

Book Epigrams in Honor of the Church Fathers: Some *Inedita* from the Eleventh Century

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BYZANTINE GOSPELS, psalteria, menologia, and other religious books abound with epigrams that only seldom receive separate treatment. These epigrams, conveniently called “book epigrams,” are poetic pieces introduced by the scribe as a supplement to the main text of the manuscripts. They praise the text and its author, give an account of the work of the scribe himself, or refer to the production and dedication of the manuscript.¹

In this article, we turn our attention to book epigrams from 11th-century manuscripts with patristic texts.² We shall edit, translate, and briefly comment upon some unknown epigrams that we have come across during our extended research on codices of that period.³ In a general conclusion, we shall make some observations on the relationship these epigrams establish between scribe, text, and reader.

¹ For the notion of “book epigram” see M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts I* (Vienna 2003) 197–212.

² In another article, we provide an edition of some book epigrams from New Testament manuscripts: “New Testament Book Epigrams: Some New Evidence from the Eleventh Century,” forthcoming in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*.

³ We would like to thank the Research Foundation, Flanders (FWO), for making this research possible, which resulted in the collecting of 568 epigrams from 414 manuscripts from the 11th century. This research was supervised by K. Demoen and M. De Groot, and carried out by K. Bentein, in close cooperation with F. Bernard, who is preparing a dissertation on Byzantine poetry of the 11th century.

1. *Collecting treasures of Basil the Great*

Source: *Vatic.Regin.gr.* 18, f. 2^v. This manuscript (251 folios) was written on parchment and measures 32.3 by 23.9 cm.⁴ The main text consists of various homilies and letters of Basil the Great (ff. 3–251). The colophon (f. 251) of the manuscript indicates that it was written in the 11th century (a. 1073) by the monk Theodore.⁵

Ἄλλος μὲν ἄλλα συλλέγει καὶ συνέχει·
 χρυσόν, λίθους, μάργαρον, ἔσθη ποικίλα·
 ἐγὼ δὲ τοὺς σοὺς ὡς μέγαν πλοῦτον λόγους,
 μέγιστε Βασίλειε, θαῦμα τῶν λόγων,
 5 ἔχω συνάξας ἄλλον ἄλλοθεν πόθῳ·
 κατατρυφῶ τε τῶν σοφῶν νοημάτων
 καὶ τέρπομαι μάλιστα ταῖς θεωρίαις.
 ναὶ μὴν τυποῦμαι καὶ ὀυθμίζομαι τρόπους
 τοῖς ἠθικοῖς σου τοῖς παραινέταις λόγοις,
 10 Γεώργιος σὸς ἐν μονασταῖς οἰκέτης.
 3 μέγα *cod.*

Different people collect and hold on to different things:
 gold, precious stones, pearls, luxurious clothes;
 but I, o greatest Basil, miracle of words,
 have collected your words as a great wealth,
 from several places, out of desire.
 I find delight in your wise thoughts
 and I rejoice deeply in your contemplations.
 Yes, I imitate and conform my behavior
 to your words of ethical advice,
 I, George, your servant among the monks.

This epigram, which precedes the main text of the manuscript, was apparently composed by a monk named George. Since we know that Theodore was the scribe of the manuscript,

⁴ H. Stevenson, *Codices manuscriptorum Graeci Reginae Suecorum et Pii PP. II. Bibliothecae Vaticanae descripti* (Rome 1888) 15.

⁵ Cf. M. Vogel and V. Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Leipzig 1909) 140. Schreiner indicates that Theodore could have been a member of a Bulgarian monastic community, cf. P. Schreiner, “Die Tataren und Bulgarien. Bemerkungen zu einer Notiz im Vaticanus Reginensis Gr. 18,” *Études Balkaniques* 21 (1985) 25–26.

George obviously made a different contribution to the production of this manuscript. As he makes clear in this epigram, he has taken care of its compilation (5 ἔχω συνάξας), and he has done so by extracting works from several sources (ἄλλον ἄλλοθεν). This compilation is indeed somewhat peculiar: Stig Y. Rudberg designated it as “d’un caractère peu habituel.”⁶ Apart from making his compilation work known to the reader by means of this poem, George confirms his adherence to the monastic rules laid down by Basil the Great (8–10).

The epigram uses a priamel to emphasise the spiritual value of Basil’s words and to contrast it with the material world. This procedure is quite traditional; one can read similar epigrams in Gregory of Nazianzus, e.g. *Carm.* 2.1.82 (PG 37.1428), ἄλλοι χρυσόν ... / ἄλλοι δ’ αὖ σηρῶν καλὰ νήματα ... / αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ Χριστὸς πλοῦτος μέγας. Another 11th-century book epigram, Ἔσπευσαν ἄλλοι χρυσὸν εὐρεῖν ἐν βίῳ,⁷ has almost the same structure and content.

