Chapter Nine

THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

During the dark ages the island of Samos was constantly under heavy attack. It was lost to the Arabs, reconquered, lost again – and when the tides of misfortune finally ebbed away, it must have been a desolate place. In the 830s emperor Theophilos reconstructed the citadel at Samos (Kastro Tigani)[1] and restored it to its former glory, as the following verse inscription tells us:

Πᾶς ὁ παριὼν	καὶ θεώμενος τάδε
καὶ τὴν πρώτην μου	γνωρίσας ἀδοξίαν
ἀξίως δοξάζει σε	τὸν εὐεργέτην
καὶ ἀπαύστως κραυγάζει·	πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη
Θεοφίλου δεσπότου	καὶ Θεοδώρας.
ὦ αὐτοκράτορ	πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης,
Θεόφιλε δέσποτα	χαῖρε Ῥωμαίων.
[...] δοξάσας	τὸ σκῆπτρον καὶ τὸ στέφος
[ἐπα]ξίως λέγωμεν·	πολλοί σου χρόνοι.

"Whoever passes by and sees these things and knows of my former misery, rightly praises you as my benefactor and never ceases to exclaim: "Long live Lord Theophilos and Theodora! Oh Emperor of the whole world, Theophilos, Lord of the Romans, hail to you!" [...] praising your sceptre and crown, let us rightly say: "May your life be long!"[2].

The epigram is written in unprosodic dodecasyllables. In the dark ages, especially during the reigns of the great iconoclast emperors, Leo III and Constantine V, most verse inscriptions did not stick to the rules of prosody. This metrical laxity ceased as the cultural climate at the Byzantine court became imbued with the ideals of a nostalgic sort of classicism, which frowned on "stupid" prosodic errors. During the reign of Theophilos, however, there was a remarkable come-back of poetry in purely accentual metres, as indicated by numerous unprosodic verse inscriptions. Therefore, the Samos text should not be viewed as a provincial product lagging behind in comparison to the

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[1] See E. Malamut, Les îles de l' empire byzantin. Paris 1988, 140, 238 and 611.

[2] Ed. A.M. Schneider, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung* 54 (1929) 139, and Koutrakou 1994: 143, n. 462.

cultural life of the capital. Another "old-fashioned" feature of the verse inscription at Samos is the use of the formula of the *polychronion*: "long live the emperor", πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη (plus genitive) and πολλοί σου χρόνοι. Similar acclamations can be found in numerous prose inscriptions dating from the period of late antiquity and the dark ages[3]; but to my knowledge, they tend to disappear after the year 800. The phrase "πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης" in v. 6 more or less recurs in the famous inscription in Porto Torres on Sardinia commemorating the victory over the Langobards in c. 645, where Constans II is called δεσπότης τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης[4]. The Samos text adroitly makes use of phrases, slogans and metrical patterns typical of Byzantine inscriptions dating from the dark ages. This is a deliberate archaism, I think. It is an attempt to praise Theophilos in the same words and the same metre as adopted by earlier poets writing encomiastic verses in honour of the iconoclast emperors of the eighth century.

Let us try to imagine the impressions of the occasional passer-by, whom the verse inscription addresses. The first thing he will notice is, of course, the newly-built citadel, the place of refuge for the citizens of Samos in times of immediate danger – massive walls of stone and brick-work, constructed as a defensive stronghold against the frequent attacks of the Arabs. The second thing he will see as he approaches the main gate of the citadel, is the inscription itself: letters carved in solid stone, letters so skilfully wrought, so splendid and of such a magnitude that the text looks as if it cannot be effaced by the hand of man. And since the inscription looks as impregnable as the fortress itself, the viewer will understand its message, even if he cannot read. The third thing to draw his attention -that is, if he is not illiterate- is the text of the verse inscription, glorifying the mighty ruler of the Romans. Against the backdrop of frequent naval battles in the Aegean and repeated invasions of the island of Samos by Arab and Byzantine armed forces, the text reads as a bold statement of power and sovereignty, claiming that Samos rightfully belongs to the Byzantine empire (and not to the infidels) and that its legitimate ruler is Theophilos, the emperor of the whole world (and not some Abbasid caliph). The inscription is particularly interesting because it records how the ordinary citizens of Samos are supposed to respond to these territorial claims. They allegedly pay obeisance to Theophilos and Theodora by shouting the *polychronion*, and thus they are drawn into the cultural orbit of Constantinople, where such acclamations form part of the daily routine at the court.

Since the vast majority of the Byzantines were illiterate, inscriptions do not seem to be a very effective means of propaganda. The question is whether this is absolutely true. Writing involves two things: sign and signification. In

[3] See, for instance, Guillou 1996: no. 119 and Grégoire 1922: nos. 79 and 114.

