Methods of self-representation in Byzantine inscriptional epigrams: some basic thoughts

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Methods of self-representation in Byzantine inscrptional epigrams: some basic thoughts*

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Abstract Byzantine epigrams are not only transmitted in manuscripts but, to a considerable extent, are also preserved as inscriptions. Many of them are metrical donors' / founders' inscriptions. They are composed according to a more or less fixed pattern: the presentation of the donor / founder plays a vital role. On the one hand, he is presented as a humble person who is grateful for the good deeds he has received from the mother of God or a saint. On the other hand, a considerable part of the text is devoted to the description of his origin, his duties etc. Examples of both literary and inscrptional epigrams will be presented.

Keywords Byzantium, epigram, inscriptions, donors, founders

Résumé Les épigrammes byzantines ne sont pas seulement transmises dans des manuscrits, mais, dans une mesure considérable, sont aussi conservées sous la forme d’inscriptions. Beaucoup d’entre elles sont des inscriptions métriques de donateurs/ fondateurs. Elles sont composées selon un schéma plus ou moins fixe : la présentation du donateur/fondateur joue un rôle essentiel. D’un côté, il est présenté comme une...

* This contribution is the almost unchanged version of a paper which was given at the symposium "L'épigramme dans tous ses états: épigraphiques, littéraires, historiques" in June 2010 at the Institut d'études avancées, Collège de Lyon. For further reading I now strongly recommend the recent article by Ivan Dprić, « The Patron’s “I” : art, selfhood, and the later Byzantine dedicatory epigram » and the collective volume « Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond » edited by Lioba Theis, Margaret Mullett, Michael Grünbart, and others.
personne humble témoignant sa reconnaissance à la mère de Dieu ou à un saint pour les bienfaits reçus. D’un autre côté, une partie considérable du texte est consacrée à la description de son origine, de ses fonctions, etc. Des exemples d’épigraphèmes à la fois littéraires et épigraphiques seront présentés.

Mots clés Byzance, épigramme, inscriptions, bienfaiteurs, fondateurs

1 The majority of Byzantine epigrams are extant in manuscripts. Their original purpose, however – to serve as inscriptions – can be deduced by examining their structure, content and context. Representative examples may serve the poems in the famous Anthologia Palatina, the verses of Manuel Philes, a very well-known poet of the late thirteenth / first half of the fourteenth century and the epigrams in the codex Marcianus Graecus 524. This codex, mainly reflecting aspects of society and cultural identity of the Komnenian period (late 11th-12th century), dates to the late thirteenth century and contains dozens of epigrams of different length which refer to icons, objects of minor arts and to architecture.

2 For a long time, the number of Byzantine epigrams preserved in situ has been considered rather small. However, as has been clearly demonstrated, thousands of verses are still preserved on frescoes, mosaics, icons, or are incised in objects of minor arts and stones. In addition, there are thousands of Byzantine lead seals with metrical inscriptions. Most consist of only one or two verses, but there are rare cases of seals with four to five verses, and managing to inscribe that much on a tiny lead seal was certainly quite a challenge.

3 How can a Byzantine epigram be defined and how does it differ from an antique or late antique one? Their most distinctive feature is metre. The great majority of Byzantine epigrams are composed in the so-called dodecasyllable, a metre which has its origin in the iambic trimetre. It is defined by the consistent number of twelve syllables, a fixed stress on the penultimate syllable and an internal verse pause (“Binnenschluss”) after the seventh or (more often) the fifth syllable.

4 Since the dodecasyllable was rarely used prior to the seventh century, the genre of the “Byzantine” epigram is normally restricted to the period between the seventh and fifteenth century.

