

ASSOCIATION OF IDEAS
AS A PRINCIPLE OF COMPOSITION IN ROMANOS

In an article written in 1960 Verdenius¹ names *association* one of two forces which determines the composition of a work of art, the other being the aim to *construct*. Already as early as 1929 Schadewaldt², referring to it as «assoziative Bindung» or «Ideenassoziation», defined it as the movement of thought «von Vorstellung zu Vorstellung». The principle of association is already present in the Homeric poems, and reappears frequently in subsequent Greek poetry³. And looking at Romanos who comes more than 12 centuries after Homer, its use as principle of composition is still much in evidence. This is, of course, not surprising at all if we come to realize that associative linking exists between words or concepts both similar and antithetical in meaning, and that *antithesis* is in fact the most conspicuous feature of his style. Reading through the hymns of Romanos one thus becomes aware of many instances in which association of ideas has been used as compositional technique. Since an extensive analysis of this technique is not possible within the space of this article, I have confined myself to examples taken from three hymns only.

An excellent illustration of this compositional principle of association is to be found in his hymn «On the Passion» (Maas-Trypanis 20). In strophe 5 of this hymn, the poet refers to Caiaphas, who did not understand his own words concerning Jesus' death on behalf of the people (strophe 4.2-3). He was unable to understand because of his envy —φθόνος (5.2). In fact this φθόνος excited him to φόνος, a word obviously chosen for the effect of assonance. Immediately following this statement the poet associatively moves to a similar thought: φθόνος is always followed by φόνος (5.3). This can be proved in the case of Abel and Cain: ὁ Ἄβελ / ὑπὸ Κάϊν φθονηθείς, φονευθείς δὲ μετέπειτα (5.4-5). Here, as in the case of line 3, the poet places these two motives next to each other (juxtaposition) for greater

1. W. J. Verdenius, L'Association des idées comme principe de composition dans Homère, Hésiode, Théognis, *REG* 73 (1960) 345-361.

2. W. Schadewaldt, *Der Aufbau des Pindarischen Epinikion*, Tübingen 1966, Max Niemeyer Verlag, p. 47-49.

3. Cf. Verdenius, *op. cit.*

emphasis, while the name Κάϊν certainly plays by the association of sound on Καϊάφας! At the end of the following strophe (6.7) the poet will continue with the motive of killing (*φονεύειν*, now referring to Pilate).

Immediately after this the poet refers to Jesus' suffering in silence (*ἵνα πάθη σιγῶν*, 6.8). This motive will again be elaborated upon by means of associative linking. In the following line the poet continues: Jesus stood silently (*ἄλαλος στήκων*, 6.9). Strophe 7 links on to this motive with its very first word, and in fact with the whole first line put into an *antithetical* form: *ἄφωνος ἴστατο ὁ βροντῶν, λόγου ἐκτὸς ὁ Λόγος*. The motive of word and sound is continued: *εἰ γὰρ ἔρρηξε φωνήν*: if He was to speak, He would not have been conquered (7.2). Thus another motive is added: conquer and be conquered: And by conquering (*νικῶν*) He would not have been crucified, and Adam not been saved. But in order to suffer He conquered his accusers by his sheer silence: *σιωπήσας ἐνίκησε* (7.5). Again the poet continues with associative linking: the judge, looking at the-Man-who-is-not-speaking (*τὸν μὴ φθεγγόμενον*, 7.6), said: «What shall I do with Him-who-does-not-speak?» (*τῷ μὴ λαλοῦντι*, 7.7). From this the poet again moves forward by association: The people cried that Jesus was guilty, that is why He is deaf, i.e. He does not speak (*κωφεύει*, 7.9). The poet, however, let Jesus indeed speak, and he thus moves on with the same motive but now in a context of *speaking*: Jesus spoke, addressing the people, not Pilate, for Jesus did not deem him worthy of an answer, the poet using play on words with the motive of speech as the focal point: *οὐδὲ λόγου γὰρ ἤξιου, λογισάμενος ἄλογον* cf. 7.1. This play on the word *λόγος*, which still continues, with the motive *word-silence* associatively serves as introduction to Jesus' *word of power*: with merely his *word* and his *voice* He raised people from the death: *λόγω μόνω* (8.5) and *φωνῇ* (8.7), clearly picking up these same words used in 7.1-2. The poet moves associatively on to the close of this motive by stating that the people got bitter when they heard his «sweet words»: *τῶν μελιρρύτων λόγων* (9.1).

