

**QVID SIT INSPIRATIO APVD VETERES SCRIPTORES
TAM ETHNICOS QVAM CHRISTIANOS**

INTRODVCTIO	1
CAPVT PRIMVM:	
INSPIRATIONIS NOTIO APVD VETERES AVCTORES	
1.1 De inspiratione in Litteris Graecis usque ad Platonem	2
1.1.1 De poetis epicis	2
1.1.2 De poetis lyricis	5
1.2 De inspirationis notione in antiquioribus Litteris Latinis	8
CAPVT SECVNDVM:	
DE INSPIRATIONE POETICA IN PLATONIS OPERE c.t. <i>IONE</i>	
2.1 De <i>Ionis</i> compositione	13
2.2 De inscitia poetarum et vatum	14
2.3 Ars vel inspiratio: poetarum simplicitas	15
2.4 De natura inspirationis poeticae: Μανία sive ένθουσιασμός	17
2.5 Poetae munus: deorum interpres sive έρμενης	19
2.6 Poeta: Lapis Heracleus	19
CAPVT TERTIVM:	
A VETERVM MVSEO AD <i>PAIDEIAN</i> CHRISTIANORVM	
3.1 Quid sit inspiratio iuxta doctrinam Christianam	22
3.2 Utrum sit duplex auctor inspirationis divinae	24
3.3 A <i>Musis</i> ad Spiritum Sanctum	28
3.4 Quid sit vinculum inter poeticam artem et vaticinium	29
CONCLVSIO	33
BIBLIOGRAPHIA	35

INTRODVCTIO

Argumentum, quod de inspiratione eiusque notione agit, nullo modo novum videtur. Nam doctissimi poetae nec non omnium aetatum scriptores multa, haud fortuito, dederunt verba. Ceterum, opinio est longe lateque vulgata, sapientiam permultis, sive divis sive hominibus, aeternam esse. De tanto munere, quo nullum aliud potius habuerunt, fusius viri docti iam disseruerunt. Nonnulli enim sunt homines, qui propter eorum scientiam nec non vel praeterita vel praesentia vel futura plane narrandi peritiam sunt clarissimi existimati. Si tanta sapientia in diis immo in Deo tantum inest, possuntne homines eam cum Deo communicare? Quinetiam potestne Deus eam benigne illis concedere? Quomodo id fieri possit, nisi per inspirationem?

Ideoque, per hanc brevem dissertationem mihi in animo est inquirere quae sit inspirationis notio apud veteres scriptores, tam ethnicos quam Christianos. Primum quae inspirationis notio sit iuxta veterum scriptorum doctrinam, accurate investigatur. Tum, quantum et quo modo ad Christianam doctrinam intellegendam proficiat, inquiritur. Denique qualia huius notionis antiqua sint vestigia iuxta ecclesiae Christianae doctrinam, aperte declaratur.

Ad tantum ac tam doctum argumentum idoneum in modum inquirendum atque explanandum, clarissimorum aliquorum scriptorum, qui nonnullis saeculis ante Christum nati vixerunt, de inspiratione eiusque natura opiniones et sententias enotare necessarium videtur. Quod cum faciamus, illam investigamus doctrinam, quae est a viribus illustribus cum Graecis, ut ab Homero, Hesiodo, Archilocho, tum Latinis ut a Vergilio, ab Horatio et aliis proposita. Quo de munere est a nobis in primo capite actum. Caput secundum insuper de inspiratione poetica apud quoddam Platonis opus, quod *Ione* inscribitur, tractat. Quibus prolatis, prospiciemus, inter alia, quae, secundum Platonem, sit inspirationis natura. Ex qua, quid sit poetae munus, constat. In capite tertio denique, postrema huius exercitationis parte, de inspiratione apud Sacros Libros disserimus et quid vinculum inter utramque, id est ethnicam et Christianam, de inspiratione doctrinam intersit demonstrare conabimur.

CAPVT PRIMVM:

INSPIRATIONIS NOTIO APVD AVCTORES VETERES

1.1 De inspiratione in Litteris Graecis usque ad Platonem

The Greeks had always believed that certain knowledge belongs to the supernatural beings. Human beings could only have access to such wisdom, thanks to the munificence of the supernatural who ‘reveals’, or renders it accessible. Inspiration is generally regarded as the process or means of communicating this hitherto inaccessible body of knowledge to choice individuals. Prominent among the privileged purveyors of this supernatural patrimony are the poets and the seers. Although this communicative process may differ in facts and details from an individual poet to another, the underlying notion is essentially the same. An overview of the claims of some ancient poets to such special supernatural privileges would not only enable us appreciate better the traditional concept of inspiration, but also be a propitious prelude to Plato’s critique of the poetic enterprise as delineated in his seminal work, *Ion*.

1.1.1 De poetis epicis

The epic poets of ancient Greece remain important literary sources of the ancient world. Through their ingenious works, useful insights regarding the life, beliefs and practices of early civilizations could be gained. Reading these works as handed down through the ages, one could easily discern that the ancient Greeks obviously had a very high regard for knowledge and learning. In fact, knowledge of past and future events was considered a patrimony of the gods. Any claims by humans to the possession of such knowledge required proofs, the credibility of which was further bolstered by references to the gods as the sources. Thus, poets were taught by the gods. The response of the swineherd Eumaeus to the request of Penelope to fetch the stranger, Odysseus in disguise, from whom she expects to learn of the fate of her spouse, Odysseus is instructive in this regard.

I would, O queen, that the Achaeans would keep silence, for he speaks such words as would charm thy very soul. Three nights I had him by me, and three days I kept him in my hut, for to me he came

when he fled by stealth from a ship, but he had not yet ended the tale of his sufferings. Even as when a man gazes upon a minstrel who sings to mortals songs of longing that *the gods have taught him*, and their desire to hear him has no end, whensoever he sings, even so he charmed me as he sat in my hall.¹

The choice of whom to teach or grant access to this “mysterious faculty” depends on supernatural grace. Knowledge was a sacred gift of the gods to some chosen individuals. In fact, E. R. Dodds rightly observed that “like all achievements which are not wholly dependent on the human will, poetic creation contains an element which is not ‘chosen,’ but ‘given’; and to old Greek piety ‘given’ signifies ‘divinely given.’”²

More so, like every other gifts, it could be sought by invoking on the benevolence of the donor. Hence, before embarking on the onerous task of recounting the adventurous return of Odysseus to his fatherland from Troy, Homer aptly invokes the Muse.

Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy.³

Another motive for turning to the Muses for information especially those regarding facts of history is evident in the prelude to that famous section of the *Illiad*, the *Catalogue of Ships*.

Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus – for ye are goddesses and are at hand and know all things, whereas we hear but a rumour and know not anything – who were the captains of the Danaans and their lords.⁴

Since the poet was not an ocular witness of the events whose history he was to narrate, there was need for the testimony of the all-seeing gods. As B. Snell suggests, “Human nature has no knowledge, but the divine nature has.”⁵ Eyewitness account was more authoritative in oral traditions than other sources of knowledge of facts. Thus, Demodocus was said to have

¹ HOMER, *Odyssey* XVII, 513 – 521.

² DODDS 1951, p. 80.

³ HOMER, *Odyssey* I, 1.

⁴ HOMER, *Iliad* II, 484.

⁵ SNELL 1982, p. 136.

sung “of the fate of the Achaeans as though haply thou hadst thyself been present or hadst heard the tale from another.”⁶

With Hesiod,⁷ some aspects of the notion of divine inspiration came into light. The vocation of the poet became even more specific and ritualized. The poet became a man called and set apart from his normal life endeavours. In the *Theogony*, the poet recounts how he got the poetic vocation from the Muses on Mount Helicon.

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was
shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon ... and they plucked and
gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and
breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and
things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the
blessed gods that are eternally.⁸

From the foregoing, certain aspects of the vocation and mission of the poet are evident. The plot spells out clearly the scenario, circumstance, mission statement and *autorictas* of the poet. He was chosen in spite of himself by the Muses while he was shepherding his flock, given a sceptre of laurel as a symbol of his poetic authority and legitimacy, and as it were, consecrated (ritualized by being breathed into - *ἐνέπνευσαν*) for a specific mission, namely, to celebrate with his songs the future and the past.⁹ With this poise, the poet went on “telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice”¹⁰, a role also true of the seers.¹¹

⁶ HOMER, *Odyssey* XVII, 491.

⁷ Hesiod (flourished c. 700 B. C) was one of the earliest Greek poets, often called the “father of Greek didactic poetry”. Two of his complete epics have survived, the *Theogony*, relating the myths of the gods, and the *Works and Days*, describing peasant life.