5 A considerable number of inscriptional epigrams, including those transmitted in manuscripts, are donors’ or founders’ inscriptions, regardless of the material they are attached to. There are many painted donors’ inscriptions in churches, some of which are of considerable length. Unfortunately, none in private houses are preserved. In addition, they can be found on stone, mosaics, icons (either

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1 Beckby, Anthologia graeca, 1965.
2 Miller, Manuelis Philae carmina [...], 1855 (reprint 1967); Martini, Manuelis Philae carmina inedita, 1900.
3 Lampros, "Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς Κῶδιξ 524", p. 113-192; see Spingou, Works and Artworks, 2012; Odorico and Messis, "L’anthologie Comnène du Cod. Marc. Gr. 524", in L’épistolographie et la poésie épigrammatique, p. 191-213; Rhoby, "Zur Identifizierung".
4 Lauxtermann, Byzantine Poetry from Pisdès to Geometry, p. 33.
5 On the project Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung see Hörandner, "Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung", in L’épistolographie et la poésie épigrammatique, p. 153-160.
6 Wassiliou, Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden; Hunger, «Die metrischen Siegellegenden».
7 Marcovich, "Quatrains on Byzantine Seals", p. 171-173.
This paper’s aim is the brief discussion of some relevant examples of metrical donors’ or founders’ inscriptions still preserved in situ with regard to the question of self-representation or “self-fashioning”, to apply the famous term created by Stephen Greenblatt to describe the process of constructing one’s identity in the Renaissance according to socially acceptable standards.

The basic question considered here is: why were epigrams chosen instead of prose inscriptions for such purposes? Why did donors undertake the effort to compose or to commission verses when the same effect could have been achieved with a prose inscription?

In a few cases, for example in churches, there are different founders’ inscriptions: one or several in prose and one in verse. A good example is the inscriptions on the outer façade of the Skripou church at Orchomenos (Boeotia, Greece) dating to the ninth century. There are four inscriptions, one of them, on the outer west façade, is composed in hexameters (Appendix, No. 1). It begins with an unmistakable hint to the reader: “Neither envy nor time eternal will obscure the works of your efforts [i.e. the efforts of the donor Leon], most wonderful one, in the vast depths of oblivion”. At the very beginning of the epigram the reader is confronted with the signal words “envy” (φθόνος) and “time” (χρόνος). Since the combination of these two elements is quite common in Byzantine literature, the literate person familiar with this topos was informed at the beginning of the inscription about what was going on: neither envy nor time, signifiers of destruction, will obscure his (i.e. the founder Leon’s) efforts. Of course, one has to wonder why the hexameter was used here. This metre was certainly incomprehensible to the majority of readers, even to many literates. Two things have to be stated. First, the φθόνος - χρόνος combination at the very beginning of the inscription made it quite clear what was meant, even for those who were not able to understand every word of the inscription. Second, using the hexameter is an act of self-representation / self-fashioning, signifying wealth and high social status. These elements mattered more than attempting to make the text comprehensible to everybody. Additionally, information about the foundation process under Leon is documented in three other inscriptions attached to the church. They are composed in prose without any literary claims, and, therefore, would be easily understood by the average literate reader.

However, not all donors / founders could afford a “proper” poet. In some epigrams one can easily recognise an attempt at composing proper verses, but on analysis one soon discovers that the authors failed. For example, (Appendix, No. 2) on the lintel of the Panagia ton Chalkeon church at Thessaloniki, dating

10 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.
11 Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, no. GR98; Oikonomidès, “Pour une nouvelle lecture”.
12 Ibidem.
13 See for example Feissel, “Deux épigrammes d’Apamène”, p. 121: Ἡ Τριάς, ὁ Θεός, πόρρω διώκοι τὸν Φθόνον.
to the first half of the eleventh century, the founder’s inscription consists of two lines. In contrast to the metrical beginning, the remainder is simple prose, which can be attributed to the author’s apparent inability to put the description of the founder, his duties and his dignities into verse. Especially in late antique prose inscriptions, the insertion of metrical (dactylic) features is quite common, with the intention of lending greater dignity to the inscription.\textsuperscript{16} What might have been the reaction of the literate or semi-literate reader of the Panagia ton Chalkeon inscription? When beginning to read, the rhythm of the first two lines must have alerted him to the fact that it is composed in verse. The elegant beginning of the inscription signalled to the reader that the founder was able to afford a proper verse inscription. That the second part, which is not metrical, concerns the description of the founder’s duties and dignities compensates for the failure to keep the whole inscription metrical.\textsuperscript{17}

10 Such epigrams’ prologue is frequently composed of spiritual remarks about the depicted person or scene, or paraphrases a biblical passage, in order to create a kind of spiritual mood for the reader. The second part is then devoted to describing the donor and his duties. One such example is the epigram on the twelfth-century reliquary of Grandmont (Appendix, No. 3), which unfortunately no longer exists.\textsuperscript{18} The first part of the epigram is devoted to describing the cross as a place of refuge. Only in the last verses do we learn about the origin of the founder, Alexios Dukas. The donor’s name is purposely not mentioned until the last verse in order to heighten the reader’s interest. Before the actual name of the donor is written we are informed of his famous origins.

