

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 20 (2010)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 20



Βιβλιοκρισία του: ANDREAS RHOBY, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, Wien 2009

Apostolos KARPOZILOS

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.1000](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1000)

Copyright © 2014, Apostolos KARPOZILOS



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

KARPOZILOS, A. (2010). Βιβλιοκρισία του: ANDREAS RHOBY, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, Wien 2009. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 20, 311–314. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1000>

ANDREAS RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* [Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, Band 1. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Denkschriften, 374.Band / [Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung XV], Wien 2009, σελ. 436 + 115 πίνακες (ISBN 978-3-7001-6106-6).

The book under review is part of a larger project initiated by Prof. Wolfram Hörandner in the year 2004/2005 with the aim to gather and publish in critical editions (with translation and commentary) the ca. one thousand and two hundred Byzantine epigrams that have been inscribed on religious works of art – frescoes, mosaics, icons, but also on luxury objects and miniatures. The chronological limits have been placed between 600 and 1500. Verse inscriptions on seals have been excluded from the plan, but they are occasionally drawn in the discussion when necessary.

In the introductory part examined are first matters of terminology: the word epigram strictly speaking signifies an inscribed text and can either refer to a literary text or to a verse inscription on an object. Discussed are also the metrical forms used in antiquity, the change of meter from quantitative to accentual and the transition from the elegiac distich and the dactylic hexameter to twelve syllables, which became eventually the norm in Byzantine poetry. Pagan themes were in fashion until the Justinianic age, but later disappeared altogether as Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregorios Pisides become models for aspiring poets. The number of inscribed epigrams on works of art is relatively small although they are documented quite early. But this again is to be expected considering the destruction of buildings and the changes in the fortunes of people and institutions. At any rate, this area of research in the last two decades has opened new perspectives

thanks to important contributions made in both art history and philology (W. Hörandner, H. Maguire, A.-M. Talbot, I. Vassis, M.D. Lauxtermann).

Verse inscriptions are classified in three categories: i) standardized verses inscribed on various objects, ii) attributed to certain authors or literary collections and iii) specifically designed to be inscribed on an object and as such claim some originality.

In the first case, the standardized verses are transmitted anonymously and as a rule they cannot be dated with certainty. Such verse inscriptions we encounter in church interiors, inscribed for instance, on liturgical scrolls, but also on gospel miniatures or icons. They are to be found with major or minor textual changes on various objects and some of them were copied and preserved by Dionysios of Phurna. As for the second category, there is a good number of epigrams that can be attributed to certain authors, in this case Manuel Philes and Christophoros Mitylenaios. The third category comprises of dedicatory verses which show some originality since they were commissioned for a special occasion and in which the donor usually expresses his gratitude to God and the saints and prays for his salvation.

From the material gathered here we conclude that the greater number of epigrams surviving to this day refer to religious objects and only a few to profane (rings, cups, swords and the like). This does not mean that secular themes were not in vogue. There were worldly epigrams in fact inscribed on frescoes and on mosaics in the imperial palace, in the precincts of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople, also on the city walls, as Theodosios Zygomalas wrote to Martin Crusius (Nr. 214), even on private houses and government buildings, but there is nothing of this kind that survives to this day. But for that matter inscribed verses surviving on frescoes and mosaics are mainly dated from the middle Byzantine period onwards and significantly only three inscriptions on frescoes have been rescued from destruction in the imperial city (nos. 213-216). On the other hand, there still exist eight epigrams on mosaics, six preserved in Hagia Sophia (nos. M. 9-14), one in the monastery of Chora (nr. M8) and one in the Theotokos Pammakaristos (nr. M. 15). The material is arranged geographically in German alphabetical order as following:

Epigrams inscribed on Frescoes

Albania (nr. 1)

Bulgaria (nos. 2-5)

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (nos. 6-61)
 Greece (nos. 62-185)
 Italy (nos. 186-188)
 Serbia (nos. 189-190)
 Turkey (nos. 191-219)
 Cyprus (nos. 220-260)

