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Descent and Ascent in the 8th Hymn of Synesius of Cirene*

1 Introduction

When the lyric poet Anacreon (6th century BC) wrote a poem on the end of life, he had death and the journey to the place where the dead go in mind. This poem is reproduced below in text (1). Let us read it:

(1) Anacreon¹

	πολιοὶ μὲν ἡμῖν ἤδη κρόταφοι κάρη τε λευκόν, χαρίεσσα δ' οὐκέτ' ἦβη 5 πάρα, γηραλέοι δ' ὀδόντες, γλυκεροῦ δ' οὐκέτι πολλὸς βίотου χρόνος λείπεται διὰ ταῦτ' ἀνασταλύζω θαμὰ Τάρταρον δεδοικώς· Ἄϊδεω γάρ ἐστι δεινὸς 10 μυχός, ἀργαλῇ δ' ἐς αὐτὸν κάτοδος· καὶ γὰρ ἐτοῖμον καταβάντι μὴ ἀναβῆναι	"My temples are ready grey; and my head is white, graceful youth is no more with me, my theeth are old, and no long span of sweet life remains now. And so I often weep in fear of Tartarus: for the recess of Hades is grim, and the road down to it grievous; and it is certain that he who goes down not come up again

Many centuries later, Synesius of Cirene (370 – 413 AD) wrote his so-called 8th Hymn, in which he presents a man who descends into the Tartarus and, after releasing the spirits of dead people, ascends out of there.² The poem continues with the ascent, supposedly of that same man, to the upper places of kosmos. This man was the γόνος παρθένου, the son of the Virgin, Jesus.

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1 In Stob. *Ecl.* IV.51.12 Ἀνακρέοντος· πολ. κτλ. The Greek text and its English translation have been taken from the edition of Campbell (1988) 78–81, poem 395.

2 According to von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1907) 277–78 Synesius had quite probably read the poems of Anacreon. Garzya (1989) 793 points out certain influences of Anacreon 34, 1–3 (West) in Synes. *Hymn.* 9. Therefore, it is not impossible that Synesius had read Anacreon's poem presented in (1).

Scriptural support for Jesus' visit to the place where dead people go can be found in the First Letter of Peter, (see texts (2) and (3)).

(2)

¹⁸ ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν [ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν] ἀπέθανεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσάγῃ τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι. ¹⁹ ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, ²⁰ ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ, εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος⁴ (1Pt 3.18–20)

¹⁸ Because Christ once went through pain for sins, the upright one taking the place of sinners, so that through him we might come back to God; being put to death in the flesh, but given life in the Spirit; ¹⁹ By whom he went to the spirits in prison, preaching to those who, ²⁰ in the days of Noah, went against God's orders; but God in his mercy kept back the punishment, while Noah got ready the ark, in which a small number, that is to say eight persons, got salvation through water".⁵

(3)

εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι (1Pt 4.6)

"For this was the reason why the good news of Jesus was given even to the dead, so that they might be judged as men in the flesh but might be living before God in the spirit".

In text (2), Peter says that Jesus died in the flesh, was given life in the Spirit, and, in this Spirit, he went (πορευθεὶς) to the spirits in prison and preached to those who in ancient times were against God, whom Peter calls spirits (πνεύμασιν). The purpose of this journey and preaching is that men come back to God. In text (3), Peter talks about the preaching to the dead, who are called now νεκροῖς.⁶

But the poem of Synesius is not a mere paraphrasis of Peter's texts. It is rather an original poem where the influence⁷ of Neoplatonism, Chaldean Oracles, apocryphal gospels,⁸ etc., can be found. This influence has already been studied, in particular regarding the ascent (vv. 31–71), by several scholars, such as, Theiler (1942), Smolak (1971), Gruber/Strohm (1991) 226–30, Seng (1996) 367–90 or Baldi (2011) 148–52. Therefore, I will not focus on these points, but try to show how Synesius had the pre-

³ Other references to Jesus' stay in the place of the dead after his own death: Mt 12.40, Hch. 2.24, (where the word θανάτου is substituted by ᾄδου in some traditions, cf. footnote 6 of Aland *et al.* 2000: 413), Hch. 2.31, Rm 10.7, Ef 4.8–10, etc. In the Gospel According to John there are also man references to the ascent and descent of Jesus, cf. Schneider (1987).

⁴ The Greek texts of the NT have been taken from Metzger/Wikgren (1968).

⁵ The English translations of the NT have been taken from Hooke (1982).

⁶ The interpretation of these texts and the beginnings of Jesus' *descensus ad inferos* has been briefly exposed in Grillmeier (1965) 86–89. Cf. also Colpe (1996) and Colpe *et al.* (1996).

⁷ Smolak (1971) 30 talks about a "kontaminatorisch Technik". This seems to be the case in this Hymn.

⁸ Like the *Euangelium Nicodemi*, cf. Garzya (1989) 789 and García Romero (1993) 93.

vious Greek literary tradition in mind, where some mythological hero visits the place of the dead or Underworld.⁹ The most famous heroes to make such a journey are Odysseus, Heracles, Theseus, with Peirithous, and Orpheus,¹⁰ and their voyages are the subject of a good deal of Greek poetry and Mythography.¹¹ Scholars have suggested in previous studies that, in this Hymn, Jesus may be understood as a new Heracles or a new Orpheus.¹² Of all the possible parallels, I have chosen two heroes and two poems to compare with Synesius' 8th Hymn: Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 and Heracles in Bacchylides' 5th victory-ode. I do not intend to be exhaustive on the subject. I will make only some remarks that may highlight the similarities and motifs of Jesus' journey to the place of the dead in the 8th Hymn and the journeys of Odysseus and Heracles.¹³

This paper will be structured as follows: section 2 will present the 8th Hymn in Ancient Greek with an English translation; its structure, meter and language. Section 3 will focus on the descent to Tartarus in Synesius' Hymn and compare it with the journey of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 and the κατάβασις of Heracles in Bacchylides' 5th Victory-Ode. Finally, in section 4, I will summarize the main conclusions.

⁹ The ἀνάβασις described in vv. 31–71 of this poem has been extensively and successfully studied by many scholars, for instance Terzaghi (1939) 266–69, Smolak (1971), Vollenweider (1985) 147–51, Seng (1996) 367–90, Baldi (2011) 148–52. Therefore, I will not focus on this part of the 8th Hymn.

¹⁰ Cf. Ganschietz (1919) 2398–2408, Graf/Brändle (1999), and Colpe/Habermehl (1996) 505–514. For a non-typical journey to Hades cf. Herrero (2011).

