A FEMININE TYPOLOGICAL TRINITY IN PROBA'S *CENTO VERGILIANVS* 380–414

ABSTRACT

The mid-fourth-century C.E. Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi *retells the biblical story using cento technique (recombining excerpted lines and partial lines from Virgil into a new poem). Its author, the Christian poet Faltonia Betitia Proba, states that her aim in writing the* Cento *is to demonstrate that Virgil 'sang the pious deeds of Christ' (*Vergilium cecinisse … pia munera Christi*). Her compositional strategy reflects the exegetical method of typology, as explored in detail by Cullhed: by reusing particular Virgilian verses for biblical characters, Proba creates an implicit typological relationship whereby a Virgilian type both prefigures and is fulfilled by a biblical antitype. This paper first presents an extended model of typology, whereby the type not only prefigures the antitype but also* enfigures *it, providing the reader with a novel conceptual paradigm through which to understand a particular supernatural reality. The paper then turns to a case study: the baptism scene (380–414), the only passage in the* Cento *depicting all three members of the Trinity. For each, Proba reuses passages which in the* Aeneid *describe* female *characters, hinting at a feminine typological Trinity, one which highlights often-overlooked aspects of the three Christian antitypes. In so doing, she convincingly advances her thesis that Virgil's poetic works reflect typological correspondences to the Christian narrative in a similar way to Old Testament prophecy.*

Keywords: Latin poetry; Late Antiquity; early Christian poetry; Virgil; Latin epic; typology; Christian exegesis; *interpretatio Christiana*

The Christian Latin poet Faltonia Betitia Proba composed her 694-line work *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi* (*A Vergilian Cento on the Praise/Glory of Christ*) in the mid fourth century C.E.[1] As a Virgilian cento—formed entirely from excerpted verses of Virgil, rearranged and at times lightly adapted[2]—that narrates a condensed version of the Christian story (primarily Genesis/Exodus/the Gospels), it falls within the broader context of early *interpretatio Christiana* (henceforth, *IC*): in Eberlein's definition, 'the reception of a non-Christian cultural element or historical fact with a view to adapting it to Christianity by means of appropriate interpretation'.[3] In the *Cento*, Proba employs *IC* not only on the *textual* level (by excerpting and redeploying

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[1] The dominant scholarly consensus is that the work is by Faltonia Betitia Proba, though a minority view attributes it instead to her granddaughter Anicia Faltonia Proba in the late fourth or early fifth century C.E. See S.S. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet: The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 21–3.

[2] Proba's most common adaptations include: changing the person, number, tense, mood or voice of a verb; changing a participle to a finite verb; changing the case or number of a noun or adjective; changing a preposition, conjunction or other connective; or leaving out a word from within the excerpted material.

[3] J.K. Eberlein, '*Interpretatio christiana*', in *BNP*, 1–18, at 1, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1406540, accessed 14 December 2020.

Virgil's words) but also on the *conceptual* level. As scholars from Jensen to Cullhed have demonstrated,[4] this is done through the Christian exegetical method of typology, by which Old Testament (henceforth, OT) people, things or events are interpreted as prophetic *types* corresponding to, and fulfilled by, New Testament *antitypes*. By reusing particular Virgilian passages for particular biblical characters, Proba creates a typo-logical relationship between Virgilian types and Christian antitypes, depicting the latter in light of the former: for example, Aeneas is used as a type of Christ.

This paper will further explore how Proba uses typology in the *Cento*. After briefly discussing interpretative issues surrounding the cento form and presenting an extended theoretical framework for typology in general, I will turn to a short case study: the pas-sage narrating the baptism of Jesus (*Cento* 380–414). I will demonstrate how Proba, by selecting passages referring to *female* characters in the *Aeneid* and redeploying them for all three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), presents the reader with a 'fem-inine Trinity': one which represents a largely novel and striking example of *IC*. In so doing, she also advances her stated goal in the *Cento*: to show Virgil as a pagan prophet of Christ.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND ALLUSION IN THE *CENTO*

