

Chapter One

BYZANTINE POETRY IN CONTEXT

In *The Secret of Eloquence*, a book on Arabic stylistics written in 1062 by the Syrian Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji, we read an amusing anecdote about a line of al-Mutanabbi († 965) which happened to come to the attention of the Byzantine emperor: “It is related that a certain Byzantine king – I believe it was Nikephoros – asked about the poetry of al-Mutanabbi. They recited to him the line:

It was as if the white-and-ruddy camels were resting on my eyelids: when they stirred, [my tears] streamed forth.

Its meaning was explained to him in Greek; but he did not like it. “What a liar this man is!”, he said. “How can a camel rest on a man’s eye?!” Now I do not believe that the reason for this lies in what I said before about translating from Arabic into other languages and the disparity in this respect; but there exist in our tongue metaphorical and other beautiful conventional expressions such as are not found in other languages”¹.

The beautiful line of al-Mutanabbi that baffled the emperor may seem absurd even to modern readers who have little or no acquaintance with the literary conventions of medieval Arabic poetry. In order to understand the bold metaphor of “camels on eyelids”, the reader certainly has to know that the sorrow of leaving one’s beloved or staying behind when someone else leaves, is usually expressed in Arabic poetry by portraying the caravan of camels trailing into the desert at dawn. The reader furthermore has to know that the verb *sala*, used in al-Mutanabbi’s line for the “streaming” eyes, is also often used to denote camels “moving in single file”². Thus there is a connection between weeping eyes and departing camels, which accounts for the striking metaphor used by the great al-Mutanabbi. Without this crucial information, however, the line is almost incomprehensible – which is why Nikephoros Phokas, if he is indeed the ignoramus who listened to the recital of al-Mutan-

¹ Translation by G.J. VAN GELDER, Camels on Eyelids and the Bafflement of an Emperor: a line of al-Mutanabbi “translated” into Greek, in: Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association. Spaces and Boundaries. Munich 1988, vol. III, 446–451.

² VAN GELDER (see footnote above), 447–448.

abbi's poetry, reacted as he did. As he was obviously not familiar with the conventions of Arabic poetry, the image of "white-and-ruddy camels resting on one's eyelids" seemed absolutely grotesque.

Over the last two decades scholars have been saying that it is time that we finally start to appreciate Byzantine literature³. In these papers written in defence of Byzantine literature, the black sheep of the flock of Byzantinists turns out to be Romilly Jenkins, whose damning comments on the subject are quoted time and again as the *non plus ultra* of short-sightedness: "The Byzantine Empire remains almost the unique example of a highly civilised state, lasting for more than a millennium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone"⁴. The quote can be found in his book on the romantic poet Dionysios Solomos – the founding father of Modern Greek poetry, who Jenkins obviously greatly admired. From his critical comments it becomes clear that Jenkins looks at Solomos' poetry from a very Anglo-Saxon perspective: Keats, Shelley, Byron⁵. These poets represent the kind of poetry he is familiar with and has learnt -at public school presumably- to regard as the pinnacle of poetic achievement. It is against the background of the romantic movement and its literary values, too, that we should view Jenkins' biased and uncharitable verdict. What he expects from Byzantine poets and unfortunately does not get, is the sort of lyricism which he, born and bred on a wholesome diet of British romanticism, considers to be the essence of poetry. In this respect, Jenkins certainly resembles the Byzantine emperor who laughed at al-Mutanabbi's poetry simply because it was not like anything he was familiar with. However, before we start criticizing ignorant emperors and prejudiced scholars, let us first consider where we stand as modern readers at the turn of the twenty-first century. Our aesthetic value judgements are based on a corpus of texts promoted through the school system and sanctified by the literary popes of our time. Sadly enough, even if we wanted to, it is impossible for us to remain entirely unaffected by modern tastes and preferences. There is no point in denying that we look at things from a contemporary perspective. If we judge Byzantine poetry -say, the poems of John Geometres- on the narrow basis of our own literary preferences, it certainly falls short of our expectations. It is different, it does not fit into our literary canon, and it does not correspond to modern aesthetics. Some people (such as Jenkins) will stop reading Byzantine poetry once they see that it is not their cup of tea; others will try to appreciate it on its own terms. Appreciation presupposes knowledge. It also presupposes that we try to read

³ See, for instance, the various contributions in *Symbolae Osloenses* 73 (1998) 5–73.

⁴ R. JENKINS, *Dionysius Solomos*. Cambridge 1940, repr. Athens 1981, 57.

⁵ See, for instance, the first two pages of his book where we find these three names along with a rather embarrassing defence of the colonial hegemony of the British Empire.

with Byzantine eyes and allow ourselves to indulge in the pleasures of Byzantine literature – which is only possible by means of what Coleridge called “a willing suspension of disbelief”. It means that we will have to decipher the literary codes of Byzantine poetry and to understand it as the Byzantines would.

This is also what this book attempts to do. I do not think that we should apply modern literary criteria to a literature that follows its own set of rules. I do not think either that we should apply the precepts of classical scholarship to a literature that is not classical (although the Byzantines tried very hard to make us believe that they wrote as the ancients did). Here we have a fundamental hermeneutic problem. Krumbacher, Dölger and Hunger view Byzantine poetry from the angle of German *Altertumswissenschaft*. They recognize that the hallowed triad, epic-drama-lyric poetry, is of little help in defining the genres of Byzantine poetry; but they do not ask themselves why they should approach Byzantine poetry from this viewpoint in the first place. Having recognized that Byzantine poetry cannot easily be divided into these three categories, they react in different ways. Krumbacher refuses altogether to try and categorize Byzantine poems according to genre. That would be of little use, for “die schöne Gliederung nach Gattungen” which we find in ancient poetry, does not exist in Byzantium; “der eklektische Charakter der Dichter und der Mangel einer grossen, deutlichen Entwicklung innerhalb der einzelnen Arten” renders “eine strenge Durchführung der Eidologie” totally impossible⁶. Dölger (who finds in Byzantine poetry only “eine Aushöhlung des Gedankengehaltes und ein Erlahmen der Phantasie”, which often leads to “Geschmacklosigkeit”) expressly states that “das übliche literarische Schema der dramatischen, epischen und lyrischen Literatur” does not apply to Byzantine poetry. However, after this apodictic statement, Dölger goes on to say that the Byzantines did not write drama, but instead devoted themselves to two genres only: “Dichtungen in epischer Form” and “in lyrischer Form” – without so much as an explanation as to why he suddenly uses the terms “epic” and “lyric”, which he himself said did not apply to Byzantine poetry⁷. Hunger’s line of argumentation is even more peculiar. He fully subscribes to the verdict of Krumbacher, but “trotzdem” he thinks that a literary history, such as the one he is writing, cannot do without some form of classification: “Ausgangspunkt für eine Gliederung dieser Übersicht werden aber doch wieder die alten Genera sein müssen”. He cautiously adds that there are great differences between ancient and Byzantine poems and that it is often difficult to classify Byzantine poems according to the classical genre system: “Deshalb sollen die Gattungsbezeich-

⁶ KRUMBACHER 1897b: 706.

⁷ DÖLGER 1948: 13, 15, 15–17, 17–23 and 23–28.

nungen [namely, epic, dramatic and lyric poetry], zumindest in den Titeln, unter Anführungszeichen gesetzt werden” [as Hunger indeed does in the titles attached to the relevant chapters]⁸. The word “müssen” speaks volumes. We “*have to*” use these generic terms. But why should we? Why should we use terms that do not apply to Byzantine literature? Well, we *have to* because Hunger does not question the intrinsic validity of this system of classification. And neither do Krumbacher and Dölger. They merely repeat what they have learnt at school. In fact, it is questionable whether the classic triad holds true for any literature, including ancient Greek poetry. The concept ultimately goes back to Plato (*Rep.*, 392c–394c). But Plato has been misunderstood in modern times by Fr. Schlegel, Schelling, Hölderlin, and other exponents of the German romantic movement, for he does not speak about *genres*, but about “*modes of enunciation*”⁹. There are three modes: (1) plain narration – the author speaks *propria voce* (for instance, in the dithyramb); (2) imitation (mimesis) – the author does not speak himself, but lets his characters do the talking (for instance, in tragedy and comedy); and (3) a mixture of both – the author sometimes speaks with his own voice and sometimes lets his characters speak (for instance, in the Homeric epics). The example given by Plato of the first mode of enunciation (incidentally, the only sort of poetry he is willing to accept in his ideal republic), the dithyramb, has little to do with the modern concept of lyric poetry. In the dithyramb the poet usually narrates in the third person and speaks about the deeds of gods and men; in modern lyric poetry, the poet usually speaks in the first person and expresses his personal emotions. In fact, the Byzantine panegyric praising the deeds of noble emperors comes much closer to Plato’s definition of the first mode of enunciation than modern lyric poetry. Justice after all! The Byzantines wrote the sort of “lyric poetry” that Plato prescribed! But did they really? Once again, Plato is not interested in genres, but in forms of representation: the author’s voice, the character’s voice and the mixed voice. He gives a few examples of the kinds of poetry in which each of these voices can be heard, but he does not discuss ancient Greek genres. Thus, it is simply wrong to apply a totally misunderstood concept of Plato, the holy triad of arch-genres, to Byzantine or, for that matter, to any literature. The theories of German philosophers are quintessential to understanding the basic tenets of the romantic movement, but are utterly worthless for the comprehension of other literary periods and other cultures.

The term “*epigram*” is another splendid example of a much used, yet entirely misunderstood literary concept. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines

⁸ HUNGER 1978: II, 108.

⁹ See G. GENETTE, Introduction à l’architecte. Paris 1979 (repr. in: G. Genette et al., *Théorie des genres*. Paris 1986, 89–159). The term “mode of enunciation” is a literal translation of the term Genette introduces: *mode d’ énonciation*.

the term as follows: “A short poem leading up to and ending in a witty or ingenious turn of thought”. Here the epigram is characterized by two features: it is short and it has a “*pointe*” at the end. This procrustean definition more or less corresponds to what most people nowadays mean by the word “epigram”, but it would probably have made little sense to the Hellenes and the Byzantines. They would not have understood the definition for two reasons. First, their epigrams are not always “short”; secondly, their epigrams hardly ever end in a “*pointe*”. The modern definition of the term goes back to the Renaissance, when the humanists rediscovered the epigrams of Martial¹⁰. Martial’s epigrams are indeed often short and witty. And so are the epigrams of other first-century poets, such as Lucilius¹¹. Hellenistic and Byzantine epigrams, however, are not always as short as the ones of Martial, but may easily turn into full-length poetic texts¹². And although they can be quite witty, Hellenistic and Byzantine epigrams (in contrast to the early Roman ones) are not structured so as to bring about the effect of the big bang at the end. These epigrams certainly achieve poetic closure, but they end in a whisper, not with a theatrical exit accompanied by the slamming of doors. Thus the “Martalian” definition of the term, which we have wholeheartedly embraced in ordinary parlance, does not do justice to the Hellenistic or the Byzantine epigram. The question is: should we continue to give credit to a Renaissance interpretation of the term based on Martial, or should we try to understand the different phases of the history of the epigram? Should we cling to a basically unhistorical concept, or should we view the epigram as a genre that changed in the course of time? It will be obvious what my answer is. It will also be clear why I object to Kominis’ definition of the Byzantine epigram. Kominis rightly states that it is difficult to distinguish epigrams from poems and that brevity is not a useful criterion in sorting out the Byzantine epigram: “περὶ συντομίας (...) οὐδεὶς δύναται νὰ γίνῃ λόγος”. But strangely enough, he then continues by saying that one should regard as epigrams primarily those Byzantine poems that have a maximum length of 8 to 12 verses (the length of most epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology*), and exceptionally, poems of up to 20 verses if there is valid “internal evidence” (such as inscriptional use or inclusion in a collection of epigrams)¹³. This makes little sense. Kominis first rejects brevity as a characteristic of the Byzantine epigram and then uses the verse length of ancient

¹⁰ See P. LAURENS, *L’abeille dans l’ambre. Célébration de l’épigramme de l’époque Alexandrine à la fin de la Renaissance*. Paris 1989.