Metrically, the epigram complies with contemporary standards: the quantity of syllables discernible by the eye as either long or short is respected, but dichrona fail the test (cf. σὺνέχει in 1).

2. *The enlightening explanations of John Chrysostom*

Source: *Paris.gr.* 712, f. 6. This manuscript (208 folios) was written on parchment and measures 37.3 by 27.8 cm. It is dated to the second half of the 11th century.⁸ The main text consists of John Chrysostom’s *In Iohannem homiliae* (ff. 1–208). The manuscript once belonged to the Resurrection monastery on Mount Galesion near Ephesus (cf. the verse on f. 1: βίβλος

⁶ S. Y. Rudberg, *Études sur la tradition manuscrite de saint Basile* (Uppsala 1953) 180.

⁷ *Vatic.gr.* 342, f. 24; edited by S. G. Mercati, *Collectanea Byzantina I* (Bari 1970) 617. The parallel poems are indicated by their initial verse, according to the usage of I. Vassis, *Initia Carminum Byzantinorum* (Berlin/New York 2005), an invaluable reference work that was obviously very useful for the compilation of our database.

⁸ S. Kotzampase, *Βυζαντινά χειρόγραφα από τα Μοναστήρια της Μικράς Ασίας* (Athens 2004) 131.

ιερά τῆς μονῆς Γαλησίου).⁹

Τὴν μυστικὴν σάλπιγγα, τὸν βροντῆς γόνον,
ὃς “ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς θεὸν λόγος” γράφων
πάσαν φαινώς φωτὶ φωτίζει φρένα,
ὁ χρυσορήμων εὐφυῶς σαφηνίσας
5 τῶν εὐσεβῶν μὲν ἐκράτυνε τὰ στίφη,
τῶν δυσσεβῶν δὲ τὰς πλοκάς ἀνατρέπει.

2 cf. Ioh. 1:1 4 χρυσορήμων *sic cod. metri causa* 6 πλοκάς *cod.*

The mystical trumpet, the son of the thunder,
who splendidly enlightens every heart with light
by writing “in the beginning the word was with God”
is skilfully explained by the man of golden speech,
who has thus strengthened the assemblies of the pious,
and refutes the fallacies of the impious.

This epigram precedes Chrysostom’s second homily on John the evangelist. The characterisation of both authors is quite stereotypical: John the evangelist is called “son of the thunder” (based on Mk 3:17) in several other epigrams such as Βροντῆς γόνον, βρόντησον ὑψίσθεν μέγα,¹⁰ Τὴν ἐκκάλυψιν τὴν Ἰωάννου δέχου,¹¹ etc. The “golden speech” is present in almost all epigrams in honor of Chrysostom, e.g. Πόνημα χρυσόρρειθρον ἔνθεον πάνυ,¹² Τοὺς μαργάρους σου τῶν λόγων, χρυσοῖς λόγοις,¹³ etc. The designation of this particular evangelist as “mystical trumpet” is less usual, but there are other epigrams

⁹ Cf. F. Halkin, “Manuscrits galésiotés,” *Scriptorium* 15 (1961) 223.

¹⁰ *Sinait.gr.* 182; *Petropolit.gr.* 208 *Granstrem*, f. 203; *Vatic.Barb.gr.* 520, f. 126^v; *Vatic.gr.* 363, f. 128. Edited by E. Follieri, “Epigrammi sugli evangelisti dai codici Barberiniani greci 352 e 520 (II),” *BBGG* 10 (1956) 154.

¹¹ *Paris.gr.* 224, f. 222^v. Edited by H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris 1929) 49.

¹² *Athous Kausokal.* 1, f. 361^v. Edited by S. Eustratiades and E. Kourilas, *Κατάλογος τῶν κωδίκων τῆς ἱεράς σκήτης Κανσοκαλυβίων καὶ τῶν καλυβίων αὐτῆς* (Paris 1930) 5.

¹³ *Athen.gr.* 2533, f. 1^v; *Paris.Coisl.* 66, f. 1^v; *Paris.Coisl.* 67 f. 1^v; *Sinait.gr.* 366, f. 2^v; *Vindobon.Suppl.gr.* 4, f. 5. Edited by A. Marava-Chatzinicolaou and C. Toufexi-Paschou, *Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece III Homilies of the Church Fathers and Menologia* (Athens 1997) 157.

comparing a saint to a σάλπιγξ, e.g. Luke in Σάλπιγξ μεγίστη τῶν λόγων Λουκάς πέλει.¹⁴

The composition of this epigram is well-balanced: the author uses only one sentence consisting of two equal parts. This feature helps to emphasise the relationship between the two Johns, central for the manuscript and its content. The style is ornamented with a striking alliteration in the third verse: φαεινῶς φωτὶ φωτίζει φρένα.