As Hinds,[5] Laato[6] and McGill discuss, the 'peculiar intertextuality' (McGill)[7] of the cento form leads to unique interpretative challenges. Unlike most poetry, which may feature occasional intertextual allusions interspersed with newly composed material, a cento is *entirely* 'intertextual' as every phrase in it (minus the light adaptation earlier discussed) has been lifted directly from Virgil ('a 100% hit rate', in Hinds's words);[8] thus each line will inevitably evoke 'echoes' of the original Virgilian context. Yet if the cento is to stand as an independent composition, the centonist cannot select material only for its Virgilian allusions; their choices are constrained by the need to craft a coherent and convincing narrative that scans as verse. How is the reader to distinguish between meaningful allusion—lines where the original context is interpretatively significant—and 'filler material' in which the original context is irrelevant? Or, framed in the equally problematic terms of authorial intention: how can we tell when material has been chosen both for its surface content and for its Virgilian allusions, and when it

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[4] A. Jensen, 'Prophetin, Poetin und Kirchenmutter. Das theologische Werk Faltonia Betitia Probas (Rom, 4. Jh)', in L. Siegele-Wenschkewitz, G. Schneider-Ludorff, B. Hämel and B. Schoppelreich (edd.), *Frauen Gestalten Geschichte: Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Religion und Geschlecht* (Hannover, 1998), 33–53; M. Margoni-Kögler, 'Typologie in den christlichen Vergilcentonen', in M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (edd.), *Studia Patristica* 36 (Leuven, 2001), 140–52; K. Pollman, 'Sex and salvation in the Vergilian cento of the fourth century', in R. Rees (ed.), *Romane Memento: Vergil in the Fourth Century* (London, 2004), 79–96; H. Harich-Schwarzbauer, 'Von Aeneas zu Camilla. Intertextualität im Vergilcento der Faltonia Betitia Proba', in D. van Mal-Maeder, A. Burnier and L. Núñez (edd.), *Jeux de voix: enonciation, intertextualité et intentionnalité dans la littérature antique* (Bern, 2009), 331–46.

[5] S. Hinds, 'The self-conscious cento', in M. Formisano and T. Fuhrer (edd.), *Décadence: "Decline and Fall" or "Other Antiquity"?* (Heidelberg, 2014), 171–97.

[6] A.M. Laato, 'Adam and Eve rewritten in Vergil's words: *Cento* of Proba', in A. Laato and L. Valve (edd.), *Adam and Eve Story in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives* (*Studies in the Reception History of the Bible* 8) (Turku, Finland, 2017), 85–117.

[7] S. McGill, *Vergil Recomposed* (Oxford, 2005), 24.

[8] Hinds (n. 5), 173.

has been chosen only for its surface content? McGill, without entirely rejecting the possibility of determining authorial intention, moves towards a reader-focussed interpretative model, arguing that the 'best approach … is to pursue readings that are plausible in terms of the textual strategies of the poems in question and the culture and moment in literary history that produced the text'.[9]

While this is a reasonable enough approach to centos in general, Proba's *Cento* is arguably a special case as it opens with a proem in which the author speaks in the first person about her own intentions, culminating in the statement: 'I will declare that Virgil sang the pious deeds of Christ' (*Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*, *Cento* 23).[10] Together with Proba's use of *iam noua progenies* (Verg. *Ecl.* 4.7) to refer to Christ (*Cento* 34) and the additional use of material from the fourth eclogue in the nativity scene (*Cento* 377–9), this strongly suggests that Proba was building upon an emerging Christian understanding[11] of Virgil's fourth eclogue—namely, that, like the prophetic books of the OT, it foretold the birth and/or second coming of Christ, and thus could be understood via similar exegetical methods (most notably typology). Proba's understanding of Virgil, however, goes even further: she is claiming that Virgil foretold not only Christ's birth but all his *munera* (understood broadly, the entire Christian narrative). The *Cento* thus arguably contains the key to its own exegesis: the reader[12] is to look not simply for 'literary allusion' broadly considered but specifically for prophetic/typological connections between Virgil's text and Proba's retelling of the Christian story. Thus, the reader of the *Cento* will ideally possess a thorough prior knowledge of both Virgil and the Bible, and will, along with Proba, be able to function as an 'interpreter' or even 'translator' between the two.

TYPOLOGY IN *INTERPRETATIO CHRISTIANA*: AN EXTENDED MODEL

The use of typology as a form of Christian exegesis is first observed in the Gospels. Drawing upon the work of first-century C.E. Jewish thinkers such as Philo,[13] it quickly became the primary Christian strategy for OT *IC*. In Christian typology, we see a *type*

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[9] McGill (n. 7), 27.