¹¹ For brevity as an essential feature of epigrams of the first century AD, see *AP* IX, 342 and 369.

¹² For the length of Hellenistic epigrams, see CAMERON 1993: 13. For the length of early Byzantine epigrams, see *AP* V, 294 (24 vv.), IX, 363 (23 vv.), and IX, 482 (28 vv.).

¹³ KOMINIS 1966: 19–20.

epigrams as a valid criterion. His notion of “internal evidence” looks much like a second line of defence. Quite unexpectedly we are told not only to count the number of verses, but also to pay attention to generic features. However, he does not clarify for what pertinent reasons Byzantine texts of more than 20 verses, which have those generic features, should not be called epigrams. For instance, is the famous verse inscription on the St. Polyeuktos (*AP* I, 10) not an epigram, simply because it consists of 76 verses? Is one of these internal criteria of Kominis in fact not the inscriptional use of epigrams? Thus, the absolute maximum of “20 verses and no more”, which Kominis is willing to accept if there are good reasons for it, is as arbitrary as the number of “8 to 12” he adopts because that is the “normal” length of ancient epigrams. What this means is that Kominis, even though he is well aware that Byzantine epigrams are not always short, still clings to the traditional, that is: Renaissance and post-Renaissance, definition of the term “epigram”.

These criticisms are by no means intended to belittle the outstanding achievements of scholars, such as Krumbacher, Hunger and Kominis, to whom I am much indebted. I hope to have made clear, however, that we should learn to question the validity of the literary terms we are familiar with and which we inadvertently apply even to literatures that are not like ours. We should learn to look at Byzantine poetry, not from a modern point of view nor from the angle of classical scholarship, but through the prism of Byzantine literary perceptions. When the emperor heard al-Mutanabbi’s line, he ridiculed it because he did not understand the literary conventions of Arabic poetry and unwittingly applied his very Byzantine reading experiences to a literature that is not Byzantine. By using a literary terminology with which we are familiar, but which has really nothing to do with Byzantine literature, we run the risk of committing exactly the same error.

In order to understand what Byzantine poetry is really all about, there is basically only one way out of the dead-end maze of modern prejudices and traditional misunderstandings: to look at the texts themselves and at the contexts that generated them. What is needed above all is a historicizing approach. The main thrust of such a scholarly approach is to study Byzantine poetry as a historical phenomenon (which is, incidentally, not the same thing as seeing it merely as a mine of historical information) and to understand it on its own terms. Byzantine poems are poems that are Byzantine. They are not modern – how could they be? They are not classical – why should they be? The tautological definition of Byzantine poems being poems Byzantine, which I have chosen simply to put things straight, does not mean that I regard the Byzantine identity as something that did not change in the course of time. Everything changes – even perennial Byzantium, where time often seems to tick away so slowly that it can only be measured against the clockwork of eternity. That Byzantium looks so perfectly timeless and immutable, is an

accomplishment of great genius. It is in itself an astonishing work of art, manufactured by thousands of diligent Byzantines working in close co-operation to produce the effect of timelessness in their paintings, hymns and writings. It is what Yeats so eloquently dubbed “the artifice of eternity” in his famous poem *Sailing to Byzantium*. But an artifice it is, and we should not be fooled by it¹⁴. Things did change in the Byzantine millennium: political constellations, military situations, economic prospects, social structures and attitudes, religious views and cultural orientations. And of course, along with all these fundamental changes Byzantine literature changed as well. The pace of change may have been remarkably slow compared to the precipitous developments of the last two centuries, but then again, Byzantium was a medieval society. Seen from the perspective of the Middle Ages, Byzantium certainly kept pace with the equally slow developments in the medieval West. The gradual changes that we observe in Byzantine society and literature more or less evolved with the same slack rhythms and movements as in the West (it can hardly be a coincidence that in both cultures dark ages, cultural revivals, pre-Renaissance tendencies, religious backlashes and the beginnings of vernacular poetry took place in approximately the same periods). However slow the pace of these changes may have been, it is incorrect to view Byzantine culture as static – to do so would mean falling into a trap which Byzantium itself has prepared.

Since we know so little about Byzantine poetry, and since we continuously make the mistake of comparing the little we know to both classical and modern literature, it is time to broaden our horizon and become acquainted with the texts themselves. First the sources, and only then the theories. That is the only way to make progress, even if it means that we, like Baron von Münchhausen, have to drag ourselves by the hair out of the morass of modern misapprehensions. If we study the manuscript material at our disposal closely, there is enough evidence to reconstruct Byzantine literary perceptions. The evidence there is consists of the following: the classification system of collections of poems and anthologies, the lemmata attached to poems and epigrams, the texts themselves which often contain internal indications as to their original purposes, and occasional remarks in Byzantine letters, text books and rhetorical writings. I am convinced that what the Byzantines themselves report, is far more important than the opinions of modern scholars, myself included. Of course, their remarks on poetry and genres need to be interpreted and weighed against the evidence of the still extant Byzantine texts. They certainly can not be accepted at face value. However, a study that does not take into account what the Byzantines have to say about their own poetry, is by definition

¹⁴ See P. LEMERLE, *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle byzantin*. Paris 1977, 251.

doomed to fail. The trite maxim “*ad fontes*” also holds true in this particular instance. If we want to understand Byzantine poetry, let us above all listen to the Byzantines themselves.

If the evocative anecdote about al-Mutanabbi’s line and the emperor’s negative response to it implicitly teaches us an important lesson, it is that any text, whether in Arabic, Byzantine Greek or another language, needs a context to be fully understood. Context is a vague concept. It includes anything relevant to the text one is reading, but which is not expressed in so many words and is therefore not entirely self-evident. It involves a number of questions: when, where, by whom, for which audience, what genre, at which occasion, for which purpose, and so forth. In this chapter I shall discuss three contextual aspects of Byzantine poetry: the function of the epigram, the relation between poets and patrons, and the forms of literary communication between poets and public.

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The Byzantine Epigram

The *Souda* presents the following explanation of the term “epigram”: “all texts that are inscribed on some object, even if they are not in verse, are called ἐπίγραμμα”¹⁵. It is rather surprising that the *Souda*, or the ancient source from which it culled this information, niggardly sticks to the etymology of the term and does not refer to the literary genre. This is all the more surprising because the lexicographers of the *Souda* made extensive use of the anthology of Cephalas and must therefore have known perfectly well what an ancient epigram was like. Whenever the *Souda* quotes a few verses of an epigram from Cephalas’ anthology, the text is invariably introduced by the standard formula: ἐν τοῖς ἐπιγράμμασιν¹⁶. Therefore the question arises: why does the *Souda* define the ἐπίγραμμα as an “inscription”, whereas elsewhere it uses the same term in connection with the literary texts found in the anthology of Cephalas?

¹⁵ ADLER 1928–38: II, 352, no. 2270: ἐπίγραμμα: πάντα τὰ ἐπιγραφόμενά τισι, κἂν μὴ ἐν μέτροις εἰρημένα, ἐπιγράμματα λέγεται. See also the definition in the *Λέξεις ῥητορικαί*, ed. I. BEKKER, *Anecdota Graeca*, I. Lexica Segueriana. Berlin 1814, 260, 7, and in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, ed. TH. GAISFORD. Oxford 1848 (repr. Amsterdam 1962), 358, 23: ἐπίγραμμα: οἱ πεζοὶ καὶ ἔμμετροι λόγοι ἐπιγράμματα καλοῦνται.

¹⁶ See CAMERON 1993: 294.

First of all, ἐπίγραμμα is not a frequently used term in the literary vocabulary of the Byzantines, except when they explicitly refer to ancient epigrams¹⁷. The epigrammatic genre was to all intents and purposes something formidably ancient, not the sort of thing the Byzantines themselves were wont to indulge in. It was something of the past they could read in the anthology of Cephalas and its various apographs: in short, the sort of literary texts found ἐν τοῖς ἐπιγράμμασιν. Since the term usually referred to ancient and not to contemporary epigrams, Byzantine lexicographers did not feel the need to go any further than a mere etymological explanation of the term. There was no reason to be more precise; it was more than enough to state rather tautologically that the noun ἐπίγραμμα originally derived from the verb ἐπιγράφω. The fact that this definition does not do justice to the various forms of ancient epigrammatic poetry, did not matter to the editors of the *Souda*. Ancient was good, but ancient was dead. And being a very dead corpse, ancient literature became a corpus of texts Byzantine lexicographers used, perused, and occasionally misused.

The second reason why the *Souda* interprets the term “epigram” in a rather strict sense, is that it does bear the meaning of “inscription” in a number of Byzantine sources. Let us look at four references to ἐπιγράμματα. The first example comes from the *Souda* itself: “Epigram on an ox and a goat depicted on a carved silver plate: (*Goat*) – How come that you, an ox, do not plough the furrows of the earth, but lie down like a drunken farmer? (*Ox*) – And you, goat, why do you not run to the pastures, but stand still like a silver statue? (*Goat*) – Well, so as to reprove you for your laziness”¹⁸. The epigram probably dates from the early seventh century for metrical and art-historical reasons. It is written in regular paroxytone dodecasyllables (such as we hardly find before the time of Pisides) based on typically Byzantine rules of prosody (τρην in τρηνεῖς short). And furthermore, silver display plates, such as the one described in the epigram, appear to have gone out of use after the reign of Herakleios. The epigram was inscribed on the silver plate it describes, probably around its rim. It is not known whether the lexicographer of the *Souda* derived this epigram from an earlier (presumably seventh-century) source, or from his own autopsy of the silver plate; but it does not really matter. What is of great significance here is that the word ἐπίγραμμα is used for a Byzantine poem and clearly means “inscription”.

The second text where we find the word is a marginal scholion attached to one of the letters of Arethas of Caesarea: “[Arethas] makes fun of the epigram

¹⁷ See, for instance, Ps. Symeon Magister, 729, and Michaelis Pselli scripta minora, vol. II, eds. E. KURTZ & F. DREXL. Milan 1940, 9, epist. 8.

