

Chapter Six

BOOK EPIGRAMS

The odes of Byzantine canons, a form of hymnography that came into being in the early eighth century, are often linked together by a metrical acrostic, usually a dodecasyllable, sometimes a hexameter¹. These metrical acrostics consist of one line. However, in the rare type of the iambic canon, where the acrostic is formed by the first letters not of the strophes but of the verses, the pattern is that of a quatrain consisting of two elegiac distichs. See, for instance, the acrostic of the iambic hymn on the Annunciation by Anastasios Quaestor:

Ἄγγελος οὐρανόθεν πολυήρατον ἄρτι καταπτάς
παιδοφόρον Μαρίη φθέγγετο γηθοσύνην,
ἦ δ' ὑποκυσσαμένη Θεὸν ἄμβροτον εἰς φύσιν ἀνδρὸς
παρθενικῶ τοκετῶ κοσμοχαρῶς ἐχάρε².

“The angel, just descended from heaven on wings, brought tidings of a lovely, childbearing gladness to Mary, whereupon she conceived God Everlasting in the nature of man and joyfully rejoiced in her virginal delivery”. Anastasios’ epigram is a splendid example of the classicizing vogue of the late ninth and early tenth centuries: impeccable elegiacs, a sublime and elevated style of writing, and epigrammatic concinnity. In Byzantine manuscripts acrostics, like this one, are written in full at the beginning of the hymn, so there is no need to decipher them line by line. Acrostics serve two entirely different functions. Not only do they form the internal structure of hymns, the framework on which the texts are patterned, but they also introduce the hymns to which they are attached. In the latter capacity, metrical acrostics serve as book epigrams.

Book epigrams are poems that are intimately related to the production of literary texts and manuscripts. The scribe may sign his work after completion, his verses forming the colophon of the manuscript. The *ktetor*, on whose behalf the manuscript has been copied³, may record his name and possibly his dona-

¹ See W. WEYH, *BZ* 17 (1908) 1–69.

² Ed. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS 1900: 55–59. See CAMERON 1993: 312.

³ For the term κτήτωρ, see K. KRUMBACHER, *Indogermanische Forschungen* 25 (1909) 393–421.

tion (if he presents the book to a third party) in a dedicatory book epigram. The author of the text or texts found in the manuscript may be praised abundantly for his literary talents: such poems are laudatory book epigrams. The first two categories, colophon verses and dedicatory book epigrams, are so closely related to the process of copying and manufacturing manuscripts that they hardly ever manage to break away from their original contexts and gain recognition as purely literary texts. Colophon verses are never found in Byzantine collections of poems; dedicatory book epigrams only rarely. Since the literary quality of some of the dedicatory epigrams is fairly high, it is reasonable to assume that they were written by professional poets working on commission for a wealthy patron. And yet, whereas the collections of the major Byzantine poets contain numerous dedicatory epigrams on works of art or other pieces of occasional poetry, dedicatory book epigrams are extremely rare. The book epigrams that we do find in Byzantine collections of poems are almost always laudatory texts praising literary figures of high esteem, such as the evangelists, David the psalmist, the church fathers (especially Gregory of Nazianzos) and the ancient authors.

Since accomplished poets like Pisides and Geometres are known to have composed laudatory book epigrams, there is a clear tendency on the part of Byzantine scribes to attribute anonymous texts to famous authors. Unless a book epigram is also found in a collection of poems, such ascriptions are highly suspect. In some Byzantine Gospels, for example, a number of epigrams on the evangelists are attributed to Niketas David Paphlagon, a prolific writer in the first half of the tenth century: three epigrams on Matthew, Mark and Luke that belong to a set of four (including John), and two epigrams on Luke, one in hexameter and the other in dodecasyllable⁴. These epigrams are ascribed to Niketas only in manuscripts dating from the twelfth century and later. In the earliest manuscripts, however, they do not bear a heading mentioning their author: the set of four epigrams on the evangelists is anonymous in Lips.Bibl. Univ. 6 (s. X)⁵; the hexametric epigram on Luke can be found in many manuscripts, dating from the tenth century and later, of which only a few Palaeologan ones mention Niketas⁶; and the dodecasyllabic epigram on Luke does not bear a heading in Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery cod. W 524 (s. X in.)⁷. Seeing that the earliest manuscripts, some of which were copied during

⁴ For the three epigrams on Matthew, Mark and Luke, see KOMINIS 1951: 264 (no. 5), 267 (no. 5) and 271 (no. 3); for the complete set, see SODEN 1902: 380–381 (nos. 24–27). For the two epigrams on Luke: see KOMINIS 1951: 270–271 (nos. 2 and 4).

⁵ See C. TISCHENDORF, *Anecdota Sacra et Profana*. Leipzig 1855, 20–29.

⁶ See FOLLIERI 1956: 72–75.

⁷ See NELSON 1980: 77–78.

the lifetime of Niketas David Paphlagon, do not attribute these epigrams to anyone, it is highly unlikely that the ascription to Niketas is correct. If an explanation is required (errors of this kind are common in manuscripts), it is reasonable to assume that the epigrams on Luke were the first to be attributed to Niketas as he was well-known for his catena on the gospel of precisely this evangelist and that once the error had been made, it contaminated a branch of the manuscript tradition.