¹¹ For Odysseus cf. Hom. *Od.* XI; for Heracles cf. Hom. *Il.* VIII.366–368, *Od.* XI.623–625, B. V.56–84, E. *HF* 23, 1227; D.S. IV.25.1, 26.1; Paus. II.31.2; 35.10; III.18.13; 25.5, V.26.7; IX.34.5; Str. VIII.5.1; Apollod. *Bibliotheca* II.5.12, X. *An.* VI.2.2.; Palaeph. 39; for Theseus cf. Hes. *fr.* 280 M-W, Paus. IX.31.5, D.S. IV.63; Plut. *Thes.* 35; Apollod. *Bibliotheca* II.12; *epit.* 1.24; for Orpheus cf. E. *Alc.* 357, etc.

¹² Cf. Terzaghi (1939) 262 and 264, Strohm (1965) 53, Lacombrade (1978) 21, Bregman (1982) 122, Vollenweider (1985) 147, Gruber/Strohm (1991) 225–226, Barkhuizen (1993) 270–71, Seng (1996) 373, Baldi (2011) 146.

¹³ According to Kayser (1956) 56: “Was ausserhalb eines literarischen Werkes in eigener Überlieferung lebt und nun auf seinen Inhalt gewirkt hat, heist Stoff. Der Stoff ist immer an bestimmte Figuren gebunden, ist vorgangsmässig und zeitlich und räumlich mehr oder weniger fixiert”. On the other hand Kayser (1956) 59 says that; “(Die Motive) stellen Einheiten dar, die in den verschiedenartigsten Zusammenhängen erschienen”; and: “Das Motiv ist eine sich wiederholende, typische und das heisst also menschlich bedeutungsvolle Situation” (Kayser (1956) 60). Alsina (1991) 496 calls them “pequeños rasgos comunes”. Finally, “Die einzelnen konkreten Ausfüllungen in dem jeweiligen Motiv bezeichnet man als Zug” (Kayser (1956) 60). Therefore, in the theoretical framework proposed by Kayser, in these three poems we are in front of three “Stoffe”: the journey to the underworld of Odysseus, of Heracles and the one of Jesus. They share some are “Motive”, namely, the descent, the Fear, the Toil, the relation between the one who descends alive and corporeal and the incorporeal souls of the dead, the salvation. The differences in the development of the “Motive” are the “Züge”. For the motifs of the 8th Hymn (Fear, Salvation, etc.) cf. Barkhuizen (1993) and Smolak (1971) 9–26, especially for the “Himmelfahrt”.

2 The 8th Hymn of Synesius of Cirene

2.1 Greek text and English translation of the 8th Hymn

We will begin with the 8th Hymn in its original Greek version and an English translation of it:¹⁴

(4) The 8th Hymn:

	Πολυήρατε, κύδιμε, σέ, μάκαρ, γόνε παρθένου ὕμνῳ Σολυμηΐδος, ὃς τὰν δολίαν πάγαν, 5 χθόνιον μεγάλων ὄφιν πατρὸς ἤλασας ὀρχάτων, ὃς καρπὸν ἀπώμοτον, τροφὸν ἀργαλέου μόρου, πόρεν ἀρχεγόνῳ κόρῃ.	<i>Most beloved august Offspring of the Virgin of Solyma, to Thee, Blessed One, I sing. Thou hast expelled the serpent of the earth, that fountain-head of treachery, from the garden of the Father, even the serpent who offered the abjured fruit, nourisher of troublous destiny, to the primal youth.</i>
10	Στεφανηφόρε, κύδιμε, σέ, πάτερ, παῖ παρθένου ὕμνῳ Σολυμηΐδος. Κατέβας μέχρι καὶ χθονὸς ἐπίδημος ἐφαμέροις βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας κατέβας δ' ὑπὸ Τάρταρα ψυχᾶν ὅθι μυρία 15 θάνατος νέμεν ἔθνεα· φρίξεν σε γέρων τότε Αἴδας ὁ παλαιγενής, καὶ λαοβόρος κύων, <***>ὁ βαρυσθενής, [δημοβόρος] ¹⁵ ἀνεχάσσαστο βηλοῦ. λύσας δ' ἀπὸ πημάτων 25 ψυχᾶν ὁσίους χορούς, θιάσοις σὺν ἀκηράτοις ὕμνους ἀνάγεις πατρί. Στεφανηφόρε, κύδιμε, σε, πάτερ, παῖ παρθένου 30 ὕμνῳ Σολυμηΐδος.	<i>To Thee I sing, Illustrious Father, that wearest the crown, Son of the Virgin of Solyma. Thou didst descend even to the earth, sojourner of a day, bearing a mortal body, and didst go down beneath to Tartarus, where death reigned over nations of souls in thousands. And then shuddered at Thee the aged ancient Hades, and his hound, the devourer of man, drew back from the threshold; and Thou, delivering choirs of righteous souls from their woes, dost raise, with unpolluted bands, hymns to the Father. To Thee I sing, Illustrious Father, that wearest the crown, Son of the Virgin of Solyma. The boundless races of demons</i>

¹⁴ The Greek text of the 8th Hymn has been taken from the edition of Dell'Era (1968) 147–53 and the English translation is the one of Fitzgerald (1930). This hymn forms a group with the 6th and 7th Hymns. According to Lacombrade (1978) 93 this hymn was written short time before or during his episcopate.

¹⁵ Garzya (1989) 788 says: “Δημοβόρος è manifesta glossa al precedente λαόβορος e si è concordi nell'espungerla”. In the same sense cf. Lacombrade (1978) 95.

Ἀνιόντα σε, κοίρανε,
 τὰ κατ' ἡέρος ἄσπετα
 τρέσεν ἔθνεα δαιμόνων·
 θάμβησε δ' ἀκηράτων
 35 χορὸς ἄμβροτος ἀστέρων·
 αἰθὴρ δὲ γελάσας,
 σοφὸς ἁρμονίας πατήρ,
 ἐξ ἑπτατόνου λύρας
 ἐκεράσαστο μουσικᾶν
 40 ἐπινίκιον ἐς μέλος.
 μείδησεν Ἑωσφόρος,
 ὁ διάκτορος ἡμέρας,
 καὶ χρύσεος Ἑσπερος,
 Κυθερήϊος ἀστήρ·
 45 ἃ μὲν κερόεν σέλας
 πλήσασα ρόου πυρὸς
 ἀγέιτο σελάνα,
 ποιμὴν νυχίων θεῶν·
 τὰν δ' εὐρυφαῖη κόμαν
 50 Τιτὰν ἐπετάσαστο
 ἄρρητον ὑπ' ἵχνιον,
 ἔγνω δὲ γόνον θεοῦ,
 τὸν ἀριστοτέχνην νόον,
 ἰδίου πυρὸς ἀρχάν.
 55 Σὺ δὲ ταρσὸν ἐλάσσας
 κυανάντυγος οὐρανοῦ
 ὑπερήλαο νώτων,
 σφαίρησι δ' ἐπεστάθης
 νοεραῖσιν ἀκηράτοις,
 60 ἀγαθῶν ὅθι παγά,
 σιγώμενος οὐρανός.
 Ἔνθ' οὔτε βαθύρροος
 ἀκαμαντοπόδας χρόνος
 χθονὸς ἔκγονα σύρων,
 65 οὐ κῆρες ἀναιδέες
 βαθυκύμονος ὕλας·
 ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἀγήραος
 αἰὼν ὁ παλαιγενής,
 νέος ὦν ἅμα καὶ γέρων,
 70 τᾶς ἀενάω μονᾶς
 ταμίας πέλεται θεοῖς.

