

# “Foreign(er)”, “Strange(r)” and “Extraordinary”: *xenos* and its Meanings in Byzantine (Metrical) Inscriptions

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*Dedicated to Prof. Johannes Koder on the occasion of his eightieth birthday on 26 July 2022*

The use of the term *xenos* (ξένος) has a very long tradition in the Greek language. First used in Homer’s epics, it can have various meanings. Basically, the word means “foreigner”/“stranger” but it also designates the “guest-friend”. As early as in Aeschylus, the adjective denotes “foreign” in the sense of “extraordinary”/“unusual”. The term *xenos* is also employed in inscriptions. The most famous ancient inscription using *xenos* is transmitted in Herodotus; it is the well-known address to the wandering stranger who is asked to tell the people in Sparta that he has seen the fallen Lacedaemonians at the Thermopylae. In late antique and Byzantine inscriptions (as well as in literary texts) the address *xene* is very often employed in (metrical) epitaphs. As in the famous Thermopylae epigram, the *xenos* is asked to stop, to have a look at the tomb and think of the deceased. Two further meanings of *xenos* are used very often in Byzantine metrical inscriptions: *xenos* (and its female form *xene*) is a very common term for monks (and nuns); they have escaped the worldly life and are *xenoi* on earth. In many cases *xenos* is employed in the sense of “extraordinary”/“unusual”; this is especially true for the description of buildings and various objects to which the inscriptions are attached but, e.g., also for inscriptions on reliquaries in order to describe a saint’s qualities. In this contribution, I will describe the various meanings of *xenos* from Antiquity onward with a specific focus on Byzantine metrical inscriptions.

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The use of the term *xenos* (ξένος) has a very long tradition in the Greek language. Its etymology is uncertain, but it could be Pre-Greek.<sup>2</sup> First used in Homer's epics (e.g. Il. 6.215, Od. 1.313, 9.720, 17.522 etc.), it can have various meanings: "guest-friend", "stranger" (especially "wanderer"/"refugee" under the protection of *Zeus xenios*), "foreigner", and in rare cases also "hireling";<sup>3</sup> used as an adjective it can mean "foreign", also in the sense of "unusual"/"extraordinary" as in Aeschylus, *Pr.* 688.

From very early, the word is also used in inscriptions. The most famous ancient inscription that uses *xenos* is transmitted in Herodotus (VII 228.2). The inscription, an elegiac distich, which is attributed to Simonides, is the well-known address to the wandering stranger (*xenos*), who is asked to tell the people in Sparta that he has seen the fallen Lacedaemonians at the Thermopylae: ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῆδε / κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι ("Foreigner, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their commands").<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in his *Histories* (IX 11.2, 55.2) one learns that the Spartans equate *xenoi* and *barbaroi*. Since this statement might have been unusual for his Greek readers, Herodotus was apparently compelled to offer this explanation.

The entry *xenos* in the tenth-century *Suda* lexicon, which is a compilation of earlier lexica, employs several citations in order to present the various meanings of the word:

*xenos*: a friend. "Embassies used to come from the cities because they considered him their guest-friend and an adviser on their manner of life and the establishment of temples and images. He set each of these things to rights." And elsewhere: "[men] create guest-friends in their own countries." A *xenos* is also someone who receives strangers. The Apostle [says]:<sup>5</sup> "my friend the *xenos* greets you".<sup>6</sup>

*Xenoi* are to be distinguished from the locals, as can be seen, for example, in Hesiod, *Opera et dies* 225, who differentiates between ξένοι and ἔνδημοι. This distinction is also made in a two-line mosaic epigram from the seventh century in the church of St Demetrius in Thessaloniki: Πανόλβιε Χριστοῦ μάρτυς φιλόπολις / φροντίδα τίθει καὶ πολιτῶν καὶ ξένων ("Most happy martyr of Christ, you who love the city, take care of both citizens and strangers").<sup>7</sup>

1 Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

2 Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, s.v. ξένος.

3 Liddell et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ξένος. See also Mentzou, *Bedeutungswandel*, 3-5.

4 Translated by Godley, *Herodotus*. At VII 228.1-3 Herodotus mentions two further inscriptions.

5 Rom. 16.23.

6 Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, at ξ 45: Ξένος: ὁ φίλος. ἐφοίτων δὲ πρεσβεῖαι ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ξένον τε αὐτὸν ἠγούμενοι καὶ βίου σύμβουλον βωμῶν τε ἰδρύσεως καὶ ἀγαλμάτων. ὁ δὲ ἕκαστα τούτων διωρθοῦτο. καὶ αὐθις ἐν ταῖς ἰδίαις πατρίσι ξένους ποιοῦνται. Ξένος καὶ ὁ ξενοδόχος. ὁ Ἀπόστολος ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς ξένος ὁ φίλος μου. English translation provided by <http://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-entries/xi/45> (accessed on 25 April 2022).

7 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, no. M3: Πανόλβιε Χριστοῦ μάρτυς φιλόπολις / φροντίδα τίθει καὶ πολιτῶν καὶ ξένων. English translation by Bakirtzis, *Pilgrimage to Thessalonike*, 175.