[10] Translation from Cullhed (n. 1), 192. Latin text from A. Fassina and C.M. Lucarini (edd.), *Faltonia Betitia Proba, Cento Vergilianus* (Berlin and Boston, 2015); all subsequent Latin quotations from the *Cento* are from this edition. There also exists an annotated edition with Italian introduction, translation and commentary: A. Badini and A. Rizzi (edd.), *Proba, Il centone* (Bologna, 2011).

[11] This is first found in Lactantius and Constantine (the latter via Eusebius): E. Bourne, 'The Messianic prophecy in Vergil's fourth eclogue', *CJ* 11 (1916), 390–400, at 390–3.

[12] The question of Proba's intended readership is a difficult one. In *Cento* 54–5 she writes: *ore fauete omnes laetasque aduertite mentes, | matres atque uiri pueri innuptaeque puellae.* This might seem to indicate that she is addressing a fairly broad audience with varying levels of poetic and scriptural knowledge rather than a small literary elite (the equal balance between male and female addressees is also intriguing). Yet the main intent here may be to establish her poetic authority by comparing herself to Orpheus (Verg. *G.* 4.475–6), as Cullhed (n. 1), 132 suggests. At the conclusion of the *Cento* she addresses unspecified *socii* and her 'sweet husband' (*dulcis coniunx*), expressing the wish that their descendants (*nepotes*) will remain faithful Christians (*Cento* 691–4), while elsewhere she depicts herself as writing for posterity more generally, with the added hope that the work will bring her lasting fame (*Cento* 335–7). Given the diverse nature of her addressees, it appears likely that she is intentionally writing a work which can be appreciated by the exegetically skilled and unskilled alike: the former will be able to unravel all the layers of meaning in the text, while the latter will at least be able to enjoy the *Cento* as a pleasing biblical epic.

[13] Eberlein (n. 3), 2–3.

(thing, person or event drawn from the OT) hermeneutically paired with an *antitype* (drawn from the New Testament).[14] According to the model of typology as typically presented,[15] the type, coming first chronologically, prophetically *prefigures* the antitype; to take one example from Jesus himself, the bronze serpent raised on a pole which allows the snake-bitten Israelites to live (Numbers 21:6–9) prefigures Christ's crucifixion, which leads to eternal life for all (John 3:14–15). Conversely, once the antitype arrives, it allows us to look back at the type with a deeper understanding of its function in the larger context of salvation history. The episode of the bronze serpent is not only important or interesting for historical reasons; by prefiguring Christ's crucifixion, it gains a deeper purpose and meaning beyond itself. The antitype thus grants us a new understanding of the type. Though typology was originally applied only to the OT, Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen in the mid second century to the mid third century C.E. used essentially the same method to interpret Homer, pagan mythology and pagan philosophy.[16]

As Cullhed and others have demonstrated, the *Cento* features a vast range of type–antitype pairings. To take just one biblical character, Jesus is paired not only with Aeneas but also with Hercules, Aeneas' father Anchises, Camilla, Minerva and the Sibyl of Cumae, among others.[17] Sometimes a Virgilian character can be connected to multiple antitypes; for example, passages referring to Dido are used for both Eve and Mary, creating a secondary type–antitype pairing between Eve and Mary that reflects traditional Christian typology connecting the two.[18]

Before building upon this work, I wish first to extend the conventional model of typology to highlight an important aspect of this method of exegesis, one that is generally left only implicit. As discussed above, the antitype lets us see the broader significance of the type by connecting it to the story of Christ and the salvific process; however, the type itself is *not* rendered redundant, unimportant or hermeneutically passive by the arrival of the antitype. Rather, it too continues to operate dynamically, allowing us to see the antitype in terms of the type and enhancing our understanding of it. The type not only *prefigures* the antitype; it also *enfigures* it, bringing out aspects of the antitype that had hitherto gone unnoticed and lending it richness and depth as well as emotional and dramatic content.