11 The family’s origins are especially mentioned in cases where the donor belongs to, or is related to a famous ruling house such as the Komnenoi (11\textsuperscript{th} - 12\textsuperscript{th} century) or the Palailologoi (13\textsuperscript{th} - 15\textsuperscript{th} century). Sometimes, new epithets are even created in order to demonstrate the relationship to a famous family or to the ruling house, especially in the twelfth century, e.g. Κομνηνοδουκόβλαστος (”sprout of the Komnenoi and Dukai”) or Κομνηνοδουκόπαις (“son of a Komnene and a Dukas”).\textsuperscript{19}

12 In many cases, the description of the donor or founder is paradoxical: donors present themselves as humble servants (οἰκτρὸς δοῦλος), as is the case in hundreds of metrical legends on seals, but they do not forget to mention their duties, offices and dignities. In addition, it is important to mention that the donor/founder has created something new. It is common, especially in epigrams that refer to the renovation of churches, city walls, towers and the like, to outline the existing problems. First, the current unacceptable situation is mentioned. A description of the improvements to the aforementioned unsatisfactory situation

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Agosti, “Literariness and levels of style”, p.199.}
\footnote{There are other epigrams in which one clearly recognises that the author did not manage to compose proper verses. Whereas the beginning and the end, where the verses followed a fixed pattern, are more or less proper verses, the middle, in which the author had to write freely, have to be identified as prose, because the author did not meet the epigram’s requirements at all. One such example is the founder’s inscription in a fourteenth-century church dedicated to Christ at Mborje (Albania, near Korça), which is a typically provincial product (Appendix, No. 4) (Rhoby, \textit{Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken}, no. 1). While the first verse and especially the end of the epigram fit into the metrical pattern very well, the middle part has to be regarded as prose. V. 7, however, Λύσιν γὰρ αἰτῶ πολλῶν ἀμπλακημάτων (“I am asking for forgiveness of the many sins”) is a typical verse expressing the plea for forgiveness of the sins as a reward for the donation (On this topos Rhoby, “The structure”, p.309-332).}
\footnote{Rhoby, \textit{Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst}, no. Me15.}
\footnote{On these examples cf. \textit{Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität}, s.v.}
\end{footnotes}
follows, which forms the centre of the epigram and provides the reader with its central message.\textsuperscript{20} One such example is the mosaic epigram of the eleventh or twelfth century over the exonarthex portal of the church at Mt. Athos’ Vatopedi monastery: Τὰ πρὶν ἀκαλλή καὶ ῥυέντα τῷ χρόνῳ / ψηφῖσι χρυσάς καὶ λαμπρῶς βεβαμμένας / φαθρέντα κατεκοσμήθη λίαν / … (“What was formerly without charm and ruined by time was adorned brilliantly and splendidly with golden and brightly coloured stones”).\textsuperscript{21} Similar expressions were also inscribed on city walls after they had been repaired. Thus, an epigram of the tenth century engraved on a stone which was perhaps once part of the city wall of either Laodikeia Keaumene (now Lâdik) or Ikonion (now Konya) reads: Τείχη φθαρέντα καὶ πεσόντα τῷ χρόνῳ / ἄνακτες αὖθις εὐσεβεῖς στεφή φοροι / … (“The walls which had been ruined and fallen down through time [were erected] by the pious crowned rulers …”).\textsuperscript{22}