This inscription is an invocation to Saint Demetrius, the city's patron.<sup>8</sup> It distinguishes between the locals and non-locals coming from outside the city, but also between locals and non-locals (pilgrims) visiting the church, which was a famous place of pilgrimage.<sup>9</sup>

After this concise introduction, which highlights the diversity of *xenos* in the Greek literature, I will now describe the various meanings of the term in Greek inscriptions with a specific focus on inscriptions which date to the Byzantine millennium (fourth-fifteenth centuries). As will be demonstrated, *xenos* is very often employed in metrical inscriptions (epigrams). I will also discuss the different ways the term is used as both a noun and an adjective.

### *The Use of xenos in Greek Tomb Epigrams*

The mode of address *xene* (ξένη) is often employed in metrical epitaphs. The famous Thermopylae epigram seems to be the first inscribed epigram, in which the *xenos* is asked to look at the tomb, to think of the deceased and to spread the glory of the deceased. The *xenos* is the “stranger”, but not in a pejorative sense, for the term describes the passer-by and the wanderer respectively. As the evidence suggests, this meaning seems to be restricted to epigrams.<sup>10</sup> The following examples, which testify to epigrams addressing the *xenos* throughout the Greek hemisphere from Antiquity to Byzantium, will illustrate this:

The beginning of a tomb epigram from the second or first century BC from Kyme (north of Smyrna/Izmir) runs as follows: Μέντορα τὸν Χίον λεύσσεις, ξένη, τόνθ ὑπὸ μητρὸς / Χίας εἰς Ἄϊδος δῶμα καθελκόμενον (“Stranger, you see here Mentor of Chios being dragged down by his mother, originating from Chios, to the House of Hades”).<sup>11</sup>

A tomb epigram from Egyptian Alexandria dating to the late Hellenistic epoch, which was composed for a sixteen-year-old girl, starts with the following words: Παῖδα Ῥοδίππῳ, ξεῖνε, Λεόντιον ἦν τέκε μήτηρ, / ἀστὴν Ἡδεΐαν τύμβος ὄδε (“This tomb took the child, the citizen<sup>12</sup> Hedeia, stranger, who Leontion, her mother, brought into the world for Rhodippos”).<sup>13</sup>

In the funerary epigrams, the *xenos* is not just someone who passes by, but someone who explicitly looks at the grave or is invited, or rather urged, to do so. Two verses of the metrical part of a Roman tomb inscription from the Arcadian town of Tegea run as follows: σῆμ' ἔσορᾶς ὧ ξε<ῖν>ε, κατ' Ἄϊδος οἰχομένοιο / πρὶν γλυκεροῦ γήρωσ οὔνομ' Ονασικλέος (“You behold the tomb,<sup>14</sup> o stranger, of Onasikleus (by name), who departed to Hades before sweet old age”).<sup>15</sup>

The address to the *xenos*, who passes by, stops, beholds the grave and contemplates the deceased, bears witness to the culture of remembrance (*memoria*), which was highly important in Antiquity and generally in premodern cultures such as Byzantium.<sup>16</sup> The *xenos* who perceives the grave is supposed to carry the memory of the dead out into the world.

8 Bauer, *Eine Stadt und ihr Patron*.

9 Bakirtzis, Pilgrimage to Thessalonike.

10 On this concept, see Tueller, Passer-by, especially 51-52 and González González, *Funerary Epigrams*, 48.

11 Merkelbach and Stauber, *Steinepigramme*1, no. 05/03/05.

12 In Egypt, the term ἀστικός denotes the “citizen of Alexandria”, cf. Liddell *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.

13 Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques*, no. 39.

14 For σῆμα with the meaning “tomb”, see Liddell *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. 3.

15 Von Gaertringen, *Inscriptiones Arcadiae*, no. 179.

16 Van Bueren *et al.*, *Reformations and Their Impact*. For Byzantium, see, e.g., Grünbart, Zur Memorialkultur and Schreiner, Schreiben gegen das Vergessen.

The *xenos*, and the viewer of the tomb in general, is also occasionally asked to reflect on his own fate: in a funerary epigram from Cyprus dating to the second century AD, it is the deceased who asks the passing *xenos* to remember that the journey to death is the same for everyone (verses 9-10): ... πάριθι, ξένε, „χαῖρε“ προσείπας, / κοινὸς ἐπεὶ θνατοῖς ὁ πλὸς εἰς φθιμένους (“Go on, stranger, after you have said ‘hail’, since common is the journey to the decaying for the mortals”).<sup>17</sup> This reminder of the unavoidability of death, known under the term *memento mori* (“Remember that you have to die”), is a topos which is often employed in funerary contexts.<sup>18</sup>

In the Christian context, the *xenos* is not just the mere stranger passing by, but also the pilgrim, who often comes from afar to visit the holy sites.<sup>19</sup>

As in Antiquity, the term *xenos* is used in tomb inscriptions which are metrical in shape. They use a higher language register than tomb inscriptions in prose, which, both in the Roman and the Byzantine era, traditionally start with Ἐνθάδε κεῖται (“Here lies”) (equivalent to the Latin *Hic iacet*) and the name of the deceased in the nominative case.