¹⁸ ADLER 1928–38: I, 487 (s.v. βοῦς ἔβδομος). Also to be found in Athous 4266 [Ib. 146] (s. XVI), fol. 2^v, and Vindob. Phil. gr. 110 (s. XVI), fol. 515^v.

that was written above the kathedra of the Eparch in the Hippodrome on the picture of the four-horse chariot – an epigram by Anastasios, then quaestor, known as the stammerer, in which he ridiculously inveighs against Alexander the Macedonian as follows: *and lying prostrate as a trophy of inebriety*¹⁹. The satirical poem by Anastasios Quaestor, of which we have only this verse, dates from 913. It was written shortly after Emperor Alexander’s tragic death from alcohol abuse in the Hippodrome, and was directed against the Macedonian dynasty and its claims to the throne; it indirectly canvassed political support for the faction of Constantine Doukas²⁰. In the scholion the word ἐπίγραμμα is used to stress the fact that the text of the satirical poem had, rather surprisingly, been inscribed.

The third text is found in Marc. gr. 524 (s. XIII). This manuscript is famous for its collection of ceremonial poems and inscriptional epigrams, all of which date back to c. 1050–1200. One of the poems is entitled: “epigram placed on the venerable cross that had been erected in the heart of the Hungarian land”. The cross had been erected by John Doukas, the military commander who led a successful expedition against Hungary in 1154–55²¹. In this lemma, just as in the two other instances I discussed above, the word ἐπίγραμμα clearly indicates that the epigram was inscribed on the cross.

The fourth example is Ambros. gr. 41 (s. XII), fol. 86^v. There we find the verses that were inscribed on the south and the north tympanon of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople after the earthquake of 869; some fragments of these verse inscriptions have been discovered *in situ*²². In the manuscript in Milan, the first of the four verse inscriptions is entitled: ἐπίγραμμα κάλλιστον. There can be no doubt what the term means in this particular instance. It is an inscription.

This specific meaning of the term ἐπίγραμμα, “inscription”, can also be found in Byzantine collections of poems: see, for instance, the lemmata attached to Theod. St. 25, 48, 58, 102, 104, 105a, 105c, 105e and 111; Chr. Mityl. 65; and Prodromos 29 and 41. It is only fair to admit, however, that the term is not much in evidence. Take, for instance, the anthology of Marc. gr. 524. It contains numerous epigrams that were inscribed on works of art, and yet, the word ἐπίγραμμα occurs only once. What does this mean? Does it mean that the epigram on the Hungarian cross presented the only genuine ἐπίγραμμα of the collection in the view of its anthologist? This is not very likely, since this particular epigram differs in no way from the other verse inscriptions that we find in Marc. gr. 524. What it probably indicates is that the term ἐπίγραμμα was

¹⁹ WESTERINK 1968: I, 322, 29–33.

²⁰ See LAUXTERMANN 1998a: 401–405.

²¹ Ed. LAMBROS 1911: 178–179 (no. 337).

²² See MERCATI 1922a: 282–288.

so unusual that, when the anthologist was composing his lemmata, it did not immediately spring to mind. Normally, a Byzantine lemmatist would simply write: εἰς ..., “on X”, which can have two totally different meanings. It either means “on the subject of X” or “inscribed on X”. For instance, εἰς τὴν βάπτισιν can mean: “on (the subject of) the Baptism” or “(written) on (a picture portraying) the Baptism”. Since the simple word εἰς already covers all the possible uses of an epigram, either as a purely literary text or as a verse inscription, the technical term ἐπίγραμμα is superfluous. Only when a lemmatist, for one reason or another, thought it necessary to emphasize that a given epigram was actually copied from stone, would he use the Byzantine term for “inscription”. But the need to do so seldom arose, for most often the Byzantines copied a manuscript text for its literary merits alone, and not out of some antiquarian interest in its former whereabouts or its original function. In the collection of Theodore of Stoudios’ epigrams the word ἐπίγραμμα can be found quite often because its redactor, who had to copy all these texts *in situ*, was obviously very proud of his scholarly accomplishments as an epigrapher. In other Byzantine collections of poems, however, the term is only rarely used because the epigrams they contain were not copied from stone, but circulated in manuscript form.

In Byzantine sources the word ἐπίγραμμα is also used in a quite different sense. I will give two examples. On the first page of Vindob. Theol. 212 (s. XVI), a manuscript of Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ *Cure of Pagan Maladies*, we find a dedicatory epigram, entitled ἐπίγραμμα. The epigram tells us that Peter the Patrician presented a copy of the *Cure of Pagan Maladies* to Emperor Leo VI on the occasion of the Brumalia. In vv. 1–12 Peter the Patrician writes that the book is a gift worthy of the μουσουργία of Leo VI, because it splendidly refutes all heresies and errors of the Hellenes; in vv. 13–21 Peter prays that the emperor may live long and victoriously, and expresses his hope that he may witness many other Brumalia in honour of Leo VI²³. The second example is an epigram found in two manuscripts containing the Greek translation of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, Vat. gr. 1666 (a. 800) and Ambros. gr. 246 (s. XVI). The epigram is entitled: ἐπίγραμμα εἰς τὸν μακάριον Γρηγόριον Πάπαν τῆς προεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης. In vv. 1–23 future readers are told that the *Dialogues* make good reading because these edifying stories, written by none other than the formidable Gregory the Great, present splendid examples of piety and fear of God, and in vv. 24–33 pope Zacharias is lavishly praised for making the *Dialogues* available to a Greek-speaking audience. The text of the *Dialogues* was translated in 748 by a certain John the Monk, who is probably also the author of this epigram²⁴.

²³ Ed. MARKOPOULOS 1994b: 33–34.

²⁴ Ed. MERCATI 1919: 171–173. See also Appendix IX: no. 8.

In these two instances the term ἐπίγραμμα means “book epigram”. It is an epigram that accompanies a literary text, either as an introduction to it (see the translation of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*) or as a dedication (see Peter the Patrician’s gift to Leo VI). This particular meaning of the term ἐπίγραμμα probably dates from the Middle Ages, as it can only be found in Byzantine sources: see, for instance, Theod. St. 124, *AP* XV, 1, and Chr. Mityl. 69 and 83. The term is even used for book epigrams written in rhythmic prose. In ms. Athen. 56 (s. X), for instance, we read on fol. 1: ἐπίγραμμα. ἔλεος καὶ ὑγεία τῷ γράψαντι· δόξα καὶ ἔπαινος τῷ κτησαμένῳ· σοφία καὶ σύνεσις τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν (“epigram: mercy and health to the scribe; glory and praise to the owner; wisdom and understanding to the readers”)²⁵. If a book epigram is expressly meant to serve as an introduction to the literary text which immediately follows, in manuscripts it is sometimes called a πρόγραμμα: so, for instance, in Laur.VI 10 (s. XIV), fol. 1, where we find Euthymios Zigabenos’ prologue in verse to the *Dogmatic Panoply*²⁶; see also the following book epigrams in literary sources: Mauroπους 27, 28 and 30, Ps. Psellos 54 and Prodrornos 61²⁷. The words πρόγραμμα and ἐπίγραμμα have basically the same meaning: the former is a “pro-script”, the latter is an “ad-script” (cf. “prologue” versus “epilogue”).

To summarize, when the word ἐπίγραμμα specifically refers to a Byzantine (and not to an ancient) poem, it can have two meanings. It is either a “text written on (an object)” or a “text written next to (a piece of literature)”, or to put it in German for the sake of clarity, it is either an “Aufschrift” or a “Beischrift”. German terminology also provides another splendid and highly relevant term, namely “Gebrauchstext”. These so-called “Gebrauchstexte” comprise a wide range of literary, sub-literary or non-literary texts intended for practical use, such as law-books, painter’s manuals, astrological treatises, medical compendia, rhetorical textbooks, gnomologies, catenae, doctrinal handbooks, letters, messages on sign-posts, inscriptions, homilies and speeches, and so on²⁸. Since the term ἐπίγραμμα, on the few occasions it is used, denotes a text which serves a practical use (either as a verse inscription or as a book epigram), it falls beyond doubt into the category of what the Germans call “Gebrauchstexte”²⁹.

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, it is totally irrelevant what classicists and modern scholars think an epigram is; we need to know what the Byzantines themselves have to say. If the Byzantines unequivocally define the

²⁵ Ed. A. MARAVA-CHATZINICOLAOU & CHR. TOUFEXI-PASCHOU, *Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece*, vol I. Athens 1978, 1.

²⁶ Ed. BANDINI 1763–70: I, 115.

²⁷ Prodrornos 26 is also entitled πρόγραμμα. I do not understand this title, unless Prodrornos 26 is supposed to be an introduction to Prodrornos 25.

²⁸ See A. GARZYA, *JÖB* 31, 1 (1981) 263–287.

²⁹ See VOLPE CACCIATORE 1982: 11–19 and HÖRANDNER 1987: 236.

ἐπίγραμμα as an inscription or a book epigram, then this is what a Byzantine epigram is. It follows, therefore, that the number of verses is not a valid criterion in establishing whether or not a Byzantine poem is an epigram. The verse inscription on the St. Polyeuktos (*AP* I, 10), which consists of 76 verses, is an ἐπίγραμμα according to the Byzantine definition of the term³⁰. The book epigram in ms. Basel B II 15 (s. IX) celebrating the wisdom of its owner, Sisinnios of Laodikeia, who had commissioned sixty-two Homilies of Chrysostom to be copied in a luxurious manuscript³¹, consists of no less than 102 verses. This poem, too, constitutes an ἐπίγραμμα in the eyes of the Byzantines. As for the sort of metre used in Byzantine epigrams, one cannot fail to notice that the elegiac distich (the metre of ancient epigrams) and the dactylic hexameter (a metre popular in late antique inscriptions) by and large disappear after the year 600. The usual metre is the dodecasyllable, either in its prosodic or unprosodic form. Almost all Byzantine epigrams make use of the dodecasyllable, with a few classicizing exceptions in hexameters or elegiacs. The Byzantine anacreontic is never used for epigrams³²; the political verse rarely, and only after the eleventh century.

In the second part of this book (chapters 4–9) I shall discuss the various types of the Byzantine epigram, including not only genuine “Gebrauchstexte”, but also purely literary imitations of the kinds of ἐπίγραμμα that were in use in Byzantium. It is often difficult to decide whether an epigram found only in manuscripts and not *in situ*, originally served a practical purpose, or whether it merely imitates the literary conventions of the Byzantine epigram. The problem is that there are so very few “matches”: Byzantine epigrams found both *in situ* and in manuscripts. There is ample material evidence for the re-use of epigrams on later Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments³³, but unfortu-

³⁰ The church of the Panagia of Panori in Mistras, dating from the Palaeologan period, was inscribed with even more verses: 87 in total. See G. MILLET, *BCH* 23 (1899) 150–154.

³¹ Ed. G. MEYER & M. BURCKHARDT, *Die mittelalterlichen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Basel*. Abt. B. Theologische Pergamenthandschriften, I. Basel 1960, 150–169. According to L. PERRIA, *RSBN* 26 (1989) 125–132, the ms. dates from before 879–880.

³² In his *De metris pindaricis*, where he discusses a holospondaic type of the paroemiac, Isaac Tzetzes tells us that this metre can be detected in an inscription in the Hagia Sophia dating from the reign of Leo VI: see C. MANGO, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul*. Washington 1962, 96–97. P. MAAS, *BZ* 24 (1924) 485–486, suggests that Isaac refers to unprosodic anacreontic hemiambs. If Maas’ interpretation is correct, this would be the only instance of the use of the anacreontic for Byzantine verse inscriptions; but it is questionable whether Isaac Tzetzes’ information is entirely trustworthy. Perhaps it was an inscription in prose, which, purely by coincidence, could be measured as if it constituted a variant of the paroemiac.

