

SEDULIUS, THE PASCHAL SONG AND HYMNS

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SEDULIUS, THE PASCHAL SONG AND HYMNS

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Michael J. Roberts

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AND HYMNS

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
Carl P. E. Springer

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

SEDULIUS, THE PASCHAL SONG AND HYMNS

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Saepe belliger miles armis quibus assuetus est dimicare delectatur et ludere.
Sedulius's first letter to Macedonius (Huemer, *Sedulii Opera omnia*, 6)

Sedulius poeta christianissimus canit:
Beatus autor seculi seruile corpus induit, idque per totam ecclesiam.
Martin Luther, *De diuinitate et humanitate Christi* (WA 39.2:95)

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PREFACE

This project has been long in the conceiving and making, and there are many who have been directly or indirectly helpful in bringing it to completion. Michael Roberts's sage counsel, from the time we first discussed our mutual interests in biblical epics of late antiquity nearly thirty years ago to his conscientious and efficient work in editing this volume, has proven invaluable. He has saved me from many an error or misjudgment with his gentle but effective *correctiones fraternae*, and while it is not possible to acknowledge all of his contributions specifically in the notes, I am eager to recognize them in general here. I am also most grateful to Roger Green for his thoughtful responses to my previous work on Sedulius as they have appeared in reviews, as well as his constructive engagement with my ideas in the pages of his *Latin Epics of the New Testament*. I owe many thanks to the late Reinhart Herzog for his kind personal encouragement early on in my career, as well as to the late Father Eligius Dekkers, the founding editor of *Corpus Christianorum*, who helped to introduce me to the often mysterious ways of European manuscript libraries while I was on a Fulbright Research Fellowship at St. Pietersabdij in Brugge. For their academic hospitality during my stay at the University of Regensburg on a Humboldt Research Fellowship, Klaus Thraede along with his colleagues and students continue to occupy a warm spot in my heart. So do Mildred Budny, Tim Graham, and Ray Page, who welcomed me to the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, with such memorable generosity. A timely grant from the American Philosophical Society helped to facilitate research on Sedulian manuscripts in Paris, Torino, and Rome. The late Virginia Brown took an active interest in my research on the commentary tradition of Sedulius and, with the aid of a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, supported my research at the Pierpont Morgan Library and the New York Public Library. My thanks also to the organizers of the conference, "Editing from Antiquity to the Enlightenment," held at The Ohio State University in 2003, to Ralph Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer for including me in a symposium, "Late Antiquity in Illinois IV," at the University of Illinois in 2008, and to Scott McGill and Joe Pucci for inviting me to participate in "The Classics Renewed: The Latin Poetry of

Late Antiquity,” a conference held at the universities of Rice and Brown in 2011. The introduction to this volume has benefited considerably from the thoughtful responses of attendees at all three events.

To Southern Illinois University Edwardsville for granting me a sabbatical leave in 2011, which I used to complete the first draft of this manuscript in Rome, my ongoing appreciation. To the College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s office as well as the Department of English Language and Literature for their moral and financial support over the years, I extend my gratitude. To the patient librarians at the Newberry Library, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis University, Washington University, and Lovejoy Library at SIUE, my sincere thanks. Three of my Latin students, Jenelle Kypta, Nancy Staples, and Michael Toje deserve special mention for their unflagging assistance with this project. SIUE’s Undergraduate Research Assistant Program helped to make student involvement possible. Finally, to my wife, Avery, above all, my deepest thanks for reading the translation with her critical eye and ear, and for everything.

Proferant igitur sua si qui carpere nitentur aliena. Promptius est omnibus iudicare quam facere.

— Sedulius’s second letter to Macedonius (Huemer, *Sedulii Opera omnia*, 173)

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. Part 2, Principat.</i> Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–.
<i>Anth. lat.</i>	<i>Anthologia latina.</i> Edited by F. Bücheler and A. Riese. Leipzig: Teubner, 1894–1906.
<i>CCCM</i>	Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio mediaevalis
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum: Series latina
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>DNP</i>	<i>Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike.</i> Edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider. 16 vols. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003.
<i>GCS</i>	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
<i>HL</i>	<i>Humanistica Lovanensiana</i>
<i>IJCT</i>	<i>International Journal of the Classical Tradition</i>
<i>JAC</i>	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MGH.AA</i>	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi
<i>MGH.PLMA</i>	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Poetae Latini medii aevi
<i>OCT</i>	Oxford Classical Texts
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Paschale carmen</i>
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graeca. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–1886.
<i>PL</i>	Patrologia latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1864.
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>

PO	<i>Paschale opus</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt.</i> Edited by Theodor Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–.
RBén	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
RE	<i>Realencyklopaedie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REL	<i>Revue des Études Latines</i>
RevPhil	<i>Revue de Philologie</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
LXX	<i>Septuaginta id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes.</i> Edited by Alfred Rahlfs. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935.
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie.</i> Edited by Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller. 36 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976–2004.
Vulg.	<i>Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem.</i> Edited by Robert Weber. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.</i> Weimar: Böhlau, 1883.
WS	<i>Wiener Studien</i>

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations in English are taken from *The English Standard Version of the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

INTRODUCTION

A gratifying amount of scholarly attention has been paid in the last decades to late antiquity, a historical period that used to be dismissed as “decadent” but has lately come to be seen as a dynamic time well worth studying for its own sake, not simply as a postscript to the classical period or as a preface to the Middle Ages. It was also a time that was particularly favorable for the production of Latin poetry.¹ Recent scholarship devoted to this topic ranges from such broadly conceived studies as Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*,² to highly specialized treatments of a single poet (Juvencus was particularly popular with Klaus Thraede and his students at the University of Regensburg in the 1990s). The emergence of a specifically Christian Latin poetry during this time is an important aspect of this larger topic. Christian Gnilka at the University of Münster and his students have devoted themselves to examining the relationship between Christian poets and the pagan culture they inherited.³ Recent years have also witnessed a fair number of new critical editions, commentaries, and translations of individual Christian Latin poems of late antiquity, although the production of these scholarly resources

1. For this point, see Alan Cameron, “Poetry and Literary Culture in Late Antiquity,” in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (ed. Simon Swain and M. J. Edwards; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 327-54. Greek Christian poetry of the same period has received relatively less attention, especially from English-speaking scholars, but see now Robert Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011). On the accomplished Greek poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus, see Peter Gilbert, *On God and Man: The Theological Poetry of St. Gregory of Nazianzus* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001).

2. Michael John Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

3. Several important collections of essays devoted to the subject have been published by E. J. Brill, including Jan Den Boeft and A. Hilhorst, eds., *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 1993) and Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann, eds., *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity: The Encounter between Classical and Christian Strategies of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

has not kept pace with what we might call more “theoretical” literary scholarship, and there are still many lacunae in our knowledge that remain to be filled. Among the most conspicuous desiderata is a complete English translation of the works of one of the most popular and important of all of the Christian Latin poets of late antiquity, Sedulius. Throughout the premodern period, his poetry was widely copied in *scriptoria*, read in schools, and sung in churches; the brightness of the fifth-century poet’s star only began to fade after the seventeenth century. Of his *Paschale carmen*, Max Manitius declares that it “enjoyed the greatest conceivable circulation and remained one of the primary models for all of the Latin poetry of the Middle Ages.”⁴ This volume is intended to help to fill the scholarly gap.

The book begins with an introduction that situates the poet and his works in historical and literary contexts, sets forth the translator’s presuppositions and methodologies, and offers a fresh literary-critical analysis of Sedulian poetics. Most of its bulk consists of a lightly edited Latin text of Sedulius’s poetic works, that is to say, his biblical epic in five books, the *Paschale carmen*, and two hymns, *A solis ortus cardine* and *Cantemus, socii, domino*, along with my own English translation, accompanied by notes. These annotations do not aim to be exhaustive, but focus on select items of linguistic, historical, and literary interest, and are designed to help readers, even those with little or no Latin and only some familiarity with the classical and biblical sources of the *Paschale carmen*, better to comprehend the Latin text and/or the English translation and lead them to a deeper understanding of Sedulius’s unique, but not uncontroversial, poetic achievements. Appendices supply texts and translations of incidental related materials, including: (1) Sedulius’s dedicatory letters to Macedonius, (2) representative excerpts from the *Paschale opus*, Sedulius’s own prose paraphrase of the *Paschale carmen*, and (3) laudatory poems associated with Sedulius’s works in manuscripts and early printed editions.

THE POET AND HIS WORKS

While many questions about Sedulius himself cannot be answered with any degree of certitude, it is possible to glean a limited amount of biographical information from his own writings, especially his dedicatory letters. In the author’s first letter to the bishop Macedonius, he mentions Jerome’s habit of dedicating literary works to his female friends. This gives us an indisputable *terminus post quem* of the late fourth century (that is to say, the 380s or 390s, when Jerome

4. Max Manitius, *Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Poesie bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1891), 309.

began the practice), for the composition of the *Paschale carmen*. As a solid *terminus ante quem*, we have a subscription preserved in the venerable Bobbio manuscript (Taur. E.IV.42; dated to the seventh century) that informs the reader of a certain Turcius Rufus Apronianus Asterius, Roman consul in 494, who issued an edition of *Paschale carmen* which he claims to have found in disarray (*inter cartulas suas sparsas*) and to have reorganized, sometime after his service as consul, most likely in the last years of the fifth century. It is possible to narrow these broad temporal parameters further, that is to say, to the second quarter of the fifth century, but such precision rests upon a less secure historical foundation, a biographical notice found in a number of somewhat later manuscripts (beginning in the ninth century), which states that Sedulius was a layman who studied philosophy in Italy and later taught epic meter and wrote “his books” in Greece during the reigns of Theodosius II and Valentinian III (they overlapped between 425 and 450).⁵

It is hard to say how many of these last biographical details are the products of a reliable oral or written tradition. They may reflect rather the ingenuity of medieval scribes who often drew upon the texts before them in the absence of other evidence as they tried to answer the kinds of questions that so often appear in the *accessus ad auctores*, such as: *Quis fecit? Quid fecit? Cur fecit? Quomodo fecit? Quando fecit? Ubi fecit?* Sedulius’s references to the city of Athens (in the first book of the *Paschale carmen*) or the Cyclades (in his second letter to Macedonius) might appear to be possible clues as to where the author wrote his works. Unfortunately, the first reference has more to do with the philosophical heritage of Athens than the city proper, while the latter is embedded in an elaborate sailing metaphor that is certainly not meant to be taken literally (for the same image, see Quintilian’s prefatory letter to his *Institutio oratoria*). It is unlikely, furthermore, as Roger Green has observed,⁶ that there was much demand for instruction in Latin epic poetry in fifth-century Greece. The reference to Italy in the biographical notice, on the other hand, may be based on more solid evidence. According to an eighth-century poem

5. As it may be found, for example, in Paris, Bibl. Nat., Lat. 18554 (f. 3v): *Incipit ars Sedulii poetae qui primo laicus in Italia philosophiam didicit. Postea cum aliis metrorum generibus heroicum metrum Macedonio consulente docuit. In Achaia libros suos scripsit in tempore imperatorum minoris Theodosii filii Arcadii et Valentiniani filii Constantii*. For fuller biographical background on Sedulius, see chapter 2 in Carl Springer, *The Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity: The Paschale carmen of Sedulius* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Johannes Huemer’s *De Sedulii poetae vita et scriptis commentatio* (Vienna: Hoelder, 1878) is still worth consulting.