A long epigram of 40 verses dating to the year 1198 is explicitly addressed to the visitor to the church San Domenico in Messina. Today it is no longer preserved, but we know that it was written on an aristocratic sarcophagus and an accompanying plate in the church. It starts with the following verses: Τὸν ναὸν ὅστις τοῦτον εἰσίης, ξένε, / δεῦρο πρόσελθε, τόνδε τὸν τάφον σκόπει / ἄνδρα γὰρ ἔνδον οὗ κλέος μέγα φέρει (“Whoever you are, stranger, who enters this church, come here and look at this tomb! For it carries within it a man whose fame is great”).<sup>20</sup> The visitor to the church and beholder of the tomb is again addressed in the verses 28-29: Σὺ δ’ ὅστις εἶ καὶ τόνδε τὸν τάφον βλέπεις / τὸ τοῦ βίου μάταιον ἔνθα μανθάνων (“You, whoever you are and look at the tomb / recognize here the vanity of life”). As in the second-century inscription from Cyprus mentioned above, the *xenos* is reminded of the inevitability of death.

In the Messina epigram, the *xenos* is explicitly invited to look at the tomb. Other tomb epigrams address the *xenos* literally as θεατής (“beholder”), as is the case in an only partially preserved inscription of the thirteenth/fourteenth century in the church of John the Forerunner in Portaria (near Volos): [Σ]ὺ δέ, θεατά, ὁρῶν τὸν τύμβον, ξένε / μάνθανε [...] (“You, beholder, when you see the grave, stranger, recognize ...”).<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, neither the text that precedes nor that which follows this passage is preserved. However, one can easily imagine that the text continued with a request to “recognize” (μάνθανε) the perishability of life, as is the case in the previously mentioned epigrams.

In the Portaria epigram, the terms ξένος and θεατής are used together, but there are many epigrams of similar content that use θεατής as the sole appellation – or alternative terms such as ἄνθρωπος (“man”) or βροτός (“mortal”) – to refer to the one who reflects on

17 Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften*, 551 (no. 1833). On this passage, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 190; see also Franceschini, *Nomi*, 90-92.

18 Lattimore, *Themes*, 256-258. See also Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR12.

19 Cf. Mango, Pilgrim’s motivation.

20 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. IT23, vv. 1-3; see also Rhoby, *Interactive inscriptions 323-324* and Rhoby, *Zur Überlieferung*, 234. *Loci paralleli* at Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 468.

21 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR104.

the transience of life. The *xenos* is occasionally also additionally called παροδίτης (“passer-by”/“traveler”) or the latter term is used instead of *xenos*. This usage dates already from the archaic period; παροδίτης is also abundantly employed in the epigrams of the *Anthologia Graeca*.<sup>22</sup>

*Xenoi* are also addressed in funerary epigrams which are constructed in dialogue form. This is a tradition that was already cultivated in Antiquity.<sup>23</sup> In Byzantium, several authors who worked on commission for the imperial household and the aristocracy, including Nicholas Kallikles (twelfth century) and Manuel Holobolos (thirteenth century), composed funerary epigrams in the form of dialogues that provided a dramatic backdrop.<sup>24</sup> In a long epigram by Kallikles, the *xenos* converses with the tomb (τύμβος), which tells him who is buried there.<sup>25</sup> No such explicit dialogical funerary epigrams have survived as inscriptions from the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. However, there is a long tradition of tomb epigrams which start with an introductory address to the *xenos*. The verses which are inscribed on a third-/fourth-century *tabula ansata* found in Bulgaria may serve as an example: Εἴ με θέλεις, ὦ ξεῖνε, δαήμεναι τίς πόθεν εἰμί / Λαδικίης πάτρης εἰμί, τοῦνομα Κυρίλλα ... (“If you want to learn from me, stranger, who and from where I am: my fatherland is Ladikia, my name is Kyrilla ...”).<sup>26</sup>

This section ends with the mention of the tomb epigram for the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos, who died on 24 September 1180.<sup>27</sup> The funeral verses, which are no longer preserved, were engraved on his sarcophagus, the lid of which consisted of seven domes that made the sarcophagus look like a model of a church or a *ciborium*.<sup>28</sup> The epigram’s length is considerable: it once consisted of more than 40 dodecasyllables. The first verse is a traditional address to the *xenos*: Ὁρῶν τὰ καινὰ ταῦτα θαύμαζε, ξένε (“Admire these new things as you see them, stranger!”).<sup>29</sup> While καινὰ is to be understood in the sense of “new, without precedent”, i.e. exceptional, the stem *xen-* is used again in verse 11, but as a feminine proper name. The verses 9-11 deal with Manuel’s (second) wife Maria from Antiocheia,<sup>30</sup> who was – like his first wife Bertha/Eirene – of Western origin: ἡ δ’ αὖ βασιλῆς καὶ σύννευος Μαρία, / τῇ δὲ στερήσει τοῦ φεραυγοῦς δεσπότη / ἀγούστα σεπτὴ βασιλῆς πάλιν Ἐένη (“The empress and his wife Maria, despite the deprivation of the resplendent ruler, is a venerable *augusta* (and) empress again *Xene*”).<sup>31</sup> The verses play on the double meaning of *Xene*: in Byzantium

22 See the entries in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG): <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/> (accessed on 25 April 2022).