³³ See chapter 2, pp. 71 and 81, chapter 3, pp. 92–93, and chapter 5, pp. 149–150. See also E. FOLLIERI, *I calendari in metro innografico di Cristoforo Mitileneo*. Brussels 1980, 218, n. 6, and HÖRANDNER 1987: 238, n. 12.

nately the number of epigrams still located in their original surroundings is fairly limited. This is mainly because the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, where most inscriptions were once to be found, has irretrievably disappeared under the building layers of modern Istanbul. Let me give an example. In the 1570s Theodosios Zygomalas wrote a long letter to Martin Crusius in which he reported having read an inscription in the church of the Pantokrator, of which he quotes the first ten verses³⁴. These ten verses form the beginning of a very long text (145 vv.) celebrating the inauguration of the Pantokrator complex in 1139–1143³⁵. The inscription Zygomalas spotted in the Pantokrator is lost for good; but we can still read the text in manuscript. Without Zygomalas' explicit testimony, few scholars would have guessed that this text is in fact an inscription, and even fewer people would actually have believed it. Nowadays there are only a limited number of epigrams that still survive in their original contexts. Whereas the Greek Anthology contains dozens of genuine Byzantine verse inscriptions, only few of these are still found *in situ*: parts of the long inscription on the St. Polyeuktos (*AP* I, 10), some of the epigrams on the late antique statues of charioteers (*API* 335–378 & *AP* XV, 41–51), and traces of the inscription on the decoration of the apse of the Hagia Sophia (*AP* I, 1)³⁶. In Byzantine manuscripts we find four ninth-century epigrams on the decoration of the walls of the Hagia Sophia, a few fragments of which are still extant³⁷. As regards the period after the year 1000, I know of only three epigrams that can be found both in manuscript and on stone: a dedicatory epigram celebrating the construction of a church of St. Peter and St. Paul on Corfu by George Bardanes³⁸, an epitaph “to himself” by the same George Bardanes³⁹, and an epitaph to the protostrator Michael Glabas by Manuel Philes⁴⁰.

³⁴ Published in: M. CRUSIUS, *Turcograecia*. Basel 1584, 74–98, esp. p. 95.

³⁵ Ed. G. MORAVCSIK, *Szent László Leánya és a Bizánci Pantokrator-monostor*. Budapest–Constantinople 1923, 43–47 (see also pp. 70–72). See G. DE GREGORIO, in: *Lesarten. Festschrift für Athanasios Kambylis*, ed. I. VASSIS, G.S. HENRICH & D.R. REINSCH. Berlin–New York 1998, 166–170.

³⁶ For *AP* I, 1 and 10, see chapter 3, p. 92, n. 32 and n. 33; for the charioteer epigrams, see CAMERON 1973: 65–95.

³⁷ See MERCATI 1922a: 282–286.

³⁸ Ed. GUILLOU 1996: no. 44. Guillou fails to mention that the epigram is also found in *Cryptensis Z α XXIX*, fol. 23, a ms. of the late 13th C. copied in Otranto (for the date of the manuscript, see P. CANART, *Scrittura e Civiltà* 2 (1978) 156, n. 134); ed. A. ROCCHI, *Versi di Cristoforo Patrizio editi da un codice della monumentale Badia di Grottaferrata*. Rome 1887, 67. See L. STERNBACH, *Eos* 5 (1898–99) 113–114.

³⁹ *CIG* 9438. Also to be found in *Cryptensis Z α XXIX*; ed. ROCCHI, 67 and STERNBACH, 114–117 (see footnote above).

⁴⁰ The inscription on the parekklesion of the Pammakaristos has been published numerous times: see the list of editions in HÖRANDNER 1987: 237, n. 6. The epitaph can also be found in manuscripts: see MILLER 1855–57: I, 117–118 (E 223). See also TALBOT 1999: 77.

Although the number of epigrams that are still to be found *in situ* is extremely limited, one should not forget that the exact opposite holds equally true: that is to say, only a very few of the verse inscriptions and book epigrams that are still extant today (see appendices VIII–IX), can be found in Byzantine collections of poems. True enough, given the poor quality of some of these verse inscriptions and book epigrams, it is hardly likely that all of these “Gebrauchstexte” were composed by competent poets, whose works were deemed worthy enough to be copied by future generations. But this hardly applies to all verse inscriptions and book epigrams. In fact, most of these texts definitely stand comparison with the literary epigrams found in Byzantine manuscripts and must surely have been written by professional poets. The reason why these excellent verse inscriptions and book epigrams have not survived in manuscript form, is simply that Byzantine poetry, even if it was as good as what we sometimes find *in situ*, was generally not copied. In other words, the Byzantine ἐπίγραμμα finds itself in a sort of Catch 22 situation: since most inscriptions were lost in the course of time and since most epigrams were not copied, there are very few “matches”; consequently, with the lack of inscriptions and manuscript material still extant, it becomes extremely difficult to interpret the little we have on the basis of what is no longer there. But let us not get too pessimistic. By closely studying the Byzantine verse inscriptions and book epigrams that have come down to us, and by comparing this material with the texts found in manuscript, genres and generic rules pertaining to all sorts of epigrams can be outlined clearly. Evidence is scarce, and we have only some loose pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle; but if these surviving pieces are put in the right place, a picture of the Byzantine epigram emerges.

In the second volume of this book, I shall discuss the remaining kinds of Byzantine poetry – all the poetic genres that do not fall into the category of the epigram. I refer to these non-epigrammatic texts simply as “poems”. “Poems” include, for instance, Byzantine satires, ekphraseis, panegyrics, catanyctic alphabets, riddles, and so forth. These various genres have nothing in common, other than the mere fact that they are not epigrams. There are two reasons for dividing the poetic output of the Byzantines into epigrams and poems, one of a practical and another of a more fundamental nature. First of all, the Byzantine epigram forms a clear-cut category of its own, with distinctive features allowing us to easily recognize and differentiate this type of poetry from all the rest. And moreover, as 30 to 50 % of the poetic texts we find in manuscripts belong to this category, the anxious classifier can comfort himself with the idea that with the Byzantine epigram alone, he already covers a substantial part of all verses written in Byzantium. “Though this be madness, yet there is method in it”. The second reason why I believe it makes sense to distinguish epigrams from poems is that some Byzantines at least made the very same distinction. In the second chapter (pp. 65–66), I shall point out that Pisides’

poetry book is neatly divided into epigrams and poems: the former are to be found at the beginning, the latter at the end of the collection. In his epitaph to Prodromos, Niketas Eugenianos praises the writings of his beloved master. Celebrating the poetic skills of his predecessor, he singles out two kinds of poetry in which Prodromos especially excelled: hexametric panegyrics, and epigrams inscribed either on works of art or tombs. He says that the former appeal to the ear and the latter to the eye. Both kinds of poetry are equally beautiful; but whereas the panegyrics please the eagerly listening audience, the epitaphs and epigrams carry a special cachet as splendid adornments of the tombs and icons on which they are inscribed⁴¹. Following the lead of these two Byzantine poets, Pisides and Eugenianos, who both differentiate between epigrams and poems, I believe this to be a fundamental distinction that may help us in sorting out the manuscript material.

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Poets and Patrons

When we think of medieval poets, there is one figure that immediately springs to mind: the begging poet – a composite of various romantic types: poor Homer and other blind bards⁴², the wandering poets of the *Carmina Burana*, the minstrels in the medieval West, and the archetypal *Ptochoprodromos* in Byzantium. In fact, there is even some truth to the romantic idea of the poor poet eating the crumbs of the rich man's dinner, at which he performs his tricks and delivers flattering poems to the host. It cannot be denied that Manuel Philes and other Palaeologan poets, in a time when there were too many intellectuals and too few posts in the imperial and patriarchal bureaucracies, repeatedly begged for some reward. And even in the twelfth century, when there were certainly more opportunities to climb up the social ladder, shockingly explicit requests for remuneration, either financial or in the form of regular appointments, can be found time and again in the literary works of Byzantine authors⁴³. However, before the Comnenian age, such straightforward requests for money or lucrative posts in the administration are rarely encountered. In

⁴¹ Ed. C. GALLAVOTTI, *SBN* 4 (1935) 225–226 (vv. 135–159).

⁴² See, for instance, Cl. FAURIEL's introduction to the *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (Paris 1824–25). Having never visited Greece, Fauriel imagined that all the singers of δημοτικά τραγούδια, quite like mythical Homer, had to be blind bards.

⁴³ See P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*. Cambridge 1993, 346–352.

poem no. 16, Michael Psellos asks Emperor Michael IV (1034–1041) to appoint him as a notary; in a poem addressed to Constantine IX Monomachos shortly after 1047, John Mauropous requests the emperor to award him a position in the imperial bureaucracy suitable to his age and his merits⁴⁴.

But there is hardly any evidence to suggest that in the years between c. 600 and 1000, Byzantine poets expected to benefit from their literary products. There is no petitioning, bargaining, or pleading to be rewarded for services rendered. What are we to make of this? Does it mean that the rules of the game were different at that time? Did poets honestly not desire to be given their due and to be recompensed for their literary efforts? Before answering these admittedly difficult questions, let us first look at two tenth-century instances of poets expecting something in return from the person they are writing for. In his panegyric, *The Capture of Crete*, Theodosios the Deacon writes at the very end of the first *akroasis* (A 269–272): “Do not overlook the works of Theodosios written in honour of your majesty, so that his hand, urged to write on, may turn to the second panoply of your army”. He evidently means to say that, with a little encouragement from the emperor, he is ready to deliver the next *akroasis* in which he once again, for the second time, will praise the military feats of the emperor’s panoply on Crete. However, he does not specify what he wants from the emperor. Applause and cheerful encouragements to continue? Money? An official position somewhere? Whatever the case, in April 963, when Theodosios the Deacon finally delivered his panegyric in public, the emperor (Romanos II) had died and Theodosios’ hopes of gaining any substantial benefits from his panegyric were thwarted⁴⁵. As is well known, John Geometres lavishly praises Emperor Nikephoros Phokas in many of his poems, and many scholars therefore rightly assume that he must have been the poet laureate at the court between 963 and 969⁴⁶. However, in none of these poems written in honour of Nikephoros Phokas does the poet explicitly ask for any material rewards. True enough, there is a poem (Cr. 305, 1) in which Geometres praises Nikephoros for his generosity: “The right hand of our lord Nikephoros is like (the river) Paktolos flowing with gold”. But this poem is not a direct request for money⁴⁷. There can be little doubt that Geometres was one of the courtiers who benefited from this Paktolos of gold, but we do not know through what sort of channels the money flowed into his pocket. Did the emperor pay the poet in hard cash? Or did he reward the poet for his services by appointing him to a lucrative post? The latter option seems more likely. Geometres served in

⁴⁴ Psellos: ed. WESTERINK 1992: 238. Mauropous: ed. KARPOZILOS 1982: 71–74.

⁴⁵ See PANAGIOTAKIS 1960: 12–17.

⁴⁶ See SCHEIDWEILER 1952: 300–319 and CRESCI 1995: 35–53.