throughout the air trembled
 at Thy ascent, O King.
 The ambrosial choir of the stars
 immaculate was seized with awe;
 and ether laughing,
 wise father of harmony,
 blended upon the seven-stringed lyre
 a hymn of victory
 to Thy might.
 The harbinger of dawn smiled,
 the messenger of day,
 and golden Hesperus,
 the star of Cythera.
 The moon filling
 with a stream of fire its horned light,
 led the way,
 the shepherd of the gods of night.
 Titan spread out
 his far-flaming hair
 under the ineffable track,
 and recognized the Offspring of God,
 Mind, the Artificer of all that is best,
 and the origin of his own flame.
 But Thou, in winged flight,
 didst leap over the black
 of the azure sky,
 and didst take Thy place amongst the
 inviolate spheres of the Mind,
 wherein is the fountain of good things, the
 heaven that is kept secret,
 where there is neither deep-flowing
 time that draggeth with untiring foot
 the offspring of the earth,
 nor the shameless destinies
 of matter's billowy depths,
 but an age born of the distant past, though
 ageless itself,
 old and yet withal ever young,
 is to the gods the guardian
 of their eternal mansion.

2.2 Structure

This Hymn seems to present a very clear structure. I will follow partially the proposal of Baldi (2011) 115–16.

(5) Structure of the 8th Hymn, cf. Baldi (2011) 115–16:

vv. 1–3	Adresse (Refrain)	
vv. 4–9	Banishment of the serpent from Paradise	
vv. 10–12	Refrain	
vv. 13–27	vv. 13–15 Reference to incarnation vv. 16–27 Descent into hells and liberation of souls	
vv. 28–30	Refrain	
vv. 31–71	vv. 31–54 Ascent through the sensible cosmos:	v. 33 demons of the air v. 35 chorus of the stars vv. 36–37 Ether v. 41 Ἐωσφόρος v. 43 Ἑσπερος v. 47 σελάνα v. 50 Τίτάν (the Sun)
	vv. 55–71 Entrance in heaven that is kept secret	

The Hymn begins with an invocation to the addressee (1–9),¹⁶ Jesus, who is identified through epithets (vv. 1–2 πολυήρατε, κύδιμε (...) μάκαρ), especially γόνε παρθένου (...) Σολυμηΐδος (vv. 2–3). These 3 first verses are the refrain, that will suffer some modification in vv. 10–12 and 28–30. After this first version of the refrain, Synesius mentions the expulsion of the serpent from Paradise, labor of the γόνος παρθένου (...) Σολυμηΐδος in this Hymn. After that, in vv. 10–12 the refrain is repeated with some alterations: hereafter, the epithet πολυήρατε (v. 1) will be changed into στεφανηφόρε (vv. 10 and 28), which anticipates the victory of Jesus in hell. Now, Jesus is not called μάκαρ (v. 2), but πάτερ (v. 11).¹⁷ On the other hand, he is son, but he is not invoked as γόνε (v. 2) but as πᾶϊ (v. 11). Vv. 13–15 refer to the incarnation as if it were a descent to Earth bearing a mortal body (v. 15 βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας). Vv. 16–25 present the *descensus ad inferos* and the liberation of souls. The place into which Jesus descends is beneath the Tartarus (v. 16. κατέβας δ' ὑπὸ Τάρταρα), where Death reigns over many nations of souls (vv. 17–18). Hades is frightened by the presence of Jesus, and Cerberus draws back (vv. 19–23). Then, Jesus releases the souls

¹⁶ The whole Hymn is in Du-Stil, which, according to Strohm (1965) 52, approaches the hymn to the sphere of the prayer, cf. also Norden (1913) 157–60.

¹⁷ Garzya (1989) 788 seems to interpret it so: “il poeta insiste sulla perfetta uguaglianza delle ipostasi”.

from their woes (vv. 24–25). After this follows a brief transition (vv. 26–27) to the ascent: here the hymns raised by Jesus and the souls to the Father are mentioned. In vv. 28–30 we find again the same refrain of vv. 10–12 and, finally, in vv. 31–72 Jesus, or his *voũς* (v. 53 *vóov*), ascends through the spheres to the upmost part of the world, the heaven that is kept secret, and Synesius makes a rough description of this place. To sum up, in this poem there are two parts to be distinguished: first, the descent into the place of dead (including the banishment of the serpent from Paradise) (vv. 1–30) and secondly, the ascent to the upmost parts of the world (vv. 31–71).

Although certain authors, like Seng (1996) 376–77, have put some effort into highlighting the unity of both parts of the Hymn, Baldi (2011) 144–55 has demonstrated that we are actually in front of two poems that were put together sometime in the course of the manuscript tradition. His analysis reveals the thematic, stylistic and metrical differences of both parts and, mainly, the evidence offered by the codex Vat. Gr. 1390, of the 13th century,¹⁸ which clearly shows by the organization of the Greek text in the manuscript that the so-called 8th Hymn of Synesius is formed, actually, by two Hymns: 8a (vv. 1–30) + 8b (31–71).

2.3 Meter

The meter of this Hymn has been interpreted in different ways: as a kind of *telesillean*¹⁹ or, even better, as an *anapestic-iambic demeter*.²⁰ According to Seng (1996) 344–46, its basic scheme in this Hymn is the one of (6) and (7):²¹

(6) uu –uu– u x

(7) uu –uu– x

2.4 Language

The language in this hymn is full of classical reminiscences,²² but it is also possible to recognize a slight doric flavor²³ in it, as can be seen in (8) and in (9)

¹⁸ Cf. Pérez (1996) 346.