23 Peek, *Griechische Grabgedichte*, 242-255.

24 See Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, 146.

25 Kallikles, *Poems*, ed Romano, no. 9.

26 Beševliev, *Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften*, no. 220 (itacistic variants are corrected).

27 Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

28 Cf. Patterson Ševčenko, *Tomb of Manuel I Komnenos*.

29 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. TR78; English translation by Mango, *Notes*, 372 (with adaptations).

30 Brand, *Maria of Antioch*. Maria (in one Western source also called Marguerite) was the daughter of Raymond of Poitiers and Constance of Tyre.

31 See n. 29.

it was customary for men and women of the imperial household and the aristocracy who entered a monastery at the end of their lives, especially if their wife or husband had died, to take the name *Xenos* or *Xene*, because it meant that they were dedicated to separation from the world.<sup>32</sup> In this verse, however, *Xene* refers not only to the fact that Maria became a nun but also to the fact that she was a “stranger”, i.e. not of Byzantine/Greek origin, because she stemmed from a Western aristocratic family.<sup>33</sup> *Xenos/Xene* with the meaning “devoted to separation from the world”, i.e. monk/nun, is already attested as early as in Late Antiquity.<sup>34</sup>

A similar pun to that in Manuel’s tomb epigram is also employed in two verses that are taken from the iambic calendar of Christopher of Mitylene (eleventh century) for 24 January.<sup>35</sup> These verses, which were painted on a wall in the narthex of the catholicon of the monastery of Treskavac (near Prilep, Northern Macedonia),<sup>36</sup> dating to the middle of the fourteenth century, are dedicated to Saint Xene, who was originally called Eusebeia but became a nun to avoid marriage: Ἀποξενούται τοῦδε τοῦ βίου Ξένη, / οὐ ζῶσα καὶ πρὶν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἦ ξένη (“Xene is alienated from this life, to which she was in truth also alien before in life”).<sup>37</sup> The epigram plays with the word stem ξεν- which is used thrice (ἀποξενούται, Ξένη, ξένη).

### *The Use of xenos in Non-Tomb Epigrams*

The mosaic epigram from St Demetrios in Thessalonica mentioned above (p. 196) testifies to the use of the term *xenos* in non-funerary inscriptions. In many inscriptions where the *xenos* is also addressed, he is asked to stop and look at the inscriptions found on monuments other than tombs.

A hexameter epigram, which is transmitted in the *Greek Anthology* (IX, no. 686),<sup>38</sup> seems to have been attached to the Eastern gate of Thessalonica’s city walls. The *xenos* is told to rejoice because he sees a statue of the prefect Basilius at the gate: Ἦνορέης ὀλετήρα ὑπερφιάλου Βαβυλῶνος / καὶ σέλας ἀκτεάνοιο Δίκης Βασιλείον ὑπαρχον, / ξεῖνε, νόω σκίρτησον, ἰδῶν ἐφύπερθε πυλάων ... (“Rejoice in your heart, o stranger, as you behold above the city gates the prefect Basil, him who destroyed the might of arrogant Babylon and who shines with the splendor of incorruptible Justice ...”).<sup>39</sup> The epigram seems to belong to the early Byzantine period, although it was recently dated as late as the tenth century.<sup>40</sup> Likewise from the early Byzantine period (c. 379) is a fragmentary epigram from the ancient city of Stobi (Northern Macedonia), which also addresses the *xenos* and invites him to look at the gate and a

32 Cf. Hörandner, *Zur Beschreibung*, 209-210.

33 See also Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 671.

34 See Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ξένος D.

35 Follieri, *I Calendari*, 2, 151.

36 Cf. Rhoby, Andreas, *On the inscriptional versions*.

37 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, no. 37. Some parts of words of the second verse are not preserved but can easily be restored by referring to the manuscript tradition of the epigram.

38 Cf. Feissel, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine*, no. 87; Gkoutzioukostas, *Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata*, 95-141; Begass, *Der Kaiser als Schutzwall*.

39 English translation by Gkoutzioukostas *Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata*, 139.

40 Gkoutzioukostas *Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata*, 139.

golden image, probably a statue of the emperor Theodosius I: [...] εἰσορᾶς, ξείνος,<sup>41</sup> πύλη[σιν] ἀντιμέτωπον / εἰκόνα [μ]α[ρ]μέρουσαν χρυσῶ πᾶσαν ἠέλιον ὡς / ... (“... you see, stranger, in front of the doors the image all shining with gold like the sun ...”).<sup>42</sup> This passage is reminiscent of the words of Hesychius of Miletus (ch. 45) in the sixth century about the statue of Constantine on the *Forum* in Constantinople: the emperor can be seen shining like the sun upon the citizens.<sup>43</sup> A case similar to the one in Stobi, but dating almost a millennium later, is the epigram once placed on the gate of Korinthos next to a statue of the despot Theodore I Palaiologos, who had reconquered the city from the Franks in 1395/1396.<sup>44</sup> As in tomb epigrams, the *xenos* is addressed right at the beginning of the twelve-verse epigram: Ἄσπεως τήνδε πύλην ἄθρει μοι, ξένε ... (“Gaze for me at this city gate, stranger ...”).<sup>45</sup>

The presence of gates, statues and accompanying inscriptions mentioning the “stranger”, who is about to enter the city and is to be distinguished from the local citizen (πολίτης), seems to have been more widespread throughout the Byzantine millennium than the surviving evidence suggests; this is especially true for the early Byzantine period<sup>46</sup> but not exclusively so, as the inscription from Korinthos indicates.