[4] Guillou 1996: no. 230 (pp. 243–246).

literate cultures, the signified meaning is more important by far than the sign itself. In illiterate cultures, however, it is exactly the opposite: there sign prevails over signification. Writing is something magical to the illiterate. Hagiography tells us about miraculous apparitions of writings, amulets bear magical signs in the form of letters, many churches are adorned with incomprehensible Kufic script, and the "philosophers" of the *Patria* regard ancient inscriptions as encoded messages predicting the future[5]. It is also worth noting that after the year 1000 Byzantine epigraphy strives after a purely ornamental effect: the script becomes more calligraphic and less legible[6]. The reason for this change is that most Byzantines, being illiterate, did not read inscriptions, but simply gazed at them. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they were not able to grasp the meaning of inscribed agit-prop. True enough, most citizens of Samos will have been unable to decipher the text written on their citadel; but they witnessed the reconstruction of the fortress, noticed the presence of Byzantine officials, observed the stone-carver as he was doing his job, and also saw the final product: the inscription itself, which stood out on the gray surface of the citadel as a visible sign of the emperor's omnipotence. The majestic letters of the inscription signalled to them the presence of a world they were not familiar with, an alien culture intruding upon their own, an ideology of empire stretching out even to the faraway island of Samos. The illiterate citizens of Samos may not have understood what the inscription said, but they knew perfectly what it meant: Byzantium is here and the new ruler is Theophilos. And they reacted accordingly -for they may have lacked education, but they certainly were not fools- by shouting: "Long live the Emperor!".

The power of the written word manifests itself not only in what is said, but also in the visible form of the inscription itself. A splendid example is the text written above the famous apse mosaic in the Hagia Sophia (*AP* I, 1), propagating the triumphal restoration of the cult of the icons after many years of heresy. This iconophile message is visualized in the mosaic itself, of course. However, it is also spelled out to the illiterate with the visual aid of the script, which instills a feeling of awe by means of its majestic size and which impresses even the modern viewer with its sober, yet elegant characters set against a background of sparkling gold.

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[5] See G. Dagron, Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria. Paris 1984, 150, and Mango 1991: 240–241.

[6] See Mango 1991: 245–247, and *ODB*, s.v. Epigraphy.

Writing in Gold

When in 814, shortly before Christmas, emperor Leo V removed the image of Christ from the Chalke, it was an unequivocal sign to all that iconoclasm had regained favour at the Byzantine court. It was here, at the same brazen gate of the Great Palace, that a similar sacrilegious act by Leo III in 726 had sparked off the famous controversy over the cult of the icons. When the iconophiles won the day in 787, one of their first public acts was to restore the image of Christ at the Chalke, so as to mark the end -temporarily, as it would turn out- of iconoclasm. And the final victory of the iconophiles in 843 once again led to the restoration of the image of Christ at the same spot. Thus the Chalke witnessed the major events of the struggle *pro* and *contra* the cult of the icons, marking the changes in imperial policy between 726 and 843 with every change in its decoration. The word "imperial" is crucial in this context, because, whatever theory on the issue of iconoclasm one may venture to put forward[7], it is an undeniable fact that the Byzantine emperors played a decisive role in either abolishing or restoring the icons. While it is difficult to assess the amount of public support for the iconoclast cause in the early ninth century, the change in imperial ideology appears to have been caused by the predicaments of the Byzantine empire at the time. The Bulgars were laying waste the northern provinces, the Arabs steadily advanced from the south, and morale was low in the military as the troops had suffered defeat after defeat. Leo V's motives for turning iconoclast must have been that the military disasters were proof of God's great displeasure with the images. The Byzantines, consequently, needed to return to the policies of the great Isaurian emperors, whose reigns had always been victorious. In 815 a local council was held, which, with the help of John the Grammarian, provided theological arguments in support of the emperor's decision to embrace iconoclasm once again.

Soon after this council, either in late 815 or early 816, Leo V placed the image of the holy and ever victorious cross above the gate of the Chalke and ordered four poets to compose epigrams celebrating the iconoclast creed[8]. The texts of these inscriptions can be found in a treatise by Theodore of Stoudios, the Ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπή (*PG* 99, 435–478; henceforth: *Refutation*), which he wrote during his exile in Boneta in 816–818. In a letter to one Litoios[9], Theodore of Stoudios provides some interesting background information on the

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[7] For a survey of publications on the topic of iconoclasm (until 1986), see P. Schreiner, *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull' Alto Medioevo*, 34. 1 (1988) 319–407.

[8] The Ph.D. thesis by E.D. Mpakos, Βυζαντινὴ ποίησις καὶ εἰκονομαχικαὶ ἔριδες. Athens 1992, was unfortunately inaccessible to me.