6. Roger Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvenecus, Sedulius, Arator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139–40.

attributed to Aldhelm, *doctiloquus Sedulius* was a native of the city of Rome.⁷ The ninth-century Paschasius Radbertus also describes him as a *rhetor Romanae ecclesiae* (*De partu virg.* 2). An Italian or even Roman provenance for the poet does seem probable. However unorganized it may have been, his poetry was to be found in Rome at the end of the fifth century, as we have just seen. The first clear quotations of the text of Sedulius are by Cassiodorus, who founded his intellectual retreat, Vivarium, in the south of Italy near present-day Squilace in the sixth century. The *Decretum Gelasianum*, written quite possibly in early sixth-century Italy, praises Sedulius highly. In the *Paschale opus*,⁸ Sedulius cites Virgil's reference to Rome in *Ecl.* 1.26–27 (*Et quae tanta fuit Romam tibi causa uidendi? Libertas...*) as he discusses the differences between the relatively disappointing “earthly city of mortal realms” and the heavenly Jerusalem. All of this evidence is circumstantial, to be sure, but taken together with theological positions Sedulius stakes out in the *Paschale carmen*, especially his consistent defense of the conduct of Peter, the patron saint of Rome, it suggests that he had a close affinity with, if not actual residence in, the spiritual capital of Latin Christianity of the period. We can be quite sure, at any rate, that Sedulius was not Irish, although he was famously confused, by Johann Trithemius (and others since), with the much later Sedulius, an Irish monk of the ninth century, named Siadhal in the Gaelic tongue, who eventually settled in Liège.⁹ The latter is often called “Scotus” to distinguish him from the earlier Sedulius, with whose poetry we know that he was familiar.¹⁰

7. *Quemadmodum mellifluis / Heroicorum uersibus / Illustris quondam poeta / Romae urbis indigena / Styli calamo stridulo / Charaxante persedulo / Sacris inserit schedulis / Doctiloquus Sedulius* (PL 19:509).

8. Johann Huemer, *Sedulii Opera omnia: una cum excerptis ex Remigii Expositione in Sedulii Paschale carmen: recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Iohannes Huemer* (ed. Victoria Panagl; Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007; repr. *Sedulii Opera omnia: recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Iohannes Huemer. Accedunt excerpta ex Remigii Expositione in Sedulii Paschale carmen*; CSEL 10; Vienna: Gerold, 1885), 191.

9. The illustrations in a ninth-century manuscript now in the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp (M. 17.4) follow iconographic patterns commonly found in the Roman catacombs. See Carol Lewine, “The Miniatures of the Antwerp Sedulius Manuscript: The Early Christian Models and Their Transformations” (Diss., Columbia University, 1970). The manuscript was written in Liège.

10. Intriguingly enough, Sedulius's poetry was well known quite early on both in Ireland and Britain. See Richard Sharpe, “An Irish Textual Critic and the Carmen Paschale of Sedulius: Colman's Letter to Feradach,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1992): 44–54; Neil Wright, “Gildas's Reading: A Survey,” *Sacris Erudiri* 32.2 (1991): 121–62,

From his description of himself as busied at an earlier stage of life with the study of worldly literature (*saecularibus ... studiis occupatus*) in his first letter to Macedonius (if not as a student of philosophy per se, perhaps as a teacher of grammar or rhetoric), it is easy to see too how one might come to the conclusion that Sedulius was a layperson. From the same letter, however, we discover that Macedonius was himself a presbyter and that there was at least one *antistes* (most likely a priest or bishop) in his circle. Given Sedulius's close connection with clergy and his impressive familiarity with the scriptures and patristic theology, it is not surprising that in the later tradition he has himself ended up being described as a priest or even a bishop (see, for example, Alcuin, *Officia per ferias*). He is often referred to as Caelius Sedulius, but it is unclear whether "Caelius" should be considered an actual *praenomen* or an adulatory adjective assigned to him years later by an appreciative scribe (*caelius* means "heavenly"). Sedulius himself does not use it in his letters to Macedonius. He is sometimes referred to as *Sedulius poeta*, most likely to distinguish him from Sedulius Scotus, but this too is a designation that we do not find applied by Sedulius to himself.

We can speak more definitively about Sedulius's works and their reception than we can about their author's biography. His poetry continued to be in vogue for over a thousand years after the poet died, and his works survive in hundreds of manuscripts.¹¹ Sedulius's masterpiece is the *Paschale carmen*, a Latin poem in dactylic hexameters, divided into five books, the first of which is devoted to Old Testament miracles prefiguring the *clara miracula Christi*, which are the concern of the remaining four books. This paraphrastic poem is one of the earliest and most influential examples of what has often been termed "biblical epic."¹² Michael Roberts's *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity*¹³ was a groundbreaking study that helped to draw serious scholarly attention in the English-speaking world to their existence. More recently Roger Green, in

and the same author's "The *Hisperica famina* and Caelius Sedulius," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982): 61–76.

11. Over four hundred manuscripts containing some or all of the works of Sedulius are included in Carl Springer, *The Manuscripts of Sedulius: A Provisional Handlist* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1995), a listing that is by no means complete. Some of what follows draws directly or indirectly on the introduction to that book. For the poet's presence in the epigraphic tradition, see M. Muñoz García de Iturrospe, "Sedulio y la tradición epigráfica latina," in *De Roma al siglo XX* (ed. Ana María Aldama; Madrid: Sociedad de Estudios Latinos, 1996), 383–90.

12. On the meaning and tradition of "paraphrase," see J. F. Cottier, "La paraphrase latine, de Quintilien à Érasme," *REL* 80 (2002): 237–52.

13. Michael John Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool: Cairns, 1985).

Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator,¹⁴ has clarified the critical role that these ambitious poems played in helping Latin-speaking Christians to bridge the literary gap between the pagan epic tradition (e.g., Virgil and Lucan) and the biblical texts sacred to Christianity. Poems like Sedulius's, which are written in dactylic hexameters and owe "their narrative continuity to a biblical sequence of events,"¹⁵ represent a "scarlet thread" running through the history of European literature from the fourth century to the seventeenth. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* could be said to be the most famous (and, for all practical purposes, final) representative of this literary tradition in the English language.¹⁶ Of the Latin biblical poets of late antiquity who were regularly part of the medieval curriculum, including Juvencus, who wrote his *Euangeliorum libri* during the reign of Constantine, and the sixth-century Arator, whose *Historia apostolica* is heavily indebted to the author of the *Paschale carmen*, Sedulius enjoyed the widest circulation and most consistent popularity during the premodern period.¹⁷ In fact, of the "patristic poets" in general, both Greek and Latin, only Prudentius can be said to match the popularity and influence that Sedulius's works enjoyed across the centuries. Manitius's partial listing of medieval collections containing a copy of Sedulius reveals the wide extent of the fifth-century poet's appeal to readers in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ To judge from the evidence of manuscript production, there was a great flowering of interest in Sedulius during the Carolingian Age, which continued unabated during the rest of the Middle Ages and well into the early modern period. There are over eighty manuscripts of the *Paschale carmen* (not including fragments) still extant, dating

14. Green, *Latin Epics*.

15. For this definition, see Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 4, n.12.

16. For a fuller discussion of the problems involved in the study of this particular literary "genre," see Carl Springer, "The Biblical Epic in Late Antiquity and the Early Modern Period: The Poetics of Tradition," in *Antiquity Renewed: Late Classical and Early Modern Themes* (ed. Zweder von Martels and Victor M. Schmidt; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 103–26. For studies of the biblical epic in general, in addition to those of Roberts and Green cited earlier, the reader is referred to Reinhart Herzog, *Die Bibel-epik der lateinischen Spätantike: Formgeschichte einer erbaulichen Gattung I* (Munich: Fink, 1975), which does not cover Sedulius; Dieter Kartschoke, *Bibeldichtung: Studien zur Geschichte der epischen Bibel-epik von Juvencus bis Otfrid von Weissenburg* (Munich: Fink, 1975); and Wolfgang Kirsch, *Die Lateinische Verse-epik des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989).

17. On Sedulius's influence on Arator, see Neil Wright, "Arator's Use of Caelius Sedulius: A Re-examination," *Eranos* 87 (1989): 51–64.

18. Max Manitius, *Handschriften antiker Autoren in mittelalterlichen Bibliothekskatalogen* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1935), 268–72.

from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.¹⁹ The flood of early printed editions, beginning already in the 1470s and ranging from Lutheran Wittenberg to Catholic Salamanca, gives the reader some indication of just how widely popular Sedulius continued to be even after the introduction of the printing press.²⁰

In the early Middle Ages, Sedulius's works were read and acclaimed by such important figures as the Venerable Bede, who used him as one of his principal models in his treatise on metrics, Alcuin of York, the influential advisor of Charlemagne and educational reformer, and Isidore of Seville, the Spanish churchman whose library included a copy of Sedulius, which came highly recommended for pious readers who had grown tired of the works of Virgil and other classical poets.²¹ The fifth-century poet continued to be read and praised well into the early modern period. The Italian humanist, Petrarch, who punned on Sedulius's name (as well as those of Juvenecus, Arator, and Prudentius) in his *Bucolicum carmen* (10.310–318), was familiar with him.²² So was the early Oxford reformer and friend of Erasmus, John Colet, who recommended the "wisdom with clene and chast laten" of Sedulius's work for students attending St. Paul's School in London. Even more critical for the survival of Sedulius's fame to the present day was the attention the Latin poet received from the German theologian, Martin Luther, who created two of his famous chorales from one of Sedulius's hymns, and referred to its author as *poeta Christianissimus*.