The address to the *xenos* does not necessarily have to be at the beginning of the epigram, but can also occur in other positions or even at the end, as is the case with an inscription that no longer exists today, but was once placed on a tower belonging to the fortifications of Herakleia Pontike (today (Karadeniz) Ereğlisi, Turkey). The purpose of the epigram is to invite the *xenos* not only to look at the building and marvel at it but also to spread the news of its construction (in the year 1211 or thereafter) under the emperor Theodore I Laskaris, the ruler of Nikaia. The last three verses, which were already no longer fully preserved when the epigram was first copied from the tower in the nineteenth century, run as follows: κέλευσμα μικρὸν προσ[.....] / Κο<μν>ηνοφουσῶ Λασχάρ[ου] Θεοδώρου / αὐτοκρατοῦς τὸν πύργον ἤγει[ι]ρε, ξένε (“A small order ... of the Comnene-born Theodore Laskaris, ruling by himself, has erected the tower, stranger”).<sup>47</sup> A similar epigram is attached to a bridge near Karytaina on the Peloponnese dating to the year 1439/1440. The *xenos* is vigorously exhorted to take note that Manuel Rhaul Melikes, a local magnate, recently erected the monument, which seems to have been damaged before: Νέον δομήτορα γεφύρας, ὦ ξένε, / Ῥαοῦλ γίνωσκε Μανουῆλ τὸν Μελίκην (“Take note, o stranger, of Manuel Rhaul Melikes, the new builder of the bridge”).<sup>48</sup>

While, as mentioned above (p. 199), dialogues were widespread in ancient epitaphs, Byzantine funerary epigrams in dialogue form have only survived in manuscripts, but not as inscriptions. However, an eleventh-century inscriptional epigram in dialogue form is attached to a marble stone block which is broken in two pieces and now displayed in Istanbul’s Archaeological Museum. The content of the fragmentarily preserved epigram proves that

41 ξῖνος inscr.

42 Feissel, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine*, no. 273B.

43 Cf. Berger, *Statues of Constantinople*, 8.

44 Maltezou, *Historikes peripeteies*.

45 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR73.

46 On Constantinople, see Berger, *Statues of Constantinople*.

47 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. TR44. The term κέλευσμα (a variant of κέλευσις) indicates an official document issued by the emperor: cf. Dölger, *Byzantinische Diplomatie*, s.v. κέλευσις.

48 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR66.

the stone block was once part of the fortifications of Dyrrhachion (now Durrës, Albania), which was called Epidamnos in Antiquity. The inscription consists of two parts: the first part (verses 1-7) is a question by the *xenos* and the second part (verses 8-22) is the city's answer. Both parts are introduced by verses which indicate the content of the respective following verses. Verse 1 is almost completely lost but was reconstructed by Cyril Mango analogously to verse 8: (v. 1) [Ἐρώτησις τοῦ ξένου πρὸς Ἐπίδαμνον (“Question of the stranger to Epidamnos”) and (v. 8) Ἀνταπόκρισις τῆς πόλεως πρὸς {τὸν} ξέ[νον] (“Answer of the city to the stranger”).<sup>49</sup> Due to its fragmentary state, it is not possible to fully grasp the content of the dialogue epigram. In the first part, Epidamnos is called “(well) accessible”,<sup>50</sup> and the *xenos*, the “stranger”, who is about to enter the city, states that it “stands like an adorned” girl. In the second part, the city seems to report its fate.<sup>51</sup> The dialogue form is ideally suited for the public presentation of the text. If one assumes that inscribed epigrams were recited publicly on certain occasions (in the case of tomb epigrams at the funeral and on the commemoration days, and in the case of monuments at the inauguration ceremony and on the anniversary of dedication, etc.),<sup>52</sup> this is particularly conceivable with epigrams in dialogue form, as they make a lively rendition very likely.

Finally, mention is made of two late Byzantine dedicatory epigrams from Mystras. The first one, which is no longer preserved, was once displayed in the St Sophia church. It is an inscription of 46 verses, perhaps dating to the year 1360, which mentions the dedication of the church, but is primarily dedicated to praising the despot of the Morea Manuel Kantakuzenos and his imperial parents John VI Kantakuzenos and Eirene.<sup>53</sup> In the second half of the epigram, at the end of verse 32, the *xenos* is addressed (ξένε). This verse introduces the laudatory description of Manuel. When the epigram was recited in public, which is – as stated above – to be assumed, the appellation “stranger!” indicated to the audience that they should now listen attentively to the following lines. The second epigram from Mystras in which the form of address *xenos* is used comes from Taxiarchoi Chapel, dated to the year 1454/1455. Very similarly to the epigram from Karytaina mentioned above (p. 201) – but less vigorously – the *xenos* is asked to take note of the founder of the church and his deed (verses 1-2): Ἦγεῖται ναὸς οὗτος ἐκ βάρων, ξένε, / παρά γε τοῦ εὐγενεστάτου Λουκάνη (“This church was erected, stranger, by the noblest Lukanes”).<sup>54</sup> Nikephoros Lukanes served as *archon* of the Peloponnese from 1453-1459.<sup>55</sup>