Another error that is often made is to assume that book epigrams are the work of the author of the book they introduce. The epigram that introduces the *Miracles of Sts. Kyros and John*, for instance, is ascribed to Sophronios of Jerusalem, the author of the book, in the Greek Anthology (*AP* I, 90). However, in Vat. gr. 1607 (s. X ex.), by far the most important manuscript of the *Miracles*, the heading attached to the epigram reads: “by Seneca the Iatrosophist”⁸. In two manuscripts we find at the end of the *Hexaameron* a long-winded epigram exalting its author, George of Pisidia⁹. In Par. gr. 1302 (s. XIII) the epigram is anonymous; in Par. Suppl. gr. 690 (s. XII) it bears the heading: τοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς ἑαυτόν (“by the same on himself”). There can be no doubt that this lemma is incorrect. In a poem *eis heauton*, the lyrical subject speaks in the first person about his personal life, his dire troubles, his brief moments of joy, his expectations and his firm belief in God. The epigram, however, makes use of the third person and tells us that Pisides is a great writer and a profound thinker. It is not in any sense an *eis heauton*. It is simply an ordinary book epigram. The fact that this book epigram can be found in two manuscripts only (out of a total of some fifty manuscripts containing the *Hexaameron*), renders the ascription to Pisides even less credible. If Pisides had written an epigram recommending the *Hexaameron* to its future readers, why is it not to be found in the other forty-eight copies of this text? Book epigrams are usually copied along with the text they praise. True enough, not always; but two out of fifty is really a bad score. As the epigram is prosodically correct, with a resolution in v. 20 and three proparoxytone verse endings in vv. 10, 27 and 33, it may have been written either by a contemporary of Pisides or by a scribe living in the ninth century when classicism was much in vogue.

The genre of book epigrams has a long history and a lasting popularity. It is impossible to establish a date for book epigrams, so absolutely fossilized is the genre. Epigrams on the evangelists in Palaeologan Gospels, for instance, may have been written centuries earlier, in the Comnenian age or during the so-called Macedonian Renaissance. The manuscripts can be dated, but not the book epigrams they contain. In some late Byzantine and post-Byzantine man-

⁸ See CAMERON 1983: 284–285.

⁹ Ed. STERNBACH 1892a: 66–68 (no. 107) and TARTAGLIA 1998: 424.

uscripts of Achilles Tatius' *Clitophon and Leucippe*, such as Laur. Conv. Soppr. 627 and Athen. 2142, we can find the elegant book epigram Leo the Philosopher wrote in defence of this novel which was notorious for its indecent passages: *AP IX*, 203. And in the Palaeologan manuscript Laur. XXXII 40, which contains the tragedies of Sophocles, we read a flattering distich written in honour of the tragedian by none other than John Geometres: Cr. 309, 21. These two book epigrams, however, are not attributed to their respective authors in the above-mentioned manuscripts. Therefore, had they not been preserved in the *Palatine Anthology* and Geometres' collection of poems respectively, it would have been impossible to date them with any accuracy.

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Colophon Verses

Colophon verses most often come at the end of Byzantine manuscripts; however, sometimes they are placed at the very beginning, or even somewhere in the middle. In colophon verses the scribe, having completed the manuscript after months of hard labour, signs his work. The scribe does not usually reveal his name, but uses instead one of the standard colophon verses, found in numerous other Byzantine manuscripts¹⁰. See, for instance, these two popular epigrams:

Ἡ μὲν χεὶρ ἣ γράψασα σήπεται τάφῳ
γραφή δὲ μένει εἰς χρόνους πληρεστάτους.

“The hand that wrote rots in the grave, but the writing remains till the end of time¹¹.

¹⁰ Examples of colophon verses can be found in: V. GARDTHAUSEN, *Griechische Palaeographie*, vols. I–II. Leipzig 1911–13; R. DEVRESSE, *Introduction à l'étude des manuscrits grecs*. Paris 1954; B. ATSALOS, *La terminologie du livre-manuscrit à l'époque byzantine*, vol. I. Thessalonica 1971, and B. ATSALOS, *Hell* 24 (1971) 5–32 and 25 (1972) 78–102; E. MIONI, *Introduzione alla paleografia greca*. Padova 1973; *La Paléographie grecque et byzantine* (Paris 1974). *Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique*. Paris 1977; H. HUNGER, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz. Die byzantinische Buchkultur*. Munich 1989; and KOMINIS 1966: 38–45.

¹¹ This distich has attracted much attention in recent decades. The most important studies are the following: G. GARITTE, in: *Collectanea Vaticana in honorem A.M. Albareda*. Vatican 1962, 359–390; K. TREU, *Scriptorium* 24 (1970) 56–64; and B. ATSALOS, in: *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio* (Erice 1988). Spoleto 1991, vol. II, 691–750.

“Ὡσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσιν ἰδεῖν πατρίδα,
οὕτως καὶ οἱ γράφοντες βιβλίου τέλος.

“Like travellers rejoice upon seeing their homeland, so too do scribes upon reaching the end of the book¹².

However, some of the colophon verses we find in Byzantine manuscripts are less formulaic and have a more personal touch. Let us look, for instance, at Par. gr. 1470, a manuscript containing patristic and hagiographic texts, which according to the colophon was copied in the year 890. The scribe, a monk called Anastasios, wrote two epigrams at the end of the manuscript. The first reads as follows:

Ἐπαυσε Χριστὸς δημιουργεῖν σαββάτῳ
κάμοῦ δὲ παύει τοὺς πόνους ἐν σαββάτῳ.