⁴⁷ In contrast to Chr. Mityl. 55, a poem in which the emperor is compared to the gold-flowing Paktolos as well: see C. CRIMI, *Graeca et Byzantina*. Catania 1983, 41–43.

the military from the late 950s to 985: his military rank is unknown, but at a certain point in his career he was awarded the honorary title of *protospatharios* (by Nikephoros Phokas?). As Geometres owned a luxurious mansion in the centre of the city and never refers to any financial problems (in his poems he complains about almost everything, but not about poverty), he must have been rather well-off. He may have inherited some of his possessions from his father, a “loyal servant of the emperor”, but the rest of his opulence will have accrued throughout his years of active service in the military⁴⁸. Thus I would suggest that Geometres did not directly depend upon financial gifts from the emperor, but that he was remunerated for his priceless literary services with a comfortable position in the Byzantine army.

To return to the initial question: why do Byzantine poets of the seventh through the tenth centuries hardly ever ask for any rewards, whereas later poets (especially from the twelfth century onwards) repeatedly beg to be paid for their services? Like Kazhdan⁴⁹, I believe that one should approach this problem from two separate angles: different forms of social stratification, and varying degrees of self-assertiveness. The Comnenian age is characterized by a political system in which a few families, related to each other by bonds of marriage and blood, effectively control the administration and the channels of promotion and demotion within the bureaucracy. As is only to be expected, in such a political system patronage plays a central role as the medium through which money, positions and favours are distributed. And this in its turn explains the sudden emergence of a social stratum of (supposedly destitute and mendicant) intellectuals who desire to enter the service of some patron in order to earn their bread. Before the year 1000, however, power is not yet as monopolized as in later centuries. The emperor was officially, and often also in practice, the main source from which power emanated; but even the emperor depended on the support of different factions at court. These factions changed all the time. They were not stable political pressure groups, but temporary coalitions of various individuals seeking (with the backing of their relatives) to protect their own interests. Allies would suddenly turn into bitter enemies; former enemies could become one’s best friends. In this continuous power struggle, no one was to be trusted and no one was to be utterly rejected. This was a political system that did not favour patronage – at least not the kind of permanent patronage whereby the patron and his favourites depend upon each other in a sort of stable symbiotic relation. John Geometres is a splendid

⁴⁸ See LAUXTERMANN 1998d: 364–365.

⁴⁹ Kazhdan has put forward his theories in various publications: see, for instance, A.P. KAZHDAN & A. WHARTON EPSTEIN, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Berkeley–Los Angeles 1985, 130–133 and 220–230.

example of an intellectual serving different masters without ever feeling obliged to enter into their service. He writes what they like to hear because it serves his own interests, not because he feels any obligations towards them. Geometres writes poems for Nikephoros Phokas; but when the emperor is dead and no longer of any use, he writes poems for John Tzimiskes and Basil the Nothos – the very two persons responsible for the death of Geometres' beloved emperor. And when Basil the Nothos is ousted from power in 985 and Geometres is dismissed from active service in the military, he repeatedly begs Basil II to be given back his former position. Not a word about his former masters. Recognizing that Basil II is now in control, Geometres addresses his pleas to the very person who can make a difference if he so wishes. Is this sheer hypocrisy? No, from the viewpoint of tenth-century Byzantium it is not. One serves the interests of the (always temporary) master as long as necessary, and then one changes sides and serves the interests of the new -but equally temporary- master. There is no place here for permanent patronage, for whoever may seem to gain the upper hand, may very quickly lose it.

Then there is the factor of growing self-assertiveness on the part of Byzantine authors. In the second volume, I shall discuss this phenomenon in more detail. Among many other things, I shall try to explain why the term “individualism”, which many scholars use to describe this phenomenon, is not entirely correct. I have to admit that the term “self-assertiveness” is ugly, but it at least aptly describes what is going on. Starting from the mid-ninth century, Byzantine poets claim for themselves a gradually more prominent role in the literary universe of their own works. They begin to assert themselves. They begin to talk about themselves. Of course, the lyrical voice of the “I” reflecting on his “inner self” is as much a figment of the poets' imagination as all the other characters that come to life in their literary creations. And yet, it cannot be denied that the first-person narrator often appears to be identical to the poet – at least, that is how we moderns are usually inclined to interpret the word “I”. Although the notorious “intentional fallacy”(that is, the error of confusing the author with the first-person narrator) is always a clear and present danger to be reckoned with, there are many poems in which poets seem to be talking about themselves. In the poetry of Pisides and Sophronios the “I” who is speaking is almost anonymous: a rather faint voice telling us that he is the one who wrote the text we are reading, but not a figure of flesh and blood. In the *Psogos* and the *Apology* of Constantine the Sicilian, however, we hear quite a different voice: the *ipse dixit* of someone stating his personal beliefs and desperately trying to defend his ambiguous views on the issue of Byzantine classicism. In the years after c. 850, Byzantine poets increasingly intrude into the literary space they create in their poems, and their voices saying “I” become more and more clamorous. In the late tenth century, this gradual development eventually leads to the full-blown type of author manifestly

present in his own literary works – a tendency exemplified by the lyrical effusions of Symeon the New Theologian and the highly egotistical poems of John Geometres. See, for instance, Cr. 333, 10: “Tell me, John, who made you an expert on matters divine and profane already at the age of eighteen? The Holy Virgin. But not only that; she also gifted me with magnificent courage. Let Momos (Envy) be shattered to pieces”. Here we have young Geometres bragging about his superb talents. He is only eighteen, but he is already versed in theology and profane wisdom. He is also a courageous soldier. That is why he is the envy of all and sundry, but he really could not care less. Is this the recklessness of youth? Perhaps, but even in his more mature poems Geometres certainly shows no lack of headstrong confidence in his own talents: he is a great poet, a profound thinker and a military genius to boot⁵⁰. The tendency of Byzantine authors to assert themselves in their literary works becomes very clear in Psellos, Mauropous and Christopher Mitylenaios, who do not seem to grow weary of flaunting their superior talents and rumbustiously manifesting themselves in the various poems that have come down to us. The same can be said, to varying degrees, of such different poets as Kallikles, Theophylaktos, Prodromos and Balsamon, all of whom display a remarkably strong sense of self-esteem.

I would say that the growing dependency on influential patrons and the tendency to increasingly assert oneself (which is perhaps simply the reverse side of servitude, of needing a patron in order to procure a place for oneself) explain to a large degree why Comnenian poets repeatedly ask for favours, whereas poets before the year 1000 do not. This does not mean that poets before the year 1000 did not desire to receive something for their trouble. But there was not yet a highly developed system of patronage in which professional poets had to compete and to struggle to ingratiate themselves and curry their patron’s favour. The game was basically the same, but the rules were different. Even back then, in the seventh through the tenth centuries, poets did write on commission and poets did try to flatter the person for whom they were writing. Needless to say, these poets certainly hoped to benefit from their skilfully wrought panegyrics and other occasional poems. And yet, before the year 1000, Byzantine poets are rarely caught red-handed in the act of soliciting. If requests are made at all, they are made very discreetly. See, for instance, the panegyric *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, vv. 72–75: “O thee, provisioner of noble favours, favours that do not relate to transient matters but lead to the everlasting substance, accept this small (contribution) and teach me (how to deliver) greater (contributions)”. The poem was written in late 610 or early 611 by George of Pisidia, when he had not yet been enlisted into the service of

⁵⁰ See LAUXTERMANN 1998d: 360, 364–365 and 369–370.

Herakleios, the emperor whom he would faithfully serve throughout his remaining career⁵¹. In the verses quoted above, Pisides obviously asks to become the favourite court poet of Herakleios: he presents his “small” panegyric and humbly asks the emperor if he cannot be allowed the honour of writing “greater” panegyrics (δέχου τὰ μικρὰ καὶ δίδασσε κρείττονα). However, this straightforward request is introduced by a few complimentary words about Herakleios and his generosity, suggesting that the favours he distributes to his followers are not at all of a material, but of a spiritual kind. This is pure hypocrisy, of course. But it clearly shows that the barter economy of give and take -poems for money or jobs- had not yet become so normal that poets dared to ask shamelessly for material favours. Financial rewards are the sort of thing one does not discuss. In his later poetry Pisides never again overtly asked for any favours, but of course, by then he had become the poet laureate and no longer needed to beg for something he was already receiving.

It can hardly be a coincidence that almost all poets between c. 600 and 1000 belong to the upper echelons of Byzantine society. Most of them are either in the service of the emperor or the patriarch; a few poets (especially between c. 850 and 900) are teachers and a few others (especially between c. 800 and 850) are monks. Taking into account the great number of bishops, high civil servants and generals among the poets treated in this book, there can be but little doubt that poetry was very much the pastime of the Byzantine elite in those days. What is more, the language and style of these poems is often so obscure and recondite that it seems very unlikely that many people, other than the powerful mandarins at the top, could have understood what was being said. Did the members of the Byzantine elite (between c. 600 and 1000) write their poems when they were off duty, or did they write their poems during working hours? There is not much solid evidence to prove or to refute either option, but a few texts clearly indicate that some form of official patronage did exist even before the year 1000. Whether this patronage accounts for the high social position of some of the poets, is a quandary difficult to solve as there is so little material to work with. Did poets write poems in order to obtain a lucrative post, or did people at the top of the Byzantine bureaucracy feel obliged to flatter their employers? In other words, were poems meant to bring about a change in the social position of Byzantine poets, or did they simply serve the purpose of reinforcing the already existing situation? These are difficult questions to which there is no answer; it may suffice just to have articulated them.

In the *Ekphrasis of the Church of the Holy Apostles*, Constantine the Rhodian writes: “O illustrious, purple-born Constantine, how can you order me to

⁵¹ PERTUSI 1959: 18–19 dates the poem to 619–620. But see STERNBACH 1891: 35 and F. GONNELLI, in: *La poesia bizantina*, ed. U. CRISCUOLO & R. MAISANO. Naples 1995, 116.

describe in words the marvellous beauty of the church of the Holy Apostles? How should I express in the iambic metre of harmonious songs this ineffable construction, the sight of which alone suffices to dumbfound me, so that I dare not speak and write about it?" (vv. 387–393). The poet expressly tells us that Emperor Constantine VII *ordered* him (πῶς οὖν κελεύεις) to write an ekphrasis. As the passage I have just quoted was part of the speech that Constantine the Rhodian delivered at the Byzantine court when he presented the text of his *Ekphrasis* to the young emperor (between 913 and 919)⁵², there is no need to question its veracity. However, as Constantine VII was certainly too young to have commissioned the poem himself, it is reasonable to assume that it was in fact by orders of the regency headed by Empress Zoe that Constantine the Rhodian undertook the difficult task of writing an ekphrasis of the church of the Holy Apostles. It is worth noticing that the prologue to the *Ekphrasis* (vv. 1–18) presents things somewhat differently. There the poet wants us to believe that he presented the *Ekphrasis* to the emperor merely as a gift (δῶρον) and that he had composed the text of his own free will, without any formal request from the emperor or his entourage (he calls himself an ὑπουργὸς ἀπόκλητος). Words like δῶρον or χάρις can be found in many Byzantine poems. The poet presents his poem as a *gift* to his patron, whom he asks to kindly *accept* his offer (δέχου or the like: see, for instance, Pisides' words quoted above: δέχου τὰ μικρά). There can be but little doubt that poets desire something in return for their generous gifts and that these requests to *accept a gift* involve more than simply showing gratitude for services rendered. In the prologue to the *Ekphrasis*, Constantine the Rhodian ends by saying that Constantine VII "is an emperor completely sympathetic to, and stepping into the breach for, those who labour hard". It does not require much imagination to understand what the emperor's "sympathy" stands for in this particular case: financial support for the poet who has served him so admirably. In an encomium on Basil the Nothos, written not long after 976⁵³, John Geometres also uses the "gift" metaphor: "now that the father [Basil the Nothos] hastened to help his sons [Basil II and Constantine VIII] and lovingly incited young musicians to sing, now, too, the farmer offers the first fruits of his labours to God and applauds loudly; likewise, now please accept and receive favourably (δέχου καὶ προσδέχου) these small first fruits of words (μικρὰς ἀπαρχὰς λόγων) that I offer to you" (Cr. 308, 3–8). In the late 970s, when he delivered this encomium, Geometres was anything but a young, inexperienced poet who needed the caring tutelage of a patron in order to start writing. In fact, by then he was in his early forties and he had already been writing court poetry for more than

⁵² See SPECK 1991: 249–268.