It comes as no surprise that the appellation *xene* (‘stranger!’) is not only used in inscriptions but also in verses which are transmitted in manuscripts only. In many cases the latter verses were intended to be inscribed too, but the physical monument or object no longer

49 Mango, A Byzantine inscription; Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. TR57.

50 The same topos is used in Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*., no. AL1.

51 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*., 619.

52 See Dagron, Troisième, and Papalexandrou, Text in Context, 282.

53 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR88.

54 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR89.

55 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 304.



exists. Many attestations of the term are found in the oeuvre of Manuel Philes (c. 1270 - after 1332/1334 ?),<sup>56</sup> a poet on commission for the court and the aristocracy in the first half of the fourteenth century. Of his many epigrams, unfortunately, only a few exist that are still preserved *in situ*,<sup>57</sup> among them the famous epigram on the outer cornice of the chapel of the St Mary Pammakaristos church in Constantinople.<sup>58</sup> According to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG),<sup>59</sup> Philes uses the form of address ξένε 61 times; interestingly enough, the vocative is only used 17 times in his tomb epigrams;<sup>60</sup> the remaining usages occur in epigrams composed for fresco paintings, icons and other objects. As in inscriptional epigrams, its position is almost exclusively at the end of the dodecasyllabic verses.<sup>61</sup> This has prosodic reasons: ξένε consists of two short vowels which, according to prosodic rules, can only occur at the end of a twelve-syllable verse. This also applies *grosso modo* to hexameters and pentameters, but Philes did not write any poems in these verse meters. In addition, the use of the appellation ξένε at the end of the verse creates tension.

As has already been stated, ξένε is not the only form of address for the one looking at the tomb, a depiction or an object. Philes uses the form of address ἄνθρωπε (“man”) even more often (76 times) than ξένε, as the search results in the TLG testify, without any significant difference to the latter. The form of address θεατά (“beholder”) is used 35 times. There are no results for βροτέ (“mortal”) or παροδίτα (“wanderer”), which are used less in Byzantium than in Late Antiquity.

#### *Xenos in its Meanings “Extraordinary”, “Unusual” and Similar*

As mentioned in the introduction, the adjective *xenos* can mean “strange” in the sense of “unusual”, “extraordinary” and similar; this meaning is already attested in Aeschylus, Aristotle and other ancient authors.<sup>62</sup> Christian authors reinforce this meaning by also using *xenos* with the meanings of “wonderful” and “marvelous”.<sup>63</sup> Of course, there are numerous passages from middle and late Byzantine literature that attest to the same meanings.

Byzantine inscriptions, again mainly metrical, often use the adjective *xenos* too. It appears in various contexts:

For example, it is employed in a thirteenth-century tomb epigram from a church in Makrinitisa (near Volos). It is used in a verse addressing the beholder; the wording is reminiscent of the epigram from Korinthos quoted above (p. 201). The viewer is invited to look at the grave and perceive the “extraordinary”, i.e. the grave and the person buried in it: Ἄλλ', ὦ θεατά, ὄρα καὶ ἄθροι ξένα (“But beholder, look and see the extraordinary”).<sup>64</sup> It is not only

56 On Manuel Philes, see Stickler, *Manuel Philes und seine Psalmenmetaphrase* and Kubina, *Enkomiastische Dichtung*; see also Rhoby, *Wie lange lebte Manuel Philes?*

57 Cf. Paul, *Dichtung auf Objekten*.

58 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. TR76 = Miller, *Manuelis Philae*, 1, no. E223 (pp. 117-118).

59 <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/> (accessed on 25 April 2022).

60 Papadogiannakis, *Studien zu den Epitaphien des Manuel Philes*.

61 With the exception of Miller, *Manuelis Philae carmina*, 2, no. P187, v. 7 (p. 202).

62 See Liddell *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. B.

63 See Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. C.1.

64 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR83, v. 12. Although ξένα at the end of the verse seems to be the correct reading (unfortunately, the available images of the inscription do not allow verification of the reading), one could also imagine the vocative ξένε when comparing it with the verse of the tomb epigram from nearby Portaria cited above (p. 198): [Σ]ὺ δέ, θεατά, ὀρῶν τὸν τύμβον, ξένε.

the appearance (of a monument) that can be extraordinary (θέα ξένη), as stressed in a ninth-century, not fully preserved epigram attached to the sea walls of Constantinople, but also the monument itself: [...] τὸ πρὶν ἡμαυρω[μένον / τανῦν] διαυγὲς καὶ θέαν ξένην ἔχον / ... (“... the previously turned black now radiant and with extraordinary appearance ...”).<sup>65</sup>