“On Sabbath Christ completed His creation and rested; on Sabbath, too, He puts my labours to rest”.

The second epigram is far more interesting because it appeals to the future readers of the manuscript and urges them to pray for the salvation of the scribe:

Μνήσθητι, σῶτερ, δημιουργέ τῶν ὅλων,
ταῖς τῆς ἀχράντου εὐκτίας Θεοτόκου
τοῦ ἐμπόνως γράψαντος Ἀναστασίου
τὴν βίβλον ἦνπερ ταῖν χεροῖν μου νῦν φέρω
καὶ τάξον αὐτὸν ἐν δικαίων τῇ στάσει
πολλῶν παρασχῶν ἀμπλακημάτων λύτρον.

“O Saviour, Creator of the Universe, remember, through the prayers of the Immaculate Mother of God, Anastasios who diligently wrote the book I now am holding in my hands, and award him a place among the just, acquitting him of his many sins¹³. Here, as in so many other epigrams¹⁴, the Byzantine reader is asked to reward the scribe for his time-consuming labours by praying on his behalf to God Almighty.

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¹² See K. TREU, in: *Studia codicologica*, ed. K. TREU. Berlin 1977, 473–492.

¹³ Ed. Φ. ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΑΤΟΥ-ΝΟΤΑΡΑ, *Σημειώματα ἑλληνικῶν κωδίκων ὡς πηγὴ διὰ τὴν ἔρευναν τοῦ οἰκονομικοῦ καὶ κοινωνικοῦ βίου τοῦ Βυζαντίου ἀπὸ τοῦ 9ου αἰῶνος μέχρι τοῦ ἔτους 1204*. Athens 1982², 123–124.

¹⁴ See B. GRANIĆ, *Byz* 1 (1924) 251–272.

Two Psalter Epigrams

Laudatory book epigrams can be found in hundreds and hundreds of Byzantine Gospels, lectionaries, copies of the Praxapostolos, Psalters, manuscripts of the church fathers and other texts¹⁵. However insignificant these usually badly written epigrams may appear from a purely literary point of view, they are important to the philologist interested in the manuscript tradition of a certain text. Since book epigrams tend to be copied along with the text they introduce, it is sometimes possible to distinguish branches of the manuscript tradition just by paying attention to these marginal scribblings. Unfortunately, however, as most editors ignore these seemingly dull and uninspired epigrams and consider them of little interest, much work has yet to be done in this field of research. Take, for instance, the most important book of European civilization: the New Testament. The splendid edition of Nestle-Aland succeeds fully in reconstructing the original text of the Gospels, but it omits to tell us what the text the Byzantines actually read may have been like. There must have been numerous “*recensiones*” of the Gospel text in Byzantium, each with its own particular readings. If we want to understand Byzantine culture in all its aspects and dimensions, we cannot, and should not, ignore the text history of the New Testament throughout the centuries. Pisides may have read a different version of the text of the Gospels from the one available to Geometres, and even a different version from the one known to his close contemporary, Sophronios of Jerusalem. As long as the text history of the New Testament throughout the Byzantine millennium has not been properly recorded, we are left in the dark hoping for simple answers. Just like the other marginalia we find in Byzantine Gospels (prefaces, evangelist symbols, canon tables, and so forth), the book epigrams on the four evangelists, if studied properly, may shed light in this frustrating darkness. It is not my intention to perform this task here (such an investigation into the text history of the Byzantine Gospels deserves a book of its own), but I do think that the epigrams on the evangelists deserve to be recalled from the editorial limbo to which they have been relegated so mercilessly. These epigrams should not be studied in isolation, but in connection with the manuscript tradition of the New Testament. For they may

¹⁵ For epigrams on the evangelists, see SODEN 1902: 377–384, KOMINIS 1951, FOLLIERI 1956, and NELSON 1980: 25–27 and 76–79; for the Praxapostolos, see SODEN 1902: 385–387, *PG* 108: 31–34, and K. STAAB, *Die Pauluskatenen nach den handschriftlichen Quellen untersucht*. Rome 1926, 117–118. For Psalter epigrams, see PITRA 1876–1888: II, 440–441, S.G. MERCATI, *OCP* 21 (1955) 272–273, FOLLIERI 1957, and FOLLIERI 1964a: 465–467. For epigrams on Gregory of Nazianzos, see SAJDAK 1914: 256–280 and 306–307, F. LEFHERZ, *Studien zu Gregor von Nazianz*. Mythologie, Überlieferung, Scholiasten. Bonn 1958, 99–101, and SOMERS 1999. For epigrams on Basil the Great, see RUDBERG 1961.

bring light where darkness reigns, and evidence where evidence is so much needed.

The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for epigrams on the Psalter, the Praxapostolos, Gregory of Nazianzos and Basil the Great. It is pointless to study these verses without taking into account the manuscript tradition. Say that fifteen manuscripts of the Psalter have the same laudatory book epigram complimenting David for his divine lyre-playing. Then we may assume that all these Psalters, or at least the majority, are closely interrelated. However, as long as the text history of the Byzantine Psalter remains a mystery and important manuscripts have yet to reveal their contents, it makes no sense to study just one of the popular book epigrams on the Psalter. For, of the hypothetical fifteen manuscripts, only three are known to us; the existence of seven more is signalled through the incipits in manuscript catalogues; and the remaining five, alas, entirely escape our notice. In order to understand the text history of a Psalter epigram, we need to know all the manuscripts – not only those that contain the epigram, but also the manuscripts that do not. Only then can we establish its context: the particular branch of the manuscript tradition to which the epigram belongs. Without a clear picture of the manuscript tradition we have only a text – but not a context.