[9] Ed. Fatouros 1992: no. 356 (II, p. 490; cf. I, pp. 358*–359*).

composition of this anti-conoclastic treatise. The letter states that Theodore received the iconoclastic iambics from Litoios when he had already written a refutation of these texts. Although Litoios was not the first to send him the texts, Theodore felt much obliged to him for his assistance – but it meant a lot of work (κόπος). In his letter he proudly emphasizes that whereas the mesostich of the iconoclastic iambics is not correct, his own epigrams are faultless. Litoios should read and copy his treatise, and then send it back. It was not to fall into the hands of the iconoclasts. If someone detected logical or grammatical errors in the *Refutation*, he was to correct them or, better still, inform him of these mistakes, for his treatise was certainly not an innocent pastime, but contained much truth. Theodore' troublesome κόπος consisted either in copying the text for Litoios or in composing a reply in verse in addition to the refutation in prose which he had previously written. The latter option seems more plausible, seeing that Theodore stresses the importance of the correct use of the acrostic, and the somewhat diffident assertion: οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔγραψά τι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολὺς λόγος ῥεῖ ἀληθείας, ὡς δοκῶ, ἐν αὐτοῖς, applies more to the ingeniously structured verses than to the serious theological refutation in prose.

The *Refutation* begins with the text of the iconoclastic epigrams Theodore will refute in detail; let's call it, for the sake of clarity, exhibit A. Theodore then adduces as counter-evidence his own impeccable verses: exhibit B. Then we have another series of iconophile epigrams by the same Theodore of Stoudios (τοῦ αὐτοῦ): exhibit C. This is followed by a detailed refutation of the iconoclastic iambics, in which Theodore, by means of an extensive commentary, demonstrates the falsity of the iconoclastic arguments and defends the cause of orthodox believers. After this passionate plea in defence of Christianity, with which the treatise could and should have ended, we find to our surprise another series of iconoclastic iambs: exhibit D. In some manuscripts of the *Refutation*, we find an iconophile response in verse to these texts[10]: this is exhibit E. This all sounds very confusing, I know. But thanks to various publications of Paul Speck[11], we may begin to understand the text history of the *Refutation* and view all these "exhibits" in their proper contexts.

As for exhibits A and B (*PG* 99, 436–437 and 437 & 440), the *Refutation* does not pose any problem. The former are the texts refuted by Theodore of Stoudios, the latter are the epigrams Theodore wrote in response to these iconoclastic texts (see his letter to Litoios). But what about C, D and E? What is their legal status? Although this is difficult to decide without a critical edition and a study of the manuscript evidence, it is reasonable to assume that C, D and E are "spurious", for they are not immediately related to the dispute between

[10] These iconophile epigrams were published by Speck 1964a.
[11] Especially Speck 1978: 606–619.

Theodore of Stoudios and the iconoclast poets. C and D ended up in the edition of the *Refutation*, because they were found in the personal papers of Theodore of Stoudios along with the original text of the treatise. E was added to it in a later stage of the text history.

Exhibit C (*PG* 99, 440–441) is a series of iconophile epigrams with a simple acrostic that runs through the first and last letters of the verses[12]. The epigrams are by Theodore of Stoudios. Since the epigrams do not have the complicated acrostic Theodore brags about in his letter to Litoios (acrostic, telostich, and mesostich), he cannot have written these verses in response to the iconoclastic epigrams on the Chalke. Furthermore, as Theodore's epigrams explicitly state that the cult of the icons had recently been restored by the emperor, they obviously refer to the iconophile intermezzo of 787–815. In all likelihood they date from the reign of empress Irene (797–802), since the acrostic of the first epigram, Χριστοῦ ἡ εἰρήνη, obviously alludes to her name. The frequent use of adverbs of place ("here"), demonstrative pronouns ("this") and verbs of perception ("see", "look") strongly suggests that these epigrams were authentic verse inscriptions[13]. This is highly interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it means that the iconoclast poets in 815 and Methodios in 843[14] were not the first Byzantines to write propaganda texts in verse on the Chalke; the practice goes back to the late eighth century, to Theodore of Stoudios and Irene[15]. Secondly, the iconoclast controversy apparently led to a vehement literary debate on the proper use of acrostic: in 797–802 a simple acrostic (iconophile!), in 815–816 a more complicated acrostic (iconoclast!!) and in 816–818 an ingeniously constructed acrostic (iconophile!!!)[16].

In exhibit D (*PG* 99, 476–477) we find a number of iconoclastic epigrams not refuted by Theodore of Stoudios in prose or in verse. One of these epigrams is the text written on the picture of the cross at the Chalke: ἐχθροὺς τροποῦμαι καὶ φονεύω βαρβάρους, "I put the enemies to flight and slaughter the barbarians"[17].