13 Also the question of material is important. Gold, silver, diamonds, precious stones, marble, etc. are always mentioned in such epigrams, for example, in the verses preserved on a golden cup of the twelfth century now kept in Skopje (Institute for the Maintenance of the Cultural Monuments): the cup is golden / brilliant because the donor Adrianos Palteas is full of brilliance in life: Ἀδριανός μου δεσπότης ὁ Παλτέας / ὃς ἐ<μ>πλεως ὢν λαμπρότητος ἐ<ν> βίῳ / ἐκ χρυσίου κύπελλον εἰργάσατό με / ἀλλ’ ἡδέως πᾶς με κατέχων πίνε (“Adrianos Palteas, my lord, who is full of brilliance in life, created me as a cup of gold. Everybody, who holds me, may drink with joy”).\textsuperscript{23}

14 Many epigrams are inscribed on icon covers, usually made of silver-gilt. There is hardly an epigram on such a cover which neglects to mention the precious silver-gilt decoration (the signifying word is ἀργυρόχρυσος). The epigram\textsuperscript{24} preserved on the golden cover of a cross kept in Monte Cassino (Appendix, No. 5) states that the donor (Romanos) adorns it ἐυπρεπῶς τῷ χρυσίῳ (v. 2), meaning that the gold is suitable for the object (the cross) and, reading between the lines, that it is equally suitable for him (the donor). In the third and last verse we are confronted with a common understatement: Χ(ριστὸ)ς γὰρ αὐτῷ κόσμο, οὐ τὸ χρυσίον (“Christ is adornment for him, not the gold”). A common understatement is also calling his donation a δῶρον πενιχρόν (“humble gift”) although the material is very precious.\textsuperscript{25} Another such example is also to be found on a textile kept in Meteora (14\textsuperscript{th} century): Μεθόδιος σοι ταῦτα, Χ(ριστ)έ, προσφέρει / δῶρον φέριστον κἂν πόρρω τῆς ἀξίας (“Methodios is offering this to you, Christ, the best gift even if far from befitting”).\textsuperscript{26} Again, the donor is humble, and in his humility he wants to offer the depicted person, the Mother of God, the most precious of materials. On the other hand, in addition to demonstrating his humility, it also signifies that he could afford such a decoration.

15 The faith of the donor / founder also plays a vital role. One sometimes read that something was created with πίστις ζεοῦσα (“burning faith”) or something similar. Moreover, the direct address, especially to the Mother of God, is a very common

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Rhoby, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, p. 383f.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., no. M1.
\textsuperscript{22} Merkelbach-Stauber, Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten, III, p. 78 (no. 14/06/02); Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. TR37.
\textsuperscript{23} Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst, no. Me11.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., no. Me70.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., no. Me44. Cf. Lauxtermann, Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., no. Te6.
feature. Expressions such as ἐκ πόθου or πόθῳ ("with desire", "with love") occur very often and express the specific affection of the donor or founder. However, it is interesting to note that the donor sometimes also wants to have something in return for his faith. In an epigram (Appendix, No. 6), which is unfortunately not fully preserved on an encolpion (reliquary worn "on the chest") from Maastricht, the female donor Eirene Synadene clearly states that [- - -] τ᾿ ἀμοιβ[ὴν πίστεως εἴκοσ[ι]π[ά][ἰου] ("and as recompense of stout-hearted belief").

The importance of faith is also clearly expressed in epigrams in which we are informed that the patron became a monk or a nun near the end of his or her life. One such example is the verses on a twelfth-century Byzantine cross that is now in the Tesoro di San Marco (Appendix, No. 7). In this epigram, one is once more confronted with the above-mentioned paradox: whereas in verse 10 one we read that the patron is ἡ βασιλὶς Δούκαινα, λάτρις Εἰρήνη, in the following verses we read χρυσενδύτις πρίν, ἀλλὰ νῦν ῥακενδύτις, / ἐν τρυχίνοις νῦν, ἢ τὸ πρὶν ἐν βυσσίνοις, / τὰ ῥάκια στέργουσα πορφυράς πλέον / πορφυρίδ<α> κρίνουσα τὴν ἐπωμίδα {(καί)} / μελεμβαφ͂ ἔχουσα, ὡς δέδοκτό σοι ("I, the empress Dukaina, the servant Eirene, formerly clothed in gold, but now in tattered garment, in ragged (garment) now, formerly in linen, because I am loving the cowl more than porphyry and I am considering as porphyry the stole, which I am wearing black-coloured as you like it"). Eirene, who used to be dressed in gold, now wears the habit of a nun and even prefers the ragged garment (ῥάκια) to purple clothes.