In the following I shall treat two Psalter epigrams that differ from all the rest, because they are not anonymous and can be found in a restricted number of manuscripts only. These two epigrams give us an indication of their original contexts. The first text is Pisides St. 72:

Τέτιξ προφητῶν, ἡ λύρα τοῦ πνεύματος,
ὁ γῆν ἄπασαν ἐμφορῶν μελωδίας·
ὦ πραότης, γνώριμα τῆς ἐξουσίας¹⁶.

“Cicada among the prophets, lyre of the Spirit, filling the whole world with thy melody: o gentleness, the hallmark of power”. The epigram can be found not only in Pisides’ collection of poems, but also in a tenth-century Psalter, Barb. gr. 340¹⁷. Although it cannot be ruled out that the scribe of Barb. gr. 340

¹⁶ The epigram can be found in Par. Suppl. gr. 690 (s. XII), fol. 116^v, and Par. gr. 1630 (s. XIV), fol. 166^r; the latter ms. omits the last verse. In Par. Suppl. gr. 690 the lemma reads: εἰς τὸν προφήτην (not εἰς τὸν πρωτομάρτυρα as STERNBACH 1892a: 61 avers); in Par. gr. 1630 it reads: εἰς τὸν Δαβίδ. In a paper presented at the International Byzantine Congress in Paris in 2001, G. Papagiannis suggested to change ὦ (v. 3) into ὧ, “for whom (gentleness is the hallmark of power)”.

¹⁷ On fol. 14^r. This is the source from which PITRA 1876–1888: II, 441 derived the epigram. The reading πρώτης (v. 3) in his edition is a typographic error. In v. 2 the ms. reads: μελωδίας (so also Par. gr. 1630); the reading of Par. Suppl. gr. 690, μελωδίας, is grammatically more correct.

read the epigram in Pisides' collection of poems, the fact that he does not mention the author strongly suggests that he copied it from an earlier manuscript: perhaps the very Psalter for which Pisides had written his epigram, or one of its copies. Pisides' epigram is certainly not a masterpiece of fine rhetoric and splendid versification. But although it falls short of our expectations, the epigram deserves some comment, if only because it is the earliest datable Psalter epigram we have. First, there is the celebrated lyre. David is "the lyre of the Spirit". In Psalter miniatures we see David playing the lyre and in Psalter epigrams David is usually compared to the famous musician of the ancients, Orpheus, who made animals listen to his music and silenced the natural elements through the divine sounds of his lyre. Secondly, the equally famous "cicada": the little creature harmoniously buzzing in foliage and thickets, never growing tired of its endless singing, never craving for anything else than pure musical delight. The image of the poet singing like the cicada, not for any material reward, but simply because he has to sing, is as old as Greek civilization itself. The lyre and the cicada symbolize the musical talents of the Psalmist. By adding the words: "among the prophets" and "of the Spirit", however, Pisides makes clear that David is divinely inspired. Whereas the ancient poets, like mythical Orpheus, did not yet know the immanent truths of Christianity, David the Psalmist touches his lyre to praise God and is therefore superior to all the other pagan singers. Thirdly, David's "gentleness", which is "the hallmark of power". David is not only a divine singer, he is also a king. And being a king, anointed by God, he displays that royal quality of *πραότης* which characterizes all good rulers. Byzantine emperors like to compare themselves to the biblical David, especially when their rise to power was as unexpected as that of David, once a poor shepherd and then a mighty king. Emperor Herakleios was certainly no exception to this rule; in fact, in artefacts produced during his reign and in panegyrics written in his honour, Davidic symbolism plays a prominent role¹⁸. Seeing that "gentleness" and other royal qualities traditionally associated with David are not highlighted in any other Psalter epigram, it is reasonable to assume that there is a connection between Pisides' epigram on the Psalter and the Davidic mania of Herakleios' reign. It is for this reason that I would suggest that Pisides wrote his epigram as a dedication to a Psalter commissioned by the emperor himself: a fine tribute to the imperial qualities of Herakleios.

Some forty years ago Enrica Follieri published an epigram on the Psalter that can be found in two manuscripts, Ambros. M. 15 sup. (s. XI) and Vallicell. E 37 (s. XIV)¹⁹. Its author, a certain Arsenios, is otherwise unknown, but in her

¹⁸ See J. TRILLING, *Byz* 48 (1978) 249–263.

¹⁹ FOLLIERI 1957.

excellent commentary Follieri established on metrical grounds that the epigram probably dates from the ninth century²⁰. She also pointed out that lines 24 to 26 are almost identical to the last three verses of an epigram that can be found in many Psalters²¹. But what she did not notice was that both epigrams plagiarize Pisides, *De Vanitate Vitae*, vv. 139–141. Let us look at the texts: first Arsenios, then the anonymous Psalter epigram, and finally Pisides.

καὶ τῶν παθῶν τὰ θράσεια κωφεύεις ἅμα,
ὄτ' ἐκτραπέισα τοῦ δέοντος ἢ φύσις
πρὸς θηριώδεις ἂν σφαλῆ δυσμορφίας.