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[12] Migne does not decipher the acrostic of the fourth epigram (*PG* 99, 441b): ἔπη τάδε σῶα ἱερά.

[13] See Speck 1978: 612–617.

[14] Ed. Mercati 1920: 209–216.

[15] If not earlier. P Speck, in: Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für Horst Hallensleben zum 65. Geburtstag. Amsterdam 1995, 211–220, esp. pp. 217–218, argues that Constantine V, not long after 754, inscribed iconoclastic iambs on the Chalke.

[16] See chapter 4, pp. 139–140. In a paper presented at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Paris in 2001, Speck suggested that the iambs of Constantine V (see footnote above) may have had an acrostic as well.

[17] P. Speck, Artabasdos. Der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren. Bonn 1981, 376–378, argues that the same inscription could already be found on the Chalke cross erected by Leo III.

The three other texts we find at the end of the *Refutation* are an epigram by John (the Grammarian), another epigram by Ignatios (the Deacon), and an anonymous dedicatory epigram. These three texts are similar to the ones in exhibit A, where we also find verses by John and Ignatios as well as an anonymous dedication. What are we to make of this? What is the purpose of these reduplications? As we have seen, Theodore of Stoudios received the iconoclastic iambics twice, first from an unidentified source and then from Litoios. The question is: what did these two correspondents send to Theodore? The texts of the verse inscriptions on the Chalke? Or an iconoclastic pamphlet which contained these texts? There can be little doubt that Litoios and the unnamed iconophile did not copy the inscriptions on the Chalke *in situ*, but sent to their friend Theodore a recent publication, which contained a number of Chalke epigrams and in addition an iconoclast manifesto in prose. This manifesto is quoted and, of course, refuted by Theodore of Stoudios in his treatise (*PG* 99, 465–476). Since it is out of the question that the manifesto was inscribed on the Chalke, it follows that the manifesto and all the other iconoclastic texts circulated in manuscript form. When Theodore of Stoudios received this heretical publication, he decided to write a refutation of the epigrams that were actually inscribed on the Chalke (exhibit A) and a refutation of the iconoclastic manifesto. This is the original treatise. However, the Stoudite editors, who published Theodore' literary works shortly after 843, added an appendix to the treatise in which they published some of the iconoclastic texts Theodore did not refute.

A few manuscripts of the *Refutation* contain a poetic rebuttal of this last series of iconoclastic epigrams: exhibit E. The epigrams of "E" have precisely the same sort of acrostic and the same number of verses as those of the appendix: (no. 1) seven verses with a complicated acrostic: Χριστοῦ ἴνδαλμα εἶδος ὡς ᾖσαν (cf. the epigram by John: *PG* 99, 476b); (no. 2) seven verses with a less complicated acrostic: Θεοδώρῳ Χριστὸς αἴνεσις (cf. the epigram by Ignatios: *PG* 99, 476c); (no. 3) a monostich: εἰδογραφοῦμαι κόσμον ἐξαίρων πλάνης (cf. the iconoclast monostich: *PG* 99, 476d); and (no. 4) a dedicatory epigram of six verses (cf. *PG* 99, 477a)[18]. These four epigrams are attributed to Theodore of Stoudios, but this ascription is certainly incorrect. It is just a hoax, an attempt to credit the great Theodore of Stoudios with the composition of a refutation in verse of the very iconoclastic epigrams he did not refute[19]. As the first two

[18] Ed. Speck 1964a: 36–37 (nos. I–III). The anti-iconoclastic texts nos. IV–V (ed. Speck 1964a: 37–39), however, have no connection to the iconoclast epigrams on the Chalke. These two texts probably date from the late ninth century as well.

[19] For a similar hoax, see Marc. gr. 573 (s. X), fol. 5, where we find three iconophile epigrams attributed to three major opponents of iconoclasm: the patriarchs Tarasios, Germanos and Nikephoros (ed. Pitra 1864–1868: II, 365). The first epigram (attributed to Tarasios) is in fact a poem by Pisides (St. 34).

epigrams can already be found in a tenth-century manuscript (Vat. gr. 1257), this literary forgery probably dates from the late ninth century.

Let us now return to the iconoclastic iambics inscribed on the Chalke in 815–816. There are six verse inscriptions in total: the monostich inscribed on the picture of the cross above the main entrance to the palace, a dedicatory epigram which was probably inscribed below this picture, and four epigrams with a complicated acrostic. These four epigrams were probably inscribed on bronze plates placed next to the gate: two on each side, left and right; in all likelihood, gold-plated letters were used for the acrostic[20]. The acrostic runs through the beginning, the middle and the end of each verse; part of the acrostic is also a word in the centre of the third verse, a sort of transverse beam that intersects the mesostich in the form of a cross (for an example, see the epigram quoted below)[21]. The four epigrams with acrostic were composed by John, Ignatios, Sergios and Stephen. John is almost certainly the notorious John the Grammarian, the leader of the iconoclast movement in 815 and after[22]. Ignatios is the equally notorious Ignatios the Deacon[23]. And Stephen is probably a certain Stephen Katepolites, who wrote a verse inscription on the Pyxites during the reign of Theophilos[24].