Epigrams inscribed on Mosaics

Greece (nos. M1-4)
 Italy (nr. 5)
 Jordan (nos. M6-7)
 Turkey (nos. M8-18)

The epigrams we are dealing with are more or less known from previous studies and collections, but about twenty-one are edited for the first time here: nos. 6-8, 15, 18, 26-33, 61 from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; nos. 89, 91, 120, 146 from Greece; nos. 253, 255 from Cyprus and nr. 4 from Bulgaria. It should be mentioned, of course, that a good number had been rendered in the past with mistakes and omissions in their transcription and this fact alone justifies a new critical edition. Their tenor in the main is classic, but this again depends, as it seems, on the social status or the schooling of the patron. Yet, in some instances we have the intrusion of demotic forms into the text (*βάφτισμα, ἄνθετο, πρόσθετο, ἀγάπησεν*). There is a direct link, of course, between the text and the picture, but mistakes occasionally occur – the artist assigning the wrong verses to an icon. Be that as it may, each entry in this edition comprises the following information: Description and date of the monument where the epigram is located, writing style and orthography, the critical edition of the text, provided with an apparatus fontium, apparatus criticus, translation and commentary.

Among the sources, figure distinctly Christophoros Mitylenaios (nos. 2, 34-44, 46-47, 49-50 53-55, 57-60, 115-117, 138, 225, 255) and surprisingly two epigrams of Michael Psellos (nos. 10, 62), with some echoes from Mauropous (nos. 25,1-2. 194,1-2, 3-5), Geometres (nos. 5,17-18. 24, 16. 137,1) and Philes (nos. 113,1-2. 180,1-2. 215,1-2, 9-10). Stray items or better said stock phrases have also found their way in the verses such as *ὀλβιόδομος*

ἀναξ (M14,2) and γῆν τὴν παντοθρέπειρα (nr. 242,3, which can be traced in the verse chronicle of Manasses (Lampsidis, 2, 30). Certain inscriptions occur with variations in more than one work (cf. nos., 3, 21, 29) and when this happens the text can be established with greater certainty. In such a case, very practical proves the painter's manual of Dionysios of Phurna (nos. 6-8, 25-28, 73, 125, 179-180). The patrons cover a wide spectrum – men of the cloth, the military, the officialdom and the ruling class, all in search of forgiveness and hoping through their piety to gain eternal life. Some in their petition include the name of their spouse (nos. 70,7. 127,9. 135,6. 175,8). The names of a certain Βαρυβίλης (nr. 97,4), of the soldier Φατιμήρις (24,7) and Στρατηγούλης (nr. 186,1) stand out as rather unusual and under the *curiosa* may come also the little known saint Menandros (nr. 52).

Considering the depth and scope of this fine work, there is nothing that can be said of substance by way of criticism. But one or two points can be still raised. In the epigram nr. 111,1-4, the emperor Michael offers his crown of power to the Theotokos, because she had offered it to him in the first place, and prays accordingly for a long life free of sickness. The emperor is identified with Michael IX Palaiologos, and there is probably nothing wrong with this supposition. Yet, this verse inscription brings to mind Michael IV the Paphlagonian, whose rise to power was unlawful and therefore he had every reason to make it acceptable before God. Michael IV also spent considerable time in Thessalonike praying in the church of Saint Demetrios to be delivered from his epilepsy (Skylitzes, Thurn, 408,51-53). And finally, the reading δόξασθαι (nr. 224,11), taken to be derived from δοξάζομαι (= Du nämlich hast als einzige das Lob der Diener), could be perhaps replaced with δέξασθαι, in the sense of forgiveness and acceptance, if not δύνασθαι: *μόνη γὰρ ἔχεις τὸ δέξασθαι* or *δύνασθαι, παρθένε,/ οἰκετῶν ... παρασχεῖν [τὴν σωτηρίαν?]* (224,11-13).

APOSTOLOS KARPOZIOS,
University of Ioannina