⁸ αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλήν ἐδίδαξαν αἰοιδῆν, ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ὑπο ζαθέοιο. τόνδε δέ με πρότις α θεαί πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον, Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο: . . . καί μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθ ηλέος ὄζον δρέψασαι, θηητόν: ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείομι τά τ' ἐσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα. καί μ' ἐκέλονθ' ὕμνεϊν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἔόντων, σφᾶς δ' αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀείδειν. (HESIOD, *Theogony* 23 – 25; 30 – 34).

⁹ In the *Iliad* (I, 70), Calchas was described as “far the best of diviners, who had knowledge of all things that were, and that were to be, and that had been before.”

¹⁰ HESIOD, *Theogony* 38.

¹¹ E. R. Dodds observes that “several Indo – European languages have a common term for “poet” and “seer” (Latin *vates*, Irish *fili*, Icelandic *thulr*). He corroborates this fact by citing H. M. and N. K. Chadwick’s *The Growth of Literature*: “It is clear that throughout the ancient languages of northern Europe the ideas of poetry, eloquence, information (especially antiquarian learning) and prophesy are intimately connected.” DODDS 1951, p. 100.

In these respects, therefore, Hesiod subtly distinguishes himself from Homer and perhaps others who seemed to sing only of facts of the past. His mission is more realistic, with retrospective and futuristic orientations. His poetic call and investiture was once and for all. He would not need to resort to the Muses on particular occasions to be presented “with a clear picture of the facts; for such a picture is of necessity confined to the short moment during which the singer relates one particular event.”¹² The Muses incarnated in the poet by virtue of the divine breath.¹³ It was, thus, a thing of honour for the poet who, by the grace of the Muses, has been distinguished from his kith and kin. For through Zeus, whose daughters the Muses are, “mortal men are famed or unfamed, sung or unsung alike, as great Zeus wills. For easily he makes strong and easily he brings the strong man low; easily he humbles the proud and raises the obscure, and easily he straightens the crooked and blasts the proud.”¹⁴ Little wonder then Hesiod did not hesitate to speak in the first person and thereby distinguishing himself from the poetic *status quo ante*.¹⁵ He claimed a special relationship with the Muses who inspired him with a special kind of truths, which enabled him to piece together the traditions about the gods and fill the story out with all the necessary names and relationships.¹⁶

1.1.2 De Poetis Liricis

The lyric poets also felt the need to turn to the supernatural for veracity and authority of their enterprise. Like their epic counterparts, they appreciated poetry as a “holy gift of the Muses to men”¹⁷. However, they differed, *inter alia*, in their relationship with the Muses.

¹² SNELL 2013, p. 138.

¹³ The Muses, according to classical mythology, were the inspiring goddesses of song, divinities presiding over the different kinds of poetry and over the arts and sciences. They were originally regarded as the nymphs of inspiring wells, near which they were worshipped, and bore different names in different places, until the Thraco-Boeotian worship of the nine Muses spread from Boeotia over other parts of Greece, and ultimately became generally established. See SMITH (ed.) 1870, pp. 1124 – 1125.

¹⁴ HESIOD, *Works and Days*, 5 – 10.

¹⁵ ARRIGHETTI 1989, p. 12.

¹⁶ See DODDS 1951, p. 81.

¹⁷ HESIOD, *Theogony*, 93.

Archilochus (flourished c. 650 B.C.)¹⁸, in a short biographical fragment, affirms his poetic personality by boasting of his knowledge of the gift of the Muses.

I am the servant of Lord Enyalios and I know the lovely gift of the Muses.¹⁹

How did he receive the poetic call? Detailed autobiographical accounts of such are lacking. This is perhaps owing to the fact that only fragments of his works survived. Direct invocations to the Muses for information of some sorts are not attested in his surviving fragments either. However, the inscription of Mnesiepes, the sanctuary in honour of the poet constructed at Paro in the 300 BC, narrates how, as a young man, Archilochus was going to sell a cow at the instance of his father, and came in contact with some maidens who after they had derided him, exchanged his cow with the gift of a lyre. Only then did he recognize the maidens to be the Muses.²⁰

Although this legend could easily be adjudged a derivation of the Hesiodic poetic investiture saga²¹, some of the details underscore a creative attempt for novelty for which Archilochus is known. Thus, in him, a dynamic shift from the epic tradition is obvious. Not only that the use of the first person singular pronoun, which was also present in Hesiod, became *à la mode*, the first person plural pronoun “we” was also used as a collective identity of the poet’s kith and kin in contradistinction to the “they” of an opposing and inimical group or community.²² Moreso, one notices in Archilochus a gradual affirmation of the personality of the poet and the merit of his creative ingenuity in poetry. Even if poetry was the gift of the gods to the beloved, in Archilochus the genius of the poet is indispensable in weaving its content and formal aspect. The poet, as it were, appropriates the gift and by means of his professional expertise, uses it to give vent to the lived vicissitudes and happenstances of his

¹⁸ Archilochus (flourished c. 650 B. C) was a poet and soldier, the earliest Greek writer of iambic, elegiac, and personal lyrical poetry whose works have survived to any considerable extent. The surviving fragments of his work show him to have been a metrical innovator of the highest ability. See SMITH (ed.) 1880, pp. 268 – 270.

¹⁹ WEBSTER 1959, p. 30.

²⁰ See ROSSI - NICOLAI 2006, p. 227; BRILLANTE 2006, pp. 75 – 89.

²¹ HESIOD, *Theogony*, 22ff.

²² ROSSI - NICOLAI 2006, p. 226.

life and environment. In this regard and more, he constitutes a continuity and discontinuity from the traditional epos.²³

Pindar²⁴ on his part, assumes the role of a prophet, an interpreter or voice of the gods. “Give me an oracle” he implores the Muses, and “I will be your spokesman (προφατεύσω).”²⁵ In another place, he seems to have called himself προφήτης²⁶. Thus, in him still runs the *leitmotif* of the Muses as revealers of hidden truth. The role of the poet consists, therefore, in applying his genius and expertise in interpreting reality as it is revealed and unfolds. This calls for excellence and creativity. As P. Murray rightly observed, “poetic creativity depends both on inspiration and on conscious effort.”²⁷ A famous tradition traces Pindar’s poetic call to the unction of his lips with wax (another, with honey) by the bees while he slumbered on a street of Tespiae.²⁸

Be that as it may, his poetic formation in Athens was a well known fact. This explains, as some scholars maintain, some athenocentric elements in his poems. For although he learnt to play the flute from his uncle, Scopelinus, at Athens he was schooled in the technique of lyrical composition.²⁹ In fact, in Pindar poetry gradually becomes more a product of human ingenuity jolted by some divinely endowed and humanly nurtured gifts. As such, poets are “the cunning builders of song”, and the trainer “a scroll-wand of the Muses,” “a mixing-bowl of song.”³⁰

From the foregoing, therefore, it could be observed that the notion of poetic inspiration was well spread among the ancient Greeks. It has its origin in the belief that “creative thinking

²³ WEBSTER 1959, p. 29.

²⁴ Pindar (522/518 B. C – 443/438 BC) was one of the most famous ancient Greek lyric poets. This perhaps explains why a good portion of his work was carefully preserved. He is particularly known for his *epinicia* (victory odes) in honour of notable personages and winners of athletic games. See ANTHON 1884, 666-667.

²⁵ PINDAR, fr. 150 S. as cited in DODDS 1951, p. 82.

²⁶ PINDAR, *Paeon* 6. 6 as cited in DODDS 1951, p.101. Etymologically, the term “prophet” (προφήτης, ου, ό) comes from the Greek “πρό” (for, on behalf of) and φημί (to say, affirm, assert). It denotes one who speaks for another, especially for a divine being. The prophet is, therefore, a proclaimer and interpreter of divine revelation.

²⁷ MURRAY 2006, p. 56.

²⁸ BRILLANTE 2009, p. 84.

²⁹ PAGE et alii (eds.) 1961, p. viii.

³⁰ PAGE et alii (eds.) 1961, p. xix.

is not the work of the ego³¹ and the need for dependence on the divine. The extent of this belief differed from one poet to another and was influenced by the self-conception of the poet and of his roles in society. This idea of poetic inspiration in early Greece, however, differs in a number of ways from subsequent conceptions and was devoid of ecstasy or possession.³² The later was popularised by Plato but could be traced to Democritus and not earlier than him.

What of their Latin counterparts, how did they regard this notion?

1.2 De inspirationis notione in antiquioribus litteris Latinis

Roman literature, written in the Latin language, remains a veritable aperture to the rich cultural legacy of ancient Rome. Therein, the influence of earlier Greek literature is amply manifest.³³ This *imitatio Graecorum* is clearly discernible in the ancient Latin authors' notion and adoption of the idea of poetic inspiration. The notion of poetic inspiration was so rife among the Latin writers that in his paraphrasing of Homer's *Odyssey*, Livius Andronicus did not hesitate to designate the *Muses* as *Camena*, thereby underscoring the close relationship between the gods or Nymphs and poetry (*carmen*).³⁴ This designation of the *Muses* as *Camenae*, which seems to be exclusive to the Saturnian poets, Livius Andronicus and Gnaeus Naevius, was however reverted by Ennius in his disapproval of the saturnian poetry. Hence, introducing the *Muses* into Roman poetry and making them the patronesses of the new poetic ideal that would find its highest expressions in Virgil, Horace, Ovid.