The first of these epigrams bears the acrostic: Χριστοῦ τὸ πάθος ἐλπὶς Ἰωάννῃ, "the passion of Christ is the hope of John". As the epigram is extremely difficult to interpret[25], I rely on Theodore of Stoudios' commentary on the text (*PG* 99, 441–448); but I must confess that even with Theodore's invaluable help, the precise meaning of the first three verses is still hard to grasp.

Χρυσογραφοῦσι χρισ**Τ**ὸν οἱ θεηγόρο**Ι**
Ῥήσει προφητῶν μὴ βλέπ**Ο**ντες τοῖς κάτ**Ω**
Ἰσηγόρων γὰρ **ΕΛΠΙΣ** ἡ θεοπιστί**Α**
Σκιογράφων δὲ τὴν π**Α**λίνδρομον πλάνη**Ν**
Τρανῶς πατοῦσιν ὡς **Θ**εῷ μισουμένη**Ν**
Οἷς συμπνέοντες οἱφ**Ο**ροῦντες τὰ στέφ**Η**
Ὑψοῦσι φαιδρῶς **Σ**ταυρὸν εὐσεβεῖ κρίσε**Ι**

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[20] See Speck 1974a: 75–76 (n. 3).

[21] See Hörandner 1990: 13–15.

[22] See E.E. Lipšic, Očerki istorii vizantijskogo obščestva i kultury VIII-pervaja polovina IX veka. Moscow–Leningrad 1961, 325–326, and J. Gouillard, *REB* 24 (1966) 172.

[23] See Lauxtermann 1998a: 397–401.

[24] Theoph. Cont. 143, 8–15. See Speck 1974a: 74–75 (n. 3) and Lauxtermann 1998a: 398.

[25] There are three modern commentaries: Gero 1973: 118–119, Speck 1974b: 378–379, and Criscuolo 1994: 145–150. The first two commentaries contain many interesting observations. Criscuolo, however, misinterprets the text. He thinks that the θεηγόροι are iconophiles, interprets the verb πατῶ as "ricalcare", "to adopt", and translates *οἷς* συμπνέοντες as "in accordo con *quanto* qui detto".

"They who speak about God write Christ in golden letters and visualize [Him], not with material [eyes] but rather with the speech of prophets, for faith in God is the hope of those who speak likewise. They trample openly upon the resurgent error of those who make images, as it is an abomination to God. In agreement with them, they who wear the crown gloriously raise high the cross with pious resolve".

Whereas the last four verses are fairly easy to understand, the text of the first three verges on the nonsensical. The problem starts already with the first word, χρυσογραφοῦσι, a word that has not been properly described in any existing dictionary[26]. Χρυσογραφῶ has four meanings: (1) "to write in gold", especially used for the golden initials and titles in Byzantine manuscripts (cf. χρυσογραφία and χρυσογράφος), see the colophon texts of Lond. Add. 19352: χειρὶ γραφὲν καὶ χρυσογραφηθὲν Θεοδώρου μοναχοῦ πρεσβυτέρου[27], and of the Gospel Book of Vani: ἐχρυσογράφη ἡ βίβλος αὕτη παρὰ Μιχαὴλ χρυσογράφου τοῦ Κορέσι[28]; according to legendary tales, the Hebrew Bible which the seventy scholars translated into Greek (the Septuagint) was written in golden ink, see Aristeas, 176: διφθέραις ἐν αἷς ἡ νομοθεσία γεγραμμένη χρυσογραφίᾳ Ἰουδαϊκοῖς γράμμασι and George the Synkellos, 328, 11: σὺν ταῖς ἱεραῖς βίβλοις ἐχρυσογραφημέναις; (2) "to write in golden words", a metaphor used by Niketas Byzantios in the introduction to his treatise against Islam (*PG* 105, 669): ποῦ γάρ μοι τοσαύτη χρυσέων ἐπῶν περιουσία, ὡς ἂν χρυσογραφήσαιμι τὰς (...) τῶν ἀρετῶν αὐτοῦ (sc. "of the emperor") λαμπρότητας καὶ τερπνότητας; (3) "to paint in gold", used for gold varnish, see Ps. Chrysostomos (*PG* 64, 30): χρυσογραφῇ τὸν ὄροφον[29]; and (4) "to embroider with gold thread", see Manganeios Prodromos: χρυσογραφοῦσα τοιγαροῦν τὴν πορφύραν, cf. idem: κάλυμμα χρυσόγραφον, "a gold-embroidered veil"[30]. Meanings 1 and 2 refer to writing, meanings 3 and 4 to decorative designs[31]. It goes without saying that, within the iconoclastic context of the epigram quoted above, meanings 3 and 4 make no sense whatsoever. This is also made clear by Theodore of Stoudios, who interprets the

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[26] I am most grateful to professors Trapp and Hörandner, the editors of *LBG*, for allowing me access to the lexicographical material they have collected until now (the autumn of 2001).