One of the reasons, doubtless, for Sedulius's enduring popularity was the use of his *Paschale carmen* in medieval educational settings.²³ It can be no accident that the poem is so often found in the company of other texts which were used in medieval schools: "Cato's" *Distichs*, the epigrams of Prosper, and the fables of Avianus, as well as more theoretical treatises on grammar and style, such as Bede's *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis* and Priscian's *Institutio de nomine et pronomine et verbo*. The *Paschale carmen* continued to be used

19. The distribution of manuscripts (not including fragments) of the *PC* by century is as follows: s. vii: 1; s. viii: 2; s. viii–ix: 1; s. ix: 19; s. ix–x: 4; s. x: 13; s. x–xi: 1; s. xi: 20; s. xi–xii: 3; s. xii: 23; s. xii–xiii: 3; s. xiii: 11; s. xiii–xiv: 1; s. xiv: 14; s. xv: 49; s. xv–xvi: 2; s. xvi: 8.

20. For a listing of over fifty early printed editions that appeared before 1600, see Springer, *Manuscripts of Sedulius*, 211–15.

21. Isidore's verses can be found in Charles H. Beeson, *Isidor-Studien* (Munich: Beck, 1913), 157–63.

22. See Thomas Goddard Bergin, *Petrarch's Bucolicum Carmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 172: *Huic comes, hinc prudens, hinc sedulus alter aranti / certabant rigido glebas confringere rastris*.

23. See A. Rigg and G. Wieland, "A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-eleventh Century (the 'Cambridge Songs' Manuscript)," *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975): 130.

as a school text well into the early modern period. The prefaces to many of the early printed editions make it quite clear that their editors expected this author to be used in schools. Aldus Manutius in Italy, Georg Fabricius in Germany, and Antonio Nebrija (or Lebrija) in Spain—all clearly believed that the poem offered the most salutary kind of pedagogical benefits for Christian school children.²⁴

Sedulius's poem enjoyed a double good fortune in the Middle Ages; it was regarded not only as well suited for study in the schools, but accorded respect as a theological work as well. In Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 8.1.59, Sedulius alone of the canonical Christian poets (cf. Fortunatus, *Vita Martini* 1.14–25), is included in the company of such distinguished ecclesiastical authorities as Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. Although Ernst Robert Curtius dismissed Sedulius as a “grandiloquent” rhetor who had “nothing to say,” his premodern readers apparently valued *what* this “most Christian poet” wrote as well as *how* he wrote it.²⁵ Sedulius's words were used by churchmen from Hincmar of Reims (*De una et non trina deitate*) to Martin Luther to illustrate doctrinal points and even to settle theological controversies.²⁶ Of the individual passages from the *Paschale carmen* that proved to be especially quotable, one of the best known was Sedulius's description of the four Evangelists (*PC* 1.355–358), as found, for example, in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 286, “the Saint Augustine Gospels.” His lines in praise of Mary, the mother of God (*PC* 2.63–69), were transformed for use in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church, guaranteeing an enviably wide and enduring audience for their author.

Also well known during the Middle Ages were Sedulius's other works, including the *Paschale opus*, a prose paraphrase of the *Paschale carmen*.²⁷ But the *Paschale opus* never enjoyed the same degree of popularity as the verse ver-

24. On the use of Sedulius as a school text in early sixteenth-century Spain, see F. J. Norton, *Printing in Spain 1501–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 127. See also the general overview of Sedulius's reception in Springer, *Gospel as Epic*, 135–50.

25. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (trans. Willard R. Trask; New York: Pantheon, 1953), 460–62.

26. In *De diuinitate et humanitate Christi* (WA 39.2:95) Luther cites Sedulius in support of the doctrine of Christ's full humanity and observes that the words of his hymn are known widely: “Sedulius, the most Christian poet, sings: ‘The blessed maker of the world clothed himself in a slave's body,’ and this throughout the entire church, although nothing is able to be said more heretically than that his human nature was the clothing of divinity. For clothing and body do not constitute a person, just as God and man do not constitute one person. But that Sedulius perceived this most piously, his other songs prove most clearly.”

27. I prefer this ordering of the two words in the titles of both works, because, as we shall see, it is how Sedulius entitles them in his letters to Macedonius. In manu-

sion. We have only a handful of manuscripts which contain the work more or less in its entirety. While the *Paschale opus* failed to achieve such a wide and sustained popularity as its verse counterpart, Sedulius's *opus geminatum* served as an influential model, particularly for Anglo-Latin authors, a number of whom followed his example in producing double versions of the same work, in prose and verse.²⁸ Insofar as the *Paschale opus* is the poet's own reformulation and expansion of what he had to say in his poem, it can be of considerable use in helping us to understand difficult passages in the *Paschale carmen*, and there are frequent references to it in the notes accompanying the texts and translations below. A brief set of translated excerpts is provided in the appendix to this volume for the reader who may wish to analyze Sedulius's compositional strategies in verse and prose comparatively.

Despite authoring only two of them, Sedulius was highly regarded as a writer of hymns and is sometimes described in the Middle Ages, along with Ambrose, Prudentius, and Gregory, as one of the *quattuor principales auctores hymnorum*.²⁹ Both of his hymns display an unusual degree of literary virtuosity. One is an invitation in 110 lines to praise Christ, beginning *Cantemus, socii, domino*, written in elegiac distichs. The hymn is constructed in an epanaleptic format, which is to say that the first half of the first line of each distich is the same as the second half of the second line. In the first half of the hymn an Old Testament type is frequently found in the first line and its fulfillment in the New Testament in the second. While it alludes directly to biblical events and personages, the hymn mostly avoids the use of proper names (Christ, Mary, and Goliath are exceptions); as a result it has something of the same sort of riddling quality so often associated with the earliest Anglo-Saxon poetry. The hymn follows the *Paschale carmen* in many of the early manuscripts, including Taur. E.IV.42. When Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury from 959 to 988, was blessed with an ecstatic vision of a chorus of virgins, the heavenly music that he heard them singing was *Cantemus, socii, domino*. It was also one of the earliest poems to be printed in the "New World." In 1577, just a few decades after the introduction of the first printing press in Mexico City, Antonio Ricardo, a printer from Torino,

scripts, early printed editions, and modern scholarship, the adjective is often made to follow the noun, in keeping with traditional Latin word order.

28. See Peter Godman, "The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum* from Aldhelm to Alcuin," *Medium Aevum* 50 (1981): 215–29, and G. Wieland, "Geminus Stilus: Studies in Anglo-Latin Hagiography," in *Insular Latin Studies: Papers on Latin Texts and Manuscripts of the British Isles: 550–1066* (ed. Michael W. Herren; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 113–33.

29. See Marvin L. Colker, *Trinity College Library Dublin: Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Latin Manuscripts* (Dublin: Scholar Press, 1991), 1, 493.

produced an anthology of poems at the newly founded Jesuit Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo that contains this hymn (ff. 53v–55v).³⁰

Sedulius's other hymn, beginning *A solis ortus cardine*, is an abecedary, an alphabetic composition, recounting in twenty-three stanzas the life of Christ from birth to ascension—or, if you like, from A to Z.³¹ It is composed in iambic dimeter quatrains, the hymnic form popularized by Ambrose of Milan. The first seven stanzas (stanzas A–G) were excerpted for use during the Christmas season as an independent hymn, most often with a final doxology appended. It was included in ancient breviaries to be sung on Lauds of Christmas Day. The stanzas immediately following, beginning with the words *Hostis Herodes impie*, were frequently used as an Epiphany hymn. Both of these found their way into the Roman Breviary and are still included in Lutheran and Episcopalian hymnals in the United States. The entire hymn appears in some of the earliest manuscripts of the *Paschale carmen* (but not in Taur. E.IV.42) and can be found in shortened form in hymnaries as early as the tenth century. Lines 65–68 of the hymn (describing Jesus' healing of the woman with an issue of blood) were evidently used as a charm against bloodletting (cf. London, British Library, Royal 2 A. XX, f. 16v). The opening words of this hymn were so well known that medieval poets could expect their audience to recognize them when they were used to introduce other serious works or even for the sake of parody. As *Christum wir sollen loben schon*, Martin Luther's German version of *A solis ortus cardine* has been immortalized in settings by Johann Sebastian Bach and other Lutheran composers.³²

A work sometimes attributed to Sedulius but generally agreed not to be his is a short cento often referred to as *De uerbi incarnatione* (Huemer, *Sedulii opera*

30. See Carl Springer, "Ovid, Christianity, and Etiquette: The Uses of Latin Poetry in Colonial Mexico City," *The Annals of Ovidius University Constanta-Philology* 21 (2010): 145–57.

31. For further interpretation, see Carl Springer, "Sedulius' *A Solis Ortus Cardine*: The Hymn and Its Tradition," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 101 (1986): 69–75, and H. Wiegand, "Ein Weihnachtshymnus aus dem 5. Jahrhundert," *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 41 (1998): 82–89.