“And you also silence the bold passions, when nature turning away from what is right slips into beastly monstrosities” [you=David].

σιγᾶν δὲ ποιεῖ τῶν παθῶν τὰ θηρία,
ὅταν σφαλεῖσα τοῦ πρόποντος ἢ φύσις
πρὸς θηριώδεις ἐκτραπῆ δυσμορφίας.

“And he puts the animal passions to silence, when nature deviating from what is seemly falls into beastly monstrosities” [he=David].

καὶ τῶν λογισμῶν ἤρεμῶσι θηρία,
ὅτε σφαλεῖσα τοῦ πρόποντος ἢ φύσις
πρὸς θηριώδεις ἐκτραπῆ μετουσίας.

“And then our thoughts come to rest, which are like animals when nature deviating from what is seemly falls into hybrid forms of bestiality” [we=mankind].

²⁰ ODORICO 1988 published a long book epigram by a certain Arsenios Patellarites, whom he identifies with Follieri's Arsenios because both poets supposedly adopt the same “archaic” metrical rules. However, none of the corrections he proposes in order to prove that Patellarites, like Arsenios, allowed metrical resolutions is convincing. For instance, in v. 38 the ms. reads: αὔθις διατμῶν τοὺς Ἰορδάνου ῥόας, which he needlessly emends into: αὔθις διατεμῶν τοὺς Ἰορδάνου ῥόους: ῥόας is acc. pl. of ῥοῦς (ῥόος, ῥοῖ), cf. νόας (νοῦς, νοός) and διατμάω is a neologism coined by analogy to the Homeric form διέτμαγον (with loss of the intervocalic gamma, cf. Modern Greek λέω: ἔλεγα, φυλάω: φύλαγα); see also the *Muses* attributed to Alexios Komnenos, II, 24: συντηρωμένον (ed. P. MAAS, *BZ* 22 (1913) 361).

²¹ Ed. FOLLIERI 1957: 107. In Ambros. B 106 sup. (a. 966–67) the epigram is attributed to a certain Ignatios; given the obvious plagiarism (see main text) this author cannot be Ignatios the Deacon, as Follieri tentatively suggests on pp. 107–108. Besides, as book epigrams are almost always anonymous and as all the other mss. omit to mention the author, the lemma attached to the epigram in the Ambrosian ms. does not seem very trustworthy.

It is beyond any doubt that the anonymous Psalter epigram almost literally plagiarizes the three verses of Pisides' *De Vanitate Vitae*, and that Arsenios in his turn imitates the text of the Psalter epigram, with a few minor changes (δέοντος, metathesis of σφάλλομαι and ἐκτρέπομαι, τὰ θράσέα instead of τὰ θηρία). And as this obviously implies that the anonymous Psalter epigram antedates Arsenios' encomium on David, it is reasonable to conclude that the epigram was composed between the time of Pisides and the early ninth century. But why did the anonymous poet of the Psalter epigram use Pisides' *De Vanitate Vitae*, vv. 139–141? Why did he turn to a source that has nothing to do with the Psalter? In the passage from which he derived these verses, Pisides compares the human soul and body to the lyre which, if its chords are well-strung, is an organ of perfect harmony and blessed music: "and then our thoughts come to rest ...". The poet of the Psalter epigram, reading these verses in truly Byzantine fashion, translated this symbol of the human lyre into a concept that was much more familiar to him: divine David playing on his lyre who, like ancient Orpheus, silenced animals and beastly passions. Thus the harmony of contrasts and counterparts so dear to Heraclitus, Plato and Pythagoras turned into a Christian symbol: the lyre of David. Pisides christianized the concept of the well-tempered lyre, but he did not have David in mind when he wrote his verses. The poet of the Psalter epigram took the decisive step and identified the harmonious lyre with that of the psalmist. And Arsenios merely worked out a poetic concept that appealed to him, although he had absolutely no idea of its remote origins.

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Two Dedicatory Book Epigrams

Laur. LXXIV 7 is an illuminated handbook on surgery which was executed around the year 900 under the direction of a physician by the name of Niketas²². On fols. 7^v, 8^r and 8^v there are three encomiastic epigrams praising Niketas for the production of this luxuriously illustrated manuscript – a useful tool for all physicians, but especially for young students who need to be instructed in the art of medicine²³. Here I will discuss the first epigram in detail. In lines 1–5 the

²² On the manuscript, see N.G. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium*. London 1983, 136–137, and T.S. MILLER, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*. Baltimore 1983, 180–182.

²³ Ed. H. SCHÖNE, *Apollonius von Kitium. Illustrierter Kommentar zu der hippokratischen Schrift περὶ ἄρθρων*. Leipzig 1896, pp. XII–XIV.