This is best illustrated by an example. If (to take a standard Christian typology) we see baptism (antitype) in terms of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea (type)—as a dramatic and miraculous escape by water from a deadly enemy—we will arrive at an understanding of baptism that is not apparent in the physical act itself, or even from reading abstract treatises on the theology of baptism. Closely related to metaphor and simile, this non-literal mode of signification reflects the way in which human beings must arguably understand supernatural realities (perhaps all realities): not absolutely or as they are in themselves but according to paradigms and models. Each new type presents us with a unique window or lens through which we can see the antitype, revealing certain aspects of its being while hiding others: to see Christ as 'the new Adam' is very different than

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[14] Eberlein (n. 3), 3.
[15] Cullhed (n. 1), 15–16; Eberlein (n. 3), 3. See also the extended discussion in L. Goppelt (transl. D.H. Madvig), *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982).
[16] Cullhed (n. 1), 186; Eberlein (n. 3), 5.
[17] Cullhed (n. 1), 158–86.
[18] Cullhed (n. 1), 16.

seeing him as 'the second Moses'—or as 'Virgilian hero'. By pairing Virgilian types with Christian antitypes, Proba causes us to consider the latter in terms of the former, and thus works together with Virgil to grant us a richer and deeper understanding of the Gospel story.

It is with this understanding of typology that I wish to examine, as a case study, the baptism passage from the *Cento* (380–414). Proba carefully and systematically uses female types from Virgil to enfigure all three members of the Trinity, who appear together in the *Cento* only in this passage. In so doing, she allows us to see 'God the Son' (384–7), 'God the Holy Spirit' (397–9) and 'God the Father' (403–12) in *feminine* terms, balancing out the predominantly male types traditionally used to enfigure the persons of the Trinity[19] and granting the reader a richer and fuller understanding of the nature of its three divine persons. At the same time, she advances her stated thesis— to show that Virgil foretold the Christian story—by drawing out the similarities between her selected Virgilian characters and the persons of the Christian Trinity.

CHRIST IN 384–7: A PERFECTLY BALANCED PAIR OF HUMAN/DIVINE TYPES

Lines 384–7 of the *Cento* describe the people's reaction when Jesus, about to be baptized, appears in public. In the first two and a half lines (384–6 *illum omnis tectis agrisque effusa iuuentus | attonitis inhians animis prospectat euntem, | turbaque miratur matrum*) we see, only slightly rearranged, material originally referring to Camilla, warrior maiden and leader of the Volscians. In *Aeneid* Book 7, she rides through the Latin city with the other warriors in preparation for battle: *illam omnis tectis agrisque effusa iuuentus | turbaque miratur matrum et prospectat euntem, | attonitis inhians animis*, *Aen.* 7.812–14).[20] This astonishment mirrors the people's amazement at Christ's new, authoritative teaching and his miracles[21] (Mark 1:27; Luke 4:22). As Clark and Hatch discuss, this passage draws upon a typology already established in *Cento* 373–6, where the infant Jesus' upbringing is depicted using material drawn from the story of Camilla's childhood. Mary's flight with Jesus is described in terms taken from Metabus' flight with his infant daughter Camilla: ***ipsa sinu prae se portans*** (11.544), *turbante tumultu, | **infantem fugiens*** (11.541) *plena ad praesepia reddit.* Two lines later, Mary is depicted nursing Jesus using lines that originally describe Metabus feeding his daughter with the milk of a mare and other animals: ***hic natum*** (11.570 *natam*) *angusti subter fastigia tecti | **nutribat teneris inmulgens ubera labris*** (11.572).[22] Harich-Schwarzbauer further points to Camilla's self-sacrifice for her people, her almost supernatural beauty and the fact that from a young age she is set apart as specially

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[19] Though mainstream Christian theology recognizes that God *per se* is neither male nor female, the vast majority of types historically used for the three persons of the Trinity have been either male or inanimate. However, a few pre-Proba female types can be found in Scripture and in the Church Fathers. For a summary, see K.E. Børresen, 'God's image, man's image: female metaphors describing God in the Christian tradition', *Temenos* 19 (1983), 17–32.

[20] This and all subsequent *Aeneid* extracts are from the Teubner critical edition: G.B. Conte (ed.), *Publius Vergilius Maro, Aeneis* (Berlin and Boston, 2019²).

[21] M. Bažil, *Centones christiani: Métamorphoses d'une forme intertextuelle dans la poésie latine chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2009), 179.