From this point onwards the poet introduces another motive which he will develop again by means of association: Jesus' discourse on the *Sabbath*. In line 3 the poet records the accusation of the people: Jesus is to be crucified because He broke the Sabbath: *ὡς λύων τὸ σάββατον*. That the people have in mind Jesus' human healings on the Sabbath, is clear from his question: «What is better —to pity the sick and ill or to honour the Sabbath?». To the motive of *breaking the Sabbath* is now added the motive of *healing the sick*. Jesus thus continues: He descended because He saw that man was *ill*, *ἡσθένησεν* obviously picks up *ἀσθενεῖς* of 9.5. In strophe 10 the line of association is continued: Jesus states that Hades does not fear the *Sabbath*, nor does *sickness* flee from it: the *Sabbath* cannot heal the *ill*, only the *Lord of the Sabbath* can. He then gives as examples the cases of the blind man and the lame man. In fact, says Jesus, the neighbours of the Jewish

people are criticising them because they keep the *Sabbath* yet they are *ill*! The development of the poet's thought is clearly composed by means of association. Starting from 9.5 and moving through to 11.8 we thus have the following line of association of ideas: *σάββατον, ἀσθενεῖς, σάββατον, σάββατα, σαββάτων, ἡσθένησεν, σάββατον ... νόσος, οὐκ ἰᾶται ἀσθενεῖς ... δεσπότης τοῦ σαββάτου, σαββάτων ... τυφλός, σάββατα / ὁ παράλυτος νοσῶν ... οὐκ ἴαθη, σάββατα καὶ νοσοῦντες, νόσους ... διὰ νόμου, σώσας τῷ σαββάτῳ.*

Another obvious example of this compositional technique is to be found in strophe 13: in lines 4-5 the poet states that Pilate let Jesus, the meek, be whipped (*ἐμάστιζεν*). At the beginning of strophe 14 the poet continues with this motive by the related word *μάστιγας*: Jesus received lashes, the Saviour was fettered (note the antithesis *δέσμιος ... ὁ λύτης*). Naked He was stretched out on the —and here the poet does not use «cross», but the word *στύλος*: ἐπὶ στύλου. This he does for a very good reason: it enables him to develop his particular theme by means of association of ideas. Christ was stretched out on the *στύλος* (14.2), He who once spoke to Moses and Aaron in a *στύλος* of clouds (14.3); He who has fixed the *στύλους* of the earth (14.4), is fixed to a *στύλος* (14.5). He who has shown the way to his people in the desert by means of a *στύλος* of fire, was nailed to a *στύλος*: the *Rock* was on a *στύλος*. At this point the poet again uses association to make a typological point: from this Rock is hewed out the church (*πέτρα ... λαξέεταιί, 14.8*).

In strophe 18 the poet refers to man as the earth-born, perishing from *thirst*: *δίψη, 18.1*. This word again forms the starting point of a long line of development of a new motive: man was consumed by the heat in a *waterless* desert (*ἀνύδρω, 18.2*), with nothing to quench his *thirst* with (*δίψαν, 18.3*). But the Lord and Saviour, the *fountain* (*πηγή, 18.5*) of all that is good, has provided man with *streams of life*: (*ζωῆς νάματα ἔβλυσε, 18.5*), crying out: *You have become thirsty* due to your *side* (*πλευρᾶς ἐδίψησας, 18.6*). Take *water* from My *side* and you will never *thirst again* (*πίε τῆς ἐμῆς πλευρᾶς καὶ οὐ μὴ διψήσεις, 18.7*). Double is the *stream* flowing from it (*ρεῖθρον, 18.8*): it *washes* clean and gives *water to drink* (*λούει καὶ ποτίζει, 18.8*). The motive thirst-water etc. is thus developed by various words and concepts forming a chain of associations. And at the beginning of strophe 19 the poet develops another motive by association of a word he has used in the previous motive: *πλευρᾶς ... πλευρᾶς* in 18.6-7. This gives him the clue to move to the motive of the two *natures* of Christ: Let no one think that the *πλευρά* (19.1) of Christ is merely that of a man, for He was man and God: in 18.6 the word *side* refers to Eve, and is then associatively used of the side of Christ as the source of life-giving water, and again of his human nature next to his divine nature.