A further epigram attached to a tower of the city walls of Dyrrhachion addresses the beholder in its verses 1-3 with the following words: Μαθῶν, θεατά, τίς ὁ πήξας ἐκ βάθρων / τὸν πύργον, ὄνπερ καθορᾶς, κτίσμα ξένον, / θαύμαζε τούτου τὴν ἀριστοβουλίαν (“By recognizing, beholder, who erected the tower from its foundations, which you see, this extraordinary building, admire its excellent planning”).<sup>66</sup> The one who had the tower built in 1224/1225 was Theodore I Dukas Komnenos, who ruled Epirus from 1215 to 1230. While the second part of the epigram (verses 4-8) is devoted to praising Theodore, the concluding part (verses 9-13) is dedicated to mentioning the year.<sup>67</sup>

However, not only monuments are labeled *xenos* but also (religious) objects, for example reliquaries.

Verses on a now lost twelfth-century reliquary that came to France (Châteaudun) after the Fourth Crusade in 1204 state that the hand relic of St John the Forerunner, which appears to have been encased in gold, is something “extraordinary”, i.e. something to be marveled at. The first three verses, which also interact with the beholder and the owner of the relic respectively, run as follows: Ὁ καρπὸς ὀστοῦν, ἡ δὲ χεὶρ χρυσοῦ· πόθεν; / ἐκ τῆς ἐρήμου καρπός, ἐκ Παλαιστίνης, / χρυσοῦ παλαιστὴ χρυσοδάκτυλος ξένον (“The wrist is bone, the hand is gold. From where? The wrist is from the desert, from Palestine, the golden palm with golden fingers is something extraordinary”).<sup>68</sup> This epigram is cleverly designed from a rhetorical perspective because the term καρπός has two meanings, namely “wrist” and “fruit”. While it means “wrist” in verses 1 and 2, it means “fruit” in verse 4: Ὀστοῦν ὁ καρπός ἐκ φυτοῦ Προδρόμου (“Bone is the fruit from the tree of the Forerunner”).<sup>69</sup> Another object, kept in the Moscow Kremlin and dated to the twelfth or thirteenth century, seems to have served as silver-gilt sheathing for a hand relic of St Barbara. The attached inscription consists of two verses which employ the term *xenos* twice: Ἐξένη τις ἡ χεὶρ ὧδε παρθένου ξένης, / Χεὶρ Βαρβάρας λύουσα λοιμώδεις νόσους (“The exceptional hand of an exceptional virgin here. The hand of Barbara which cures diseases”).<sup>70</sup> It is no coincidence that *xenos* is used as the first and last word in verse 1. This stylistic device, also called a *kyklos*, underlines the extraordinary material as well as the spiritual value of the relic.

The Ermitaž in St Petersburg houses a wooden object, probably dating to the fourteenth century, which may have served as the base of a cross. The epigram, which is placed under the carved depiction of the Dormition of the Mother of God, uses the term *xenos* in reference to two statements in the text. It is “extraordinary” that Mary remained a virgin despite

65 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. TR88.

66 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*., no. AL2; cf. Rhoby, Interactive inscriptions, 321-322.

67 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 110-111.

68 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Ikonen*, no. Me13. Translation (with adaptations) by Pitarakis, Female piety in context, 160.

69 Pitarakis, Female piety in context, 160.

70 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. AddII15.

having given birth and it is “extraordinary” that she continues to live despite her death: Ὑπὲρ λόγον τεκοῦσα παρθένος μένεις. / Θανοῦσα δὲ ζῆς ταῦτα γὰρ ἄμφω ξέν<α> (“Beyond all reason, you have given birth and yet remain a virgin. Having died you live. For both of these things are extraordinary”).<sup>71</sup>

The attribute *xenos* does not only mean “strange” in the sense of “extraordinary”, but also “strange” in the sense of “outlandish”. In the monk’s cell at St Neophytos’ *Enkleistra* near Paphos (Cyprus) we find late-twelfth-century representations of two saints identified as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. Both saints hold scrolls in their hand each containing one verse. As can be seen from the content, the verses correspond. While the verse on Basil’s scroll reads Τί καθορῶν ἐξίστασαι σαφῶς φράσ[ον] (“What are you looking at that makes you lose your mind, say clearly!”), the verse on John Chrysostom’s scroll reads Ἐένον θέα[μα] Χριστὸν [ἐ]σταυ[ρωμένον] (“The outlandish sight of Christ crucified”).<sup>72</sup> *Xenos* is not used here to express the beholder’s excitement, but to describe his dismay at the crucifixion, which is a strange spectacle alien to mankind. The same topos is employed in an epigram which is attached to a fourteenth-century *epitaphios* (i.e. a cloth bearing an image of the dead body of Christ) now kept in the Monastery of Putna (Romania): Ἐένον βλέπων θέαμα δῆμος ἀγγέλων / αἶνον ξένον κέκραγεν, ὦ Θεοῦ Λόγε (“When they saw the outlandish sight, the people of the angels sang extraordinary praises, O Logos of God”).<sup>73</sup> The source of both epigrams, as well as of other attestation of ξένον θέαμα, is a *troparion* for the Holy Sunday.<sup>74</sup> In my view, in this epigram, ξένος is used with two meanings that differ slightly from each other: while the praise sung by the angels is “extraordinary”, the sight of Christ crucified is outlandish because it is – as in the epigram from St Neophytos *Enkleistra* – alien to mankind.