[22] E.A. Clark and D.F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, The Oaken Cross: The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Chico, CA, 1981), 115.

devoted to the divine (the goddess Diana: 11.557–60, 581–4).[23] Yet the parallels between Camilla and Christ go far beyond this. She is her father's beloved only child (11.540–50); while still an infant, she is saved by divine intervention from an approaching armed enemy (11.557–66; Matthew 2:13–15). Her father, having fled his homeland, raises her in exile (11.540–3, 567–9).[24] She runs so fast as to outrace the winds, fly over a field of corn without damaging the tender ears, and skim over the waves without the soles of her feet touching the surface (7.808–11): miraculous abilities, the last of which closely resembles Christ walking on the water, notably one of his few miracles featured in the *Cento* (545–56). It is intriguing as well that in the catalogue of warriors she is placed last of all, after even Turnus, suggesting that she is a more skilful and/or prominent warrior. She rides out to battle and thus to her death clothed, like Christ, in purple (7.814–15; Mark 15:17; John 19:2) and is felled by a thrown spear 'beneath her breast' (11.803–4), recalling the lance thrust into Jesus' side (John 19:34). Her death is described as a sacrilege (11.848–9); her attacker (Arruns) does not exult in his kill but, like Judas in the Gospels, shamefully slinks away 'like a wolf conscious of his audacious deed' (11.811–12), his own death soon following (11.863–6). An insignificant warrior unworthy of felling such a high opponent, he has managed to do so only through divine assent (11.794–7). In summary, although Camilla is a mortal woman, she is a woman who is *almost* goddess-like in her appearance, abilities and presence.

Moreover, she is a virgin: a fact which Virgil emphasizes, repeatedly using *uirgo* to refer to her (7.806; 11.508, 664, 676). Though the Gospels make no direct reference to Jesus' sexual life or lack thereof, traditional Christian teaching holds that he remained celibate his entire life. This aspect of Christ, however, would be very difficult to depict using a masculine type, either OT or Virgilian, since purely celibate male characters are difficult to find in either text. By applying the type of Camilla as virgin warrior to Christ, Proba is able to highlight an aspect of Christ's earthly life that we recognize at once, yet one that the conventional male types are unable to capture. Given the many parallels between the two figures, it is not difficult to see why Proba might indeed have regarded Virgil's depiction of Camilla as a genuine prophecy of Christ.

In the remaining line and a half (*qui spiritus illi, | qui uultus uocisque sonus uel gressus eunti*, 386–7; *Aen.* 5.648–9) we are in very different territory. While the warrior maiden Camilla presents an apt (if, in her gender, slightly unusual) type of Christ, the goddess Iris in her disguise as Beroë might seem an eminently unsuitable choice to enfigure Christ. She is engaged in an act of subterfuge, and her work is not salvific but destructive: she is persuading the Trojan women to burn their ships. However, as Cullhed argues, these particular lines in Virgil's text emphasize Pyrgo's recognition of Beroë's divine qualities: though she at first appears human, she can be identified as divine by 'her spirit, her glance, the sound of her voice and her steps', in the same way that Christ's superhuman qualities mark him out as divine.[25] Furthermore, just as Camilla is a mortal woman who is almost goddess-like, Iris is a goddess who (for a short time at least) is almost human.[26] To be sure, Iris is not 'incarnate' in quite the same way that Christ is incarnate; she has assumed not the substance of

[23] Harich-Schwarzbauer (n. 4), 343.
[24] Bažil (n. 21), 179.
[25] Cullhed (n. 1), 162.
[26] Harich-Schwarzbauer (n. 4), 343 points out that Iris, like Christ, moves between the realms of human beings and gods.

humanity but only its (temporary) appearance, made evident by the fact that—as Pyrgo points out (5.650–2)—the real Beroë still exists offstage. None the less, Iris as Beroë could not help but strongly remind a Christian reader of Christ's incarnate nature. Proba's choice of Iris as a type for Christ is thus a deft balancing act with the Camilla type, serving to highlight Christ's dual nature: he is at once completely divine and completely human.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN 397–9: TWO CELESTIAL MESSENGERS