32. Bach's most famous setting is in the Cantata for the second day of Christmas (Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis, 121), but the hymn is also included in *Orgelbüchlein* (BWV, 611), and *Choralbearbeitungen in Kirnbergers Sammlung* (BWV, 696). Earlier composers such as Michael Praetorius, Hans Leo Hassler, and Samuel Scheidt also produced musical treatments of Luther's translation. Various sections of the hymn in Latin have been set to music by Guillaume Dufay, Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, Francisco Guerrero, Johann Josef Fux, and Alan Charlton. See also John Rutter's setting of the first stanzas of the hymn in English translation, "From East to West."

omnia, 310–15). Versions of the popular hymn beginning *Salve festa dies* are also attributed to Sedulius in a number of manuscripts. Laudatory verse compositions frequently attached to the *Paschale carmen* in the manuscripts, but which were certainly not written by Sedulius, include two acrostic (and telestic) poems, whose initial and final letters spell out the words *Sedulius antistes*. A number of poems such as these are included in the appendices to this volume along with translations. There is also a verse preface often associated with the Virgilian cento of Proba (*CSEL* 16:568), which begins *Romulidum ductor clari lux altera solis*. Intriguingly, this dedicatory poem is found in a number of Sedulian manuscripts which do not contain Proba's cento (see Springer, *Manuscripts*, 15–16 n. 40). The poem mentions “the younger Arcadius” (lines 13–14), Theodosius II, one of the two emperors during whose reigns, as we have seen above (note 5), the *Paschale carmen* was supposed to have been written.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND NOTES

As the basis for the Latin texts included in this volume I have adopted, with alterations, Johannes Huemer's critical edition of Sedulius's works, published in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 10 (*Sedulii Opera omnia*). While the Latin edition presented here is not intended to be a new critical edition complete with scholarly apparatus, it does offer a limited number of revisions to Huemer's text based on my own preliminary analysis of the evidence of manuscripts and early printed editions.³³ Among the hundreds of manuscripts not consulted by Huemer, there are many that are quite early, including the eighth-century manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 173, as well as the earliest witness to the *Paschale opus*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Phillipps 1727 (written in Verona; s. viii–ix). There are over fifty separate early printed editions, including the *editio princeps* published in Utrecht around 1473, a number produced in Spain (e.g., Salamanca, Valladolid, Saragossa, Tarragona, Seville, Barcelona), as well as those of Jakob Thanner (Leipzig, 1494), Aldus Manutius (Venice, 1501–1502), and

33. For specific criticisms of and emendations to Huemer's edition, see M. Petschenig's review in *Zeitschrift für die Österreichischen Gymnasien* 37 (1886): 187–90; the anonymous review in *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 6 (1886): 361–63; E. Ludwig, “Präpositionales Retro,” *Archiv für lateinische Lexicographie und Grammatik* 8 (1893): 294; Carl Weyman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Poesie* (Munich: Hueber, 1926), 121–37; and C. Tibiletti, “Note al testo del *Paschale Carmen* di Sedulio” in *Forma Futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (ed. Michele Pellegrino; Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1975), 778–85.

Georg Fabricius (Basel, 1564), to mention a few of them.³⁴ Modern editions predating Huemer's include those of Chr. Cellarius (Halle, 1704); Hendrik Jan Arntzen (Leeuwarden, 1761);³⁵ Faustino Arevalo (1794; reprinted in *Patrologia Latina* 19);³⁶ Johann Looshorn (Munich, 1879); and E. Ludwig (fifth book of the *Paschale opus*; Heilbronn, 1880).³⁷

While Huemer failed to consider a number of early and important Sedulian manuscripts, he did recognize the central importance of two seventh-century manuscripts of Sedulius written in Bobbio, still extant. One of these, Taur. E.IV.42, was apparently once part of Columban's library and is now housed in the University of Torino's library. It is fairly complete. The other is a fragmentary palimpsest preserved in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milano, R. 57 Sup., written in Bobbio at around the same time. Some of the idiosyncrasies of Huemer's edition may be due in part to his zealous dedication to the Bobbio manuscripts, especially Taur. E.IV.42, his "*codex optimus*." The manuscript certainly does deserve pride of place in any modern edition of Sedulius (it has a number of unique, viable readings), but it should be noted that some of its unique readings are impossible and its scribe was little concerned with orthographic consistency. Huemer's dedication to recording minor peculiarities leads to an overly cluttered and cumbersome critical apparatus, and his own edition's orthography can be as erratic and unpredictable as that of his favorite manuscript. For example, Taur. E.IV.42 has *posquam* at PC 2.9 and *postquam* at PC 2.105 (misrecorded by Huemer as *posquam*), and Huemer has *posquam* four times and *postquam* six times in the *Paschale carmen*. It is unlikely that the orthographic practices of early medieval scribes shed much light on Sedulius's own spelling some two hundred years or more earlier. For the purposes of this edition, I have

34. On early editions of Sedulius printed in Barcelona, see Alejandro Coroleu, "Printing Sacred Texts in Early Modern Barcelona (1480–1530)," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 86 (2009): 743–50.

35. Arntzen included in his notes observations of Cellarius, Vonck, Gruner, and Wopkens; my personal copy used to belong to Nicolaas Scheps and contains his extensive handwritten notes.

36. See M. Hernández Mayor, "El Codex Arevalianus del Carmen Paschale de Sedulio," in *Koinòs Lògos: Homenaje al profesor José García López* (ed. Esteban Calderón Dorda et al.; Murcia: University of Murcia, 2006), 413–24.

37. Among the most helpful editions of the hymns are: Guido Maria Dreves, *Hymnographi Latini: Lateinische Hymnendichter des Mittelalters* (vol. 50 of *Analecta Hymnica*; 2nd series; Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1907), 53–60; Arthur Sumner Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 151–58; Walther Bulst, *Hymni Latini Antiquissimi LXXV, Psalmi III* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1956), 71–73 and 187.

assumed that Sedulius himself would have been fairly consistent in matters of orthography. This confidence may be unfounded, but if Sedulius was a professional *grammaticus* or *rheto*r, as might be gathered from the evidence of the biographical note discussed above, one might reasonably suppose that he would have been more attentive to such considerations than many medieval scribes. Out of modern concerns for consistency and for ease of reading, therefore, the Latin text provided here regularizes variations between “oe,” “ae,” and “e,” alternations between “t” and “d,” “y” and “i,” “t” and “c,” consonant assimilations, aspiration or lack thereof before initial vowels, the spelling of proper names, the doubling or undoubling of letters, and other irregularities so commonly found in the manuscript tradition. Every “v” is written as “u” unless at the beginning of a line of poetry. Inspired by the same concerns for accessibility to contemporary readers and internal consistency, I have also tried to present the reader with a Latin text that has predictable punctuation (mine is based on more modern, less acoustical, principles than those guiding the medieval scribes or Huemer) and consistent, minimal, capitalization.

With a few exceptions, I observe the paragraph divisions for the *Paschale carmen* found in Huemer’s edition, although Green’s suggestions (*Latin Epics*, 223–24) for alternative paragraphing especially in the third and fourth books are worthwhile. Many of the manuscripts do include *capitula* for the individual pericopes. It is most unlikely, however, that these were authored by Sedulius himself, since they sometimes refer to the author in the third person; they are, therefore, omitted in my Latin text and translation. The number of books into which the *Paschale carmen* is divided varies widely. Often it is divided into four continuous books, with no break between what are the third and fourth books in Huemer’s edition. A common system of book division in the manuscript tradition divides the *Paschale carmen* into five books, with the second book described as “the first book concerning the New Testament.” Still other manuscripts divide the *Paschale carmen* into six books, often with 5.261–438 as the final book. The best evidence that the five-book format is Sedulius’s own can be found in the conclusions of each of the books themselves. The final two lines of each of the five books sound conclusive. They are replete with assonance and rhyme, the kind of ringing homoioteleuta so often associated with the clausulae of Latin prose. They include *-es* and *-os* in 1.366–367: *mittentes ... omnes / portantes nostros ... maniplos*; *-a* and *-i* in 2.299–300: *... bona ... torua cruenti / ora lupi uitaque frui ... pasqua Christi*; *-a*, *-ale*, and *-am* in 3.332–333: *parva ... facta ... curram / speciale ... generale, reuoluam*; *-a*, *-o*, *-e*, and *-um* in 4.307–308: *obuia turba ... domino ... patre Christo / ... aetherium ... principe ... regnum*; *-a*, *-us*, and *-os* in 5:437–438: *facta ... totus ... mundus / densos ... uolumina ... libros*. In addition to the sound of the final lines of each book, their sense also seems appropriately conclusive: book 1 concludes with a reference to the final harvest

when Christ will return, and believers will carry in the sheaves; the ending of book 2 refers to the heavenly pasture, where God's will is accomplished, and his sheep may enjoy themselves free from the threat of wolves; Sedulius finishes book 3 with a summary statement about his poetic progress thus far in light of his own authorial inadequacy; book 4 concludes with a doxology; at the end of book 5, Sedulius uses the conclusion of John's Gospel to serve as his own.³⁸

Where I have made more substantive changes to the actual wording of Huemer's edition, these modifications, with justifications, are discussed in the notes. These are relatively few in number. My textual critical assumptions are fairly conservative. Given the strong likelihood that a *stemma codicum* will never be able to be developed for such widely circulated and frequently copied poems as these, I maintain a high degree of respect for the evidence of the manuscript tradition itself, especially the earliest Bobbio witnesses, combined with a distrust of the rampant conjectural emendation that often characterized the practice of earlier editors of Sedulius. Of Cornelius Vonck, for example, Gruner remarked that he was "swept away by a remarkable lust for innovation" (*mira innovandi libidine abreptus*). It is unlikely that such a charge will be leveled at this edition. *Lectio difficilior*, the notion that it is more likely that a copyist would have changed a reading that he found more difficult (or scandalous) to understand to one less difficult, rather than vice-versa, is a principle that I find particularly well suited for the textual study of a poet who delights in paradox as much as Sedulius. Otherwise, the textual critical principle memorably enunciated by J.B. Hall serves as my guiding star: "The truth is that only untrammelled eclecticism founded on a recognition of the inapplicability of stemmatics will permit full exploitation of the wealth of the tradition."³⁹

The *Paschale carmen* has yet to be translated in its entirety into English. In *The Easter Song: Being the First Epic of Christendom by Sedulius, the First Scholar-Saint of Erinn*,⁴⁰ George Sigerson translated sections of the poem into English verse, but some passages he simply summarized. In addition, his trans-

38. By contrast, there is no concluding sentiment readily apparent at 5.259–260, just before some manuscripts begin the final book of the poem. On this issue in general, M. Hernández Mayor, "La división de libros en el Carmen Paschale de Sedulio" in *La Filología Latina: Mil años más* (eds. Pedro Conde Parrado and Isabel Velázquez Soriano; 3 vols.; Burgos: Fundación Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, 2005), 1071–87. Perhaps the variations in book (if not paragraph) division can be traced all the way back to the editorial work that Turcius Rufius Apronianus Asterius claims to have done.