In order to demonstrate the various connotations of the adjective *xenos*, a poem on the Seven Wonders of the World embedded in the historical work of George Cedrenus may serve as an example. While the latter’s verses in his *History* start with Κενὸν φρύαγμα τῶν πάλαι πυραμίδων,<sup>75</sup> the version which is transmitted in the commentary on the verses in cod. Vat. gr. 573 reads as follows: Ἐένον θέαμα τῶν πάλαι πυραμίδων / Αἴγυπτος ἄσπερ εἶχε κόμπον ἢ πλάνος (“The extraordinary spectacle of the ancient pyramids that elusive Egypt boasted with”).<sup>76</sup> The commentary, which follows these verses, discusses the meaning of both θέαμα and ξένος; on *xenos* it reads: ξένον δὲ τὸ οἶον εἶπεῖν ἀλλότριον καὶ ἐκτὸς τῶν ἐν συνηθείᾳ ἡμῶν πραγμάτων δηλονότι τὸ παράδοξον (“*xenos*, on the other hand, is synonymous with alien and is foreign to what is familiar to us, i.e. extraordinary”).<sup>77</sup> As indicated in this phrase, the verses play with the two meanings of *xenos*: on the one hand, the term describes the amazement at the sight of the pyramids, on the other hand, however, it means “foreign” in the sense of “pagan” and “non-Christian” respectively. The latter meaning is stressed to an even greater extent by the use of κενὸν φρύαγμα (“empty pride”) in the manuscripts of Cedrenus’ *History*.

It goes without saying that this list could easily be expanded by examples of inscriptional and non-inscriptional Byzantine poetry.

71 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Ikonen*, no. Ho8.

72 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, nos. 245-246.

73 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Ikonen*, no. Te11.

74 Follieri, *Initia*, 2, 563; see also Johnstone, *Byzantine Traditiony*, 119.

75 Tartaglia, *Georgii Cedreni historiarum compendium*, 1, 326 (ch. 196.20).

76 Barbero, Un commento bizantino inedito 8.

77 Barbero, Un commento bizantino inedito 8.

The adjective *xenos* in the meaning of “extraordinary”, “unusual” and similar belonged to standardized vocabulary employed in Byzantine poetry. However, it was also interchangeable with other terms with a similar meaning since the use of specific terms was also due to metrical and prosodical requirements. This may, for example, be testified to by a fragmentary epigram, perhaps dating to the twelfth century, which was once attached to the medieval walls of the fortress of Skopje: Νέαν πόλιν, ἄνθρωπε, θαυμάζεις βλέπων / καὶ τερπνὸν ὠράϊσμα ... (“Full of admiration you are seeing a new town and the lovely adornment ...”).<sup>78</sup> Not only τερπνός could have been replaced by ξένος but also ἄνθρωπος by θεατῆς or ξένος, but the current wording was intentionally employed to accommodate the metrical and prosodical demands of the dodecasyllables.

### Conclusion

The term *xenos* is used in Greek literature from Antiquity to modern times. This is likewise true for inscriptions. As the discussion has shown, the form of address ξένε is almost exclusively attested in metrical inscriptions, and the same is true for the adjective ξένος/-η/-ον.<sup>79</sup> In tomb epigrams, the *xenos* is the “stranger” and the “guest”<sup>80</sup> respectively, who comes from outside (the city and therefore differs from the local inhabitant), stops and looks at the tomb. The address is meant not only to make him/her aware of the evanescence of life but he is also addressed in order to spread the deceased’s fame beyond the place where he is buried. However, as has been demonstrated, other forms of address were also used instead of ξένε. This is especially true for other epigrams in which the beholder of the monument/object or the listener to the text is addressed. Whatever the case, the form of address ξένε (or similar vocatives) attracts the attention of the listener, assuming that these texts were read aloud on certain occasions.

The adjective *xenos* with the meaning “unusual”, “extraordinary”, “exceptional” or similar is also very popular in all kinds of epigrams. It is likewise used in order to elicit specific attention from the beholders, readers and listeners at the epigram’s performance.

78 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. FY2; cf. Rhoby, Interactive inscriptions 322.

79 The study of the usage of ξένος and the form of address ξένε in so-called Byzantine book epigrams was beyond the scope of this paper. A search in the Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams (DBBE) offers many impressive examples: <https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/> (accessed on 25 April 2025)

80 Cf., e.g., Speck, *Theodoros Studites. Jamben*, 270 (no. CVa): Ἐπίγραμμα εἰς ξένους. Χριστὸν ξενίζει πᾶς διατρέφων ξένους / δι’ ὃ προθύμως τῆδε τοὺς ξενουμένους / μάλα τρέφοιτε, καὶ τραφήσεσθε ξένως (“Epigrams on Strangers. Everyone who hosts guests hosts Christ. Therefore, willingly entertain the strangers here, and you will be entertained in a wonderful way”). Like other examples in this essay, the author employed the various meanings of the stem *xen-*. For further examples in Greek literature, *ibid.*

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