⁵³ See LAUXTERMANN 1998d: 373–375 and 377–378.

twenty years. There is no need, therefore, to interpret verse Cr. 308, 4 too literally: καὶ μουσικοὺς ἔθαλψεν εἰς ᾧδὰς νέους. The opening verses of the encomium are intended to create the impression of fatherly love. Just as Basil the Nothos eagerly assisted his “sons” (in fact, his great-nephews), so does he “foster” his cherished young poets. The verb ἔθαλψε is deliberately ambiguous. Basil not only “warms up” his young poets and “spurs” them to write poems, but he also “cherishes” them. To put it more mundanely, Basil commissions Geometres and other “young” poets to write poems in his honour and shows them his “loving care” by rewarding them for their encomia. The word ἀπαρχαί, “first fruits”, may indicate that this was the first encomium Geometres wrote on behalf of Basil the Nothos and that he implicitly promises to write more “fruits of words” if Basil is pleased with this particular product of his pen. If so, it would explain why Geometres uses the metaphor of fatherly care for young poets. He is no longer that “young”, but he wants to serve a “new” master (νέος can have both meanings). He is a poet in need of loving care from his new patron – that is, loving care in the form of a lucrative position in the army.

The most explicit references to the prevailing system of patronage can be found in Byzantine letters. In letter 32, Ignatios the Deacon writes to Constantine Asekretis that he must have been joking when he requested him to correct once again “the lame and halting rubbish of those iambs” – iambs written by an unnamed poet, which celebrated the restoration of the cult of the icons in 843, and exalted both empresses Irene and Theodora⁵⁴. Ignatios really cannot understand why his first correction was not good enough to be presented to “those who requested it” (τοῖς αἰτήσασιν). Well, says Ignatios, probably because “you and the one who bids you” (σύ τε καὶ ὁ καλῶν) prefer the laming iambs of the original version to the prosodically correct verses I have written. Here we clearly see the mechanisms of patronage. Constantine Asekretis is acting as the middleman. He is asked by unnamed persons in the higher bureaucracy (τοῖς αἰτήσασιν and ὁ καλῶν) to take care that empresses Irene and Theodora are praised in verses that do not fall short of the expectations of people at the court – prosodically correct iambs celebrating the cult of the icons. He hands this project over to Ignatios the Deacon, a writer of high repute, but with a fairly low social status at the time (being a former iconoclast, who had to make amends for his lapse into heresy). Ignatios does what he is told to do and returns the corrected version to Constantine, who in his turn shows Ignatios’ work to his employers. But they are not pleased with the result and send the papers back, ordering Ignatios to go over the text once again. In his letter Ignatios unfortunately does not make clear what he could expect to

⁵⁴ See MANGO 1997: 92–93 and 186–187.

gain from this whole rigmarole of drafting and redrafting corrected versions of someone else's poem. He works on commission from people high in the hierarchy -that much is clear- but what is his fee? The Anonymous Professor (c. 920–940), on the contrary, leaves no doubt as to the financial aspect of patronage. In a letter to Theodore Mystikos, he writes that his students need an incentive (τὸ παραπειθόν τι) to write encomiastic iambs in honour of Theodore and to post them on every street corner of Constantinople⁵⁵. Seeing that this impoverished schoolmaster time and again begs for money in his letters, there can be but little doubt that the “incentive” he requests (officially on behalf of his students, but in fact for himself) must have been of a financial nature.

So far I have only discussed panegyrics and other encomiastic occasional poems, where the relationship between poet and patron is fairly clear. Even when court poets, such as Pisides, do not explicitly clarify what they expect to gain from their literary “gifts” to their patrons, it is reasonable to assume that they desire some form of reward. There is clearly something in it for them. But what about epigrams and verse inscriptions written on behalf of powerful Byzantines? How does patronage work there?

In Athous Laura Ω 126, a manuscript dating from the first half of the eleventh century, we find a collection of eight dedicatory epigrams, all devoted to a silver bowl made at the behest of Constantine Dalassenos when he was governor of Antioch, after 1024⁵⁶. The first three epigrams are anonymous, the following five are attributed to a certain eunuch. The literary quality of the verses is very low and there would be no need to pay any attention to them, were it not for the fact that they look rather like rough drafts. What is so unusual about these epigrams is that they “are so similar, and are simply shuffling around the same words and conceits” (as Maguire puts it). The eunuch, for instance, uses the same stock phrases in all his epigrams: ἔτευξε Κωνσταντῖνος Ἀντιοχείας, ἄρχων δικαίως, Δαλασσηνῶν τὸ κλέος: 5. 3–4 = 6. 2–3 and 7. 2–3 (cf. 4. 2–3 and 8. 3–4); τεργπνὸν ἔργον: 4. 1 = 6. 1, 7. 1 and 8. 2 (cf. 5. 1–2); δίψης ἄκος: 4. 1 = 8. 2; and εἰς πόσιν: 5. 2 = 7. 1. Byzantine poets can certainly be quite tedious, but they are never that repetitious. They at least try to achieve some stylistic variation in their poems. That is plainly not the case here. Why then do the eunuch and the other anonymous poet constantly repeat themselves? Like Maguire, I would say that these epigrams were composed “as trial pieces for the patron to choose from”. “In these verses what we

⁵⁵ Ed. A. MARKOPOULOS, *Anonymi Professoris Epistulae* (CFHB 37). Berlin 2000, 83. See LAUXTERMANN 1998a: 404–405 (Markopoulos, p. 10*, n. 46, is not convinced by my arguments).

⁵⁶ Ed. MERCATI 1970: II, 458–461. On the manuscript, see J. DARROUZÈS, *Épistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle*. Paris 1960, 20–27; on Constantine Dalassenos, see J.-C. CHEYNET & J.-F. VANNIER, *Études prosopographiques*. Paris 1986, 80–82.

see, in effect, is the Byzantine poet ringing all the changes, in a somewhat desperate effort to find the right formula to please his patron⁵⁷. Balsamon, no. 18, constitutes an interesting parallel. There we have three epigrams, celebrating a golden cup commissioned by Andronikos Kontostephanos. The quality of the verses is much higher, of course, but it cannot be denied that Balsamon, too, is “shuffling around the same words and conceits”. In epistle no. 7, addressed to Kontostephanos, a letter which accompanied the delivery of the epigrams, Balsamon tells him that the verses may not stand comparison with the beauty of the golden cup and may not deserve to be touched by the lips of Kontostephanos, but that they certainly will improve a great deal if Balsamon’s patron is willing to show his benevolence⁵⁸. All this is false modesty, of course. Balsamon is simply flattering his patron. He is asking for his *συμπάθεια*, his “benevolence”, which shows itself in financial or other favours to the poet. The oblique reference to Kontostephanos’ lips suggests that the verses Balsamon had written were meant to be inscribed on the golden cup from which Kontostephanos would drink his wine. If so, it follows that these three splendid epigrams, like the insipid verses in Laura Ω 126, were composed as trial pieces for the patron to choose from. For, whatever the size of the golden cup, it can hardly have borne the text of three different epigrams (of six lines each).

There are not that many Byzantine poems that survive in the form of rough drafts, with the exception of the poetic output of Dioskoros of Aphrodito written on the verso of his personal papyri⁵⁹ and some of the poems in Manuel Philes’ *Metaphrasis of the Psalms* (published after his death on the basis of the poet’s papers)⁶⁰. Apart from the verses in Laura Ω 126, there is only one instance I know of: the iconoclastic epigrams on the Chalke. As I shall discuss these propaganda texts in chapter 9 (pp. 274–278), it may suffice to point out that the epigrams we find in *PG* 99, 475b–477a, are mere “trial pieces”, which did not win official approval and were therefore not used as verse inscriptions (in contrast to the other iconoclastic epigrams in *PG* 99, 435b–437c, which were actually approved by the government committee in charge of the Chalke and the decoration of its facade). The iconoclastic epigrams that were eventually rejected by the committee in charge would normally have ended up in the waste-basket, were it not for the magnitude and societal repercussions of the debate on the cult of the icons. As iconoclasm remained the universal bogey even after 842, anything connected with the Chalke and its decoration was of

⁵⁷ See MAGUIRE 1996: 8–9.

⁵⁸ Ed. HORNA 1903: 185 (poem 18) and 214 (letter 7).

⁵⁹ See BALDWIN 1985: 100.

⁶⁰ The so-called “Zweitmetaphrasen”: see STICKLER 1992: 125–156 and M. LAUXTERMANN, *JÖB* 45 (1995) 371.

great interest to the iconophile opponents, even epigrams that never made it. The badly written verses in Laura Ω 126 survived because the manuscript was probably copied either at the behest of Constantine Dalassenos himself, one of his relatives, or one of his most intimate friends (given the fact that the date of the epigrams and the date of the manuscript practically coincide).

Rough drafts are extremely interesting because they highlight a pivotal phase in the production of epigrams, which is as important as it is difficult to pinpoint, namely the moment when the poet showed his work to the patron in order to get his approval. The majority of the epigrams that have come down to us, are final products carefully polished, and polished over again, until the poet and his patron were satisfied with the result. It is all this polishing that makes it difficult to understand the production process⁶¹. What went on between poet and patron before the epigram was inscribed on the object for which it was intended? What did the patron tell the poet when he asked him to write a nice epigram? What were the crucial details that the poet should absolutely not forget to mention? Well, above all, the name and the social status of his patron. See, for instance, the eunuch's epigrams in Laura Ω 126: the silver bowl was "made" by Constantine, who was a Dalassenos and who was the governor of Antioch. The poet also has to specify the type of object his epigram is inscribed on. That is of course why the eunuch uses the words εἰς πόσιν ("for drinking") and δΐψης ἄκος ("a remedy against thirst"). Furthermore, the poet needs to praise the work of art his patron has commissioned: the silver bowl is a τετραπλὸν ἔργον ("a delightful piece"). These three elements -patron, object and praise- are characteristic of all Byzantine dedicatory epigrams.