The motive of thirst-water of life is again taken up in strophe 22. The poet begins with a reference to the *vinegar* they gave Christ to *drink*, He who is the *source of sweet waters* (*ὄξος ἐπότισαν τὴν πηγὴν τῶν γλυκερῶν ναμάτων*). From

this the related idea of *gall-manna* is developed: they gave Him *gall* to eat, He who has *rained* on them *manna* and who let *water* flow from the *rock* (χωλὴν ἐπέδωκαν τῷ τὸ μάννα / ὑετίσαντι καὶ νᾶμα ἐκ τῆς πέτρας πηγάσαντι), in these instances the nature of the association being antithetical.

Kontakion 24 («On the Resurrection») is another case in point. From the very first strophe the poet develops his theme of *life-death*⁴: God, the *Life*, was given to *death*, to *Hades* He who has conquered *Hades* stripping him of his weapons. He was handed over as *mortal*, He who *immortalized* the *mortal*, as one who is *dead*, but who gives *life* to the *dead* by raising them from *death*. Thus a line of associative thought has been established by related words, emphasized by the use of juxtaposition and *antithesis*: ζωήν, τῇ ταφῇ, τῷ θανάτῳ, τῷ ἄδῃ τὸν ἄδην, ὡς θνητὸν τοὺς θνητοὺς ἀθανατίσαντα, ὡς δὲ νεκρὸν τοὺς νεκροὺς ἀναστήσαντα (lines 1-5). But this is taken a step further by mention of his *tomb*, μνήματι, in line 6, and the words νεκρός, ζῆ and ἀνέστη in lines 8-9. At the beginning of strophe 2 the poet continues associatively with the *tomb-motive*: Christ was lain in a tomb (ταφῇ) by Joseph, who has once saved another Joseph from the λάκκος. He was guarded visibly as one who is dead (ὡς θνητός) but invisibly He has frightened the soldiers to death (φόβῳ ἐνέκρωσε), the poet in this case using metaphorical language. The tomb-motive is carried further: there was a *stone* before his tomb (τοῦ μνήματος), but a *Rock* within the tomb (τοῦ μνήματος). But already the poet is picking up the motive of the *stone* (λίθος) in line 6, and develops it antithetically into the *Rock-motive* (πέτρα), and from here to the *play on words* between λίθοι and λίθῳ in lines 7-8. Both these motives, the one of the *tomb* and the *stone*, will again be taken up in strophe 19, in a structural pattern full of chiasmi and parallelisms, juxtapositioning and antithesis: from λάκκος the poet moves in a constant line of antithesis to κέρδος, to αἰσχος, to καῦχος, πληγή, to ζωή and ἀνέστη. At the same time λάκκος and ἀνέστη associatively suggest μνήμα, and from there the poet moves to a saying from another biblical passage concerning the *stones* that will witness to Christ (οἱ λίθοι μᾶλλον κράξουσιν) and from this point to the metaphor of lines 7-8: ὅτι ἄνευ χειρῶν λίθος / ὁ ἐξ ὄρους τμηθείς, which leads him to the idea of a comparison between the birth of Christ and his resurrection: ὡς ποτὲ ἐκ γαστροῦ, καὶ νῦν ἐκ τῆς ταφῆς / ἀνέστη (with juxtaposition). Again the poet moves associatively to the next strophe with the same motive: ἐκ γαστροῦ ἦλθες ἄνευ σποραῶς / τὰ τῆς παρθενίας λιπῶν / ὡς νῦν τὰ τῆς ταφῆς ἀνείλες τῇ ταφῇ. / ὡς σινδόνα Ἰωσήφ καταλείψας ταφῇ / ἔλαβες δὲ τῆς ταφῆς τὸν γεννήσαντα τὸν Ἰωσήφ.