³¹ DODDS 1951, p. 81.

³² MURRAY 2006, p. 61.

³³ CAVARZERE - DE VIVO – MASTANDREA 2003, p. 15.

³⁴ *Odussia I: Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum*. See SUERBAUM, 1987, p. 628. Even though the earliest appearances of Latin literature seem to have been adaptations of their Greek counterparts, there seem to have been scattered evidences that the Romans, in the centuries prior to the classical period, had their own epic tradition, the "heroic lays" of ancient Rome that were learned and recited at banquets. However, they appear to have died out under the pressure of Greek influence and literature. See WILLIAMS 1982, pp. 53 – 59.

Thus, before embarking on the story of the horrendous ordeal of Aeneid, Virgil³⁵ invokes the Muses for inspiration in the same manner as Homer.

O Muse, the causes tell! What sacrilege, or vengeful sorrow, moved
the heavenly Queen to thrust on dangers dark and endless toil a man
whose largest honour in men's eyes was serving Heaven? Can gods
such anger feel?³⁶

Also before the metamorphosis of the ships, the poet beseeches the poetic divinities for information thus “What god, ye Muses, turned such fierce flames from the Teucrians? Who drove away from the ships such vast fires? Tell me; faith in the tale is old, but its fame is everlasting.”³⁷ Yet in another place, he explicitly prays for inspiration: “Do thou, O Calliope, thou and thy sisters, I pray, inspire me while I sing, what slaughter, what deaths, Turnus dealt on that day, and whom each warrior sent down to doom; and unroll with me the mighty scroll of war.”³⁸ In order to give an etiological explanation of the formation of bees from the carrion of a calf which forms the prelude to the myth of Aristaeus, the poet asks his divinity in a very personalized manner “What god was it, my Muse, that worked this miracle for us? Who caused this novel practice to cross the minds of men?”³⁹ This is logical given the fact that the task before the poet was that of retelling the heroic deeds of the past, to which he was not an eyewitness. The voice of the gods, therefore, becomes inevitable for credibility and authenticity; only “the divine ones, remember and can recount.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Publius Vergilius Maro (70 – 19 B. C.) was regarded by the Romans as their greatest poet, an estimation that subsequent generations have upheld. His fame derives from the excellence of his works (*Eclagues, Georgics and Aeneid*), especially the *Aeneid*, which chronicles Rome’s legendary founder and proclaims the Roman mission to civilize the world under divine guidance. Hence, the Romans regarded him as the national poet; spokesperson of the roman ideals and achievements, and his influences were felt in society wherein his poems were recommended and used as school textbooks. See R. D. WILLIAMS (ed.), “*Virgil*” in Robert MCHENRY (ed.) 1992, pp. 499 – 501.

³⁶ VIRGIL, *Aeneid* 1, 8 – 10 : *Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso, quidve dolens, regina deum tot volvere casus insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores impulerit. Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*

³⁷ VIRGIL *Aeneid* 9, 77 – 79.

³⁸ VIRGIL, *Aeneid* 9, 525 - 228.

³⁹ VIRGIL, *Georgics* 4, 315.

⁴⁰ VIRGIL, *Aeneid* 7, 641 – 646.

The gods were not only called upon for information and a retentive memory necessary for a credible narration of events of the past, but are also active agents in the vocation and ministry of the poet. They call and consecrate the poet for poetic mission. This is remarkably evidenced by Virgil's account of the poetic consecration of his friend, Gallus⁴¹

at large by the streams of Permessus, met one of the Muses, who led him to the Aonian hills where the whole choir of Apollo stood up to honour him, a mortal; and that divine poet of pastoral, Linus, wearing his wreath of flowers and bitter parsley leaves, said to Gallus, « the Muses give you this pipe – accept it - which long ago they gave to Hesiod ; and he played it so well, his music drew downhill the obstinate ash-trees. Sing, to this pipe, the story of the Grynean wood, and not one grove on earth will Apollo be so proud of.⁴²

It should be noted, as W. Suerbaum did, that in Virgil, as in other classical Latin authors the role of the Muses or their allies is more of literary than religious.⁴³ For Virgil, therefore, the Muses are only poetic personalities assumed by literary tradition and utilized by the poet for the purpose of affirming his poetry. His indirect self-definition as *sacerdos Musarum* and as *ingenti percussus amore*⁴⁴ of the Muses should not, thus, be construed as a personal veneration for the Muses but as a traditional metaphor adopted by the poet to portray his poetic personality, activity and integrity.⁴⁵

This is not exactly the case in Horace⁴⁶ who boasts of being protected by the inspiring deities due to his privileged friendship with them,⁴⁷ attributes his poetic personality to their

⁴¹ Gaius Cornelius Gallus, (c. 70 – 26 B. C), Roman soldier and poet, famous for four books of poems to his mistress “Lycoris”, which, in ancient opinion, made him the first of the four greatest Roman elegiac poets. Gallus was a friend of Augustus and Virgil and, having distinguished himself in the war against Mark Antony, was made governor of Egypt. There, however, his imprudent conduct led to his disgrace and suicide. Quintilian ranked him with Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid as one of the great Roman elegists. Virgil celebrated him, and Parthenius dedicated to Gallus his book on unhappy love affairs. See MCHENRY (ed.) 1992, p. 95.

⁴² VIRGIL, *Eclogue* 6, 64.

⁴³ SUERBAUM 1987, p. 628.

⁴⁴ VIRGIL, *Georgics* 2, 476.

⁴⁵ SUERBAUM 1987, p. 626.

⁴⁶ Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace: 65 – 8 B. C) was an outstanding Latin lyric poet and satirist under the emperor Augustus. The recurrent themes of his *Odes* and *Epistles* are love, friendship, philosophy, and the art of poetry. See MCHENRY (ed.) 1992, pp. 57 – 59.

⁴⁷ HORACE, *Odes* I 26, 1 ; II 16, 37- 40.

munificence and expresses his unalloyed gratitude to them.⁴⁸ This feeling of affection for the poetic deities could have been the *raison d'être* for the numerous references to the Muses in the poet's works, even calling them by names.⁴⁹ This seems to underscore his familiarity with them; a factor that distinguishes the poet from his cronies. As such, he could hear the voice of the deities even when others seem not to perceive it. He addresses one of the deities thus:

Descend from heaven, O Queen Calliope, and play upon the flute a long-continued melody, or sing with thy clear voice, dost thou prefer, or to the strings of Phoebus' lyre! Do you hear, my mates or does some fond illusion mock me? Methinks I hear her and am straying through hallowed groves, where pleasant waters steal and breezes stir.⁵⁰

Here, Horace not only gives eloquent testimony to his privileged rapport with the divinity, but also seems to suggest a unique kind of psycho-religious experience, *amabilis insania*⁵¹ characteristic of the notion of inspiration right from Democritus and object of Plato's critique.

That Horace shares the traditional belief that "creative thinking is not a work of the ego"⁵² is clear from his numerous invocations to the deities for inspiration,⁵³ and his explicit affirmations of such beliefs.

To the lyre, the Muse granted tales of gods and children of gods, of the victor in boxing, of the horse first in race, of the loves of swains, and of the freedom over wine.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ HORACE, *Odes* IV 3.

⁴⁹ CAMILLONI 1998, pp. 145 – 180.

⁵⁰ HORACE, *Odes* III, 4, 1-8.

⁵¹ HORACE, *Odes* III, 4, 5.

⁵² DODDS 1951, p. 81.

⁵³ HORACE, *Ars Poetica* 141 – 142 : *Dic mihi, Musa, virum, captae post tempora Troiae qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.*

⁵⁴ HORACE, *Ars Poetica* 83-84 : *Musa dedit fidibus divos puerosque deorum et pugilem victorem et equum certamine primum et iuvenum curas et libera vina referre.*

However, he did not stop at that, he equally appreciated the role and importance of skill in poetry. This constitutes the gist of his *Ars Poetica*. Thus, seemingly accusing Democritus of undervaluing the role of human ingenuity or art in poetry by disproportionately valorising “native talent,” nay, inspirational aspect and banning poets in their sober senses from the Helicon⁵⁵, Horace affirms the necessity for a mutual harmonization of the two aspects.

Often it is asked whether a praiseworthy poem be due to Nature or to art. For my part, I do not see of what avail is either study, when not enriched by Nature’s vein, or native wit, if untrained; so truly does each claim the other’s aid, and make with it a friendly league.⁵⁶

With this affirmation, he seems to be responding to Plato’s famous critique of poetry as expounded in the *Ion*.