There are some rare cases in which the male patron – there are only few works of art preserved donated by women like the above mentioned encolpion from Maastricht – also includes his wife (and sometimes his family) in the donation / foundation. There are some examples where even the family is depicted as is the case in some middle and late Byzantine period churches in Greece and Cyprus.

There is one interesting example where the wife of the donor was purposefully included in the epigram. An epigram (Appendix, No. 8) embroidered on an altar cloth in the thirteenth or fourteenth century and now kept in the National Historical Museum at Sofia indicates that it is a gift (δῶρον) of the famous μέγας ἑταιρειάρχης (i.e. Progonos Sguros). In order to increase his significance and his social status, later on in the epigram his wife Eudokia is also mentioned. This, however, is most likely because she is related to the renowned family of the Komnenoi, through her two grandfathers: μ(ητ)ροπαπποπατρόθεν.

The same applies to another embroidery, dated to the thirteenth century, kept in the same museum. In the epigram (Appendix, No. 9) the donor Theodoros mentions his wife, called καλή συζυγία, because she was born into the Komnenian family: Κομνηνοφυοῦς τῆς καλῆς συζυγίας ("the good Komnenian born wife"). For the same purpose the parents, either one or both of them, are sometimes mentioned. In another epigram preserved on an altar cloth (15th century) at Urbino, three verses are devoted to the origins of the donor’s, Manuel, mother: … / οὕτως ἔγωγε Μανουὴλ σὸς ὀἰκέτης / Εὐδοκίας παῖς

27 Ibid., no. Me95.
28 Ibid., no. Me90.
29 Cf. Kalopissi-Verti, Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits.
30 Ibid., no. Te1.
31 This word is only attested here, cf. Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s.v.
32 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst, no. Te2.
While there are many hints to and reflections of origin, family, rank and status in these epigrams, there is hardly anything that underlines the education or the literacy of the donor or founder. The use of distinguished vocabulary, sophisticated language (e.g. Homeric forms) and allusions to other biblical or classical texts demonstrate the education and the knowledge of the epigram’s author rather than that of the donor. This indicates that general education played a minor role in comparison to other virtues such as wealth, strength, power, origin, and so forth.

One specific tool for vividly representing the donor or founder in epigrams is the inclusion of the reader and/or beholder. There are many cases in which they are asked to become participants of the performance, as when the epigram begins with Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν (“You seek to learn”). With this prologue, which can even be found on metrical seals’ legends, the importance of the donor is very much emphasised. For example (12th century): Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, τίς ὅπερ βλέπεις / σεπτὸν δόμον τέτευχεν ἐξ αὐτῶν βάθρων; / Κωνσταντῖνος μάγαστρος ὁ Μανιάκης / … (“Do you, man, seek to learn of who created this sacred house, which you see, from its foundations? Konstantinos Magistros Maniakas”). The answer to the rhetorical question in the verses 1 and 2 is given in the third verse. This topos is not a Byzantine invention but is much older. A similar rhetorical question had already been posed in an epigram of the fifth century BCE from Halikarnassos: αὐδὴ τεχνήεσσα λίθο, λέγε τίς τοδ᾿ ἄγαλμα / στᾶσεν Ἀπόλλωνος βωμὸν ἐπαγλαί[σα]; (“Skilful voice of the stone, tell: Who erected this statue and honoured Apollo’s altar?”).

Until the late Byzantine period, the donor is usually well-represented, and even the reader is sometimes included, but the artist or author often remains obscure. There are very few examples of the artist trying to present himself: one such example is the painted epigram (14th century) in the church Soter Christos in the Macedonian town of Beroia. The painter, Καλιέργης, calls himself “best painter in the whole of Thessaly”, (ὅλης Θετταλίας ἄριστος ζωγράφος), meaning best painter of Thessalonike.