¹⁹ About this meter cf. Koster (1936) 183–85.

²⁰ Cf. Terzaghi (1939) XXXII–XXXIII and, specially, Baldi (2011) 116–24, where the author summarizes all the proposals presented up to date.

²¹ Cf. also Gruber/Strohm (1991) 35. A brief study on the relation of this meter and the hymns of Synesius with the previous Christian poetry and the byzantine poetry is in Polo (2014) 123–24.

²² According to Baldi (2011) 146 Synesius uses in this Hymn “un linguaggio particolarmente intriso di reminiscenze classiche”.

(8) Long a-vowels [a:] where ionic has [ɛ:]: v. 4: τὰν δολίαν πάγαν;²⁴ v. 13, 16: Κατέβας; v. 14: ἐφαμέροις.

(9) Genitive plural of a-stem in [-â:n]: v. 17, 25 ψυχᾶν.

It is also possible to find features of the epic language, as it is usual in the Greek poetic tradition,²⁵ topic on which I will focus in the next section.

3 The descent into Tartarus

As I mentioned in the first section, it is my aim to highlight some elements in the 8th Hymn of Synesius that can be related to previous depictions in Greek poetry of heroic journeys to the place of the dead.

Therefore, in this section I will focus on some language usages in the 8th Hymn that remind of the language of epic poetry, where heroes were the main characters.

Then I will summarize the features of the journeys to the place of the dead that can be found in the poem of Anacreon, in order to contrast them with the journeys of heroes in *Odyssey* 11 and Bacchylides' Ode. I will finish this section comparing the features of Odysseus' and Heracles' journeys with those of Jesus' descent.

3.1 Epic language:²⁶

As is well known, the language of the Homeric Epic influenced the Greek poetry that came after *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,²⁷ and the language of the 8th Hymn is no exception, because it is possible to find in it, at least, the Homeric features presented in (10) to (14).

(10) Epithet: κύδιμε (v. 1)

Κύδιμος was an epithet of the god Hermes²⁸ in the poetry composed in epic style. Besides, one of the responsibilities of this god was to accompany men in their journeys,

²³ Cf. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1907) 277. About the dorian dialect in literary texts cf. Horrocks (2010) 53–54 and Colvin (2007) 44–47.

²⁴ This word presents the same phonetics in Aeolic.

²⁵ Cf. Horrocks (2010) 49.

²⁶ Cf. Chantraine (1948)

²⁷ Cf. Adrados (1999) 88 and, specially, Horrocks (2010) 44–59.

²⁸ Cf. *h.Merc.* 46, *Hes. Th.* 938.

like Priamus when he visits Achilles in *Iliad*.²⁹ Another duty of Hermes was to accompany the souls of the dead in their journey to Hades.³⁰ Therefore, the use of κύδιμος for Jesus in this very first verse could suggest the idea of the journey to the place of the dead, preparing the catabatic flavor of the first part of the hymn.

(11) Word formation: Σολυμηΐδος (vv. 3, 12, 30), λαοβόρος (v. 21), βαρυσθενής (v. 22)

Synesius invents an adjective that is applied to the mother of Jesus, Σολυμηΐδος. It is usually interpreted as “Jerusalemite”. Synesius joins σόλουμα, the second part of Ἱεροσόλουμα, to the Homeric suffix -ηιος.³¹

The compound λαοβόρος, a hapax with which Synesius³² designates Cerberus, could be interpreted as a variation of δημοβόρος,³³ used in Hom. *Il.* 1.231 with the same meaning but used by Homer with regard to the hero Agamemnon.

Finally, as for βαρυσθενής, “das seltene Wort βαρυσθενής in h. VIII 22, wohl auf den Kerberos bezogen, ist gebildet nach dem Muster zahlreicher Götterattribute auf -σθενής”.³⁴

Therefore Synesius, with this word construction, evokes the epic language.

Other words yield a Homeric coloring as in (12):

(12) Homeric words or homeric usages:³⁵ δολίαν (v. 4) βρότεον (v. 15), δέμας (v. 15), ὄθι (v. 17), ἀνεχάσματο (v. 23), πημάτων (v. 24)

Δολίαν (v. 4) “treacherous”. This adjective is used in *Odyssey* combined with substantives such as κύκλον,³⁶ ἔπεα³⁷ or τέχνη,³⁸ expressing someone’s aim to prevail over an enemy.

βρότεον (v. 15) “mortal” is the Homeric adjective for βρότειος, -ον.³⁹

δέμας (v. 15) is used by Homer for designating the bodily frame.⁴⁰ Synesius could have used σῶμα or σάρξ to refer to the corporeity of man, but he prefers a Homeric word.

29 Cf. Hom. *Il.* XXIV.334–347; 440–448; 457–467. Priamus’ journey has been interpreted as short of κατάβασις by Herrero (2011).

30 Cf. Hom. *Od.* 24.1–10.

31 Cf. Seng (1996) 216–127.

32 Cf. Seng (1996) 391.

33 Cf. Seng (1996) 304. For the difficulties of the verse 22 cf. Gruber/Strohm (1991) 226.

34 Seng (1996) 70–71.

35 For the words of (12) and the references to the Homeric text cf. Liddell *et al.* (1996).

36 Cf. Hom. *Od.* IV.792, in a comparison, men in circle vs. a lion.

37 Cf. Hom. *Od.* IX.282, Odysseus vs. the Cyclops

38 Cf. Hom. *Od.* IV.455; 529, Proteus vs. Menelaus and his comrades.

39 Cf. Gruber/Strohm 1991: 225 for the metrical and textual difficulties of this verse.

40 Cf. Hom. *Il.* V.801; *Od.* VIII.116.

ἀνεχάσσατο (v. 23), this aorist is written in its epic form and it is used in *Iliad* for designating the withdrawal of some warrior.⁴¹

πημάτων (v. 24) is also used in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* for expressing misery, calamity.⁴²

Other epic words are πολυήρατε (v. 1),⁴³ ορχάτων (v. 6).⁴⁴

Further linguistic features of the Homeric language are the lack of augment in imperfect and aorist,⁴⁵ as in (13), or the lack of contraction,⁴⁶ as in (14).

(13) Lack of augment: πόρεν (v. 9), νέμεν (v. 18), φρίξεν (v. 19)

(14) Lack of contraction: ἔθνεα (v. 18)

In conclusion, the language used in the part of Jesus' κατάβασις in the 8th Hymn contributes to create an epic atmosphere.