39. L. D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmissions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 144.

40. George Sigerson, *The Easter Song: Being the First Epic of Christendom by Sedulius, the First Scholar-Saint of Erinn* (Dublin: Talbot, 1922).

lations are often quite free and, indeed, sometimes bear only a loose resemblance to the original. Otto Kuhnmuench included prose translations of a limited number of selections (1.17–87; 1.242–247; 2.20–34; 2.49–72; 5.63–68) in his *Early Christian Latin Poets*.⁴¹ Carolinne White's volume bearing the same name as Kuhnmuench's⁴² includes her translations of selections from the first (136–59) and the fifth book (20–68 and 164–244) of the *Paschale carmen*. Roy Swanson translated the first book of the *Paschale carmen* into English verse in *Classical Journal* 52 (1957): 289–97. Francesco Corsaro's *Sedulio Poeta*⁴³ includes an Italian translation of the *Paschale carmen* and the hymns.⁴⁴ The opening verses of Sedulius's popular alphabetical hymn, *A solis ortus cardine*, have been frequently translated into English and German, but Sedulius's other hymn, *Cantemus, socii, domino*, as well as his dedicatory letters to Macedonius, have not (to my knowledge). The most famous translator of Sedulius is no doubt the influential sixteenth-century theologian and reformer of the church, Martin Luther. His German version of the first seven stanzas of *A solis ortus cardine* (with a doxology) appeared in the *Erfurt Enchiridion*, published in 1524, as *Christum wir sollen loben schon*. The translation of the following stanzas beginning with *Hostis Herodes* did not appear until later (1541) as *Was furchstu, Feind Herodes, seer*.⁴⁵

As opposed to John Dryden and other distinguished translators according to whom a translation should be something of a brand new literary creation, my own philosophy of translation is much less ambitious, more attuned to the

41. Otto Kuhnmuench, *Early Christian Latin Poets from the fourth to the sixth century, with an introduction, translation, commentary, and notes* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1929), 254–72.

42. Carolinne White, *Early Christian Latin Poets* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

43. Francesco Corsaro, *Sedulio poeta* (Catania: Istituto universitario di magistero, 1956).

44. There is also a translation of the collected works of Sedulius into Polish by Henryk Wójtowicz (Lublin, 1999) that I have not consulted.

45. See WA 35:431–33 and 470–71. Johannes Hutt, an Anabaptist from Augsburg, had produced a less literal translation of the first stanzas shortly before Luther's, but there were a number of other German versions long before his; see, e.g., Philipp Wackernagel, *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts* (vol. 2; Leipzig: Teubner, 1867), no. 562 and 756, and Günther Bärnthaler, *Übersetzungen im deutschen Spätmittelalter: Der Mönch von Salzburg, Heinrich Laufenberg und Oswald von Wolkenstein als Übersetzer lateinischer Hymnen und Sequenzen* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983). There have been over 20 English translations of the hymn, including John Mason Neale's and John Ellerton's. The latter is used in a recent American Lutheran hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), which leaves out three of the original stanzas (C, E, and F).

priorities of a scholar than a poet. It is my aim to find an English idiom that is fairly faithful to the original Latin, while not sounding too wooden. Especially when translating poetry, the preservation of metaphor is of critical importance, so I have tried to stay somewhat close to the language of the original without sacrificing clarity.⁴⁶ This said, the reader will discover that I have taken a number of liberties in this translation (e.g., shorter sentences; active for passive voice and vice-versa) which I have deemed necessary to ensure greater readability. Like other Latin poets, Sedulius allows himself a great deal of compositional flexibility, often for metrical considerations. The present tense may be used “historically” for the past; an abstract word may be substituted for a more concrete one; the singular may be employed for the plural or vice-versa. These distinctive features are almost always impossible to reflect literally in a fluent English rendering. As much as possible, allowing for the difference between English word order, with its strong preference for sentences that begin with the subject followed shortly thereafter by the verb, and the much greater flexibility found in Latin word order, I have tried to ensure that the lines of text and translation remain relatively close. The reader who has even a limited amount of Latin should have little difficulty in consulting the original language.

The most famous medieval commentary on Sedulius was written by Remigius of Auxerre (ca. 840–908), whose work serves as the basis for much subsequent glossing on the text of the *Paschale carmen*, but there are other glosses in Old English, Old High German, and Latin which may or may not be connected with Remigius’s commentary. Extensive portions of it, based on select manuscripts, are included in Huemer’s edition. The best known commentary of the early modern period is that of the great Spanish humanist and grammarian of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Antonio Nebrija, first published in 1510 and reprinted 20 times in as many years.⁴⁷ It is much more thorough than the one prepared earlier by his student, Juan de Sobrarias, which first appeared

46. I am impressed with Walter Benjamin’s insistence on the importance of the principle of “transparency” for a good translation: “it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” See “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations* (transl. H. Zohn; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 69–82.

47. See R. Manchón, “El Comentario de Antonio de Nebrija al poeta cristiano Sedulio,” in *Humanismo y pervivencia del mundo clásico* (ed. José María Maestre Maestre et al.; Madrid: Ediciones del Laberinto, 2002), 943–54, and Antonio de Nebrija, *Comentario al Carmen Paschale y a dos himnos de Sedulio* (trans. Valeriano Yarza Urquiola; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2011).

in 1500.⁴⁸ Modern commentaries which I have consulted include Nicolaas Scheps, *Sedulius' Paschale Carmen, Boek I en II: Ingeleid, Vertaald en Toegelicht*;⁴⁹ Michael Mazzega, *Sedulius, Carmen Paschale, Buch III. Ein Kommentar*;⁵⁰ P. W. A. Th. van der Laan, "Sedulius Carmen Paschale Boek 4. Inleiding, Vertaling, Commentaer";⁵¹ and Daniel Deerberg, *Der Sturz des Judas: Kommentar (5,1–163) und Studien zur poetischen Erbauung bei Sedulius*.⁵² Manfred Wacht's *Concordantia in Sedulium*⁵³ has proven to be an invaluable tool for close verbal analysis, although its title is somewhat misleading; it includes only the *Paschale carmen*. Roger Green's *Latin Epics of the New Testament* includes a thoughtful reading of the letters to Macedonius and the *Paschale Carmen* (154–209) as well as translations of select passages,⁵⁴ to which my own translation is sometimes indebted and with which my notes are frequently engaged.

Suffice it to say that for what follows I have drawn on all of the scholarly resources acknowledged above, although some have proved to be more useful for my purposes than others. In the interest of preserving a reasonable degree of brevity, however, it will not be possible to indicate my specific debt in every instance in the notes proper. It should be noted too that these annotations are not intended to be comprehensive in any way or to replicate the work already done in commentaries or other specialized studies. Sedulius is an exceedingly intertextual author and to list every possible borrowing from earlier or contemporary pagan or Christian Latin poets, for instance, would be unduly cumbersome in notes such as these, especially when the language borrowed is standard poetic phraseology and may function, as it sometimes appears to do, as little more than a kind of *Übersetzungsmedium*. Panagl's *Index fontium et locorum similibus* is ten pages long and cites over seven hundred instances. Of these I

48. See Charles Fantazzi, "Nebrija and the Horatius Christianus," *IJCT* 11 (2005): 620–28. *A solis ortus cardine* and *Hostis Herodes* were included along with over eighty other Latin hymns by Nebrija in his completely reworked *recognitio* of *Aurea hymnorum expositio*, reprinted ten times before 1520. See A. Moss, "Latin Liturgical Hymns and their Early Printing History, 1470–1520," *HL* 26 (1987): 112–37.

49. Nicolaas Scheps, *Sedulius' Paschale carmen, Boek I en II: Ingeleid, Vertaald en Toegelicht* (Diss., Delft, 1938).

50. Michael Mazzega, *Sedulius, Carmen Paschale, Buch III. Ein Kommentar* (Basel: Schwabe, 1996).

51. P. W. A. Th. van der Laan, "Sedulius Carmen Paschale Boek 4. Inleiding, Vertaling, Commentaer" (Diss., Oud-Beijerland, 1990).

52. Daniel Deerberg, *Der Sturz des Judas: Kommentar (5,1–163) und Studien zur poetischen Erbauung bei Sedulius* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011).

53. Manfred Wacht, *Concordantia in Sedulium* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1992).

54. See, e.g., *PC* 1.17–28:162; 3.46–63:200; 3.219–228:194; and 4.125–141:187–88.

will focus only on unusually conspicuous cases of borrowing or where it seems likely that the poet is deliberately engaged in what has been called *Kontrastimitation* with the poetic forbears to whom he was so deeply indebted, such as Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, or Juvenecus. Another disclaimer about the notes: Sedulius has had an enormous influence on the later literary tradition. It would be wearisome to enumerate all of the instances in which Sedulius's works are cited by later authors, to say nothing of offering an analysis of each. Panagl's *Index imitatorum* runs to nearly thirty daunting pages.⁵⁵ The list of authors and works apparently influenced by Sedulius includes: Abelard, Alain de Lille, Albert of Stade, Alcuin, Aldhelm, Amalarius, Arator, Avianus, Avitus, Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, Cassiodorus, "Cato," Columban, Dracontius, *Ecbasis Captivi*, *Ecloga Theoduli*, Ennodius, Ermoldus, Eugenius of Toledo, Hincmar of Reims, *Hisperica Famina*, Hrabanus Maurus, Hrotsvitha, Isidore of Seville, Jean Gerson, John of Salisbury, Julianus Toletanus, Luitprand, Matthew Paris, Odo of Cluny, Paschasius Radbertus, Paulinus of Aquileia, Paulinus of Pella, Peter the Venerable, Remigius of Auxerre, Sedulius Scotus, Smaragdus, Tatwine, Theodulf of Orleans, Thomas à Kempis, Venantius Fortunatus,⁵⁶ Walafrid Strabo, Walter of Châtillon, and Wulfstan, among others. In my notes I offer only select examples where the poet's influence seems especially important and interesting.