The metrical and prosodical qualities correspond to those of contemporary high-brow poetry: the quantity of the syllables is respected, except for the *dichrona* (cf. στίφη in 5).

3. *The awe-inspiring life and works of Dionysius the Areopagite*

Source: *Paris.gr.* 440, f. 185. This manuscript (185 folios) was written on parchment and measures 26.2 by 19 cm. The main text consists of Dionysius the Areopagite's *Liber de divinis nominibus* (ff. 1–72), *De caelesti hierarchia* (72^v–105^v), *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (106–152^v), *Epistulae* (153–176), and an anonymous *vita* of Dionysius (179–185). Halkin dated the manuscript to the 11th century.¹⁵

Ἐπίγραμμα εἰς τὸν βίον καὶ τὴν ἀθλησιν τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις
Διονυσίου τοῦ Ἀρεοπαγίτου

- Σὺ τοὺς σοφοὺς ἅπαντας ἐν τῷ πανσόφῳ
νικᾷς λόγων σου, Διονύσιε, κράτει.
πλὴν ἄλ<λο>ς οὐκ ὦν καὶ δοκῶν σοφός, πάτερ,
τῶν σῶν ἀγώνων ἄθλα τολμήσας γράφει.
5 φόβῳ δὲ συλλέξαντες ἡμεῖς καὶ πόθῳ
συντάττομέν σου τὸν βίον καὶ τὸν δρόμον
ἐν συντόμῳ μὲν μὴ λελοιπότες δέ τι,
ὅπως ἔχοιεν οἱ θέλοντες πολλάκις
ἐγκωμιάζειν σὴν ὑπὲρ λόγον χάριν
10 ὕλης ἀφορμὴν εὐχερῆ πρὸς τὸν λόγον.
3 ἄλλος *suppletivus*

¹⁴ *Vatic. Barb.gr.* 520, f. 76^v. Edited by Follieri, *BBGG* 10 (1956) 152.

¹⁵ F. Halkin, *Manuscrits grecs de Paris. Inventaire hagiographique* (Brussels 1968) 13.

Epigram on the life and struggles of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite

You, Dionysius, prevail over all wise men
 by the most wise force of your words.
 Others, who are not wise yet seem to be, father,
 write daringly about the prizes for your struggles.
 We, however, have made a selection with great awe and desire,
 and we give an outline of the course of your life
 in a summary, yet without leaving anything out,
 so that those who want perhaps
 to praise your grace that is beyond words,
 would have a ready starting-point with material for their words.

Most other epigrams encountered in 11th-century manuscripts of Dionysius the Areopagite have a fixed form and content: they consist of dactylic distichs or tristichs, and praise one or more of Dionysius' major works. Examples are Ἀγγελικῶν γραφίδων ἀμαρύγματα πολλὰ κικήσας¹⁶ and Οὐρανίων θιάσων ιεραρχικὰ τάγματα μέλψας.¹⁷ Our epigram diverges from this pattern on both counts: composed in dodecasyllables, it extends its praises to the Saint himself, and it highlights the work of the compiler.¹⁸

Our epigram can only be properly understood in the context of this particular manuscript, which contains a *vita* of Dionysius the Areopagite (*BHG* 555e) on folios 179–185.¹⁹ The epigram tells us that this *vita* consists of a concise selection (5 συλλέξαντες, 7 ἐν συντόμῳ). The scribe asserts that his hagiographic work is carried out with respect and awe, unlike that of other

¹⁶ *Oxon.Corp.Christ.* 141, f. 27; *Oxon.Corp.Christ.* 163, f. 6^v. A close parallel, Ἀγγελικῆς σοφίης ἀμαρύγματα ..., appearing among others in *Vatic.gr.* 1787, f. 176., has been edited by V. Lundström, "Ramenta Byzantina," *Eranos* 4 (1900/02) 134–147, at 140.

¹⁷ *Vatic.gr.* 2162, f. 8^v. Edited by Lundström, *Eranos* 4 (1900/02) 141.

¹⁸ See also a poem by Christopher Mitylenaeus on the same subject, which was in its turn used as an anonymous book epigram in *Laur.Phil.* V.26, a 14th-century manuscript: E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (Leipzig 1903) no. 86.