As a final example of the use of association as compositional principle we may

4. See J. H. Barkhuizen, Romanos Melodos: Essay on the Poetics of his Kontakion 'Resurrection of Christ' (Maas-Trypanis 24), *BZ* 79 (1986) 270-271.

turn to his hymn «On Joseph II» (Maas-Trypanis 44). The hymn proper begins with an elaborated image complex⁵ of military preparation and combat in which there is a natural flow of association from one element to another. We, the poet begins, have a *King*, who gives a *heavenly kingdom* to his *soldiers*. To be effective as soldiers we are to put on our *armour* (πανοπλία) which the poet defines as ἀρετή (1.3), and which will enable us to *combat sin* (our enemy). But in line 6 this ἀρετή is redefined as φιλοσοφία. This latter concept is again explained by association of idea as τέχνη ... τῶν τεχνῶν and ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν (1.7-8). As such it *teaches* men prudence and courage, temperance and justice, the words φρόνησιν (1.11) and σωφροσύνην (1.12) echoing ἔμφρονες of 1.4 and φιλοσοφίαν of 1.6, while the idea of διδάσκει is obviously linked with the intellectual concept of φιλοσοφία. The virtues which we are taught constitute our *weapons* with which we should *protect* ourselves, praying for the grace of Christ, who gives to those who love Him, to *crown* them with *victory* over our *enemies*. Thus the poet has by means of association moved in a complete circle of concepts. At the beginning of strophe 2 (lines 1-5) the poet introduces the theme of Joseph with the express purpose (i) that we should learn what glory this ἀρετή, which he has introduced in strophe 1 as our armour, brings, and (ii) that we should obtain by means of self-control a life of temperance, the words φιλοσώφρονα ... ἐγκρατείας (line 5) obviously and clearly being linked with ἔμφρονες, φιλοσοφίαν, φρόνησιν and σωφροσύνην of strophe 1. These two word groups (σωφροσύνη and ἐγκράτεια) form together the key motive of the entire hymn, which runs throughout the hymn like a golden thread, and which therefore in itself figures as example of an extensive use of association⁶.

In line 6 (strophe 2) the poet, beginning his narrative of Joseph at this point, refers to Joseph being *sold as slave* due to the envy of his brothers. From this observation he immediately passes again by means of an associative thought process to his image of *slave* vs *master*, an image which follows naturally from the situation of Joseph as slave in the household of Potiphar: although bought to be a *slave*, he was *not found* to be a *slave of sin*; his *mind* was like a *master* and therefore he was

5. M. Bernard, *Pindars Denken in Bildern. Vom Wesen der Metaphor*, Neske 1963, p. 28, refers to this as a *Bildkette*.

6. Cf., e.g., ἔμφρονες (1.5), φιλοσοφίαν (1.6), φρόνησιν (1.11), σωφροσύνην (1.12), φιλοσώφρονα (2.5), νοῦν σοφὸν (2.7), σωφροσύνης (2.12), φρόνημα (3.1), σώφρων (3.2), σώφρονος (5.6), σωφροσύνης (10.5), σωφροσύνην (10.15), φιλοσώφρων (11.9), δολιόφρων (11.10), σωφροσύνης (12.1), παραφρονοῦσαν (12.2), σωφροσύνης (15.2), σωφρονήσασαν (15.7), σώφρων (16.2), σώφρονι (18.2), σώφρονος (18.14), σωφροσύνης (19.2, 20.5); thus also the concept of ἐγκράτεια (2.5): αὐτοκράτορα (2.7), ἐκυρίευσε (2.8), κρατούμενος ἐκράτησε τῶν κρατησάντων (3.5), ἐκράτει (4.3), κύριος (8.8), ἐγκρατείας (14.10), κρατῶ (14.10), παγκράτιον (20.9), αὐτοκράτωρ (22.2), ἐκυρίευσε (22.5).