poet addresses Hippocrates, Galen, Rufus and mythical Cheiron, “the quadruplet that soothes pain”, and tells them to rejoice and to applaud. As a Byzantine encomium usually begins with a *synkrisis*, comparing the laudandus to illustrious figures of the past, the subtext of the opening passage is that Niketas as a physician stands comparison with these four ancient doctors. In the next nine lines (vv. 6–14) we learn why this ancient quadruplet should be rapturous: their writings had been forgotten in the course of time and were ignored as if they had never existed, but Niketas, the new Hippocrates, fortunately rescued them from oblivion and provided an illustrated commentary. This is the mythology of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance in a nutshell. In numerous tenth-century editions we read that the arts and sciences had fallen into oblivion until genius so-and-so (Constantine Porphyrogenitus is a favourite name) took decisive action against the corroding effects of ruthless Time and made the knowledge of the ancients available to the reading public²⁴. There is no reason to take these pieces of self-advertisement very seriously. Lines 15 to 23 explain why Niketas’ book is so useful to future practitioners: see the text and the translation below. In lines 24 to 30 the poet admonishes all physicians, young and old, to praise Niketas as a benefactor of the arts and to crown him with a garland of musical flowers. Of course, the concept of the literary garland is familiar to any scholar interested in ancient epigrams²⁵. The poet, however, does not derive the motif from Meleager’s or Philip’s *Garlands*, but from another, more Byzantine tradition: book epigrams²⁶. In the book epigram attached to Clemens of Alexandria’s *Paedagogus* we read: “From a virginal meadow I bring thee, O Pedagogue, this garland which I plaited with words”²⁷. The anonymous book epigram on Pisides’ *Hexaemeron* states: “And he presented to God a flowery garland from the virginal meadow of the universe, which he plaited with variegated songs of divine contemplation”²⁸. And

²⁴ See I. ŠEVČENKO, Rereading Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in: Byzantine Diplomacy, eds. J. SHEPARD & S. FRANKLIN. Aldershot 1992, 168–169, 176, and n. 19. See also the following three book epigrams: TH. BUTTNER-WOBST, *Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis*. Berlin 1906, 3; A. CAMERON, *Phoenix* 38 (1984) 256–260; and M. BERTHELOT, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*. London 1963, 3–4.

²⁵ See CAMERON 1993: 6–7.

²⁶ In book epigrams the motif of the garland ultimately goes back to Euripides, *Hipp.* 73–74; but it is questionable whether Byzantine poets derive the *topos* directly from Euripides rather than from other book epigrams.

²⁷ Ed. O. STAHLIN, Clemens Alexandrinus. *Protrepticus et Paedagogus*. Berlin 1936, 339 (vv. 1–3).

²⁸ Ed. STERNBACH 1892a: 66–68 (no. 107, vv. 9–11) and TARTAGLIA 1998: 424–425, n. 2. The *topos* of the literary garland is also used in poems that are not book epigrams: see Pisides, *Exp. Pers.* III, 374–380 (ed. PERTUSI 1959: 132) and Constantine the Rhodian, *Ekphrasis*, vv. 12–14 (ed. LEGRAND 1896: 36).

the epigram celebrating Niketas' surgical handbook tells all future readers: "Crown the composer of this text with flowers and plait a garland of musical words". In the last four lines of the epigram (vv. 31–34) the poet asks Niketas to accept this book epigram benevolently as the first of many tributes to his learning and wisdom. In the manuscript the epigram is followed by two more poetical "tributes" to Niketas' wisdom. As these two last epigrams are written in a different handwriting to the first, and as there are also considerable differences in style, language and metre, it is reasonable to assume that the three epigrams were written by different authors²⁹. The first of these three book epigrams is quite an elegant piece of writing: see vv. 15–23

οὐκοῦν ἐάν τις εὐθετεῖν σκελῶν βάσιν
 θραύσεις τε μηρῶν, ἐμβολήν τῶν σπονδύλων,
 χωλοὺς ἀνιστᾶν καὶ τελεῖν δρομηφόρους
 ποδαλγιῶντας, ἐκροῆς τῶν ἰσχίων
 τὸ ῥεῦμα δεσμεῖν καὶ κρατύνειν τοὺς πόδας
 ἄλλην τε τοῦ σώματος ὀστώδη θέσιν
 θραύουσαν εἰς σύμπηξιν ἀρμόσαι θέλοι,
 ὧδε σκοπεῖτω τῆς γραφῆς τὰς εἰκόνας
 καὶ πᾶσαν εὐρήσειε τῶν παθῶν λύσιν.

"Therefore, if one wishes to set legs, femoral fractures and dislocated vertebrae, to make the lame stand up and turn those who suffer from gout into runners, to stem the flow of the humours in the hip-joints, strengthen the feet and solidly join together all other bony parts of the body that are broken, one may look at the pictures in this book and find a treatment for each injury".

Par. gr. 1640 contains two historical works of Xenophon, the *Cyropaedia* and the *Anabasis*. The manuscript (dating from c. 1320) derives, either directly or indirectly, from a copy produced in the early tenth century, which was presented to Leo VI³⁰. On fol. 123^v, between the *Cyropaedia* and the *Anabasis*, we find a long book epigram, which ends with the wish that the emperor may live for many years to come³¹. In another manuscript presented to Leo VI, the dedication on the front page concludes with a strikingly similar wish for longevity: there we read that Peter the Patrician, who donated a copy of Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Cure of Pagan Maladies* to Leo VI on the occasion of his Brumalia, hopes that his beloved emperor may live happily ever after³². The

²⁹ See SCHÖNE, Apollonius von Kitium, p. XV.

³⁰ See A. HUG, *Commentatio de Xenophontis Anab. codice C i.e. Parisino 1640*. Zürich 1878, and MARKOPOULOS 1994a: 194–195.

³¹ Ed. MARKOPOULOS 1994a: 195 (vv. 27–30).