¹⁹ No other manuscripts are known to have this particular *vita*. Cf. A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche* III (Berlin/Leipzig 1952) 1019, and F. Halkin, *BHG*³ I 167.

biographers, who are daring enough (4 *τολμήσας*) to describe Dionysius' excellence, which of course cannot be really expressed in words (9 *ὑπὲρ λόγον*). They should know that Dionysius' wisdom exceeds that of everyone, thanks to his eloquence (1–2). This *vita*, however, does not aspire to do this: it only provides the material for those other, more daring, hagiographers or encomiasts (5–10). The poem uses the concepts of σοφία and λόγος in a cunningly paradoxical way to make this point.

The literary skills of the author of this epigram are also evident in the handling of the metre, which is impeccable.

4. *An alleged poem for John Climacus*

Source: *Oxon.Corp.Christ.* 72, f. 257^v. This manuscript (280 folios) was written on parchment and measures 24.3 by 19.5 cm. The main text consists of John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi* (ff. 13 – 256^v). Hutter dated the manuscript to the first half of the 11th century.²⁰ An almost identical text is found in the *Monac.gr.* 340 (13th c.).²¹

Ἠλλιοιωμένος ὅλως ἐκ πνεύματος ἀγίου
πέφηνας, πάτερ, παμμάκαρ Ἰωάννη.
ὄθεν ἐξύφανας ἡμῖν ἰστὸν θεογνωσίας
δι' οὗ πᾶς τις τέμνεται καρδίαν
5 καὶ πρόσω βαίνει τῆς ἥσπερ ἐκέκτητο ἀχλύος,
φωταυγούμενος σαῖς δαδουχίαις
εἰς ἔφεσιν γλυκίου παραδείσου πάμπαν,
οὐπερ πολίτης ληστής νῦν ὑπάρχει
σὺν σοί, φέριστε, καὶ χορείαις ἀγίων πάντων,
10 ὧν ταῖς προσβείαις σωθεῖημεν πάντες.

1 ὅλως *scripsimus nisi* Greg. Naz. *Or.* 44.8 (PG 36 616c): ὅλος *cod.*

4 τέμνετε *cod.* 7 πάμπαν *cod.* 9 χορείας *cod.*

You have appeared to be totally changed

²⁰ I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften* IV (Stuttgart 1993) 23.

²¹ I. Hardt, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum graecorum Bibliothecae Regiae Bavariae (348–472)* IV (Munich 1810) 362. It deviates slightly from our text in 1 (ἠλλιοιωμένος), 5 (βαίνειν), 6 (φωταυγούμενος), 7 (*om.* παραδείσου), and 8 (*om.* νῦν).

cm.²³ The main text consists of John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi* (ff. 12–212) and *Liber ad pastorem* (214^v–228). Its colophon (229^v) indicates that it was written in the 11th century (a. 1070) by a scribe named Peter²⁴ and that it was ordered by a certain Cosmas.

The epigram occurs also in two others manuscripts that contain the *Scala Paradisi*: the 12th-century *Paris.gr.* 862 (ff. 301^v–302^r)²⁵ and the 13th-century *Hierosolym.Sab.gr.* 175 (ff. 190^v–191^r).²⁶

Στίχοι

Εἶπερ κατέγνωσ ἀτρεκῶς ἀμαρτάδος
καὶ νητρεκῶς ἔφησθα φεύγειν τὸν βίον,
τὴν βίβλον, ἄζυξ, Ἰωάννου προῦμμάτων
ἀσκητικὰς βρίθουσιν οἴμας πλουσίως
5 ἔχειν ἀπαύστως μὴ παραιτήση πόθῳ.
εἰ γὰρ κελεύθους εὐσταθῶς αὐτῆς δράμοις
ἔρωτι θερμῷ, σῶφρονι προαιρέσει,
κραυγὰς, βοήσεις κερτόμων στωμυλμάτων
μακροῦς τε λήρους ἀστικῶν ἀθυρμάτων
10 δόξαν κενὴν τε πάμπαν ἐκφύγοις φόβῳ·
ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἀμείψοις τὰ φθορὰς τῶν κρειπτόνων,
ἀλλ' ἠδονῆς μὲν ἀντὶ καὶ χλιδῆς κόπους
γλυκεῖς ἐφεύροις, ἀντὶ δόξης ἧς ἔχεις
κρημνοὺς ὀρόγκους, ἀντὶ δ' εὐγλυφοῦς στέγης
15 πέτραν τραχείαν, ἀντὶ δ' εὐπαθοῦς βίου
μάζαν βραχείαν, ἀντὶ ποικίλων πέπλων
σισύραν ἔξις, ἀντὶ δ' εὐχύλου πότου
ὔδωρ διαυγές· ἄρτος οὐ μέτρου πλέον,
ῥυμνος τὸ δεῖπνον, ὄψον ἢ ψαλμῳδία,
20 αὐχμὸς δ' ὁ κόσμος, ὠχρότης ἢ φαιδρότης,

²³ E. Martini and D. Bassi, *Catalogus codicum graecorum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae* I (Milan 1906) 59.