3.2 Anacreon's descent into Tartarus

As we already saw in text (1), it is possible to recognize in it some features of the journey to the place of the dead, summarized in (15):

(15) Features of Anacreon's view of the descent into Tartarus:

Status of the one who goes to Tartarus: dead

Name of the place of the dead: Τάρταρον (v. 8), Αἴδew (v. 9)

Fear: δεδοικώς (v. 9), δεινός μυχός (vv. 9–10)

Toil: ἀργαλὴ κάτοδος (vv. 10–11)

Direction of the journey: κάτοδος (v. 11), καταβάντι (v. 12), μὴ ἀναβῆναι (v. 12)

The features that are recognizable in Anacreon's Victory-Ode contrast with the features of the journey of the hero to the place of the dead, as it will be shown in the following sections.

⁴¹ Cf. Hom. *Il.* VII.264; XV.728; XVI.819; XVII.47.

⁴² Cf. Hom. *Il.* XI.347; XV.721; XVII.688; XXIV.547; *Od.* II.163; III.152; V.179; XIV.338.

⁴³ Cf. Hom. *Od.* XV.126; Hes. *Th.* 404.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hom. *Od.* VII.112.

⁴⁵ Cf. Chantraine 1948: 481.

⁴⁶ Cf. Chantraine 1948: 208.

3.3 Odysseus' journey in Hom. *Od.* XI

In the 11th book of *Odyssey*,⁴⁷ Odysseus and his companions sail until the end of Oceanus, where the land of the Cimmerians is “wrapped in mist and cloud” (Hom. *Od.* 11.15), the sun does not shine and it is always night. He makes this journey in order to consult the dead Tiresias about the future. Circe ordered him to do so in Hom. *Od.* 10.487–540. I will highlight only the points that I found relevant for my purposes.

When Odysseus arrives to the land of the Cimmerians, he “dug a pit of a cubit’s length (...) and around it poured a libation to all the dead” (Hom. *Od.* 11.25–26) (milk, honey, wine and water). After that, he sprinkled barley meal and entreated the dead, as can be seen in (16).

(16)

τοὺς δ’ ἐπεὶ εὐχολῆσι λιτῆσί τε, ἔθνεα νεκρῶν, / ἐλλισάμην (Hom. *Od.* XI.34–35)

“But when with vows and prayers I had made supplication to the tribes of the dead”.⁴⁸

Immediately after, he sacrificed sheep, and the souls (ψυχαί) of the dead came out of the place of the dead, called Erebus, as in (17).

(17)

αἱ δ’ ἀγέροντο / ψυχαὶ ὑπὲς Ἑρέβους νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων (Hom. *Od.* 11.36–37)

“Then there gathered from out of Erebus the spirits of those that are dead”.

Therefore, it is not properly a κατάβασις, but an ascent of the souls of the dead from Erebus to the place where Odysseus dug a pit in the land of the Cimmerians.⁴⁹ Properly said, it is a νέκυια. The souls tried to drink the blood dropped at the sacrifice of sheep. In this moment, Odysseus, fighting with his sword, struggles to drive the souls away from the blood, until Tiresias arrives. Let us read (18):

(18)

οἱ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος / θεσπεσίη ἰαχῇ· ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει. / δὴ τότε ἔπειθ’ ἐτάροισιν ἐποτρύνας ἐκέλευσα / μῆλα, τὰ δὴ κατέκειτ’ ἐσφαγμένα νηλεὶ χαλκῷ, / δει-

⁴⁷ The structure of this 11th book of *Odyssey* and the place of Odysseus journey in it has been well described by de Jong (2001) 271–312.

⁴⁸ The Greek texts and English translations of *Odyssey* have been taken from the edition of Murray (1984).

⁴⁹ Cf. Bowra (1952) 81. Nevertheless it is usually considered as a κατάβασις, cf. de Jong (2001) 271 who calls it “Odysseus’ descent into the Underworld”.

ραντας κατακῆαι, ἐπέυξασθαι δὲ θεοῖσιν, / ἰφθίμῳ τ' Αἴδη καὶ ἐπαινῇ Περσεφονείῃ· / αὐτὸς δὲ
ξίφος ὄξυ ἔρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ / ἤμην οὐδ' εἶων νεκύων ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα / αἵματος
ἄσπον ἵμεν, πρὶν Τειρεσίαο πυθέσθαι (Hom. *Od.* XI.42–50)

“These came thronging in crowds about the pit from every side, with a wondrous cry; a pale fear seized me. Then I called to my comrades and bade them flay and burn the sheep that lay there slain with the pitiless bronze, and to make prayer to the gods, to mighty Hades and dread Persephone. And I myself drew my sharp sword from beside my thigh and sat there, and would not suffer the powerless heads of the dead to draw near to the blood until I had enquired of Teiresias”.

As we can see, the souls came in crowds, Odysseus is afraid, and two characters of the Underworld are mentioned: Hades and Persephone, the king of the Underworld and his wife. After that, he speaks with the spirits of the dead, like Elpenor, Tiresias or Anticlea. During the talk he holds with his mother, Odysseus paradoxically says:

(19)

μητέρα ἐμή, χρεῖώ με κατήγαγεν εἰς Αἴδαο / ψυχῇ χρησόμενον Θηβαίου Τειρεσίαο (Hom. *Od.* XI.164–165)

“My mother, necessity brought me down to the house of Hades, to seek soothsaying of the spirit of Theban Teiresias”.

Odysseus uses the verb κατάγω “bring down”. Therefore, he understands in some sense his journey as a κατάβασις.⁵⁰ Besides, the immaterial status of the dead can be seen in the text of (20):

(20)

μητρός ἐμῆς ψυχὴν ἐλέειν κατατεθνηυῖς. / τρίς μὲν ἐφωρμήθην, ἐλέειν τέ με θυμὸς ἀνώγει, /
τρίς δέ μοι ἐκ χειρῶν σκιὴ εἴκελον ἦ καὶ ὄνείρῳ / ἔπτατ' (Hom. *Od.* XI.205–208)

“I was fain to clasp the spirit of my dead mother. Thrice I sprang towards her, and my heart bade me clasp her, and thrice she flitted from my arms like a shadow or a dream”.

Several verses after, when Odysseus speaks with Achilles, the latter uses the verb κατέρχομαι in order to designate Odysseus' journey in (21). Therefore, Achilles seems to understand the journey as a κατάβασις.

(21)

πῶς ἔτλης Αἰδόςδε κατελθέμεν, ἔνθα τε νεκροὶ / ἀφραδέες ναίουσι, βροτῶν εἶδωλα καμόντων; (Hom. *Od.* XI.475–476)

⁵⁰ Heubeck/Hoekstra (1990) 75 talk about the hypothesis of “an older *nekuomanteia* (that) has been conflated with the poetic conception of a heroic katabasis”. Cf. also Herrero (2011) 39, with further bibliography.