³² Ed. MARKOPOULOS 1994b: 33–34 (vv. 13–16).

similarity between the two book epigrams indicates that the Xenophon manuscript, just like the *Cure of Pagan Maladies*, was probably donated to Leo VI on the occasion of the feast of the Brumalia when it was customary to give presents. Unfortunately, however, the book epigram attached to the copy of Xenophon does not reveal the name of the person who surprised Leo VI with such a generous gift as a costly manuscript doubtless was. But taking into account the considerable costs involved in the production of such a manuscript and the fact that the anonymous donor, as I will show, was well informed about the latest gossip and court intrigues, it is reasonable to assume that Leo VI received the manuscript as a gift from someone quite high-up.

The first sixteen lines of the epigram read in translation: “Nothing is as pleasant as an ancient text oozing with Attic eloquence, especially if it lucidly shows the truth and depicts the state of affairs; then it teaches the wise and renders them even wiser so that they know what to do in life. For it provides courage (ἀνδρεία) and readiness for action (προθυμία), procures the most accurate insights (ἀτρεκεστάτη φρόνησις) and renders the young more mature and aged through its lessons in ancient lore. Speak up, Xenophon, in support of what I am saying! For I have in mind our lord Leo, the bright splendour of the empire, who, having culled intimate knowledge about the world from his study of ancient writings, is the eye of the whole universe”³³. The epigram refers to Leo VI’s legendary wisdom. Through his study of ancient texts Leo the Wise has become even wiser than he already was. And although he is only in his thirties and therefore still relatively young, he displays all the signs of wisdom and prudence that usually come with age. There are two things he has learnt especially from his extensive reading and scholarly research: the virtues of ἀνδρεία (combined with προθυμία) and φρόνησις. In the following ten verses, the poet provides negative examples to demonstrate that the lack of φρόνησις and ἀνδρεία can lead to catastrophic results:

τίς γὰρ θεωρῶν ἔνθα Κῦρον τὸν νέον
τὸν μυρίαν τάξαντα κείνην ἀσπίδα
καὶ χεῖρας ὀπλίσαντα πρὸς πρῶτον Κῦρον,
οὐκ εὐθύς ἔγνω πῆμα τὴν φιλαρχίαν;
θυμὸν γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐμπνέων καὶ πικρίαν
σφύζων τε πολλὰ καὶ διὰ ττων ἀσκόπως
ὄρμαῖς ἀτάκτοις συμπλακείς ἀνηρέθη.
δοκεῖ δέ μοι Κλέαρχος, ὁ κλεινὸς Λάκων,
σφῆλαι τὰ πάντα συσχεθεὶς ἀτολμία
Κύρου σοφὸν βούλευμα φαυλίσας τότε.

³³ Ed. MARKOPOULOS 1994a: 195 (vv. 1–16).

“For, whoever sees Cyrus the Younger here as he deploys his shield of ten-thousand men and takes up arms against Cyrus the Elder, would he not immediately understand that the lust of power is fraught with disaster? In a fit of blazing anger and spite, rushing at full speed but without any sense of direction, he was killed, a victim of his own undisciplined impulses. Yet I think that Clearchus, the famous Spartan, ruined the whole enterprise by his cowardice, thus thwarting the wise strategy of Cyrus”³⁴.

In his *editio princeps*, Hug drily comments: “in his versibus, quos Byzantinae farinae esse cum aliis rebus tum ex inscitia et stupore versificatoris adparet, quo v. 19 dicit Cyrum minorem Cyro maiori bellum intulisse, ...”³⁵. Is the poet indeed as obtuse and stupid as Hug thought he was? Of course, Cyrus the Younger did not wage war against Cyrus the Elder, but against his own brother Artaxerxes. Yet it is hardly likely that the Byzantine courtier who presented to Leo VI a copy of the *Cyropaedia* and the *Anabasis*, would not know what the texts were about. He had only to thumb through the manuscript to discover that Cyrus the Elder (the subject of the *Cyropaedia*) and Cyrus the Younger (the subject of the *Anabasis*) did not fight against each other. Furthermore, it is well known that the Macedonian dynasty, with the help of a fictitious pedigree concocted by Photios, claimed to descend from illustrious forebears, the Arsacids, an imperial family of which Artaxerxes was held to be one of the forefathers³⁶. In the light of the genealogical preoccupations of Leo VI and his entourage, not to know who Artaxerxes and Cyrus were would not only have been a gross blunder, but also a gross insult to the reigning emperor. So, seeing that *inscitia* and *stupor* can be ruled out as possible explanations for the grotesque oddities of the epigram, what are we to make of this puzzling text? Why is Artaxerxes called *Kūros ὁ πρῶτος*?

The Persian name *Kuruš* is rendered in Greek as *Kūros*, not only because it is very close to the original name, but also because, by coincidence, it suggests the concept of supreme power (cf. *τὸ κῦρος, ὁ κύριος*, etc.). By means of this false analogy the name *Kūros* assumed the meaning of “sovereign lord”, and this is how the Byzantines usually understood the name. It is for this reason that I would suggest to interpret the name *Kūros ὁ πρῶτος* as “the senior emperor” and the name *Kūros ὁ νέος* as “the junior emperor”. If we decode the epigram in this way, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. *Kūros ὁ πρῶτος* is Leo VI and *Kūros ὁ νέος* is Alexander. It is no secret that Leo VI suspected his younger brother Alexander, officially co-emperor, of plotting to take the throne, especially after the Mokios incident in 903, when Leo was nearly killed

³⁴ Ed. MARKOPOULOS 1994a: 195 (vv. 17–26).