⁵⁵ HORACE, *Ars Poetica* 295 – 297.

⁵⁶ HORACE, *Ars Poetica* 408 – 411 : *Natura fieret laudabile carmen an arte, quaesitum est: ego nec stadium sine divite vena, nec rude quid prosit video ingenium: alterius sic altera poscit opem res et coniurat amice.*

CAPVT SECVNDVM:

DE INSPIRATIONE POETICA IN PLATONIS OPERE c.t. IONE

2.1 De Ionis compositione

The *Ion*, the shortest of the dialogues of Plato (427 - 346 B. C), probably belongs to the early period of his philosophical activities, but its precise date remains contentious among scholars.⁵⁷ Amidst all the discrepancies in dating, the dialogue seems more likely *post mortem Socratis*. Despite the initial controversies regarding the authenticity of this dialogue, contemporary scholars maintain that there are no objective reasons for regarding it as spurious.⁵⁸

The *Ion* presents the dialogue between Socrates (469 – 399 B. C)⁵⁹ and Ion, a rhapsodist well known in the whole of Greece for his genius in reciting Homer, travelling to important centres and cities of the ancient Greek world, competing at contests and festivals and winning laurels therefrom. In this eponymous dialogue, Plato insistently presents his notion of poetic inspiration through a detailed critique of the poetic enterprise and the role of the rhapsodist.⁶⁰

Structurally, the *Ion* could be divided into the following sections⁶¹:

- Prologue: Presentation of the Rhapsodist (530A – 530B4)
- First part: The Activity of the Rhapsodists is not an Art (530C – 533C)
- Second part: The Foundation of Poetry (533C – 536D)
- Third part: The Pretence of Ion to Art and its Inconsistency (536D – 541B)

⁵⁷ MURRAY 1997, p. 96 ; PAGE et alii (eds.) 1962, pp. ix – xiv.

⁵⁸ MURRAY 1997, p. 96; TIGERSTEDT 1969, 18 – 20; MOORE 1974, 421 – 424; REALE 2000, p. 1023.

⁵⁹ KRAUT 1995, pp. 749 – 750.

⁶⁰ Rhapsodists (ῥαψωιδόι: literally ‘song-stitchers’) were professional reciters of poetry, particularly the poetry of Homer, who travelled round Greece, competing at contests and festivals. During the early periods, the terms ῥάπτειν and ῥαψωιδός was used to designate both oral bards who performed their own poetry, and rhapsodists who recited the poetry of others. Hence, the distinction between these two groups of people may not be pressed too closely. See MURRAY 1997, pp. 96 – 97.

⁶¹ Of the various schemes of the *Ion*, that by G. Reale is presented here for its simplicity. For more details, see REALE 2000, p. 1022.

- Conclusion: The activity of the rhapsodist is due not to skill (*τέχνη*) but inspiration (541B – 542B)

Suffice it to consider the principal issues of the dialogue in some details.

2.2 De inscitia poetarum et vatum

In the prologue, Socrates meets the rhapsodist, Ion, and having congratulated him for his recent success and laurels in the rhapsodic contest at Epidaurus⁶² and wished him good fortunes⁶³ in the Panathenaea,⁶⁴ expressed his admiration or envy (*ζήλω*) for the profession of rhapsodists.⁶⁵ The enviable nature of the rhapsodic profession is due to not only the physical adornment and aesthetic beauty of the rhapsodist, but particularly because of their acquaintance with a number of good poets, and especially their expertise in Homer, “the best and most divine poet of all.”⁶⁶ This acquaintance is based on their knowledge, ability to apprehend the poet’s thought and not merely learning off his words.⁶⁷ Such ability empowers the rhapsodist to carry out effectively his role as the interpreter of the poet (*ἐρμηνέα τοῦ ποιητοῦ*) to the audience.

However, this ability of the rhapsodist to understand and interpret is limited to a specific poet and not to all poets. In other words, it is a limited kind of knowledge, knowledge of particulars and not that of universals. As such, Ion admits that his skill is restricted to Homer, and that he knows nothing of inferior poets, such as Hesiod and Archilochus; he brightens up and is wide-awake when Homer is being recited, but is apt to go to sleep at the recitations of any other poet.⁶⁸ He affirms his ability to expound Homer better than Hesiod and others. Nevertheless, this sort of limitedness could not pass for Plato’s epistemological paradigm.

⁶² Epidaurus was the temple of the Greek god of healing, Asclepius, where a festival that included athletic and musical contests was held.

⁶³ PLATO, *Ion* 530a1 – 530b4.

⁶⁴ The Panathenaea was an annual celebration by the Athenians in honour of their patron goddess, Athena. Every four years, the ceremony was celebrated with greater grandeur, pomp and pageantry, which included musical and athletic competitions.

⁶⁵ PLATO, *Ion* 530b5 – 530d8.

⁶⁶ PLATO, *Ion* 530b10.

⁶⁷ PLATO, *Ion* 530c1.

⁶⁸ PLATO, *Ion* 531a3.

Ipsa facto, Plato would not consider the rhapsodists and even by extension, poets enviable purveyors of knowledge, nay wisdom. For Plato, knowledge entails a formal apprehension of universals, and ought to be universally applicable in the judgement of realities. Such is not a given but a skill that is consciously desired and acquired.

But why is Ion unable to pay “attention when somebody discusses any other poet, and unable to offer any remark at all of any value, but simply drop into a doze, whereas if anyone mentions something connected with Homer, wake up at once and attend and have plenty to say?”⁶⁹

2.3 Ars vel inspiratio: poetarum simplicitas

Socrates attempts to resolve the question by tracing the source of the rhapsodist’s knowledge. From where does the rhapsodist derive his knowledge? Is this knowledge based on art or on inspiration? Were Ion’s knowledge to have been due to art (*τέχνη*), Plato maintains, he could speak on every other poets as well, since the art of poetry is one and a whole⁷⁰, and he who judges of poetry by rules of art ought to be able to judge of all poetry. This is confirmed by the analogy to sculpture, painting, flute playing, and the other arts.

Referring to Plato’s *Gorgias*, where *τέχνη* (art) is contrasted with *ἐμπειρία* (habitude)⁷¹, P. Murray insists that *τέχνη* must be based on rational principles and be able to give an account of its procedure.⁷² If this is so and Ion’s enterprise is wanting in this regard, his rhapsodic activities could not have been based on art. Thus, Socrates affirms, “this ability of yours to speak well about Homer is not a skill.”⁷³ Since it is with neither art nor knowledge⁷⁴ that Ion spoke on Homer, how then did he accomplish his feats?

The rhapsodist just like the poet, insists Socrates, is inspired by a divine power. In other words, poetic activity is not the making of the poet but of the divine through the poet. Thus,

⁶⁹ PLATO, *Ion* 532b8 – 532c4.

⁷⁰ PLATO, *Ion* 532c5 – 9.

⁷¹ PLATO, *Gorgias* 462 – 3.

⁷² MURRAY 1997, p. 108.

⁷³ PLATO, *Ion* 533d1 - 2.

⁷⁴ It is noteworthy that in this dialogue *τέχνη* και *ἐπιστήμη* are virtually synonymous. For details, see MURRAY 1997, p. 108.

poetry is not a product of unaided human reason, but “sweets culled from honey-dropping founts in certain gardens and glades of the Muses.”⁷⁵ In the lyric poets, particularly Pindar, honey is a symbol for poetry. Honey, of course, suggests sweetness, as is reflected in the anecdotes about bees smearing the infant lips of Pindar with honey.⁷⁶ A poet is, by this very fact, unable to compose unless inspired and stirred into action by a divine dispensation.

Each is able only to compose that to which the Muse has stirred him, this man dithyrambs, another laudatory odes, another dance-songs, another epic or else iambic verse; but each is at fault in any other kind.⁷⁷

This notion not only takes note of the various kinds or forms of poetry but also tends to explain why particular poets specialize or are famous for particular forms of poetry and not others: they are mere instruments in the hands of the gods. However, could the divine not use a particular poet in various ways and for various purposes to realize more than one form of poetry? One thinks that since the classical theogonies assigned specific roles to specific divinities, who in turn chose and, as it were, possess particular persons as their messengers for specific missions within the purview of their prerogatives, it would be *ultra vires* on the part of a divinity to encroach or usurp another’s form, message and/or messenger.

Furthermore, by insisting on the divine origin of poetic activities, Socrates bolsters the veracity of the poets’ message. Accordingly, “what they tell is true. For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indict until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer with him.”⁷⁸

More so, to drive home his case for the inspiration of the poet, Socrates cites the example of Tynnichus⁷⁹ who had never composed a poem in his life, but instantaneously composed a

⁷⁵ PLATO, *Ion* 534b1 - 3. The comparison of flowing speech to a river goes back to Homer as does the association between honey and eloquence. See, for example, *Iliad* 1. 247- 9, *Odyssey*. 8. 170-3; HESIOD, *Theogony* 39-40, 83 - 4.