Of course, Sedulius is a biblical poet, and he constantly refers to the scriptures, both as the basis for his narrative itself, and in support of his poetic explanations. While I have tried to indicate in the notes the most relevant biblical passages, there are many important and often vexed subsidiary questions that the reader will find less than fully addressed in the notes. Which version of the Bible did Sedulius use? Did he consult the Greek original? Did he use a version of the Vulgate or the *Itala* or both?⁵⁷ Did he have some kind of harmony of the Gospels before him as he wrote, or did he rely on his memory, or use some combination of both?⁵⁸ Upon what extrabiblical sources (e.g., apocryphal Gospels, contemporary art, oral catechesis and preaching, or his own fertile imagination), might he have drawn? Many of his biblical interpretations sound quite similar to those

55. Well over two hundred individual authors and anonymous works are listed.

56. See Michael John Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 321, for an assessment of "Fortunatus' unusual familiarity with the *CP* and the special status that the poem had for him." The fifth-century poet "is far and away the most influential Christian poet on his work" (31).

57. See the first Appendix to P. Van der Laan, "Sedulius Carmen Paschale," 204–12, which makes the case that Sedulius used the *Vetus Latina*, not the Vulgate.

58. See the detailed study of G. Moretti Pieri, "Sulle fonti evangeliche di Sedulio," *Atti e memorie dell'accad. tosc. di sc. e lett. La Columbaria* 39, NS 20 (1969): 125–234.

of patristic authors such as Origen, Hilary, Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine.⁵⁹ Since he never credits them, it is difficult to know how much he may have owed to them either directly or indirectly. Questions such as these are highly complex and have been analyzed at length elsewhere. To address them in each instance goes beyond my purposes here; the reader interested in greater comprehensiveness in this regard is urged to consult the relevant commentaries and specialized studies for more detailed considerations.

As for historical background, I have tried to provide in the notes, without overloading them, brief contextualizations that may help to establish the *Sitz im Leben* for Sedulius's paraphrase of the Gospel accounts, so very far removed, in time and space, from the cultural expectations of first-century Palestine. These are intended to give the modern reader a more vivid sense of what his words may have meant to his earliest readers, by concentrating on the world of thought, images, and events of the city, empire, and church of Rome in the fifth century. A listing of relevant primary and secondary sources is included in the select bibliography that concludes the volume.

“PIOUS MIRTH”⁶⁰

The critical responses to Sedulius as a poet have been quite varied. On the one hand, as a biblical poet working in the paraphrastic tradition, Sedulius's poetics do not fit comfortably with what Michael Roberts has called “the jeweled style,” the highly worked verbal virtuosity so characteristic of the poetry of peers like Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, and Prudentius. Of Sedulius and Arator, Roberts declares: “The jeweled style is largely avoided; narrative and interpretation are interfused to produce a poetry of commitment to the Christian message that refutes any accusation of self-serving stylistic virtuosity. But other poets were less rigorous in their avoidance of literary tours de force in the preferred style of late antiquity.”⁶¹ Indeed, it is possible to read the *Paschale carmen* as though it were a kind of pious midrash of the Bible (or even a missionary treatise) that just

59. Ambrose and Augustine were probably the most influential (Green, *Latin Epics*, 235–36). Theodor Mayr, *Studien zu dem Paschale carmen des christlichen Dichters Sedulius* (Augsburg: Pfeiffer, 1916), 54–68, while dated is quite specific and still useful. For a comprehensive study of the doctrinal perspectives of the biblical epics of late antiquity, see Daniel Joseph Nodes, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry* (Leeds: F. Cairns, 1993).

60. Catherine Winkworth, the Victorian translator of Luther's hymns, describes the angels who sing at Christ's birth as filled with “pious mirth” in her translation of the German Christmas hymn *Vom Himmel Hoch*.

61. Roberts, *Jeweled Style*, 142–3.

happens to be written in verse. Not a few critics, on the other hand, have focused on the liberties this poet takes with the sacred text and how heavily he adorns its narratives with classical figures and tropes. According to Ernst Robert Curtius, the “grandiloquent” Sedulius was an “inflated, vain, soulless, and unintelligent rhetor” whose poetry demonstrates “only that even a recent convert could take over the frippery of the pagan school rhetor into his Christian life, could indeed make it over into Christian clothing and strut about in it” (460). How could the same poet’s achievement elicit such disparate critical assessments?

Certainly, throughout the Middle Ages and beyond Sedulius was taken to be a serious religious poet, a *poeta Christianissimus* as Luther described him, whose verses were employed in theological controversy and embedded in the language of the liturgy. In the opening lines of the *Paschale carmen*, Sedulius himself lets his reader know that he is a poet who believes strongly in the truth of his poetry. He is a verse evangelist, not just another charming poet playing with trifles. Sedulius has serious ambitions, to be a *vates*, the old-fashioned kind of poet, like Homer or Hesiod (or Lucretius or Virgil), inspired by the Muses. As he indicates at the conclusion of his first letter to Macedonius, he intends the fruits of his poetic labors to be an offering to “our Lord Jesus Christ.” What he has to say, as he explains to Macedonius, is substantial, salutary, useful, like medicine, and it is not always palatable without the sweet coating of verse. Without coming to faith in the *clara miracula* of Christ as they are retold in his poem, this polemical poet is convinced that everyone in the world around him—heretics, pagans, Jews—will never enjoy the fruits of Christian salvation.

At the same time, despite his “grand” poetic ambitions, like other contemporary Christian poets, Sedulius expresses great modesty about his own poetic abilities. This has struck readers like Curtius as proof of his insincerity, as there can be no doubt that Sedulius was a highly accomplished wordsmith. In fact, it would be surprising if Sedulius had not expressed some degree of authorial modesty in his prefatory remarks; it is a trait with very deep roots in a Christian ethos that tends to prize human humility and to give glory to God alone (cf., e.g., the Apostle Paul’s description of himself in 1 Corinthians as an “earthen vessel” in which the rich treasures of the Gospel are stored).⁶² Rhetorical “topoi” such as authorial modesty become so formulaic and predictable not because they do not map reality, but precisely because they so often do. It is, of course, highly unlikely that anyone forced Sedulius to write this fairly long and highly worked poem that required him to sail what he called “the immense sea of the paschal majesty,” or, as Curtius cuttingly observes, its even longer and more

62. See A. Dihle, “Demut,” *RAC* 3:735–78.

tedious prose paraphrase.⁶³ Just because the author appears to derive a great deal of enjoyment from the exercise of his considerable rhetorical gifts does not, of course, rule out the possibility that he may at the same time still feel overwhelmed by the literary task he has set himself. Since we have no actual textual evidence to suggest that Sedulius's expressed feeling of poetic inadequacy is any more insincere than his passionate outbursts against heretics and Jews or his not infrequent editorial expressions of personal piety and religious awe, conjectures in this regard may tell us more about the critic than the poet criticized.

The *Paschale carmen* is without question highly rhetorical, but so is much of the Latin poetry of authors such as Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan, if by "rhetorical" we mean highly worked and artificial. Sedulius may not be altogether to the taste of readers, in other words, who expect poetry to exhibit the kinds of spontaneous, natural freedom characteristic of Shelley's skylark who pours forth from its "full heart" its song "in profuse strains of unpremeditated art." Sedulius's style cannot really be judged to be "classical." Perhaps "baroque" (or "mannered"), if not "jeweled," would be appropriate adjectives. Certainly, the classic Horatian criterion, *simplex et unum*, is not a principle endorsed by Sedulian poetics. "Ornament" is clearly a high priority for the poet. Indeed, it would be unfeasible to note in each instance the figures and tropes Sedulius employs with such extravagant profusion throughout the *Paschale carmen*. These include: adnominatio, allegory, anaphora, antithesis, apostrophe, asyndeton, chiasmus, commutatio, ecphrasis, enallage, epanastrophe, exclamatio, geminatio, hendiadys, hyperbaton, hysteron proteron, irony, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, parataxis, polyptoton, praeteritio, rhetorical question, simile, synecdoche, transferred epithet, tricolon, variatio, and others. He writes with great vividness, using language that is sometimes shocking in its effect, and he is keenly aware of how his poetry sounds. His verse is filled with alliteration and assonance, internal and end rhymes, and "golden lines." Like Juvenal and other Roman satirists, he loves to offer witty, pointed *sententiae* in the most striking manner conceivable. He mixes styles with great freedom, juxtaposing extravagant outbursts with simple retellings of biblical narratives (cf., e.g., *PC* 3.8) and succinct theological summations (see, e.g., *PC* 5.404).

If Sedulius's poetic style is different from that of Virgil or Horace, that does not mean, of course, that it should be judged perforce as deficient or defective. It is possible to read his poetry not as a pale imitation of "better" poetic forbears in

63. The expression of obligation is a trope that appears in many prefaces of the Christian literature of the time, but see Catherine M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), especially chapter 2, on the connection between scholarly work and piety.

the Latin tradition, but as the trendsetting work of a poetic pioneer who helped to shape the aesthetic contours for Latin biblical epics and hymns for centuries to come. Sedulius is one of the first poets, for instance, to fully embrace the acoustic potential of rhyme that was to become such an important feature of European poetry in the following centuries.⁶⁴

An element in his verse that has often escaped the attention of his theological or literary critics, but is perhaps the most vital poetological aspect to notice because it sets Sedulius apart from many other poets engaged in the same kind of literary-theological project, is its playfulness. All the biblical poets of late antiquity could be said, of course, to be ludic in some sense, even the meticulous Juvenecus and the didactic Arator. The biblical centos of Proba and others who used lines and half-lines of pagan poets like Virgil and Homer to retell sacred narratives have an inherent virtuosic quality that made them a source of delight for some premodern readers but may have offended or upset others, like Jerome.⁶⁵ But Sedulius is even more self-consciously and explicitly playful. He uses the Latin verb *ludere* ["to play"] in his first letter to Macedonius. Sometimes, the poet suggests to the busy presbyter, it is pleasant "to take a tiny break from writings that are loftier and gladly enjoy humbler fare. The eagle does not always soar high above the clouds, but also descends to earth sometimes in easier flight. The battle-hardened soldier also often delights to play with the arms with which he is accustomed to fight." The doughty word of God, which Paul describes as the "sword of the Spirit," is not only useful for "instruction in righteousness," polemical theologizing, and converting hardened hearts, but can, according to Sedulius, serve as a source of literary delight.