[27] See V. Gardthausen, Griechische Palaeographie. Leipzig 1911, vol. I, 214–217, esp. p. 217.

[28] See E. Takaîchvili, *Byz* 10 (1935) 659.

[29] This text is quoted by Photios, Bibliotheca 522, B 35 and Amphilochia no. 167, 42.

[30] Ed. E. Miller, *Annuaire de l' Association pour l' Encouragement des Études Grecques en France*, 17 (1883) 39, 29 and 37, 25 (cf. 39, 13). See also *LSJ*, s.v. χρυσογραφής, "gold-embroidered".

[31] In the *Tale of Achilles*, v. 125, we read that Achilles' shield bore χρυσογραμμίες μεγάλες, either "great golden letters" or "great golden figures".

verb χρυσογραφῶ as λογογραφῶ[32]. But what about the first two connotations of the term? I would say that meanings 1 and 2 are equally important for clarifying the sense of χρυσογραφοῦσι in the Chalke epigram. The term literally refers to the golden capitals of the acrostic on the bronze plates attached to the Chalke – an acrostic that spells out the name of Christ: *Χριστοῦ* τὸ πάθος, etc. But the term metaphorically refers to the golden words of the theologians speaking about Christ: they write in gold when they praise the Lord (just as Niketas Byzantios would like to "write in gold", praising the emperor with "an abundance of golden words"). As Speck already argued[33], "writing in gold" also obliquely refers to the fact that the true theologians do not view Christ in His earthly presence, but envisage with prophetic eyes His divine majesty in the heavenly Jerusalem, which is made of gold and precious stones. In Byzantine texts the Heavenly Kingdom is often compared to one gigantic book, as in *Ps.* 103. 2, where it is said that God, when He created heaven and earth, stretched out the heavens like a parchment[34]. As the Bible was written in golden ink according to widely-spread legends, and as the heavenly Jerusalem, according to equally popular beliefs, sparkled with gold, the equivalence of heaven and holy writ was self-evident to the Byzantines: see, for instance, Ps. Chrysostomos, who compares the heavenly realm to a χρυσογράμματος βίβλος, a book written in golden letters (*PG* 62, 752). Thus we see that the first word of the epigram, χρυσογραφοῦσι, refers to the golden letters of the acrostic, to the golden words of the theologians and to the golden book of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Χριστόν – note the strong alliteration: [xrysogra´fusi xri´ston]. Θεηγόροι – as Theodore of Stoudios says that the "theologians" write Christ in gold because they have seen him "with their own eyes" and as he illustrates this by referring to 1 Joh. 1. 1, it is obvious that he is thinking of the evangelists and especially of John the Theologian. This is indeed the usual meaning of the word in Byzantine texts, see *Lampe*, s.v. It cannot be ruled out, however, that Theodore implicitly criticizes John the Grammarian for thinking that he, a heretic, has the right to theologize like his famous namesake, John the Theologian. In the epigram the word θεηγόροι probably refers to all those who speak about God, namely the evangelists, the church fathers and the iconoclast theologians, including John the Grammarian himself.

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[32] R. Cormack, Writing in Gold. Byzantine Society and its Icons. London 1985, quotes on the title page of his book a text by Theodore of Stoudios: "The gospels were writing in words, but icons are writing in gold". I have been unable to find this passage.

[33] Speck 1974b: 378–379. In his commentary he refers to Matth. 5. 8 and 1 Joh. 3. 2.

[34] See, for instance, the dedicatory epigram in the Menologion of Basil II, ed. H. Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae. Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris. Brussels 1902, pp. XXV-XXVI, vv. 13–14: ὡς ἄλλον ὄντως οὐρανὸν τεύξας βίβλον ἐκ δέρρεων ταθεῖσαν.