The majority of the dedicatory epigrams must have been written by official poets working on commission for privileged patrons, and not by these patrons themselves. Unfortunately, many art historians appear to confuse patrons and poets. Take, for instance, the tenth-century illuminated Bible of Leo in the Vatican library (Reg. gr. 1), where we find epigrams on the frames of full-size miniatures. Its patron, Leo Sakellarios, is not only thought to have personally guided the artists who were working on the miniatures, but he is even credited with the composition of the epigrams in the illuminated manuscript that bears his name. Quite something for a patron! He is both artist and poet! There is no evidence to support this ridiculous theory, and it does not accord with the little we know about the production of epigrams in Byzantium. True enough, what we know is not much, but all the pieces and shreds of evidence clearly indicate

⁶¹ HÖRANDNER 2003–04 discusses an interesting verse inscription on a niello cross at Sinai, at the bottom of which we find a text in prose: καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐν τῇ γραφῇ αὐτοῦ ("and the rest in his own drawing"). He rightly interprets this as a technical instruction to the artisan, which by mistake was engraved along with the verse inscription.

that high-placed Byzantines would normally turn to professional poets in order to ensure that the verse inscriptions on the works of art they had commissioned met the high literary standards they and their peers at court so much appreciated. Why should Leo Sakellarios have been any different? It is reasonable to assume that he not only hired artists and scribes to produce a luxurious manuscript, but also ordered one of the Byzantine literati, perhaps an employee working in his service, to write a few elegant verses. The artists, the scribes and the poet are all hired hands.

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Poets and Public

What about the reception of Byzantine poetry? What do we know about its reading public or, in the case of poetry that is declaimed, its audience? Very little, and the little information we have is clouded in darkness⁶².

In literature written before the year 1000, there are hardly any references to the way poetry was received by the public. In a letter to Naukratios, Theodore of Stoudios complains that his friend had not told him whether he thought that writing iambs against the iconoclasts is a good idea; and in another letter, to his brother Joseph, Theodore writes that he much regrets that Joseph's iambic pamphlet against the iconoclast heresy got lost in the mail⁶³. In the *Refutation of the Sacrilegious Poems*, Theodore inveighs against the iconoclastic iambs on the Chalke and proves that they are totally inappropriate⁶⁴. In poem no. 105d, the same Theodore of Stoudios praises a poet for composing beautiful iambs on some religious subject. And in his *Vita*, we read that certain disciples of Gregory Asbestos made fun of Theodore's poems because they considered them to be badly written⁶⁵. All these testimonies are hardly of any value because it is obvious that poems are praised or vituperated, not for their literary merits, but because of their contents. If you are in favour of the cult of the icons, any anti-iconoclastic poem is good (see Theodore's letters) and any iconoclastic piece of writing is bad (see the *Refutation*). If you are a good Christian, you like any form of religious writing as long as it

⁶² For an excellent introduction to the topic, see HÖRANDNER 1991: 415–432.

⁶³ FATOUROS 1992: II, 226 (no. 108, cf. I, 231*) and II, 474–475 (no. 333, cf. I, 350*–351*).

⁶⁴ *PG* 99, 435–478. For Theodore's criticism of the mesostich of these iconoclastic pattern-poems, see chapter 4, pp. 139–140.

⁶⁵ *Vita* B: *PG* 99, 312C–313B.

concorde with true orthodoxy (see poem no. 105d). And if you are a disciple of Gregory Asbestas and, therefore, support the cause of patriarchs Photios and Methodios, you cannot but loathe the Stoudites and despise anything written by that horrid Theodore of Stoudios (see the *Vita*).

After the year 1000, however, there are many texts that bear proof of a purely aesthetic, and not ideologically biased, appreciation of contemporary poetry and prose. For instance, in poem no. 27, Christopher Mitylenaios praises a certain Niketas of Synada for his splendid orations, religious treatises and epigrams. And to give another example: Kallikles celebrates the famous Theodore of Smyrna for a brilliantly written eulogy, which, in its portrayal of the characteristics of the recently deceased person, surpasses even the artistic skills of Pheidias, Lysippus and Apelles (poem no. 30). The main reason why literary skills are praised so abundantly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is that Byzantium by then had turned into a mutual admiration society, in which advancement on the social ladder by and large depended on the good will people had built up for themselves by flattering other, more important members of the intellectual elite. Flattery, then, is what we find in these encomiastic texts on other people's literary products. However, all this ostentatious flattering is certainly of great relevance inasmuch as it reveals to us the literary standards of the time, consisting primarily in a good style, impeccable metrics, familiarity with classical texts, a rich vocabulary and rhetorical pyrotechnics. When authors are criticized in Byzantine texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is almost always because they allegedly failed to live up to these high literary standards. In Chr. Mityl. 79, however, we hear another sort of criticism. In this poem Christopher Mitylenaios replies to criticism vouchered by a certain Peter the Grammarian, who had read Chr. Mityl. 77 (see Chr. Mityl. 78). Although the text of Chr. Mityl. 79 is badly damaged, it is clear that Peter was surprised that Mitylenaios could compose a beautiful monody to his sister, although he was grief-stricken by her death at a young age. If he really bewailed her untimely death, how could Mitylenaios write such a superbly constructed text? If he genuinely regretted her loss, how could he indulge in splendid rhetoric? This is hardly a veiled criticism. Peter praises Christopher Mitylenaios for his beautiful style and fine rhetoric, but takes him to task for not being sincere enough. Peter's criticism sounds almost modern. Sincerity is something we moderns value highly (although the art of artistic writing, of course, is to fake sincerity); but it is not an argument much used by the Byzantines.

The problem with these aesthetic value judgments is that style is not an entirely objective criterion by which we can measure whether a given text possessed all the literary qualities needed to please the audience. There can be little doubt that Metochites was a *bad* poet in the eyes of the Byzantines because he had no feel for the language, often erred in prosody, lacked stylistic

dexterity, and failed to achieve rhetorical grandeur. But we do not know if *good* poets, such as Christopher Mitylenaios or John Mauropous, were widely acclaimed in their time. Talent they certainly had; but did they have a large audience? There are dozens of texts in which one intellectual congratulates another for his sublime style, impeccable metrics and fine rhetoric, but these texts, I am afraid, do not help us much to understand the modes of literary communication in Byzantium. What these texts tell us is how the inner circle of intellectuals judged new literary texts, not how the much larger group of intended readers and listeners actually responded. Since Byzantine poetry was rarely copied, the circulation of texts is unfortunately not an argument on which a literary sociologist can build his case. Whereas the value judgments of contemporary critics constitute a sort of Byzantine literary review magazine, there is not a contemporary bestseller list to put things into perspective. In short: we know more or less what the Byzantine critics liked, but we do not know what the Byzantine public liked.

In the iambic preface to the *Cycle*, Agathias tells the public that if they want to read more epigrams than his anthology provides, they should go to the market-place and buy whatever they like (*AP* IV, 3. 39–41). In the sixth century there was still a flourishing urban culture, with bookshops and cultivated readers buying books. After the year 600, however, manuscripts are no longer an everyday commodity, the trade in books reaches rock-bottom, and we lose sight of the literary market. True enough, there are some references to prices in the manuscripts Arethas possessed and there are some inventories of personal libraries (such as the one of Eustathios Boilas), but one can hardly pretend that the book trade in Byzantium was a booming business. Of course, many texts were produced for oral performance and thus were not intended for consumption in the tangible form of a book. But what about all the other texts, the reading materials of the Byzantines? Given the scarcity of manuscripts containing Byzantine literary texts in prose and verse, it is highly unlikely that these texts were much read. The reason for this is probably that there were not that many readers interested in Byzantine literature – at least, not interested enough to spend large sums of money on the purchase of expensive manuscripts. Literary texts were not a marketable commodity and the book trade, as far as it existed, must have been bumping along the bottom of recession. Therefore, to speak of texts as “literary products” is rather an anachronism, because it conjures up the image of a lively industry and a large market of consumers. There is only one poem that one may perhaps call a “product”, inasmuch as it is a ready-made standard text that could be used by any Byzantine who had to give a speech. This encomium can be found in two southern-Italian manuscripts. In Vat. gr. 1257, fol. 57^v (s. X), the poem consists of 30 verses and addresses an unnamed Calabrian youth; in Vall. E 37, fol. 91^r (a. 1317), however, there are 86 verses and the poem addresses an

anonymous Sicilian⁶⁶. The poem is, even by Byzantine standards, a mediocre piece of writing. It excels in sterile verbosity with a lot of redundant adjectives and appositions. It contains hackneyed metaphors and images, such as virtues shining forth “like the sun, a radiant crown, the light at dawn, glittering diamonds”, etcetera. And it reveals stylistic clumsiness, such as, for instance, the elative *κατεξοχώτατος*, “most superbly eminent”, where the word *ἔξοχος* would have been more than enough. What is so interesting about this southern-Italian text is that the *laudandus*, the person so lavishly praised in no less than 86 verses, is not named at all. His name is left open in the second verse: *θαυμαστέ, τερπνὲ καὶ λαμπρὲ κῦρι τάδε*, “admirable, delightful and brilliant mister so-and-so”. For *κῦρι τάδε* any suitable four-syllable name can be supplemented: *Κωνσταντῖνε, Ἰωάννη, κῦρι Μάρκε, κῦρ Ῥοδόλφε, κατεπάνω*, and so forth. The name is a blank and the poem is a form to be filled in by future users. Whoever likes the poem can appropriate it for his own purposes. By good fortune we know of such an instance when the text was re-used: Vat. Pii II gr. 47 (s. XII), fol. 155^r, where we find vv. 1–5 and 29 of the laudatory poem and where the name has been supplemented as follows: [*κῦρ νοτᾶρ*] *Ἰωάννη*⁶⁷.

To return to the subject of readers and listeners, there are many poems that, either explicitly or implicitly, address an audience. In panegyrics, epithalamia and other occasional poems that are meant to be declaimed, the audience is almost always invited to participate actively in the festivities. See, for instance, the beginning of Theodosios the Grammarian’s triumphal ode celebrating the victory over the Arabs in 717–718: “Let us applaud with pious hearts our Lord Christ for the magnificent miracles we have witnessed of late! Now that we see the haughty spirit of hostile Ishmael lying on the ground, let us say right here, as is the custom to say at times of victory: “What God is great like Thou, O mighty creator of the world?”⁶⁸. In this fervently anti-Islamic *epinikion*, the orator invites the audience to join in by clapping their hands and repeating after him: “*τίς θεὸς μέγας ...*”. He even reminds them of the fact that it is customary to sing this psalm verse on the occasion of victorious celebrations. The use of the plural voice (“let us ...”, “rejoice, all ye faithful ...”, and so forth) is quite common in Byzantine declamatory poetry.

⁶⁶ Ed. MERCATI 1931: 364–365 (vv. 1–30) and 368–369 (vv. 31–86).

⁶⁷ See S.G. MERCATI, *Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 11 (1941) 65–72 (repr. MERCATI 1970: II, 17–23). When he declaimed the poem, the orator probably just pronounced the four-syllable name *Ἰωάννη*; but when he copied the text, he added the words *κῦρ νοτᾶρ* to ensure that other people who had not been present at the recital, would know who the *laudandus* was: the Honourable Mr. John the Notary.