⁷⁶ See LEFKOWITZ 1981, p. 59.

⁷⁷ PLATO, *Ion* 534c1 - 5.

⁷⁸ PLATO, *Ion* 534b4 - 7.

⁷⁹ Nothing is known about this poet except that Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 2, 18 relates that when the Delphians asked Aeschylus to write a paean, he said that Tynnichus had already done that to perfection.

reputable paean,⁸⁰ thanks to the inspiration of the Muses.⁸¹ Thus, “the god of set purpose sang the finest of songs through the meanest of poets.”⁸² In other words, God chooses the weak to make them strong.⁸³ However, how?

2.4 De natura inspirationis poeticae: *Μανία* sive *ἐνθουσιασμός*

Although the notion of poetic inspiration could be considered an age-old cliché,⁸⁴ Plato’s conception and presentation of it smacks of some novelties and uniqueness. According to him, poets and, in fact, all those who experience the inspiration of the Muses do so in a similar state of enthusiasm or mania. Modern scholarship, however, maintains that the word *ἐνθουσιασμός* first occurred in Democritus who insisted that “the finest poems were those composed ‘with inspiration and a holy breath’ and that no one could be a great poet *sine furore*.”⁸⁵ This attribution also finds a place in Cicero⁸⁶ and Horace.⁸⁷ P. Murray, on his part, underscores the nuances between the Democritan and Platonian notion of poetic inspiration as enthusiasm without prejudice to the influence of the former on the latter. According to him, while Democritus does not regard inspiration and technique as incompatible but appears to combine the two, Plato consistently contradistinguishes and

⁸⁰ A poem/hymn in honour of a god, usually Apollo.

⁸¹ This is reminiscent of the story of Caedmon as related by the Venerable Bede. In the twenty-fourth chapter of the fourth book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Venerable Bede (672 – 735) extols the life, virtues, and poetic excellence of a certain Caedmon, who was believed to have been taught the art of poetry by divine inspiration. According to the Venerable Bede, prior to the gift of writing verses, Caedmon, a secular brother and horse tender in the monastery of Streaneshalch, was so incapable of versifying that he always evaded any attempts to do so even when obliged by fraternal and communal obligations of the monastery. On one of such occasions, and while in the stable where he took care of the horses, a certain person appeared to him in his dream requesting him to “sing the beginning of created beings.” After initial hesitations and expressions of his incapability, Caedmon, probably taught by the person in the apparition, began to sing verses, hitherto unheard, to the praise of God. Awakening from his slumber, he was presented to the abbe, who, in the presence of literary and artistic doyens, concluded that our Lord had conferred supernatural grace on him. Further tests of his extraordinary poetic inspiration yielded litanies of poetic pieces, quintessential and unparalleled in the tapestry of English doctrinal poetry, “for he did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God”. Convinced of this extraordinary grace operant in him, the abbe immediately admitted Caedmon into the monastic life to which he remained faithful and devoted *usque ad finem*. See *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, IV, XXIV.

⁸² PLATO, *Ion* 534e6 – 7.

⁸³ I Cor. 1: 27.

⁸⁴ Plato calls it *παλαιὸς μῦθος* – an old story/tale. See PLATO, *Laws* 719c.

⁸⁵ DODDS 1951, p. 81; BRILLANTE 2009, p. 215.

⁸⁶ *De oratore* 2. 194: “*Saepe enim audivi poetam bonum neminem – id quod a Democrito et Platone in scriptis relictum esse dicunt – sine inflammatione animorum exsistere posse, et sine quodam afflatu quasi furoris*”.

⁸⁷ HORACE, *Ars poetica* 295 – 7.

opposes them, an opposition that became central to the discussions of poetry in antiquity, and orchestrated in the *ars-ingenium* dichotomy.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Plato consistently insists, “all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed⁸⁹ and the good lyric poets likewise.” It could be noted that in Plato, the idea of inspiration is not essentially equal to that of possession or frenzy. This is clear from the fact that he uses different terms to designate these realities: inspiration (*ἐνθουσιασμος*), possession (*κατεχόμενος*).⁹⁰ The frantic demeanour of the poet is, therefore, a corollary of his possession by the gods. It is an evidence, an outward manifestation of the reality of inspiration. Hence, the poets were described as *οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες*” and it is “when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession.”⁹¹ It is in this regard that the poets are likened to the Corybantian⁹² worshippers and the bacchants.

It could be observed, at this juncture, that Plato’s notion of mantic displays seems to border more on performance than on the content of inspiration. It tells more of the deportment of the poet or rhapsodist while rendering his piece. They behaved in abnormal ways, such as to be adjudged mad or outside of their senses. It was an evidence of divine possession. The divine being possesses, as it were, the poet’s entire being and uses it, as he desires, to accomplish the desired effects on the audience. As such, it would no longer be the poets speaking, but the deity himself who speaks and addresses people through them.⁹³ This distinctly points to the roles of poets as prophets of the gods.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ MURRAY 1997, p. 114.

⁸⁹ PLATO, *Ion* 533e7-10: πάντες γὰρ οἱ τε τῶν ἐπῶν ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ οὐκ ἐκ τέχνης ἀλλ' ἐνθεοὶ ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι πάντα ταῦτα τὰ καλὰ λέγουσι ποιήματα, καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ὡσαύτως (emphasis mine).

⁹⁰ PLATO, *Ion* 533e7 – 534a8.

⁹¹ PLATO, *Ion* 534a3 - 5.

⁹² The Corybantes were priests of Cybele or Rhea, mother of Zeus and other Olympian gods, and she was worshipped with wild music and frenzied dancing which, like the Bacchic revels or orgies of women in honour of Dionysius, carried away the participants despite and beyond themselves. Euripides’ *Bacchae* contains a description of this myth. See PAGE 1925, p. 421.

⁹³ PLATO, *Ion* 534d1 - 5.

⁹⁴ See CHADWICK 1952, pp. 1 – 14.

2.5 Poetae munus: deorum interpres (ἑρμενῆς)

Given that the words of the poets do not flow from them but are “the sweets they cull from honey-dropping fountains in certain gardens and glades of the Muses”, an inquiry of the roles of the poet in the poetic process becomes imperative. A reading of the *Ion* reveals that the major role assigned to the poet by Plato is that of interpreting the gods. In his words, “the poets are merely the interpreters (ἑρμενῆς) of the gods.”⁹⁵ They decode divine message and encode it in ways intelligible to human intelligence. In this regard, they could be said to be ministers⁹⁶ of the gods since it is through them that the gods communicate their minds to human beings. Murray observes that it was conventional to describe the poet as ‘servant of the Muses’ in the phrase μουσῶν θεράπων, but θεράπων suggests an active relationship between poet and Muse. Perhaps, Plato prefers the word ὑπηρέτης here in order to emphasize more the dependence of the poet on the Muse.⁹⁷

This dependence of the poet on the gods even in the very act of interpreting the gods is worth noting. Being possessed by a divinity, every activity of his becomes circumscribed within the operational whims and caprices of the putative deity. Therefore, the poet dispenses his roles “according as each is possessed by one of the heavenly powers.”⁹⁸ Here, Plato seems to emphasize the complete passivity of the poet in the process; he is as a stone suspended in a ring by the central magnetic force of the Herculean lodestone.

2.6 Poeta: Lapis Heracleus

To drive his thesis home, Plato attempts a sort of phenomenological description of the process of inspiration. He resorts to the physical mechanism of magnetism, which although not novel in the thoughts and experiences of thinkers before him,⁹⁹ proved expedient for a

⁹⁵ PLATO, *Ion* 533e4.

⁹⁶ PLATO, *Ion* 534c8.

⁹⁷ See MURRAY 1997, p. 120.

⁹⁸ PLATO, *Ion* 534e5.

⁹⁹ The attractive power and process of the magnet had always elicited the rational curiosity of ancient thinkers. Thales believed the magnet to have been gifted with a soul given its power to attract irons to itself. The phenomenon also elicited the interest of such classical personalities as Empedocles, Diogenes of Apollonia, Sophocles, Euripides (whom Plato explicitly acknowledged in the *Ion*) and Democritus who is said to have written a work entitled “*Περὶ τῆς λίθου*” on the phenomenon of magnetism. See BRILLANTE 2009, pp. 232 – 233.

clearer illustration of his standpoint. Plato adopts the imagery of the poet and likens it to the possessive power or influence of the divine on the poet. He insists that the activity of the poet derives not from a skill or art of his but that he is possessed by a divine power.