In conclusion, as could be seen, the presentation of the donor is manifold. The metrical text has several purposes: to present the object, to describe it—although ekphrastic elements are few—and to offer a platform for the donor to present himself and to bolster his social status, his power and his influence. There was certainly a strong interrelationship between the donor / founder

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33 Ibid., no. Te8; cf. also Dprić, “The Patron’s ‘I’” p.929-935.
37 Merkelbach–Stauber, Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten, I, p.47 (no. 01/12/05).
38 Cf. Rhoby, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, p.157-160. The expression “Thessaly” for Thessalonike is based on a false etymology but occurs as sign of eruditeness from the 9th century onwards, Ibidem, 159, n. 423.
and the author of the metrical text. Many of the mentioned features were most likely commissioned by the donor / founder. Others, however, were created by the epigrams’ authors, simply to please the donor / founder, in order to receive more appointments for the composition of future epigrams. As we know from many examples, Byzantine authors were often living on mandates which they received either by the imperial family or other magnates. The twelfth century knows the two Prodromoi, Theodoros and the anonymous Manganeios, as well as John Tzetzes; in the fourteenth century it was Manuel Philes who wrote thousands of verses — some of them are also found as inscriptions — ordered by his employers. The proper investigation of relevant epigrams will certainly enrich our knowledge about the interrelationship of donor / founder and poet and their contribution to Byzantine culture.

Appendix

1. Orchomenos, church of Skripou (9th century), ed. Oikonomidès, “Pour une nouvelle lecture …”, p. 484; Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. GR98:

Οὐ φθόνος οὐδὲ χρόνος περιμήκετος ἔργα καλύψει σῶν καμάτων, πανάριστε, βυθῷ πολυχανδεῖ λήθης …
Neither envy nor time eternal will obscure the works of your efforts, most wonderful one, in the vast depths of oblivion. …

2. Thessaloniki, Panagia ton Chalkeon (11th century), ed. Spieser, “Inventaires en vue d’un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance”, p. 163; Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. GR126:

Ἀφιερώθη ὁ πρὶν βεβήλος τόπος εἰς ναὸν περίβλεπτον τῆς Θ(εοτό)κου παρὰ Χριστοφό(ρου) τοῦ ἐνδοξοτάτ(ου) βασιλικοῦ (πρωτο)σπαθαρίου κ(αὶ) κατ(ε)πάνω Λαγουβαρδίας κ(αὶ) τῆς συμβίου αὐτοῦ Μαρίας κ(αὶ) τῶν τέκνων αὐτῶν Νικηφό(ρου), Ἄννης κ(αὶ) Κατακαλής· μηνὶ Σεπτεμβρίῳ, ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιβ´ ἔτ(ους), κ(αὶ) τῆς σημείας τοῦ κατανόησι τὰ ἐπετείχοντα τῶν τεκτονῶν (5).
The former unholy place was consecrated to be a renowned church of the Mother of God by Christophoros, the most glorious imperial Protospatharios und Katepano of Langobardia, and his wife Maria and their children Nikephoros, Anna and Katakale. In the month of September, 12th indiction of the year 6537 (= 1028/9).


Βραχὺν ὑπνώσας ὕπνον ἐν τριδενδρίᾳ ὁ παμβασιλεὺς καὶ θεάν(θρωπ)ος Λόγος πολλὴν ἐπεβράβευσε τῷ δένδρῳ χάριν· ἐμψύχεται γὰρ τὰς πυρόμενον νόσος ὁ προσπεφευγὼς τοῖς τριδενδρίας κλάδοις·  

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270 L’épigramme dans tous ses états : épigraphiques, littéraires, historiques
When he fell asleep quickly at the tree of three woods, 
the all-king and God-man Logos, 
his guard Alexios from the Dukai dynasty,
ANDREAS RHObY

Χ(ριστὸ)ς γὰρ αὐτῷ κόσμος, οὐ τὸ χρυσῖον.

The wood that redeemed us from the fall (caused) by wood

Romanos did adorn worthily with gold.

Christ is adornment for him, not the gold.


Π[Π]ίστις νεουργε[ῖ ταῦ]τα θερμῶς Εἰρ[ήνης]
τής Συναδ[ηνής] [- - - - - - - - - - -]
[ - - - ] τ` ἀμοιβ[ὴν πίστεως εὐκαρ[ξίαν]
... τὴν λύσιν βράβ[ευε τῶν] ἐπταισμ[ένων].