master of his carnal passions. The statement in strophe 2, line 7, especially σοφὸν αὐτοκράτορα, referring to his mind, clearly reflects the key motive of the hymn, viz. self-control and temperance, echoing ἐγκρατείας of the transitional passage (line 5), while φιλοσάρκων in 8 stands in direct contrast to φιλοσώφρονα of the same line (5) so that we have in fact association of both similar and antithetical concepts. From this point on antithetical statements abound, as Hunger⁷ has clearly demonstrated.¹

The statement in line 6 ff that Joseph was in control of, and master of his passions is followed by the statement of lines 9-10: Joseph was thus *not shaken* by the flattery of the woman, but in a manly way he *shook off* her flattery. The phrases οὐκ ἐσειέτο ... ἀπεσειέτο in 2:9/10, however, immediately serve associatively as introduction to the image taken from the well-known parable of Jesus regarding the house built on a rock⁸: the words of Potiphar's wife were like the *winds*, her drunken lust like the *rain*, and her bribery like the *rivers* of the parable sweeping against his «house» of temperance. But Joseph *withstood* her onslaught, because he was *standing firmly* on an *unshakable rock*. The repetition of the word-group ἐσειέτο ... ἀπεσειέτο of lines 9-10 in ἀσειέτου in line 16 forms in conjunction with ἐστηκὼς ἐπὶ πέτρας ἀσειέτου (2.16) an internal ring or frame, marking 2.9- 16 off as a close-knit unit within the broader context of the image of slave vs master (2.6-8 + 3.1-5), while the expression «the house of temperance» again links associatively with the key motive of temperance and self-control. At the beginning of strophe 3, however, the poet returns by means of association to the concepts of lines 6-8: although Joseph was *enslaved* as far as his *body* is concerned, his *mind* was *free*. He in fact became *master* of those who *controlled* him, although he was bodily under their *control*. Thus 3.1-5 reflects 2.6-8 in every manner!

The poet leaving his image of slave vs master, now moves on by means of association to reality, stating in lines 6-16 in antithetical manner how Joseph was respected and loved by Potiphar, but desired by his wife, the words δεσπότης and δεσποίνης clearly linking up by association with the preceding κρατούμενος, ἐκράτησε τῶν κρατησάντων of 3.5 as well as *all* the concepts of slave vs master in the preceding passage. Referring in strophe 4 to the lawless conduct of the Egyptian woman, turning all topsy turvy, he again picks up the concept of slave vs master. Joseph, the *slave*, became absolute *master* of pleasure and carnal passions, she, the *mistress*, became the *slave of sin*. From this point the poet again establishes an associative link, moving from δοῦλος ... ἀμαρτίας to the related idea that he who

7. H. Hunger, Romanos Melodos, Dichter, Prediger, Rhetor - und sein Publikum, *JÖB* 34 (1984) 28-30.

8. Matth. 7: 24-27.

commits sin is the slave of sin, taken from the metaphorical passage in John 8.34.

From these examples which come from only three hymns it has become abundantly clear that association of ideas as principle of composition is still very much in evidence in Romanos after centuries of its first appearance in the poems of Homer. It has also become clear that the *basic essence* of its use is still alike: often a motive is developed by means of association. Within this motive another secondary motive is afterwards picked up and again developed associatively in such a way that this motive now becomes the focal point of the poet's thought. In this connection the observation of Verdenius is informative. Referring to the art of a musical composition he writes: «A un moment presque imprévu, le courant des sons peut donner naissance à un motif qui se détache un peu du schéma. La force motrice d'un tel développement est l'association. Elle s'attache à quelques sons souvent d'importance secondaire, pour évoquer une figure analogue, mais différente, qui alors devient le centre de l'attention»⁹.

In the light of Romanos' preference for the use of antithesis as device to emphasize the point he is making within the development of his thought, it would seem that a detailed study of association as principle of composition will be of importance for the interpretation of his thought structure in general.

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9. Verdenius, *op. cit.*, 345.