Ῥήσει προφητῶν – ῥήσεις προφητῶν is a collocation in Byzantine Greek, it means "the sayings of the prophets" or, generally speaking, "the prophetic words of the Old Testament" (προφῆται are not only the "prophets", but also all biblical figures of great significance, like David, Abraham, Moses, etc.). The use of the singular is quite unusual and the dative case poses a problem: does it mean "with", "through", "in accordance with"? There can be little doubt, however, that the epigram refers to the biblical prohibitions against idolatry, not only laid down in the Ten Commandments, but also categorically stated in numerous other texts of the Old Testament. Μὴ βλέποντες τοῖς κάτω – the verb βλέπω is always transitive and cannot govern a dative: τοῖς κάτω cannot be the object of βλέποντες, but must be an adverbial modifier. In his commentary, Theodore of Stoudios writes that the "theologians" (that is, the evangelists) portrayed the figure of Christ not solely on the basis of what the prophets had said, but also of what they themselves had seen with their own eyes (οἰκείᾳ αὐτοψίᾳ); and shortly afterwards, he paraphrases τοῖς κάτω as τοῖς κάτω ὀφθαλμοῖς. This is probably the correct interpretation of this strange adverbial phrase. Speck rightly sees a connection with the *Horos* of the Iconoclast Council of 754: εἴ τις (…) μὴ ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας προσκυνῇ αὐτὸν (sc. τὸν θεῖον τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου χαρακτῆρα) ὄμμασι νοεροῖς[35]. In a poem dating from c. 874, Christopher Protasekretis warns a group of newly-converted Jews not to interpret the prophecies of the Old Testament in a literal sense: τῶν προφητῶν τὰς ῥήσεις σωματικῶς μὴ νόῃ (…) μηδὲ τοῦτο ἐκδέχου ὀφθαλμοῖς τοῖς σαρκίνοις θεάσασθαι ἐν βίῳ, "do not intend materially the sayings of the prophets (…), nor do expect to see <the divine kingdom> with your bodily eyes, in your life"[36].

Ἰσηγόρων – this is probably the most difficult word of the epigram. The verb ἰσηγορέω (or ἰσηγορέομαι) is a legal term, indicating that someone has an equal right to speak; the right to do so is called ἰσηγορία and the person who enjoys this right is an ἰσήγορος. In the *Life of Theodoros of Stoudios* we read that he and his followers were sent into exile because they had dared to speak out freely against the emperor: ἐπ' ἴσῃ τοῦ λόγου παρρησίᾳ, "because of an equal freedom of speech"[37]. And in numerous other hagiographical texts we read that the saint enjoyed the privilege of παρρησία, "freedom of speech", because he was so close to God. This idea of saintly παρρησία may account for the use of the term ἰσηγόρων to a certain extent, but it does not explain why the ἰσήγοροι have an *equal* right to speak. Equal to whom? In the word ἴσος and its various derivatives there is always a point of comparison. By definition, "to be equal"

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[35] Speck 1978: 619 (Mansi 336E). Cf. Mansi 352E–353A: πάντες νοερῶς τῇ νοερᾷ θεότητι προσκυνοῦμεν.

[36] Ed. Ciccolella 2000b: 76 (vv. 3–4 and 9–12) and 80 (translation).

[37] Ed. V. Latyšev, *VV* 21 (1914) 269.

presupposes that there is someone just like you, who has the same rights, enjoys the same prerogatives, and shares with you many other things. In the iconoclastic *Horos* of 754, for instance, we read that the church fathers teach the same things as the divine apostles: τὰ ἴσα (…) ἐκδιδάσκουσι, namely the fact that images are not allowed in the church[38]. And in his second *Antirrheticus*, Theodore of Stoudios triumphantly writes that his iconoclast opponent by "saying the same things as he does" (τὰ ἴσα λέγοντι) concedes that he is in the wrong (*PG* 99, 360). Therefore, as regards the noun ἰσηγόρων, the question is: who shares the iconoclasts' views? Who speaks like they do? In the context of the epigram, the answer can only be: the prophets. In the first two verses we read that the θεηγόροι, they who *speak* about God, do not visualize Christ in a material sense, but spiritually, as they portray Him with the *speech* of prophets (ῥήσει προφητῶν). The "theologians" and the "prophets" allegedly share the same views on the cult of the icons. And this is why they speak with one accord and enjoy the same freedom of speech, a prerogative granted to them by God Almighty because they speak the truth.