Eirene Synadenes' belief is eagerly making this new
[- - - - - - - - - - -]
[- - - ] and as recompense of stout-hearted belief
... grant forgiveness of the sins.


Καὶ τοῦτο γοῦν σοι προσφέρω πανυστάτως
ἡδὴ προσεγγίσασα ταῖς ᾿Αιδου πύλαις,
τὸ θεῖον ἀνάθημα, τὸ ζῶς ξύλον,
ἐν ᾧ τὸ πν(εῦμ)α τῷ τεκόντι παρέθου
καὶ τῶν πόνων ἔληξας, οὓς ἐκαρτέρεις·
καὶ τῶν πόνων ἔλυσας, οὓς κατεκρίθην,
καὶ καρτ<ερ>εῖν ἔπεισας ἡμᾶς ἐν πόνοις.
ταύτην δίδωμι σοὶ τελευταίαν δόσιν
θυσιάσουσα καὶ λήγουσα κάνω τῶν πόνων,
ἡ βασιλίς Δούκαινα, λάτρις Εἰρήνη,
χρυσενδύτις πρίν, ἀλλὰ νῦν ῥακενδύτις,
ἐν τρυχίνοις νῦν, ἡ τὸ πρὶν ἐν βυσσίνοις,
τὰ ῥάκια στέργουσα πορφύρας πλέον
πορφυρίδ<α> κρίνουσα τὴν ἐπωμίδα {(καί)}
καιρούς καὶ χαρμονὴν ἄληκτον ἐν σεσωσμένοις.

I bring this to you at last
as I am approaching the gates of Hades,
(this) the divine offering, the wood of life,
on which you gave the spirit to the Father
and on which you finished the pains which you had endured.
With these (pains) you solved the pains to which I had been sentenced,
and convinced us to endure the pains.
I am giving you this last donation

40 Allusion to the tree in Paradise.
dying and also me finishing the pains,  
(me) the empress Dukaina, the servant Eirene, formerly clothed in gold, but now  
in tattered garment,  
in ragged (garment) now, formerly in linen,  
because I love the cowl more than porphyry  
and I regard as porphyry the stole,  
which I am wearing black-coloured as you like it.  
You may give me in return an end among the blessed  
and never ending joy among the rescued.


Δῶρόν σοι κλεινὸς μέγαρ ἑταιρειάρχ(η)ς  
tύπον σῆς στ(αυ)ρώσεως ἀνατυπῶ σοι  
ἐκ τῆς δυναστείας τάχα τιμίας ὕλης  
σὺν Εὐδοκία τῇ ὁμοζύγῳ. Λόγε,  
οὔση Κομνηνή μηταπαπποπατρόθεν  
ινα λύσιν λάβωμεν ἀμπλακημάτων.

As a gift I, the famous Megas Hetaireirarches,  
am embroidering a picture of your crucifixion for you  
on seemingly valuable material  
with my wife Eudokia, Logos,  
who is a Komnene from her maternal and paternal grandfather  
so that we may receive forgiveness of the sins.


Ὁ σάρκα λαβὼν ἐξ ἀπειράνδρου κόρης  
τρόποις ἀφράστοις, ὦ Θ(εο)ῦ Π(α)τρ(ὸ)ς Λόγε,  
ἡν νῦν ὀρῶμεν ἄνθρωποις προκεμένην  
eἰς ἑστίασιν κἂν πᾶσι παρ᾿ ἀξίαν,  
δέξαι τὸ δῶρον ἐκ Θεοδώρου τόδε  
Κομνηνοδούκα καὶ Δουκαίνης Μ[αρίας]  
Κομνηνοφυοῦς τῆς καλῆς συζυγίας·  
ἀντιδίδου δὲ ψυχικὴν σωτηρίαν.

You who was made flesh from the virgin maid  
in an inexpressible way, o Logos of God, the Father,  
which (sc. the flesh) we now see as it is presented to mankind  
as nourishment – even it is undeserved for all –,  
accept this gift from Theodoros  
Komnenos Dukas and Maria Dukaina,  
the good Komnenian born wife!  
Give salvation in return!

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