“How didst thou dare to come down to Hades, where dwell the unheeding dead, the phantoms of men outworn?”.

Finally, at the end of the 11th book, Odysseus returns by going out of the place of the dead, embarking, and leaving the place with no explicit reference to an ascent.⁵¹

(22)

αὐτίκ' ἔπειτ' ἐπὶ νῆα κιὼν ἐκέλευον ἑταίρους / αὐτοὺς τ' ἀμβαίνειν ἀνά τε πρυμνήσια λῦσαι. / οἱ δ' αἶψ' εἴσβαινον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθίζον. / τὴν δὲ κατ' Ὠκεανὸν ποταμὸν φέρε κύμα ῥόιοιο, / πρῶτα μὲν εἰρεσίῃ, μετέπειτα δὲ κάλλιμος οὖρος (Hom. *Od.* XI.636–640)

“Straightway then I went to the ship and bade my comrades themselves to embark, and to loose the stern cables. So they went on board quickly and sat down upon the benches. And the ship was borne down the stream Oceanus by the swelling flood, first with our rowing, and afterwards the wind was fair”.

To sum it up, in this 11th book of *Odyssey*, the hero goes on a journey to the place of the dead. This journey is understood, in some sense, as a descent. The journey's end is called Erebus or Hades. The hero reaches this place alive, whereas the crowds of inhabitants are incorporeal ψυχαί. Some inhabitants of this place are mentioned, like Hades and Persephone and many ψυχαί of dead people are identified. In this place, Odysseus is afraid and must do efforts in order to achieve his objective. After that, he goes out of this place alive.

3.4 Heracles' κατάβασις: Bacchylides, *Victory-ode* 5.56–84⁵²

Only the verses 56–86 are relevant for my purpose:

(23) Bacchylides, *Victory-ode* 5.56–84

60 τ[οιγάρ π]οτ' ἔρειψιπύλαν
[παῖδ' ἀνίκ]ατον λέγουσιν
[δῶναι Διὸς] ἀργικεραύ-
νου δώματα Φερσεφόνας τανισφύρου,
καρχαρόδοντα κύν' ἄ-
ξοντ' ἐς φάος ἐξ Ἀΐδα,
υἱὸν ἀπλάτοι' Ἐχίδνας·

Once, the say, the gate-wrecking,
unconquerable son⁵³ of thunder-flashing
Zeus went down to the house
of slender-ankled Persephone
to fetch up to the light from Hades
the jagged-toothed dog⁵⁴,
son of unapproachable Echidna.

⁵¹ The only reference to an ascent could be found when Odysseus and his comrades embark, because embarking entails an ascent. But it is not a convincing argument.

⁵² The Greek text and English translation have been taken from the edition of Campbell (1992) 142–45.

⁵³ Heracles.

⁵⁴ Cerberus.

65 ἔνθα δυστάνων βροτῶν
 ψυχὰς ἐδάη παρὰ Κωκυτοῦ ῥέεθροις,
 οἷά τε φύλλ' ἄνεμοις
 ἴδας ἀνὰ μηλοβότους
 πρῶνας ἀργηστάς δονεῖ.
 ταῖσιν δὲ μετέπρεπεν εἶδω-
 λον θρασυμέμονος ἐγ-
 70 χεσπάλου Πορθανίδα·
 τὸν δ' ὡς ἶδεν Ἀλκμή<ν>ιος θαυμαστὸς ἦρωις
 τ[ε]ύχεσι λαμπόμενον,
 νευρὰν ἐπέβασε λιγυκλαγγῇ κορώνας,
 χαλκεόκρανον δ' ἔπειτ' ἔξ
 75 εἶλετο ἰὸν ἀναπτύ-
 ξας φαρέτρας πῶμα· τῷ δ' ἐναντία
 ψυχὰ προφάνη Μελεάγρου,
 καὶ νιν εὖ εἰδὼς προσεῖπεν·
 'υἱὲ Διὸς μεγάλου,
 80 στᾶθί τ' ἐν χώρᾳ, γελανώσας τε θυμὸν
 μὴ ταῦσιον προΐει
 τραχὺν ἐκ χειρῶν οἷστόν
 ψυχαῖσιν ἔπι φθιμένων·
 οὐ τοι δέος.'

There he perceived the spirits
 of wretched mortals by the waters
 of Cocytus,
 like the leaves buffeted by the wind
 over the bright sheep-grazed
 headlands of Ida.
 Among them stood out
 the ghost of bold-hearted,
 spear-brandishing Porthanides;⁵⁵
 and when the wonderful hero, Alcmena's
 son,⁵⁶
 saw him shining in armour,
 he put the clear-twanging string on his bow-
 hook,
 then opened the lid of his quiver
 and took out a bronze-headed arrow.
 But Meleager's spirit
 confronted him, face to face,
 and his full experience addressed him:
 'Son of great Zeus,
 stay where you are! Calm your heart,
 and do not send a fierce arrow in vain
 from your hands
 against the spirits of the dead.
 You have nothing to fear'.

In this part of the Victory-Ode, Bacchylides talks about the journey that Heracles, alive, made to the place of the dead. This journey is understood as a going down, if the reconstruction of δύναι in v. 58 is correct. The destination of the journey is called Hades (v. 61). The aim of his travelling there is to fetch up to the light to Cerberus (vv. 60 – 61). Actually, it is Heracles' last labor, according to Apollodorus.⁵⁷ The characters of the place of the dead mentioned are Persephone (v. 59) and Cerberus, with the expression jagged-toothed dog (vv. 60 – 61). In this place the ψυχαί of the dead (φθιμένων v. 83) dwell and can be identified, like that of Meleager (v. 70). Again, our hero is afraid (Meleager says in v. 84: οὐ τοι δέος) and tries to shoot an arrow against the ψυχή of Meleager, who understands this as vain action (ταῦσιον v. 81). In the rest of the ode, there is no explicit mention of the achieving of Heracles' aim and ascent, but it may be entailed from vv. 60 – 61: κύν' ἄξοντ' ἐς φάος ἐξ Ἀΐδα.

⁵⁵ Meleager.

⁵⁶ Heracles.

⁵⁷ Cf. Apollod. *Bibliotheca*. 2.122.

3.5 Odysseus, Heracles and Jesus

We may compare now these three poetic passages in order to verify if Jesus is presented somehow as a hero in a similar way to Odysseus or Heracles in their journey to the place of the dead. In (24) a table summarizes some heroic features and motifs that appear in the three poems.