Cento lines 397–9 draw upon two types from the *Aeneid*. The first, in line 397 and again in line 399, is that of a female dove (**subito commota columba** | *deuolat et supra caput astitit. inde repente* | **radit iter liquidum celeres neque commouet alas**): this is drawn from the episode of the boat race (*Aen.* 5.213, 217), where the motion of Mnestheus' ship is compared to that of a dove gliding swiftly through the air without moving its wings. One might, of course, object that, since the story of Jesus' baptism features the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, it is inevitable that Proba should draw upon some Virgilian passage depicting a dove, and that its use here therefore cannot hold any deliberate typological significance. However, Proba is perfectly capable of paraphrasing or adapting her biblical material, even radically, when it suits her purpose. Hence we can conclude that, if she draws upon Virgil's dove imagery in particular, it is precisely *because* she feels that the type of the dove in Virgil is well suited, even prophetically so, to the Christian symbol of the dove as Holy Spirit.

The word *columba* (female dove) is used in five passages of the *Aeneid* and, broadly speaking, carries one (or both) of two connotations. The first is that of 'miraculous celestial messenger'. We have already seen how the swiftness and directness of the dove's passage is used to portray the motion of Mnestheus' ship. Shortly thereafter, an archery contest involving a dove takes place (5.485–518). Acestes, whose turn comes only after the prize has already been claimed, shoots his arrow into the air none the less (5.519–21), and it is transformed before the watchers' eyes into a fiery comet which passes through the heavens (5.525–9): a miraculous sign, Aeneas concludes, designed to mark Acestes out as especially favoured by Jupiter, king of the gods (5.533–4). Furthermore, it is prophetic: the poet as narrator comments in 5.522–4 that *hic oculis subitum obicitur magnoque futurum* | *augurio monstrum; docuit post exitus ingens* | *seraque terrifici cecinerunt omina uates*. Similarly, at Jesus' baptism, we see the Holy Spirit in dove form descending upon Jesus as a mark of God's special favour, followed by a miraculous and prophetic sign (God's voice from heaven). In *Aeneid* Book 6, twin doves are sent by Aeneas' divine mother Venus to guide him to the Golden Bough in answer to his prayers (6.183–204). It is worth noting that Virgil's vocabulary here closely resembles the second 'dove' line used by Proba: *tollunt se **celeres liquidumque** per aëra lapsae* (6.202; compare *radit iter **liquidum celeres** neque commouet alas*, *Cento* 399/*Aen.* 5.217).[27] The Holy Spirit is likewise sent by God in answer to prayer and provides guidance and inspiration in times of need (Luke 11:13; Mark 13:11; Acts 2:1–4).

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[27] This resembles the 'covert keyword' cento compositional technique discussed by McGill (n. 7), 16–17.

Conversely, dove imagery in the *Aeneid* is also associated with impending death. The first use of *columba* in the *Aeneid* (2.515–17) metaphorically describes Hecuba and her daughters, huddling around their household altar as Troy is sacked. The dove in the archery contest in *Aeneid* Book 5 is herself the target, slain by Eurytion's arrow directly before Acestes shoots (5.515–18), while the doves in *Aeneid* Book 6 prepare Aeneas for his descent into the Underworld by leading him to the Golden Bough. Finally, the metaphor of a falcon rending a dove into pieces is used to describe the warrior maiden Camilla as she slays Aunus' son, who has attempted to escape her by guile (11.721–4): this striking image with its reversed gender roles (Camilla as masculine *accipiter*, Aunus' son as feminine *columba*) foreshadows Camilla's own impending death at Arruns' hands (11.801–6) and recalls the aforementioned Camilla/Christ typological pairing in the *Cento*.

An association with death features as well in the second type which Proba employs here, a celestial messenger of a different sort: Iris, sent by Juno to free the dying Dido's soul from her body (*deuolat et supra caput astitit*, *Cento* 398/*Aen.* 4.702).[28] We have, of course, seen Iris in her disguise as Beroë used as a type for Christ; however, as discussed earlier, there is nothing to prevent a type from enfiguring two different antitypes in different respects. Similarly, the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus at his baptism not only serves to mark him out as divinely favoured, but implicitly also marks him out for death: the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29, the words of John the Baptist) can do so only by dying. The dove, then, in its dual Virgilian connotations, serves to highlight an important aspect of this scene, left implicit in the Gospels: even as Jesus is revealed by God as 'My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17), his crucifixion is likewise foreshadowed as inevitable.

