ones and, opening the entrails alive, gives life to his patients through the death of the pigs, in the same way Christ, when he noticed the weakness and gullibility of his disciples, wanted to strengthen them through the example of the cursed fig tree; therefore, he, without guilt, lets the branches wither. We have said such things with the intent to report our thought, but whoever tries to investigate in any way will find other interpretations, because divine deeds are like gems; however they are interpreted, they will look marvelous.
Bibliographie


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