(24) Odysseus (Hom. *Od.* 11), Heracles (B. 5) and Jesus (Synes. *Hymn.* 8):

Feature /Hero	Odysseus (Hom. <i>Od.</i> 11)	Heracles (B. 5)	Jesus (Synes. <i>Hymn.</i> 8)
Direction of the journey	a) ἀγέροντο ψυχαὶ (vv. 36–37) b) κατελθέμεν (v. 475)	δῦναι (v. 58)	κατέβας (vv.13, 16)
Name of the place	a) ὑπὲξ Ἑρέβους (v. 37) b) Ἀϊδόσδε (v. 475)	a) δώματα Φερσε- φόνας (v. 59) b) ἐξ Ἀΐδα (v.61)	ὑπὸ Τάρταρα (v. 16)
Status of the one who descends	Corporeal: a) ἐλέειν (v. 205) b) χειρῶν (v. 207)	Corporeal: εἴλετο ἰὸν (v. 75)	Corporeal: βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας (v.15)
Status of dead people	Incorporeal: a) ψυχαὶ (...) νεκύων κατατε- θνηώτων (v. 37) b) σκιῇ εἴκελον ἦ καὶ ὄνειρῳ (v. 207)	Incorporeal: a) δυστάνων βροτῶν ψυχὰς (vv. 63–64) b) οἷά φύλλ' ἄνεμος (...) δονεῖ (vv. 65–67) c) ψυχᾶσιν ἔπι φθι- μένων (Bacch. 5.83)	Incorporeal: ψυχαί
Name of the group of dead people	ἔθνεα νεκρῶν (v.34)		a) ψυχᾶν (...) μυρία (...) ἔθνεα (vv. 17–18) b) ψυχᾶν ὁσίους χορούς (v. 25) c) θιάσοις ἀκηράτοις (v. 26)
Underworld charac- ters	a) Αἰδῇ καὶ (...) Περσεφονείῃ (v. 47) b) Ἐλπίνορος, etc. (v. 51)	a) Φερσεφόνας (59) b) κύνα (60)	a) Θάνατος (v. 18) b) Αἶδας (v. 20) c) κύων (v. 21)
Fear	χλωρὸν δέος (vv.43, 633)	τοι δέος (v. 84)	φρίξεν (v.19)
Toil	οὐδ' εἶων (v. 49)	κύν' ἄξοντ' ἐς φάος ἐξ Αἶδα (vv. 60–61)	ᾔφιν (...) ἥλασας (vv. 5–6)

Continued

Feature /Hero	Odysseus (Hom. <i>Od.</i> 11)	Heracles (B. 5)	Jesus (Synes. <i>Hymn.</i> 8)
Victory-Success	Speech of Teiresias (vv. 100–137)	κύν' ἄξοντ' ἐς φάος ἐξ Ἀΐδα (vv. 60–61)	a) κύων (...) ἀνεχάσαστο (vv. 21, 23) b) λύσας ἀπὸ πημάτων (v. 24)
Ascent	ἐπὶ νῆα (...) ἀμβαίνειν (...) πρὸς μνήσια λῦσαι (vv. 636–637)	κύν' ἄξοντ' ἐς φάος ἐξ Ἀΐδα (vv. 60–61)	a) ἀνάγεις (v. 27) b) ἀνίοντα (v. 31)

Let us examine first the direction of the journey. It seems that in the three poems, Odysseus, Heracles and Jesus go down. The verb used for Heracles is δύναι (B. 5.58) and in Jesus κατέβας (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.13, 16). As we have seen, the souls came towards Odysseus, it is a νέκυια, but somehow it is also understood as a going down because the verb κατέλθεμεν is used (Hom. *Od.* 11.475).

As for the destination of the going down, it receives different names:

- Erebos (ὑπὲξ Ἑρέβους, Hom. *Od.* 11.37) and Hades (Ἄϊδόσδε, Hom. *Od.* 11.475) in Odyssey
- Δώματα Φερσεφόνας (v. 59) and Hades (ἐξ Ἀΐδα, v.61) in Bacchylides' Ode.
- And, finally, "below Tartaros" (ὑπὸ Τάρταρα) in Synes. *Hymn.* 8.16. The equivalence of Tartaros with Hades can be seen in Anacreon's poem of (1), although they are not necessarily the same place in the oldest Greek cosmology. Synesius could have used this denomination in order to emphasize the vertical descent of Jesus, since, according to Hes. *Th.* 119, it is in the innermost part of the earth, being the same distance from earth to heaven as from earth to Tartaros.⁵⁸ Another reason for using this name is the fact that Tartaros was understood as the place where the condemned went after their criminal life, for example, in Pl. *Grg.* 523a, *Phd.* 113e. Therefore, the descent of Jesus to Tartaros, not simply to Hades, could highlight his redeeming mission.⁵⁹

Regarding the physical status of the one who descends, the hero is alive and corporeal.

- In Odyssey, Odysseus tries to embrace with his arms the spirit of his mother, but that is impossible (Hom. *Od.* XI.205–207).
- Heracles is corporeal and can grasp material objects like arrows, but the matter cannot touch the souls, it is a vain action (B. 5.81).

⁵⁸ Cf. Hes. *Th.* 721–725, Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 1.1.2.

⁵⁹ In Greek mythology, Tartaros is also a place where to shut someone up, as it happened, for example, with Titans, cf. Hes. *Th.* 730–819.

- c) Finally, Jesus goes down possibly in a corporeal body, βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.15).⁶⁰ Synesius does not specify if Jesus is alive or dead, since he omits any reference to his death.⁶¹ Therefore, maybe the expression βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.15) could be also assigned to the descent. Why would he explicitly use this expression? If we see some actions performed by Odysseus (he tried to embrace his mother) or Heracles (he took an arrow) in the Underworld, one can realize that their actions entail corporeity. But in the 8th Hymn of Synesius, this is not the case. Jesus' action in the Underworld, the releasing of the souls, is not described in physical terms. Therefore, the expression βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας could be necessary in order to indicate that the one who descends is not just a ψυχή or νοῦς, but a corporeal man.

On the other hand, the inhabitants of this place are ψυχαί in the three poems. Only in Odyssey and in the poem of Bacchylides it is said that they belong to dead people (ψυχαὶ νεκρῶν κατατεθνηώτων Hom. *Od.* XI.37, and ψυχαῖσιν ἔπι φθιμένων B. 5.83). These souls are like shadows or dreams, in Odyssey (Hom. *Od.* XI.207) and, in a similar fashion, they are blown like leaves (B. 5.65–67). In Synesius' 8th Hymn, they are simply ψυχαί.