[It] moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call “Heraclea stone.” For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain.¹⁰⁰

This poignant similitude between the magnetic field and poetic inspiration highlights more than meets the eye. It not only identifies the fount from which all inspirations flow but also takes note of the human instruments in the process. In Aristotelian metaphysical parlance, it takes note of both the formal and efficient causes of poetic inspiration, without neglecting, in any way, the relationship between these agents in the poetic process. Therefore, even if as scholars like Velardi¹⁰¹ suggest, Plato adopts a well-known *topos* here, his originality and ingenuity in utilizing it in a very constructive and didactically propitious way remains instructive. The inspiring power of the divine is mediated through the poets to the rhapsodists and through them to the audience, thereby forming a kind of communicational chain in the poetic process. Plato himself conceptualized it in a form of concentric rings, in which the spectator is the last of the rings [...], the rhapsodist and the actor are the middle ring; the poet himself is the first; but it is the god who through the whole series draws the souls of men whithersoever he pleases, making the power of one depend on the other.”¹⁰²

Thus, the gods communicate their minds directly to the poet; this message is then decoded and, as it were, transmitted to the audience by the rhapsodists and actors. The flow chart or organigram is also true of the inspirational influence of the gods on them. Hence, while the

¹⁰⁰ PLATO, *Ion* 533d1 – 533e5.

¹⁰¹ See VELARDI 1989, pp. 100 – 102.

¹⁰² PLATO, *Ion* 535e7 – 536a3.

poets are interpreters of the gods, the rhapsodists are those of the poets, and so on. But since each poet is possessed by a particular god, different from that who possesses another, it follows that each individual poet would exercise his influence on certain rhapsodists and audience different from another's. This seems to explain the professionalism of rhapsodists like Ion on the works of a particular poet and not on others. Furthermore, it tends to account for why one appreciates and enjoys a particular kind of poetry and/or performance but not others. The possessive power of the Muse on the poet is mediated through the rhapsodists and other performers of art to the appetitive faculty of the spectators. For Plato, therefore, even though poetic inspiration occurs at different levels, the role of the divine in the process remains dominant: they are the principal agents in the poetic process; the poets and their ilk are but mere instruments in the hands of the all-knowing divine realities.

CAPITVLVM TERTIVM:

A VETERUM MUSEO AD PAIDEIAN CHRISTIANARUM

3.1 Quid sit inspiratio iuxta doctrinam Christianam

Theologians are unanimous as regards the etymology of the term “inspiration”. It basically derives from the Latin verb “inspirare” which literally means “to breathe into, upon, or in.” Even though the term, *inspiration*, as Richard F. Smith observes, may have had its earliest Christian appearances in post-Augustan writings,¹⁰³ the concept and reality that it expresses was in no way novel. As we have already shown in the previous chapters, the phenomenon already found ample expressions in the poetic works of classical authors. Early Christian Literature preferred such classical equivalents of the concept of inspiration as *afflatus*, *inflatus* and *instictus* in referring to the stimulation of man’s mental state or attitude.¹⁰⁴ With Tertullian (ca. 160 – 220 A. D), however, the term which was hitherto almost exclusively employed in poetry, gradually started donning its specific Christian garb, albeit generically as the promptings of God on the human mind.¹⁰⁵ It was only gradually that it came to be used to express God’s influence on the sacred authors that resulted in the sacred books. This development could have been influenced by Jerome’s rendition of the LXX Greek word Θεόπνευστος¹⁰⁶ as *divinitus inspirata* (divinely breathed).¹⁰⁷ What does it mean to say that all of Scripture is divinely inspired? In other words, what is the Christian notion of divine inspiration?

According to Richard F. Smith, “In Catholic theology, the words “inspired” and “inspiration” are frequently used both generically of any and all promptings of God’s grace in and on the human psyche and specifically of the divine promptings at the origin of the

¹⁰³ See SMITH 1968, p. 500.

¹⁰⁴ See SMITH 1968, p. 500.

¹⁰⁵ *Nisi quod bonorum quorundam, sicuti et malorum, intolerabilis magnitudo est, ut ad capienda et praestanda ea sola gratia diuinae inspirationis operetur.* See TERTULIANUS, *De Patientia*, I, 2.

¹⁰⁶ 2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum, ad corripiendum et erudiendum in iustitia: ut perfectus sit homo Dei, ad omne opus bonum instructus.*

books of the Bible.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, the Church’s doctrine of the divine inspiration of the sacred scripture states as follows

Those things revealed by God which are contained and presented in the text of sacred scripture have been written under the inspiration of the holy Spirit. For the holy mother church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the holy Spirit (see Jn 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2Pet 1:19-21; 3:15-16), they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the church itself.¹⁰⁹

The Church locates the basis of her doctrine on divine inspiration in the New Testament, which in turn has its mooring in the traditional Jewish belief in inspiration. The Holy Writ, no doubt, bears abundant testimonies of divine influence on the prophets, judges and priests. The prophets were not only called, often in spectacular ways, by Yahweh from the practice of their normal professions, but were also consecrated as messengers of Yahweh and interpreters of his will to the people. The reoccurrence of such formulaic expressions as “The spirit of the Lord came upon ..., thus says the Lord,” and so on not only depicts the underlying orality of the tradition but also bespeaks of the messenger role of the prophet. The authority and truism of what he says derive essentially from the authority and powerfulness of the sender, Yahweh himself. As such, “Moses was the unique mediator who communicated the will of God to Israel. The prophet was one who spoke the word of the Lord. Wisdom was a gift of Yahweh. The priests continued in a derived manner the instructional office of Moses.”¹¹⁰ Gradually, therefore, the belief that the Scripture is a product of divine inspiration developed and took roots in Judaism. However, the different parts of the Scripture were not considered equally inspired; they admitted of different grades in the inspirational process according as their relevance to national identity. The highest

¹⁰⁸ SMITH 1968, p. 500.

¹⁰⁹ VATICAN II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, 11.

¹¹⁰ MCKENZIE 1965, p. 390.

grade of inspiration was attributed to the Torah, a lower grade to the Prophets, and a still lower grade to the Writings.¹¹¹

The New Testament, on the other hand, corroborate the fact that both Jesus and the NT writers acknowledge the divine origin of the Jewish sacred books;¹¹² in them, the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of human beings.¹¹³ While the referenced part of the second letter of Timothy gave rise to the word *inspiration* in Christian theology and affirms the extent and purpose of inspiration, it failed to take due cognizance of the human factor that may have been involved in the process. This silence regarding the human factor was, however, broken by Peter when, in his second epistle, he parenthetically warns the readers that “There is no prophesy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophesy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God.” Thus, the nature of prophetic inspiration comes into full light: “it is men who, impelled by the Holy Spirit, utter prophesy.”¹¹⁴ Ipso facto, in relating the origin of the books of Scripture to God, the Christian doctrine of divine inspiration also acknowledges the role of a human factor, and in this regard, resonates the classical question of double authorship and the relationship between the inspirer and the inspired.

3.2 Utrum sit duplex auctor inspirationis divinae

Christianity has always been conscious of the divine origin of the Sacred Scripture and has constantly sought proper ways of conceptualizing and expressing this belief. This finds testimony in the concerted attempts of early ecclesiastical writers to develop terminologies that would aptly express the divine role in the writing of the sacred books. It is believed that in writing these books, God made use of selected individuals that he called, prepared and inspired in various ways for the realization of his divine will of revealing himself to humanity. It was to such inspired persons that he communicated his divine message and

¹¹¹ MCKENZIE 1965, p. 390.

¹¹² 2 Timothy 3: 16; 2 Peter 1: 19 - 21.

¹¹³ SMITH 1968, p. 500.

¹¹⁴ SMITH 1968, p. 502.

through them the message was transmitted to the entire humanity. Thus, God was seen as a co-writer of the inspired books, in that he either dictated what was to be written or cooperated with the human agents in the process of inspiration. The process, therefore, would admit of two authors: the divine and the human authors. This phenomenon is generally referred to as “the double authorship of the Sacred Scriptures.”¹¹⁵

How did the idea of God as the author of sacred Scripture emerge? In the preface to his *Books of the Morals*, Gregory the Great clearly refers to the Holy Spirit as the literary author (*auctor*) of Scripture, distinguishing him from the human factor in the process whom he calls the writer (*scriptor*).¹¹⁶ This same distinction, which was also present in Isidore of Seville¹¹⁷ gradually, became a commonly acceptable and convenient theological lexicon.