GOD THE FATHER IN 402–12: A DIVINE MOTHER, EMBODYING AND SENDING LOVE

After the passage depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit, God the Father speaks to Christ (*Cento* 402–12), telling him that he is to rule the world and its people: coming to their aid, showing them the way and answering their prayers. Though much of the speech is drawn from Faunus' prophecy to King Latinus in *Aen.* 7.96–101, the first line *nate, meae uires, mea magna potentia solus* (*Cento* 399), in which God directly addresses Christ, is taken from the goddess Venus' speech to her son Cupid (*Aen.* 1.664). Though the contrast between the original and the novel contexts may seem jarring at first, Cullhed points out that it is indeed highly fitting that the pagan goddess of Love is used as a type for God the Father: we are told in the New Testament that God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16) and that He sent His Son out of love for the world (John 3:16).[29] Furthermore, just as Cupid's mission is to awaken love in Dido, Christ's mission is to awaken love in the human race, 'whose souls have long been in hibernation and whose hearts have become unaccustomed'[30] (*iam pridem resides animos desuetaque corda*, *Cento* 410): the same words are used to describe Dido (*Aen.* 1.722).

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[28] Cullhed (n. 1), 162.
[29] Cullhed (n. 1), 163.
[30] Translation from Cullhed (n. 1), 163.

There is, however, a further significance of Venus as a type for God the Father here. Just as Venus is Cupid's divine mother, so she is also *Aeneas'* divine mother; indeed, it was she who sent the doves to Aeneas in *Aeneid* Book 6 just as God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to God the Son in the baptism scene. Furthermore, though it is Cupid who awakens love in Dido on the mythical level, it is in fact Aeneas himself who awakens love in Dido on the psychological level (*Aen.* 4.1–14). In this way Cupid, an implicit type of Christ in this passage, is presented as parallel to Aeneas, the 'default' type of Christ in the *Cento*. Here we see once more a balanced pair of divine/human types used for Christ, reinforcing his divine nature as well as his identity as the Son of God. If, as Harich-Schwarzbauer argues, Camilla and Iris as types for Christ destabilize the Aeneas–Christ typology,[31] the use of Venus as a type for God the Father implicitly reinforces that typology even while presenting an alternative female type for the first person of the Trinity.

CONCLUSION

In the baptism passage from the *Cento*, Proba combines thoughtfully selected passages from the *Aeneid* to present us with a group of feminine types enfiguring the three members of the Trinity. For Christ, we see a carefully balanced pairing of human (Camilla) and divine (Iris) figures that represent his dual incarnate nature; for the Holy Spirit, a pair of celestial messenger types (the female dove, Iris) at once alluding to the miraculous sign of the dove's descent upon Christ and foreshadowing his death; and for God the Father, a divine Mother (Venus) who at once is Love personified and sends Love into the world through her divine (Cupid) and human (Aeneas) sons. In so doing, Proba also argues convincingly that certain Virgilian characters, viewed typologically, do seem to foreshadow the Gospel story in a manner comparable to OT prophecy. It is not hard to see why Proba—a rare female author in a time when both literature and biblical exegesis were male-dominated—might have wished to make sense of the Trinity in feminine terms for herself and her readers, female as well as male. The immense popularity of her work in the medieval world (as evidenced by over a hundred extant manuscripts)[32] as well as the recent resurgence of scholarly interest in the *Cento* hint at her lasting success in having done so.

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[31] Harich-Schwarzbauer (n. 4), 343–4; her discussion of gender and typology in the *Cento* is worth reading in full. She concludes that we can interpret Proba's use of male and female types for Jesus in one of two ways: 1) as implying that Christ transcends gender, or 2) simply as a textual interplay of male and female typology. In fact, I think that both are at work here: the use of male and female types to enfigure Christ (as well as the other members of the Trinity) points to the fact that the divine is *beyond* gender while recognizing that we can best conceptually approach it if we utilize *both* male and female types. This is beautifully expressed by Jensen (n. 4), 47: 'Mit den menschlichen Kategorien von »männlich« und »weiblich« ist die Gottheit nicht zu fassen, doch unsere anthropomorphe Redeweise über Gott wird reicher und somit wenigstens etwas adäquater, wenn Metaphern aus der Erlebniswelt beider Geschlechter Verwendung finden.'

[32] Cullhed (n. 1), 61.