Would Sedulius's first readers, including the pious Macedonius, have appreciated his poetic humor as applied to the Bible? The question of intended readership is quite complicated when it comes to a literary work like this that overtly addresses the question of faith. Who could Sedulius have conceived as his readers? Those who did not believe; those who said they believed but did not really; those who believed but still had doubts; those who believed but who believed wrongly; and, of course, those who were already devout believers—all were potential readers of a biblical epic such as Sedulius's, provided they had at least some preliminary grounding in Latin grammar. Conversion of the heathen, providing instruction to catechumens, building up the faith of immature

64. See Jules Candel, *De clausulis a Sedulio in eis libris qui inscribuntur Paschale Opus adhibitis* (Toulouse: Societatis Sancti-Cypriani, 1904), on the thousands of *clausulae* in the *Paschale opus*, and Dag Ludvig Norberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification* (ed. Jan Ziolkowski; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), especially 31–32.

65. See my "Jerome and the Cento of Proba," *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 96–105.

or mature believers, refuting skeptics and heretics—all of these were undoubtedly authorial intentions to some extent or another for Juvencus, Sedulius, and Arator.⁶⁶ It is not at all unusual, of course, for authors to have more than one set of readers in mind as they write and to envision more than one purpose for their writing.

In the opening lines and elsewhere in his poem, Sedulius does express his interest in the conversion of pagans to Christianity. In fact, he addresses them directly in the second person plural, urging them to favor the truthful content of his biblical poem over the *mendacia* and *figmenta* of the *gentiles poetae*. They should leave the barren wasteland of Attic philosophy for the well watered pasturage of Holy Scripture. It would be unwise, however, simply to take Sedulius “at his word” here as Michael Mazzega recommends that we do⁶⁷ and suggest that this means that his primary or even sole intention as a poet was to make a contribution to “*der Dienst der Heidenmission*.” It is important that we try to distinguish as much as possible an author’s stated “audience,” which can be entirely fictional, from his or her potential or actual readers.⁶⁸ Just because Virgil gives farmers specific advice on how to raise cattle, tend vines, and keep bees, in his *Georgics*, for example, does not mean that he really imagined that illiterate farmers in rural Italy would be able to use his poem for practical purposes or even appreciate its artistry. He wrote it for his patron Maecenas and his group of well-educated Roman elites, including Augustus, to enjoy. From his dedicatory epistles to the presbyter Macedonius and his circle of devoutly Christian friends, it is clear that whatever he may say about and to pagan readers, Sedulius had a very specific group of Christian readers in mind as he wrote his poem. They were not novices to the faith by any means. Sedulius describes Felix, for instance, as one to whom the world is crucified, using language borrowed from the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. Syncretica, another member of Macedonius’s circle, is described by the poet as a *sacra virgo* and *ministra*. Ursinus was an *antistes*. These were clearly not pagans. In fact, they were not even catechumens, still learning the first principles of the faith before being admitted fully into its mysteries. Sedulius may be directing his poem *against* or *to* pagans, among others, but he is writing it *for* Christians.

There are, doubtless, simple, straightforward poems, which deserve simple and straightforward readings, but this is surely not one of them. To illustrate

66. Sedulius mentions only Arius and Sabellius by name in his poem, but it is quite possible that he was aware of more recent heretical controversies, including Nestorianism; see Springer, *Gospel as Epic*, 33–44 and Green, *Latin Epics*, 239–44.

67. Mazzega, *Sedulius, Carmen Paschale*, 16.

68. Walter J. Ong, “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction,” *PMLA* 90 (1975): 405–27.

this point with just one example: when Sedulius assures us in his preface that as our host he will be serving up a simple, rustic paschal meal, not featuring the fancy kind of food served by the pagan culinary competition, his metaphorical declaration itself is hardly simple or straightforward. It is the height of sophistication to claim lack of sophistication. His own sophisticated rhetoric undercuts what he is saying. We cannot simply take this poet “at his word” without ignoring his words themselves. Equal caution is required when we read Sedulius’s addresses to the *gentiles populi* (e.g., 4:304). The fact that he addresses pagans and unbelievers does not necessarily mean that he thinks that they are going to be reading his poem. Throughout the course of the *Paschale carmen*, Sedulius apostrophizes a whole cast of biblical characters including Eve, Mary, Herod, and Judas, all of them long dead before the author’s time. He also addresses non-human elements such the Jordan River and nature and death. Such apostrophes are a common poetic convention, but they most certainly should not be taken literally. Nobody could seriously imagine that Sedulius expected Judas or the Jordan River to be in a position to read his poem or hear his poetic voice, just because we find him addressing his words to them in the poem.

Now it may be that Juvenius, a contemporary of Constantine, the emperor who famously converted to Christianity in the first quarter of the fourth century, did write his verse paraphrase of the Gospels, the *Evangeliorum libri*, in order to help an educated pagan audience who were put off by what many considered to be the relatively unpolished style of the scriptures better to appreciate the sacred narrative, once it was recast in a more aesthetically pleasing form. And, of course, there were still adherents of paganism left in Sedulius’s time, a century or so later.⁶⁹ But the last pagan temple in Rome (dedicated to Venus and Rome) was closed in 391, and Theodosius prohibited pagan worship the following year. Given the historical realities of his own times, it is most unlikely that the conversion of pagans represented as pressing an issue to the fifth-century poet as it had to the earlier Juvenius, with whose work he was doubtless familiar. But even if the *Paschale carmen* is trying to emulate what Juvenius had already done a hundred years or so earlier, we should not be misled into simply assuming that its author is trying to do nothing more than replicate Juvenius—any more than Juvenius is trying to do nothing more than replicate the original evangelists. The fifth-century poet’s hexameter retelling of the life of Christ is a very different kind of poem from Juvenius’s. Its narratological focus is not on simply retelling the reader what happened in another way, but on accentuating the wonder of what happened. In his account of the multiplication of the

69. See now, in general, Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

loaves and fishes, Sedulius tells us that he is adding the biblical detail about how much was left over so that his readers might marvel even more (*plus ut mireris*, 3.267). Sedulius's poetic theme is the *clara miracula salutiferi Christi*. This is a poem about "the wonderful." Nature's laws are routinely broken. The Red Sea becomes a pedestrian traffic route. The lions surrounding Daniel in the den learn not to be hungry. Water changes to wine and blushes on the table at the wedding of Cana. The virgin Mary stares at her swelling stomach in amazement. A dead man is raised from the grave, and Lazarus becomes his own successor. These marvels begin already in the Old Testament, the first book of his poem, and culminate in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his ascension into heaven in the final book.

Not every biblical account that Sedulius retells is as wonderful on the face of it as those in the long series of Jesus' miracles he recounts in the third and fourth books. There is much that is inherently miraculous in the passion story, retold in the fifth and final book of the poem, but there is also much that is not. But even when Sedulius is retelling an episode in the story of Christ's betrayal, his trial and beatings, his crucifixion, which is not explicitly miraculous, he is never content simply to retell it. He uncovers for his reader the paradoxical, the unexpected, the significant in what could justly be considered mundane or insignificant, and then revels in it. There is a wild abundance of poetic figures of speech: antithesis and chiasmus, metaphor and simile, allegory and paronomasia, as the poet elaborates and emotes about what the evangelists (or Juvenecus) narrate simply and succinctly (or ignore): the shape of the cross, the day of the week that he rose from the dead, the fact that his mother Mary is the first to whom he appears. His readers will not only be informed or convinced or instructed, but also, and above all, delighted. His poem is not supposed to be a synoptic overview of the Gospels in verse like Juvenecus's. Nor is it as comprehensively exegetical as Arator's more prosaic *Historia*. It is a *carmen*. One could even go so far as to translate its title as "The Easter Charm."⁷⁰

Could not well-educated pagans who were already generally familiar with scriptural narratives or Christian doctrines, but hostile or indifferent to them, have appreciated this kind of poem? Might they not have been delighted and charmed too? Possibly. But the answer would certainly depend a lot on the level

70. See Ambrose, *Epistulae*, 75A, 34, for this meaning of the word *carmen*. On the power of the "marvelous combined with astonishment" to prevail "over the persuasive and pleasant because persuasion for the most part is in our own power, while the marvelous and astonishing exert invincible power and force and overwhelm every hearer," see the preface to Longinus, *On Sublimity*, as translated in George Alexander Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (2nd ed.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 134.

of their familiarity with Christianity. Some pagans (e.g., Origen's Celsus) were indeed well versed in the Christian scriptures and their allegorical interpretations. It is interesting, however, to note how seldom Sedulius bothers to give any kind of background at all for fairly obscure biblical names (e.g., Baal and Barabbas in 5.147). It is difficult to imagine readers with some Virgil or Ovid in their educational background, but with only a superficial knowledge of the Christian scriptures, really comprehending a metaleptic passage such as the following from the fifth book of the *Paschale carmen* describing the rending of the veil of the temple on the occasion of Jesus' death on the cross:⁷¹

Illud ouans templum, maioris culmina templi
 Procubuisse uidens, ritu plangentis alumni
 Saucia discisso nudauit pectora uelo,
 Interiora sui populis arcana futuris
 Iam reseranda docens, quia lex uelamine Moysae
 Tecta diu Christo nobis ueniente patescit. (5.270–275)

[The great temple paid its respects as it saw that the roofs of the greater temple
 Had succumbed. Just like a foster-child in mourning,
 It bared its wounded breast and tore its veil, in order to teach us
 That its inner secrets were now to be revealed to the peoples from that
 point on,
 Because the law covered so long by the Mosaic veil
 Lies opened to us now that Christ has come.]