The role of the human agent in the transmission of the divine message was never denied even if it seems to have been less emphasized. The attribution of individual sacred books to specific persons evidences this fact. To what extent does the human agent participate in the process? “Is the human factor or agent conceived to be merely a channel or transmitter, or is he thought to be an active producer making a personal contribution to the inspired books?”¹¹⁸ A superficial reading of some Old Testament passages that recount God’s command to some individuals to commit some instructions to writing tends to suggest the passivity of the prophet or the human agent in the process, in that, he appears as a mere transmitter of the divine message and nothing more. Jewish rabbinical tradition, as epitomized in Philo’s mantic theory of the inspiration of Scripture, obviously tends to reinforce this tenet.¹¹⁹ However, “it would be wrong to formulate from such passages the theory that the human beings who obeyed God’s command to write played an entirely

¹¹⁵ KELLY 1965, pp. 60 - 64.

¹¹⁶ GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum B. Iob*, Praefatio, I, 2.

¹¹⁷ See ISIDORE of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, I, 13.

¹¹⁸ SMITH 1968, p. 503.

¹¹⁹ For Philo, the prophet becomes possessed by God, loses autoconsciousness, and surrenders to the divine spirit, which then operates upon his communicatory powers. Philo Judaeus, also called Philo of Alexandria (c.15 B. C. – 50 A. D) was a Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher; in fact, the most important representative of Hellenistic Judaism. His writings provide the clearest view of the development of Judaism in the Diaspora. His pioneering attempt in the syncretization of revealed faith and philosophic reason; in combining Hellenistic philosophy and education with Jewish exegesis and theology earned him some prominence in the history of philosophy. He is also regarded by Christians as a forerunner of Christian Theology. See MCHENRY (ed.) 1992 (Vol. 9), pp. 385 – 386.

passive role”, since such commands could be literary devices to buttress the absolute primacy of God in the divine - human communicative process.¹²⁰

More so, mainstream early patristics not only confuted but also rejected the mantic theory of inspiration. They upheld the active and conscious participation of the human agent in the entire process of divine inspiration. In fact, refuting any identification of the Christian notion of inspiration with the mantic inspiration of paganism, Origen insisted that the moment of inspiration is characterized by perspicuity of perception, and that the inspired loses neither free will nor judgment, but apprehends reality better consequent upon the divine illumination of the soul thereof.¹²¹ Some scriptural passages also tend to lend credence to the active participation and ingenuity of the sacred authors. For instance, in the Foreword to the book of Sirach, the author lays bare his literary diligence and craves the indulgence of readers for any persistent deficiencies therein.¹²² In addition, the author of the second book of Maccabees expresses the laborious nature of the imminent task thus “For us who have taken upon ourselves the labor of making this digest, the task, far from being easy, is one of sweat and of sleepless nights.”¹²³ Concluding the task, he accepts responsibility for the merits and shortcomings appertaining thereunto.¹²⁴ The evangelist, Luke, on his own part presents his narratives as consequent upon his accurate investigation of the existing traditions¹²⁵ and the

¹²⁰ SMITH 1968, p. 503.

¹²¹ ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* 7, 3 - 4. The *Contra Celsum* stands out as the culmination of the apologetic movement of the second and third centuries. In it, Origen (c. 185 – c.254) desires to present Christianity to the educated classes as something intellectually tenable and respectable as against the insinuations of Celsus, a pagan philosopher who in his *Ἀληθῆς λόγος* (*The True Logos*) not only denied the divinity of Christ but also considered the rationality of Hellenists’ philosophical belief in God as far superior to Christianity. And so Origen devotes the eight books of his *Contra Celsum* to painstakingly confuting Celsus’ Hellenistic approach to Christianity and its doctrines on the Trinity, Creation, good and evil, God and the world, inspiration and so on. In doing this, he stood upon the shoulders of his predecessors (Justin, Tatian, Theophilus and Athenogoras) who had taken over the traditional apologetic for Judaism which had been developed in the Hellenistic synagogue and bolstered his arguments with a heavy dose of his philosophical learning. In fact, if with Celsus Christians seemed stupid and uneducated fools, if not downright knaves, with Origen Christians and pagans met intellectually on equal terms. See ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum*, (translated with Introduction and Notes by Henry CHADWICK, University Press, Cambridge 1965, pp. ix – xxxii); DROBNER 2007, pp.146 – 147.

¹²² See the Preface to the Book of Sirach.

¹²³ 2 Mac 3: 26.

¹²⁴ 2 Mac 15: 38.

¹²⁵ Luke 1: 3.

Pauline epistles – just like others - bear obvious imprints of his personal experiences and *Lebenswelt*.¹²⁶

Thus, the patristic authors not only rejected the mantic theory of inspiration but strongly affirmed that the human agent remained an active participant in the inspiration process.¹²⁷ However, as per what their exact roles were, patristic and medieval theological reflections seem to maintain dignified silence. Their reflections were astutely circumscribed to a preponderant emphasis of the primacy of the divine influence, a denial of the pagan ecstatic notion of inspiration and, *ipso facto*, a recognition of the consciousness and free cooperation of the human partner in the process.¹²⁸

In the 19th and 20th centuries, contemporary Catholic theology acknowledges the Bible as truly the word of God expressed in words that are truly the product of human minds, as though two authors composed the books of Scripture: God and man.¹²⁹ Regarding the relationship between these two “authors”, Catholic doctrine recognizes and insists on a variation in the levels of their operation; the human factor is instrumentally subordinate to the divine. This instrumental subordination finds eloquent expressions in such biblical references where God is said to speak through the prophet,¹³⁰ and in the patristic comparisons that depict the role of the human authors of the sacred books as the mouths, fingers, cithara, minister, instrument, handmaid or servant of God. Thus, Thomas Aquinas insists “*Scriptura, cuius spiritus est auctor, homo vero instrumentum; secundum illud Psalm. LXIV, v. 2: lingua mea calamus Scribae velociter scribentis.*”¹³¹

This teaching was confirmed by the Fathers of the Vatican II

To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in the task, made full use of their powers and faculties so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as

¹²⁶ 1 Cor 1:14-16.

¹²⁷ Smith cites the patristic designation of the sacred authors as *suggrapheus* or *auctor* – terms customarily used for human literary authors – as evidence of their conception and identity of the inspired human agent as an active participant in the process. See SMITH 1968, p. 504.

¹²⁸ See KELLY 1965, pp. 60-64.

¹²⁹ See SMITH 1968, p. 504.

¹³⁰ For example, in Acts 4: 25 God is said to have spoken by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David.

¹³¹ *Quodlibet* VII, q. 6 a. 3.

true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.¹³²

Therefore, without denying the invaluable activity of the inspired person, the Church insists on the positive role of the Holy Spirit in the entire process of divine inspiration.

3.3 A *Musis* ad Spiritum Sanctum

From the foregoing, one notices a sort of conceptual progression from the classical pagan notion of poetic inspiration and the roles played by the Muses therein to the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Christian doctrine of inspiration of the Sacred Scripture. While the Muses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne who governed the arts and sciences, out of their magnanimity, granted special knowledge of facts and realities regarding the past, present and future - a kind of knowledge regarded as exclusive patrimony of the gods - to choice individuals of the society, the Holy Spirit revealed God and His eternal will to humanity through the sacred authors. Since *nemo dat quod non habet*, effective revelation of such eternal truths would presuppose strong identity and intimacy with the divinity. In the case of the Muses, they were daughters of Zeus, the god of all gods. More so, the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is God Himself.

Just as the poetic pieces of classical authors are replete with invocations to the Muses, invocations to the Holy Spirit are not uncommon in Christianity. The Holy Spirit is constantly invoked in the Christian life and prayers as counselor, advocate, comforter, teacher, seal of truth and orthodoxy, inspirer and guide of Christian thought and action, witness of divine truth. It is to Him that Christians turn for divine inspiration, illumination and guidance. In fact, of the seven spiritual gifts traditionally attributed to the Holy Spirit, namely wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of God, wisdom comes first, and all of them, in fact, bear on the enlightenment of the beneficiary.

By and large, this conceptual transition from the Muses of classical epic tradition to the Holy Spirit of the Christian doctrine of inspiration, was already signaled by the 17th century

¹³² VATICAN II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, 11.

English poet, John Milton in his *Paradise Lost*.¹³³ Invoking one of the Muses, Milton makes it clear that his referent is different from the ones that traditionally inspired classical poets; his inspired Moses to receive the commandments and to write the book of Genesis. Because of the superiority of this special muse of his, Milton believed that his poem will fly above those of the classical poets and accomplish things never attempted before, because his source of inspiration is greater than theirs. Then, he invokes the Holy Spirit, asking it to be inundated with knowledge of the beginning of the world, because the Holy Spirit was the active force in creating the universe.¹³⁴ Actually, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was necessary for such tasks which Milton and, of course, the sacred authors set out to accomplish.

3.4 Quid sit Vinculum inter poeticam artem et vaticinium

At this stage in the reflection, it would be pertinent to bring to light, as much as space and time permit, some of the remarkable relationships existing between the poetic and prophetic enterprise.