Θεοπιστία – the word is practically a *hapax legomenon*, it can only be found in a homily by Timotheos of Antioch (*PG* 28, 1005). Note the anapestic resolution in θεο: resolutions are generally avoided in dodecasyllabic poetry after Pisides, but a few classicistic poets of the ninth century, such as Leo the Philosopher, occasionally write "iambic trimeters" consisting of thirteen syllables. Ἐλπίς and θεοπιστία – in Hebr. 11. 1 the apostle Paul avers: ἔστι πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, "faith gives substance to our hopes". In the third *Antirrheticus* by Theodore of Stoudios (*PG* 99, 433), we read that the iconoclasts often justified their heretical views by referring to another passage in Paul (2 Cor. 5. 7): διὰ πίστεως περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἴδους, "faith is our guide and not the things we see", cf. *Ps*. 39. 5 μακάριος ἀνήρ, οὗ ἐστιν τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου ἐλπὶς αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐνέβλεψεν εἰς ματαιότητας καὶ μανίας ψευδεῖς. In iconoclast theology, true believers do not look at the things below nor at material images, but ascend, through their faith in God, into a sort of intellectual contemplation of the trinitarian divinity. It is easy to understand why the Epistles of Paul were among the favourite texts of the iconoclasts, for the apostle Paul stresses time and again the importance of "faith" and "hope" and emphasizes that believers can see the unseen if their faith is strong enough. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 2. 9–10: "Things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love Him, these it is that God has revealed to us through the Spirit". The word ἐλπίς forms the central and, therefore, the crucial part of the acrostic: "the passion of Christ is the *hope* of

[38] Textus byzantinos ad iconomachiam pertinentes, ed. H. Hennephof. Leiden 1969, no. 236 (Mansi 292D).

John". John the Grammarian places his hope in Christ's redemptive death on the cross – a divine mystery which he, a true Christian and knowledgeable theologian, does not visualize in the deceptive form of images, but renders visible, on a purely symbolic level, in the cruciform shape of the acrostic.

As the last four verses of the epigram do not pose any serious hermeneutic problem, it may suffice to comment on a few words only. Σκιογράφος – a variant form of σκιαγράφος, literally "a perspective-painter" (someone who paints with shadows to create the illusion of distance): a term of abuse in the vocabulary of the iconoclasts, which they use to stigmatize painters as creators of illusion. Παλίνδρομον (πλάνην) – in his commentary Theodore of Stoudios rightly interprets this as an accusation of pagan idolatry, into which the iconophiles have supposedly lapsed. Πατέω – "to trample upon", a technical term for the so-called *calcatio colli*, an essential part of late antique and Byzantine triumphal ceremonies, in which the emperor tramples upon the necks of defeated enemies as a symbolic sign of their subjugation. In the Pantokrator Psalter we find an image of Patriarch Nikephoros and the Iconoclast Council of 815; in the epigram that describes this particular miniature, we read that he "tramples upon (πατοῦντα) the hostile head of Theodotos (…) and crushes the abominable neck of Leo"[39]. Οἱ φοροῦντες τὰ στέφη – Leo V and his son Symbatios, renamed Constantine[40]. Οἷς συμπνέοντες – in the *Horos* of 754, Constantine V and his fellow iconoclasts write that the testimonies of the evangelists and the church fathers concur with what they say themselves (συμπνέουσας ἡμῖν)[41]; in the epigram, however, it is the emperors who agree with what the Bible and the Church have to say. This may seem a slight difference, but it does suggest a change in attitude, from self-confident righteousness to pious deference and respect for the time-honoured traditions of God's own congregation of faithful – His divinely inspired prophets, evangelists, church fathers, saints and martyrs.

Since the iconoclastic iambics on the Chalke plainly served as propaganda, there is the unavoidable question of how successful the spin doctors of Leo V actually were in getting their message across. Intellectuals, such as Theodore of Stoudios, certainly had no problems in understanding what was being said. But were people with less education capable of grasping the subtle theological

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[39] Ševčenko 1965: 43, vv. 2–3 and 6–7. On the *calcatio colli* and the iconoclast controversy, see idem, pp. 49–51.

[40] Wolska-Conus 1970: 351–359 and Gero 1973: 113–126 incorrectly date the iconoclast epigrams on the Chalke to the reign of Leo III and his son Constantine V; Speck 1974a: 74–75 (n. 3) and 1974b: 376–380 irrefutably proves that the epigrams were written during the reign of Leo V and Symbatios / Constantine.

[41] Textus byzantinos ad iconomachiam pertinentes, ed. H. Hennephof. Leiden 1969, no. 233 (Mansi 280D).

arguments of John the Grammarian and his fellow iconoclasts? And what about the vast majority of the population, those who were ignorant of writing and reading? Did they understand the imperial propaganda when they looked at the Chalke and its iconoclastic verse inscriptions? The illiterate and those with little education will certainly have needed an interpreter, someone more knowledgeable than themselves, in order to fathom what John the Grammarian was actually saying. But even without this sort of basic guidance, they will have immediately grasped the essence of the iconoclastic propaganda at the Chalke just by looking at the golden letters and the cruciform shape of the acrostics. They saw golden-lettered crosses – what more did they need to understand that iconoclasm was back in town? Rational arguments, sophisticated words? No, not necessarily. For words and arguments speak to the mind, but writing in gold speaks to the heart.