³⁵ HUG, *Commentatio*, p. 2.

³⁶ See MARKOPOULOS 1994a: 197.

by an Oswald allegedly operating on his own³⁷. Whether Alexander was actually implicated in any sinister conspiracy against his own brother or not, is of little importance; what matters is that Leo VI thought he was. Leo VI's suspicions and fears of what his little brother was up to were known to all and sundry, at least to those that were close enough to the Byzantine court at the time³⁸. The emperor feared that his younger brother, Alexander, suffered from *φύλαρχία* – from “lust for power”, or to use the Byzantine term, from “tyranny”. This is why Leo VI, rightly or wrongly, assumed that Alexander was conniving to seize power. The book epigram tells him that his fears are justified. Beware of *φύλαρχία*. With all your *φρόνησις*, which makes you as wise as the legendary Cyrus the Elder, you will certainly know that your brother, Cyrus the Younger, is scheming against you. But your brother's plans will come to naught because he is simply too rash and impulsive. He is fickle. His endeavours are aimless. But still, take care!

Once we understand that the epigram refers to contemporary court intrigues by comparing figures of the past to figures of the present, we can attempt to decipher the last three lines of the passage quoted above. In v. 26, the same young Cyrus who was killed because of his lack of prudence, is said to have devised a “wise strategy”, which, unfortunately, was thwarted by the cowardice of Clearchus. The word *σοφόν* refers to the wisdom of Leo VI. Whereas in the previous lines *Κῦρος ὁ νέος* symbolically stood for power-mad Alexander, here he quite unexpectedly changes masks and turns into the figure of Leo the Wise. It is worth noting that the famous Clearchus, before he became the general who commanded the Greek mercenaries hired by Cyrus the Younger, used to be the military governor of ancient Byzantium during the Peloponnesian war. This is hardly a coincidence, of course. The poet cleverly makes use of biographical data provided by Xenophon and assumes that his readers are as familiar with the *Anabasis* as he himself is and that they are capable of reading between the lines and grasping all the subtle innuendoes. Clearchus, the famous Spartan, is in fact a “Byzantine” general. Can we identify “Clearchus”? Let us look at the Greek. The word *ἀτολμία*, which I translated as “cowardice”, literally means “lack of daring”. The most notorious instance of *ἀτολμία* displayed by any general during the reign of Leo VI is certainly that of Himerios in the summer of 904 when, as the commander of the Byzantine navy, he pursued the Arab fleet at a safe distance, but dared not engage the enemy into combat. Himerios probably had sound strategic reasons

³⁷ See S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912). Politics and People*. Leiden 1997, 223–227.

³⁸ See, for instance, the *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP.*, ed. P. KARLIN-HAYTER. Brussels 1970, 55, 20–57, 10 and 66, 23–26. See also A. SCHMINCK, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern*. Frankfurt 1986, 105–107.

for keeping his distance and not attacking, but the sad result of his ἀτολμία was that the Arabs captured Thessalonica and sacked the city. The (temporary) loss of Thessalonica, the second city of the empire, was a severe blow to Leo VI and a terrible shock to the Byzantines³⁹. Since Byzantine emperors are always wise and never fail, the traumatic experience of the sacking of Thessalonica could not be the fault of the emperor, of his σοφὸν βούλευμα. And so Himerios gets all the blame for the major catastrophe. It was his gross ἀτολμία that led to disaster. However, seeing that Himerios remained commander-in-chief of the Byzantine fleet in the years after 904, and with considerable success, it is questionable whether Leo VI himself believed in the official version of events and whether he gave any credence to the rumours about Himerios' cowardice.

The book epigram attached to the copy of Xenophon which Leo VI received as a present appears to date from 904, since it implicitly presents Alexander, the emperor's brother, as a would-be usurpator and Himerios, the emperor's general, as a dangerous coward. As the book was probably presented to Leo VI on the occasion of his Brumalia celebrated on the 4th of December, it is reasonable to assume that the epigram was written in the autumn of 904: that is, soon after the sacking of Thessalonica. The Xenophon epigram is absolutely fabulous. It is Byzantium at its best. In the first sixteen verses Leo the Wise is lavishly praised because he has studied the ancients and has learnt from them the virtues of ἀνδρεία and προθυμία as well as ἀτρεξεστάτη φρόνησις. Then the poet presents examples *a contrario* of the lack of φρόνησις (vv. 17–22) and the lack of ἀνδρεία/προθυμία (vv. 23–25). Since Leo VI is as wise an emperor as the famous Cyrus the Elder, he obviously does not need to be told what the lack of these cardinal virtues can lead to. But a small warning won't hurt and therefore the poet cautiously warns him against the φιλαρχία of Alexander and the ἀτολμία of Himerios. However, as Byzantine court etiquette demands that appearances are always kept up, neither Alexander (the co-emperor) nor Himerios (the admiral) could be identified by name. Fortunately for our cunning poet, Xenophon's *Anabasis* provided a suitable alibi and suitable aliases – a whole masquerade, the purpose of which was to say by implication what could not be said openly. Therefore, far from displaying Byzantine “inscitia” and “stupor”, as Hug assumed, the epigram cleverly addresses contemporary anxieties and fears without being painfully explicit. It is a masterpiece of disguise.

³⁹ See S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912). Politics and People*. Leiden 1997, 186–189.