From the foregoing considerations, it is evident that both phenomena, poetry and prophesy, were highly valued not just for their content or subject, but also for the reality that they represented. For the ancient and classical civilizations, certain knowledge or wisdom was an exclusive attribute and patrimony of the divine. Human beings participated in this wisdom only in the measure willed and conceded by the divine to some chosen individuals. The magnanimity of the divine is fundamental and shines out in the entire process of divine revelation and human participation thereof. Whether to a prophet or to a poet, the process of revealing or granting this access to divine will and realities is basically identical and was almost always referred to as inspiration.¹³⁵

Apart from the reality of divine inspiration, which seems to be phenomenologically identical in both aspects – prophetic and poetic, some striking similarities could also be discerned in the call and commissioning of the poet and the prophet. They were chosen and called from

¹³³ See MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, I, 1 - 25.

¹³⁴ COPE 1957, pp. 6 - 10.

¹³⁵ See KUGEL 1990, pp. 1 - 25.

their active, usually pastoral, life and commissioned often in spectacular ways for the set purpose. Moses, for instance, was called from the pasturing of his father-in-law's flock and commissioned amidst such spectacular events as the saga of the burning but unconsumed bush.¹³⁶ Amos defended his authenticity as a prophet before Amaziah by asserting how he was called by God while he shepherded his flock;¹³⁷ Jeremiah despite his initial hesitations and downright expression of his incapacitations, was reassured of divine guidance and subsequently commissioned through a symbolic touching of his mouth,¹³⁸ and in Ezekiel's case, by his devouring of the scroll,¹³⁹ thereby implanting the word of God therein. Spectacular theophany experiences, not excluding trances or ecstasies also characterize such vocational narratives.¹⁴⁰ The NT also chronicles the apostles as called from their professional chores to become disciples of the kingdom, messengers of Christ.¹⁴¹ These facts were also true of the classical poets. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod recounts his poetic call and investiture by the Muses while he pastured his flock at the foot of the holy Helicon.¹⁴² Such rites of investiture as the plucking and handing over of the staff, a branch of luxuriant laurel and breathing into the poet are reminiscent of similar fascinating theophanies that punctuate biblical accounts of the call and commissioning of the classical prophets. Hence, comparing the calling of Hesiod as a poet with the prophetic calling of Isaiah, Baumann observes:

Both accounts are—noticeably—written in the first person, presented as life-changing episodes with wider ramifications for society. Both also feature visions of divine glory [...]. Each presentation of divine glory includes a statement about the difficulty of seeing god. In Hesiod, we have “shrouded in thick invisibility, by night”; in Isaiah, “the house filled with smoke.” In both accounts, the divine glory includes incredibly loud sound; in Hesiod, Zeus is called “loud-thundering”, while in Isaiah, we have the building shaking from the voices of the divine attendants. These similarities are expected, of course, for both Zeus and Yahweh were sky-gods. In any case, the presentation of glory is in each account contrasted with mere humanity; in Isaiah, the prophet pronounces himself a man of

¹³⁶ Ex. 2: 11 – 3:22.

¹³⁷ Amos 7: 12 - 15.

¹³⁸ Jer 1: 4 – 10.

¹³⁹ Ez. 2: 1 – 3: 15.

¹⁴⁰ The biblical account of the call of the prophet, Isaiah is typical in this regard. See Isaiah 6: 1 – 13.

¹⁴¹ Matthew 4:18 – 22; Mark 1:16 – 20; Luke 5:1 - 11.

¹⁴² HESIOD, *Theogony* 1 – 35.

“unclean lips,” while in Hesiod the Muses themselves call the shepherds “mere bellies.” In each account, too, the human who is to receive his divine mission is singled out with an action that involves something being given to him. In Isaiah, the man’s lips are touched with a hot coal “taken” from the fire; similarly, in Hesiod, a branch that is “plucked” from the tree is given to the man who will become a great poet.¹⁴³

In fact, as Dan Pagis suggests the analogy between poetry and prophesy was regarded as obvious in respect to “inspiration, imagination, and the gift of receiving semi-divine visions and imparting them to an audience.”¹⁴⁴ The mediatory roles of the prophet, as well as that of the poet, shine out in their identity as messengers and interpreters of the divine being. They, like the priests, are the *via media* in the divine – human relationship. As such, they remained authoritative teachers of virtues and morals. To be sure, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”¹⁴⁵ In short, the educational and formative role of poetry in the ancient and classical world can never be overemphasized. It was not only useful for the formation of the classical memory but also was the most effective and prominent mode of transmitting traditional mores, cultures, and history.¹⁴⁶

More still, to be able to achieve the desired impact and effect on the audience, there was, in both cases, the constant need to refer to the authoritative source of the message. This is evident in such recurrent prophetic formulas as “Thus says the Lord, The word of the Lord, The oracle of Yahweh”, etc. The same effect is realized in classical poetry by the not infrequent invocations and allusions to the Muses and/or their ilk. In fact, the poetic genre was so influential in primitive societies that it became the most authentic way of expressing divine truths and messages. Hence, Von Rad maintains that “While there are exceptions, the prophet’s own way of speaking is, as a rule, in poetry: that is to say, it is speech characterized

¹⁴³ BAUMANN 2012, *Hesiod’s Theogony (lines 1- 52): The Calling of Hesiod as a Poet Compared with the Prophetic Calling of Isaiah*: <http://nathanbauman.com/odysseus/?p=3587> [14 August 2015].

¹⁴⁴ PAGIS 1990, p. 141.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 3: 16 – 17.

¹⁴⁶ See BLOOMFIELD - DUNN 1989, pp. 1 – 16.

by rhythm and parallelism. In contrast, passages in which they are not themselves speakers but are the subjects of report, are in prose.”¹⁴⁷ This idea is also shared by many contemporary theological authors and constitutes the kernel of J. L. Kugel’s essay.¹⁴⁸

Wrapping it up, therefore, it is obvious that poetry and prophesy share some similar characteristics, prominent amongst which is the claim to divine inspiration. The process may be more or less radical, but the individual emerges with a kind of knowledge or ability that was hitherto either lacking or imprecise.

¹⁴⁷ RAD 1965, p. 31.

¹⁴⁸ See KUGEL 1998, 59 – 95.

CONCLVSIO

In huius disserationis fine, illud argumentum, quod magni mihi fuit momenti, summatim hic in unum cogam locum et reminiscendi causa unum sub aspectum subiciam oportet. Hac vero in dissertatione divinitatis nec non eius inspirationis notio nullo modo nova, immo perennis ac per varia saecula hominum generi, vel vetustiori vel recentiori, cum ethnicis tum Christianis, nota et rata videtur. Sicut tamen aliae notiones et opiniones, ita illa inspirationis notio per varias praesertim hominum aetates apud classicos qui dicuntur auctores originem invenit et, tempore progrediente, alia et eadem usque ad nostram pervenit aetatem. Quae, ut par est, una cum hominibus eorumque cultu crevit, ut nullo tempore hominum mentes reliquit ac societatem. Quam ob rem per hanc exercitationem illas precipuas sententias investigare atque explanare, quomodo societate tempore progrediente huius notionem eiusque effectum doctrina Christiana sive Ecclesia Catholica exaraverit ac tradiderit, sum conatus.

Quod vinculum inter ethnicam et Christianam sit doctrinam, quod potui, vestigavi et exposui. Nam inter utramque, id est inter veterum museum et *paideian* Christianam, hac in re haud parvam esse concordiam puto. Quibus igitur breviter vestigatis ac prolatis, illum agnoscamus nexum oportet, ut omnium gentium concordiae nec non inter varias religiones dialogo proficiat et quae dicuntur Semina Verbi opus missionale servet extollatque. Ideo bonum et iucundum est homines magna cum voluptate litteris antiquis cum ethnicis tum Christianis studere. Oportet praeterea, quod, per studium optimorum hominum, melior in dies societas sit facta, institutioni faveamus. Facillimum enim est illos antiquos et invenire et legere auctores, qui vel Latine vel Graece, multis iam peractis saeculis, cum ad sui temporis homines tum ad posteritatem erudiendam praeclara illa scripserunt opera, quibus innumera ingenia sunt omnibus temporibus usi. Sed quamvis haud facile videatur coeptum, humanitatis tamen amor nos continuo urgat. Qua quidem de causa magno cum gaudio gratias plurimas ac maximas cum magistris tum praeceptoribus eruditissimis, qui ulla sine intermissione apud Facultatem nostram summa cum diligentia discipulis illam auream ostendunt sapientiam ac disciplinam, humili me acturum corde spero. Gaudeo insuper quia nonnullis abhinc mensibus sermones ab antiquis scriptoribus Latine et Graecos exaratos quadam cum difficultate et legere et comprehendere potui. Nunc vero, necessariis peractis

studiis, hoc unum dicere queo: me, quamvis incertum, itineris tam longi, Deo favente atque opitulante, primum et validum fecisse gressum.

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