⁶⁸ Ed. LAMBROS 1884: 129 (vv. 1–8); cf. on p. 144 the end of a synaxarion text similar to vv. 6 and 8. Read in v. 6: *εἰπόμεν αὐτοῦ* “*τίς θεὸς ...*” (instead of *εἰπόμεν αὐτ’* “*οὗ τις θεὸς ...*”, as Lambros prints); cf. *Psalms* 76 [77], 14 and *Book of Ceremonies*, 611.

It is simply a trite poetic device that helps to ensure that all those present at the recital of a panegyric or another occasional poem feel obliged to take part in the universal merriment. Let us look, for instance, at the beginning of Leo Choïrosphaktes' anacreontic celebrating one of Leo VI's marriages: "I unhooked and took my lyre, touching the right chord, when I saw the tender maiden below the sweet canopy. *All ye lads, weave garlands at once and chant a musical ode.* See the thorn of the rose, see the plectrum of desire; impart freshness to the flame and inflame the fresh desire"⁶⁹. In the first strophe of the anacreontic, the lyrical subject adroitly presents himself in the guise of a new Anacreon, who grasps his lyre as soon as he spots the lovely bride, and then intones the epithalamium that follows. The first strophe is self-referential. It describes the enactment of what is already taking place. In the intercalary distich (printed in italics), the poet addresses the choir of young men and urges them to participate in the singing. This refers once again to the actual performance of the poem, for the choir has been hired to sing the intercalary distichs, including this one (whereas the strophes are sung by a soloist). In the next strophe, the poet directly addresses the audience present at the recital of the poem and asks them to witness the wedding ceremonies. Look at the thorny rose of love, listen to the plectrum of desire! Bride and groom are all flames; temper their burning passion, yet kindle it lest it cool off! By using the imperative mood, the poet appeals for all those present to engage in the festivities, to look at what is going on before their eyes and to listen to his poem. Thus the purpose of the first two strophes and the intercalary distich is to set the stage for the performance of the epithalamium by introducing the lyrical subject (impersonated by the soloist), addressing the choir of young men and inviting the audience to participate.

The audience is also present on occasions of public mourning. The monodies that resound at funerals always address the audience. The monody on the death of Leo VI, for instance, begins as follows (in the metrical translation of Ihor Ševčenko)⁷⁰:

O ruling City, wail; remove thy queen's crown from thy forehead;
thy citizens bid to convene and to bemoan thy ruler.

O vanity triumphant.

Here the imperial city, Constantinople, is personified and figures as a symbol of loss and sad bereavement. It wails, it moans, it laments. It removes the wreath from its forehead. Emperor Leo is dead and the funeral rites are taking place. No wonder the citizens of Constantinople feel sad. As they are all

⁶⁹ Ed. CICCOLELLA 2000a: 76 (vv. 1–10).

⁷⁰ Ed. ŠEVČENKO 1969–70: 201 (text) and 204 (translation).

gathered along the streets and on the central squares, they see the emperor's body escorted to its final resting-place in the church of the Holy Apostles. On seeing this, they are reminded of the fact that life is transient, for even emperors as glorious as the late Leo do not live for ever: "O vanity triumphant!" (as the refrain of the monody says). And then they cry and lament. In this monody, just as in the epithalamium I just discussed, the use of the imperative mood is not so much an exhortation to do something, but rather a description of something that is already happening. The mourners are told to mourn. The moaning citizens of Constantinople are urged to bemoan their dead emperor. Nonetheless, although it may seem superfluous to admonish the people to do what they are already doing, the use of imperatives helps to strengthen and increase the feeling of utter grief. It tells the audience that what it is doing is only appropriate: public display of grief and sorrow is the right thing to do when the emperor has died.

In poems meant to be declaimed or sung, the audience is always present and plays an important role in the performance, either by just listening and showing signs of approval of what is being said, by loudly cheering or crying, or else by joining in, humming the melody and singing the refrains. Reading these poems, there can be hardly any doubt that they directly address an audience. The audience is there. It actively participates in what is going on. And yet, despite its vociferous presence, it remains a vague category of people. Who are they? Who are the persons present at the recital of declamatory poems? In order to answer this question, we need to know more about the context of these poems, the actual circumstances and physical surroundings. Where did Theodosios the Grammarian declaim his *epinikion* in 718? In the Hagia Sophia, during an all-night vigil? In the Hippodrome, in the presence of thousands of people? Or perhaps in the Great Palace, for a select audience of court officials? As we cannot situate the *epinikion* in its original context and locate it along the co-ordinates of time and space, it makes no sense to speculate about its intended audience. The same goes for most of the declamatory poems. As the epithalamium celebrating the marriage of Leo VI appears to address the wedding guests, it is reasonable to assume that only members of the court were present at its recital. The monody on the death of Leo VI expressly addresses the whole population of Constantinople; but seeing that monodies were declaimed at the moment of the burial⁷¹, it is obviously impossible that all citizens were gathered in the church of the Holy Apostles. The persons assembled there must have been the imperial family, various court dignitaries, as well as some representatives of the people (notably, the factions and the guilds).

⁷¹ See LAUXTERMANN 1999c: 25.

As for poetry that is not declaimed or sung, but rather is intended to be read, it is again quite difficult to form an idea of its intended public. Since literacy was not widespread and education in general was meagre, the number of readers of highbrow poetry will have been limited. It is reasonable to assume that the readers belonged to the same intellectual milieus that created this kind of refined highbrow poetry, namely the imperial officials, the patriarchal bureaucracy and the monasteries. It is also clear that Constantinople, at least after the year 800, is the place where most literature was produced and consumed, and that even poetry written by provincial intellectuals, such as bishops, judges and generals, was usually intended to be savoured by the reading public back home, in the capital. Unfortunately, however, it is impossible to get a clearer picture of the literary coterie and intellectual constituencies that made up the reading public in Byzantium. For instance, by whom exactly was a given satirical poem read? Only by the allies and direct opponents of the author? Or by the reading public at large? We do not know. In fact, most of the times we even do not know who these supposed allies and opponents of the author may have been. There is almost no group of people as difficult to get a firm hold on as that of the Byzantine readers: we have hardly any idea as to their exact numbers, their social composition, their reading habits and their literary preferences. In short, the Byzantine reader is a question mark.

There are some types of poetry that directly address the intended reader. Didactic poetry usually makes use of the second person. Ignatios the Deacon's paraenetic alphabet begins as follows: "Listen to my advice, lad, and pay attention to nothing else. Take my dear counsels to heart. Spend all and buy only wisdom"⁷². In this poem Ignatios the Deacon, who at some point in his life used to be a schoolteacher, addresses his pupils and urges them to listen to his wise counsels. Of course, only the sun shines for free: so, if they want to attend his lessons, they will have to pay his teacher's fee. Right at the beginning of his didactic poem, the *Thousand-Line Theology*, Leo Choiosphaktes gives the following advice to his readers: "If thou art skilled in the art of literary discourse, take me in thy hand and in the depth of thy knowledge; but if thou art ignorant of higher learning, leave what thou canst not understand to friends who do"⁷³. Two sorts of readers are singled out here: scholars equipped with all the literary baggage needed to interpret Leo's learned poem, and less knowledgeable readers who are in need of their friends' intellectual guidance. Since the ignorant readers are supposed to be acquainted with persons capable

⁷² Ed. MÜLLER 1891: 321 (vv. 1–4).

⁷³ Ed. VASSIS 2002: 73 (vv. 1–4). These four verses imitate a well-known book epigram to Thucydides (*AP* IX, 583; also found in Laur. LXIX 2 (s. X), fol. 512); cf. *AP* XV, 13, an epigram by Constantine the Sicilian.

of understanding Leo Choïrosphaktes' didactic poem, there can be hardly any doubt that the *Thousand-Line Theology* addresses an inner circle of Constantinopolitan literati who possess the intellectual capacities needed to grasp the meaning of this difficult and often rather obscure poem. It is a poem for the few; a poem for the select group of people who could understand the drift of Leo's theological arguments.

Gnomic poetry, too, makes use of the second person. It is a collective "you". "You have to avoid evil company". "You should not drink or eat too much". "Do not gossip at all". "Do not listen to false friends". "Try to stay away from youngsters". "Let yourself not be fooled by the deceptive world". Although Byzantine gnomologies were usually composed in monastic milieus, the manuscript evidence suggests that this kind of literature also reached out to laics living outside the monastery but aspiring to live up to the high moral standards of true Christianity. Since gnomic epigrams essentially point out to all Christians the right conduct in life, it is rather difficult to define their intended public. Primarily monks, of course; but apart from the monks, who exactly were the pious Byzantines reading and memorizing this kind of poetry? This is something we do not know.

Epigrams and verse inscriptions often prescribe how the viewer should react when he is looking at a picture. Theodore of Stoudios' epigram no. 41, for instance, begins as follows: "Behold here, in the fabric of the image, the Creator incarnated and His mother, and stand in awe upon seeing how God is a mere child and does everything for the sake of mankind's salvation". The epigram was woven into a richly embroidered textile, an altar cloth depicting the scene of the Birth of Christ, which had been donated to the chapel of the Holy Virgin in the Stoudios monastery. Theodore of Stoudios invites the viewer to look at the depiction and to marvel at the awesome sight of God's incarnation. In the next two verses he explains God's motives for donning the garment of mortal flesh: "(... in order that He, by putting Death on trial and suffering Himself, will save created man through His divine authority". This, of course, refers to Christ's redemptive death on the cross – the final stage of His earthly presence. In the last two verses we read what the female benefactor who had donated the altar cloth to the Stoudios monastery, hoped to gain by her gift: "In view of this, [she] presents her immaculate gift to the Theotokos for the redemption of herself and her husband"⁷⁴. Here the text comes full circle. The imaginary viewer is looking at an altar cloth that depicts the infant Christ and His

⁷⁴ See SPECK 1968: 190–191. The epigram misses its last verse or verses where the name of the female donor was mentioned: cf. vv. 7–8 τὸ δὴ φρονοῦσα τῇ Θεοτόκῳ φέρει πρὸς λύτρον ἀντῆς τ' ἀνδρὸς ἄχραντον δόμα. For the chapel of the Holy Virgin, see JANIN 1969: 439; see also the preceding epigram, no. 40.

mother. He is told to interpret this image as a symbol of God the Saviour, who became man on earth, put Death on trial and died in the flesh in order to save fallen mankind. Then he reads that the motive for donating the altar cloth had been this very aspect of salvation: the donor presented her immaculate gift to the immaculate one, so that she and her husband might be redeemed at the last judgment. In fact, the viewer is urged to follow the example of the female donor and to read the visual message of the image in the same symbolic manner as she did.

But who is this viewer? Who sees the altar cloth and reads its epigram? In this particular case, the answer is actually quite simple: the epigram was to be read only by the few monks and priests who had access to the sacrosanct space of the *bema*, where the altar cloth was on display. In order to understand who the readers of a given epigram might have been, the question of context is crucial. Where was the epigram to be found? Epigrams written next to splendid miniatures in luxuriously illustrated manuscripts can have been read only by the happy few; but verse inscriptions on the city walls of Constantinople address all those who can read and are willing to try to decipher the text. Between these two extremes, however, there is a whole range of epigrams and a whole range of intended readers, varying from a mere handful to dozens of people.