Except in Bacchylides' Ode, the souls form groups. What Odysseus sees is designated as ἔθνεα νεκρῶν (Hom. *Od.* XI.34) and, in a very similar manner, Jesus finds ψυχᾶν (...) μυρία (...) ἔθνεα (Synes. *Hymn.* 5.17–18), an expression that reminds the one in Odyssey. In this poem, they are called also ψυχᾶν ὁσίου χορούς (Synes. *Hymn.* 5.25) and θιάσοις ἀκηράτοις (Synes. *Hymn.* 5.26), which suggests a Bacchic revel.

Regarding the characters of the Underworld in the three poems, some of them are mentioned:

- a) Hades in Odyssey (Hom. *Od.* XI.47) and in Jesus κατάβασις (Synes. *Hymn.* 5.20).
- b) Persephone in Odyssey (Hom. *Od.* XI.47) and in Bacchylides' Ode (B. 5.49).
- c) Finally, Cerberus, the hound of Hades, is mentioned in the Heracles' κατάβασις (B. 5.60) and in Jesus' κατάβασις (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.21) with the word κύων. Cerberus is καρχαρόδους ("with saw-like teeth") for Bacchylides and for Synesius λαοβόρος ("devourer of man"). In both cases, he is identified by his devouring ability.
- d) Only Synesius mentions Θάνατος (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.18) and relates it to souls using the verb νέμω. Synesius says: ψυχᾶν ὅθι μυρία / θάνατος νέμεν ἔθνεα

⁶⁰ For the comprehension of incarnation in Synesius cf. Bregman (1982) 93–124.

⁶¹ About the relation of Jesus' dead and resurrection with *descensus ad inferos* and the moment it takes place cf. Müller (1998) 308 and especially Grillmeier (1965) 86, who commenting 1Pt 3.18–20, says: "This passing (πορευθεῖς) need not be death as such, but it can presuppose death and also include the Resurrection and the Ascension. The one who descends to death and to Sheol (or who is already raised and now goes up to heaven) goes to a place where the spiritual powers or also the souls of men are lodged".

(Synes. *Hymn.* 8.17–18). The verb νέμω means “hold” or “reign” but also “drive to pasture”. The word ἔθνεα (ἔθνος in singular) may be understood as “number of people living together”, which is congruent with the translation “reign” of νέμω, but ἔθνος means also “flock”.⁶² Therefore, Death reigns over the souls but at the same time Death is like a shepherd who leads the flocks to pasture.⁶³

Concerning the motif of Fear, it is present in the three poems.⁶⁴

- a) In *Odyssey* and in the Bacchylides’ Ode, the hero seems to fear (χλωρόν δέος Hom. *Od.* XI.43; 633 and τοι δέος B. 5.84).
- b) But in the case of Jesus, Synesius introduces a change, since it is not the hero who is afraid, but Hades who experiences Fear. Hades is the subject of the verb φοίξεν, an aorist in its Homeric form that means “of the effect of fear, shudder”.⁶⁵ The object of this verb, σε, is Jesus. On the other hand, Cerberus, ἀνεχάσσοτο, again an Homeric aorist used in the epic when a warrior draws back.⁶⁶ It may be understood in this context that his withdrawal is a consequence of fear.

On another front, in the three poems the hero must do an effort:

- a) Odysseus must avoid with his sword that wrong souls drink blood (Hom. *Od.* XI.49).
- b) Heracles must fetch up Cerberus from Hades and lead it to the light (B. 5.60–61).
- c) Synesius presents two actions performed by Jesus: the banishment of the serpent from Paradise (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.4–9) and the freeing of the souls in Hades from their woes (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.24). The first labor (in vv. 4–9) announces the achievement of Jesus’ aim in the place of the dead: the release of souls.

As for the victory, we might attribute some sort of victory to the three heroes:

- a) Odysseus achieves his goal:⁶⁷ to speak with the soul of Tiresias (Hom. *Od.* XI.100–137).
- b) It is supposed that Heracles successfully drives Cerberus out of Hades.
- c) And, as it has been mentioned, Jesus releases the souls. In the case of Synesius, Jesus is presented as a victor or winner⁶⁸ by the epithet στεφανηφόρος (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.10 and 28) that means “who wears a crown”, prize of a victory in a com-

⁶² For all these meanings cf. Liddell *et al.* (1996).

⁶³ It could evoke the Psalm 14.15 where it is said about the impious ὡς πρόβατα ἐν ἄδι ἔθεντο, θάνατος ποιμαίνει αὐτούς (ed. Rahlfs/Hanhart (2006)).

⁶⁴ Vollenweider (1985) 147: “Furcht und Zittern sind überhaupt traditionelle Charakteristika der Hadesfahrt”.

⁶⁵ Cf. Liddell *et al.* (1996) s.v. φοίσσω.

⁶⁶ Terzaghi (1939) 264 relates these verses of the 8th Hymn with Horatius 3.11.15 and Verg. *Georg.* IV.481.

⁶⁷ Cf. Graf/Brändle (1999) 327.

⁶⁸ Cf. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1907) 288.

petition⁶⁹. In this sense, as Barkhuizen (1993) 265 says, this hymn “has been appropriately called a Christ-epinikion”.⁷⁰

Regarding the last feature, in the three poems the heroes return from the place of the Dead (Hom. *Od.* XL.636–637; B. 5.60–61). In the case of Synesius’ Hymn, it is suggested that Jesus gets out of the place of the dead with the released souls elevating hymns to his Father (Synes. *Hymn.* 8.26–27). The verb ἀνάγω (v. 27) suggests the ascent of the one who descended. The second part, which more than probably is another hymn, begins precisely with the ascent and the words “ἀνίοντα σε...”.

In the next section, I will draw conclusions from the comparison made in this section.

4 Conclusions

In the former sections I have tried to show how Synesius could have had in mind the journeys to the Underworld of some heroes of earlier Greek poetry.

In my opinion, the use of some linguistic features, idioms and expressions taken from the epic language, as we have seen in section 2, contributes to create a coloring that reminds the world and times of the heroes.

We should also consider that some features, motifs or literary elements employed by earlier poets when describing the journey to the Underworld of some heroes are also present in the 8th Hymn; this, as well as the differences between them, has been explained in section 3.

Therefore, considering his language and the aforementioned literary characteristics, Synesius could have had the intention of presenting Jesus as hero in his 8th Hymn.

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⁶⁹ Cf. Liddell *et al.* (1996) s.v. στεφανήφορος.

⁷⁰ Barkhuizen (1993) 266–270 studies the two parts of the Hymn under the point of view of Jesus’ victory.

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