Sedulius makes a complicated reference here to the great temple of Herod, describing it as the *alumnus* (or foster-child, if you will) of an even greater temple and suggesting that it is rending its veil in mourning. The "greater temple" is Jesus himself, who refers to his body as "this temple" in John 2:21. Sedulius's pagan readers would probably have been familiar with the notion that there was once a great temple in Jerusalem (Herod's) whose underpinnings are visible to this day. Some of them might even have heard of Solomon's earlier temple. But would they have been aware that the veil of the temple was rent on Good Friday, an event to which Sedulius makes a most oblique reference here? And even if they had read all of the poem up to this point, is it likely that pagan readers would have been able to make a connection between the greater temple

71. On Paul's use of metalepsis, see Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

described here and Jesus' own reference to his body as a temple in John's Gospel, not mentioned by Sedulius heretofore in his poem? Readers already thoroughly familiar with the Gospels, of course, would be afforded a shock of delighted recognition, something akin to the pleasure that can be derived from solving a difficult clue in a crossword puzzle. It is not supposed to be readily apparent; in fact, it is disappointing if it is too easy, but the cognoscenti can figure it out eventually. Such a difficult and ultimately frustrating exercise could hardly have delighted novices to the faith. Complicated allegorical interpretations of the scriptures, unabashedly emotional expressions of intense love of God and deep hatred for his human and spiritual enemies, obvious devotion to the sacraments, the virgin mother of God, and the good shepherd and his heavenly paradise—all are, on the face of it, aspects of the poem more likely to provide compelling reading for devout Christian readers than for skeptical pagans.⁷²

For devout Christians there is no biblical story more central, no subject matter more serious than that of the passion of Christ. So it is striking that it is precisely in his treatment of this subject that we see Sedulius at his ludic best. Consider, for instance, his treatment of Judas's betrayal of his master:

Tune cruenta, ferox, audax, insane, rebellis,
 Perfide, crudelis, fallax, uenalis, inique,
 Traditor immitis, fere proditor, impie latro,
 Praeuus horribiles comitaris signifer enses?
 Sacrilegamque aciem, gladiis sudibusque minacem
 Cum moueas, ori ora premis mellique uenenum
 Inseris et blanda dominum sub imagine prodis?
 Quid socium simulas et amica fraude salutas?
 Numquam terribiles aut pax coniurat in enses,
 Aut truculenta pio lupus oscula porrigit agno. (5.59–68)

[You bloody, savage, impudent, crazy, rebellious,
 Faithless, cruel, deceitful, venal, evil,
 Heartless traitor, savage betrayer, disloyal thug,
 Are you their standard bearer, marching in front of the bristling
 swords?
 As you bring up the unholy line that threatens him with swords and
 staves,
 Do you press your lips to his, slip poison into the honey,

72. See G. de Nie, "What Mysteries Miracles May Teach Our Souls," *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010): 273–88.

And betray your Lord, using the guise of a friendly gesture?
 Why do you pretend to be his ally and greet him with congenial deceit?
 Never does peace conspire to use dreadful swords;
 Never does a wolf offer fierce kisses to a holy lamb.]⁷³

Note what Green calls “a torrent, albeit a smoothly structured one, of ten virulent epithets, with three more neatly attached to nouns”⁷⁴ in Sedulius’s lines. By contrast, Juvencus assigns just one fairly cool participle to Judas here (*dissimulans*). The emotional impact of the asyndeton in the *Paschale carmen*, the sheer, angry force of the repetitive epithets, is unmistakable. The author, it seems, cannot stop from inserting himself into the objective narrative and addressing his characters in the second person at such a tense and dramatic moment in the story. Sedulius’s anger at Judas has a passionate quality which would readily fuel the fires of faith for an already devout, probably anti-Semitic, readership, but it is hard to imagine that this would be very convincing in a missionary tract. At the same time, even at such a diatribic moment, it is clear that the Christian poet has not forgotten the art that he knows so well. His language is not only deeply insulting but also highly metaphorical.⁷⁵ He highlights the antithesis between

73. For the sake of contrast we may consider Juvencus’s earlier, more emotionally reserved treatment of the same biblical event in his *Evangeliorum libri*:

Cum dicto Iudas numero stipante cateruae
 Aduenit procerum iussu populique ferocis.
 Pars strictis gladiis pars fidens pondere clauae
 Signa sequebatur Iudae promissa furentis.
 Oscula nam pepigit sese contingere Christi,
 Quo facile ignotum caperet miserabile uulgus.
 Ille ubi dissimulans blanda cum uoce salutat,
 Attigit et labiis iusti uenerabilis ora,
 Continuo Christus: “Totum complere licebit,
 Huc uenisse tuo quaecumque est causa paratu.” (4.511–520)

And here is Arator’s much briefer treatment of Judas’ betrayal in his *Historia apostolica* (1.100–103), which is heavily dependent on Sedulius (written a century or so later after the *Paschale carmen*):

... cuius tuba saeva cruentum
 Est exorsa nefas, qui signifer oscula fingens
 Pacis ab indicio bellum lupus intulit agno.

74. Green, *Latin Epics*, 204.

75. Even what appear to be severe insults can, in the right literary context, perform a ludic function, “in lightening a heavy discourse with a licensed release of aggression,” as Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 8 n.6, observes. With roots that extend as far back as Aristotle, insulting

violence and peace in this situation with vivid images: honey and poison, the wolf and the lamb. The ludic coup de grace is Judas's kiss. Here we see a much lighter touch on Sedulius's part. The elision of the words *ori* and *ora* replicate the physical meeting of the mouths of the Savior and the traitor. They literally and acoustically "kiss." Arator uses the word *oscula*, but there is no similar wordplay.

To pick just one other example of how Sedulius weds the light and the serious: when rendering into Latin verse the *titulus* placed over Jesus' head as he was being crucified, he uses only spondees: *Scribitur et titulus: "Hic est rex Iudaeorum"* (5.196). This is an important official pronouncement, and the poet assigns each syllable equal weight. The unusually steady beat at the end of a dactylic hexameter line (normally it concludes with a dactyl in the fifth foot) has a hammering quality that may be meant to evoke the manner in which Jesus was affixed to the cross; his executioners pounded his body to the cross with nails (see John 20:25). There is something about this kind of poetics that resembles the compositional style often associated with baroque music. One thinks of the wildly colorful effects of Vivaldi's music or the tone-painting that characterizes the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. In fact, we find precisely this kind of slow repetitive effect in Bach's Mass in B Minor in the methodical *Crucifixus*, which listeners have suggested is intended to replicate the effect of the relentless pounding of nails. This, or the euphuism associated with the Elizabethan court in England of the 1580s, is perhaps a more apt analogy to use as we try to describe Sedulius's extravagant style than the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics associated with the name of J. K. Huysmans,⁷⁶ or with the elaborate, minute, verbal artistry that Michael Roberts describes as "the jeweled style."

Sedulius explains his use of verse in the first epistle to Macedonius in terms of honey (used then as now to help make the medicine go down).⁷⁷ There is a difference between verse and prose, and that was clear even in the ancient world. Poetry is "made," if we go back to the basic meaning of the Greek root. It is more

"is the fruit not only of a quick intellect but of *urbanitas*." Even though they appear to be "angry, emotion-laden outbursts," the primary rhetorical purpose of some literary insults may be not so much to offend as to teach and delight.

76. Sedulius is included in the library of the eccentric hero, Des Esseintes, of J. Huysmans, *Against the Grain (A Reboours)* (trans. Havelock Ellis; New York: Illustrated Editions, 1931).

77. See Gwendolyn Mae Gruber, "Medium and Message in Lucretius' Honey Analogy" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2009). Sedulius may also be thinking of Prov 16:24: "Gracious words are like a honey-comb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." The title of Judah Messer Leon's Hebrew study of the rhetoric of the Old Testament (couched in classical rhetorical terms) is *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow*; see Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 143.

highly wrought than other forms of discourse. Prose can have its rhythms, to be sure, and is certainly not without its own sophisticated artistry, especially as employed by the great Attic and Roman orators. But verse has even more capacity for sweet playfulness. With its metrical shape, its capacity to incorporate many poetic figures, its matching of sound and sense, it has a uniquely attractive power not only to delight aesthetically but also to move the heart and help it to retain words deep in its memory, as Sedulius explains to Macedonius.⁷⁸ This kind of poetic purpose seems rather ill suited for the purposes of missionary work, but it makes perfect sense if its intention is to edify and amuse Christians who have already embarked on the process of spiritual development in the faith and may be charmed by a poet's ludic skills into paying even more attention to, or renewing their interest in, what they thought they already knew.⁷⁹

It is not Sedulius's playfulness, nor his piety, by themselves, but their uncomfortably close proximity, one suspects, that has confounded critics who are used to encountering one or the other but not both of these characteristics together, especially in Christian contexts. Curtius condemns the biblical epic because it is a "hybrid" genre. It is so displeasing aesthetically to him precisely because it combines elements that were never intended to be put together.⁸⁰ We should be careful to note, however, that such a close juxtaposition of earnest and playful, high and low, simple and grandiloquent, modest and ambitious, appears not to have offended all of Sedulius's readers over the ages. High rhetoric and flamboyant verbal effects combined with simple declarations of biblical truths may have little appeal for many readers of poetry today, but we should remember that for centuries Sedulius was considered one of the great literary *auctores* of the ancient world. A shrewd student of language and literature once observed that a text's identity rests "in its destination, not its origins."⁸¹ The attempt to adapt scriptural stories to dactylic hexameters may be judged from modern critical

78. See Reinhart Herzog, "Exegese-Erbauung-Delectatio: Beiträge zu einer christlichen Poetik der Spätantike," in *Formen und Funktionen der Allegorie. Symposium Wolfenbüttel 1978* (ed. Walter Haug; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), 52–69.

79. It is not, of course, unknown, for such believers to have doubts about the faith they have embraced, to crave deeper meaning in the sacred texts in which they already are immersed, to want reassurance about supposed sureties. That Sedulius is aware of these readers and their needs seems clear in his description of the encounter of doubting Thomas with the risen Jesus, whom Sedulius describes as *dubitantis amicus* (PC 5.386).

80. See K. Smolak, "Die Bibelepik als verfehlte Gattung," *Wiener Humanistische Blätter* 41 (1999): 7–24.

81. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (trans. Stephen Heath; New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 148.

perspectives as destined from the beginning to be a *genre faux* that would inevitably fail to do full justice either to Virgil or to the Gospels. What is impossible to dispute, however, is that this fifth-century poet's "mirthful" renderings of sacred narratives, apparently designed to edify and at the same time amuse, enjoyed the kind of long-lived appeal with his premodern readers that would be the envy of all those authors who hope, secretly or not so secretly, that their works will come to be regarded as a "monument more lasting than bronze." It is the hope of the translator that a new text and translation of this poet's works may assist modern readers to understand, if not appreciate, some aspects of what made Sedulius once so popular and help to send his poems a little farther along their way to wherever their ultimate textual "destination" may be.