²⁴ Vogel/Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber* 388.

²⁵ The version in this manuscript slightly deviates only from ours in 6 (αὐτοῖς) and 14 (εὐγλύφου).

²⁶ Unfortunately, this manuscript was inaccessible during the preparation of this article.

γαστήρ φυγοῦσα πλησμονὴν ἀφορδίωv.
 εὐκοσμίας τὰ δῶρα ταῦτά σοι λέγω
 ἃ ζωγραφήσας σὺ νοὶ φρικτῶς, μέροψ,
 ἀπρὶξ κατάρχου τῆς ὁδοῦ τοῦ κυρίου.

8 στομυλμάτων *cod.* 17 εὐχίλου *cod.*

Verses

If you have truly condemned sinfulness
 and if you have really declared to flee wordly life,
 monk, then don't decline to hold the book of John,
 abundantly rich with ascetic paths,
 constantly before your eyes with desire.
 If indeed you want to walk its paths steadfastly,
 with affectionate love and wise devotion,
 you shall fearfully keep away from the shouts and cries
 of mocking small-talk,
 from the great nonsense of urban jesting
 and from idle glory, altogether.
 You shall not prefer things of corruption over better things!
 Instead of pleasure and luxury
 you shall find sweet suffering; instead of the glory now yours,
 cliffs and mountains; instead of a well-carved chamber,
 a hard rock; instead of a luxurious way of life,
 a small lump of bread; instead of fancy robes,
 you shall have a goatskin; instead of succulent drinks
 transparent water. Bread, no more than necessary:
 hymns shall be your meal, your dish shall consist of singing
 psalms;
 squalor shall be your ornament, pallor your brilliance;
 your belly shall flee the filling with mere excrements.
 Those are the gifts of good conduct I declare to you,
 mortal being: sketch them, replete with awe, in your mind,
 and take the path of the Lord at once.

Rather than giving an encomium of John Climacus, this epigram elaborates on the spiritual value of the *Scala Paradisi*. The author intends to outline briefly some of its rules of “good behavior” (22). The poem is addressed to an unspecified monk who wants to live a truly religious life (1–2, 23–24).

In the advice that is given in the main body of the poem (8–21), the easy way leading to corruption (τὰ φθορᾶς) is contrasted with the harsh way leading to moral perfection (τὰ κρείττονα). The author employs an exceptional metrical struc-

ture to juxtapose examples from both life stances (12–21). Each line is split in two by a strong pause after the fifth syllable. The negative part of each comparison, formulated in the second half of each verse, is complemented by its positive counterpart in the following line. This gives the moral advice a dinning tone, apt for a lively performance. The unusual verse structure is clearly a conscious procedure: this is confirmed by the practice of the scribe, who put a clear punctuation mark at the verse pause. Apart from that, the verses are consistent with the basic rules concerning accents and hiatus and are “pure” from a prosodic point of view—which certainly is not a common practice in book epigrams—except for the long *v* in σούσαν (17).

The monastic instructions in the epigram are closely connected with the ascetic content of the *Scala Paradisi*. Furthermore, the considerable attention paid to the sin of gluttony (15–16, 17–18, 19, 21) may be inspired by Climacus’ claim that it was the most dangerous of all passions (*PG* 88.865B). But the epigram does not simply summarize the text. Apart from ἀσκητικὰς βριθουσάν οἶμας (4),²⁷ the reader can find hardly any direct references to the text. What is more, the author does not follow the order of the *Scala* in his argument.²⁸

The author uses some quite uncommon words, such as στώμυλμα (8),²⁹ ὄρογχοι (14),³⁰ εὐγλυφής (14),³¹ and ἀφόρδιον (21).³² None of these words can be found in the *Scala Paradisi*.

²⁷ τὴν βίβλον ἀσκητικὰς βριθουσάν οἶμας seems to refer to the prologue of the *Scala Paradisi* (*PG* 88.632A).

²⁸ Besides the chapters Περὶ ἀποταγῆς βίου (*gradus* I), Περὶ ἀπροσπαθείας, ἡγουν ἀλυπίας (*gr.* II), and Περὶ ξενιτείας (*gr.* III), the argument may be related to *gr.* XI Περὶ πολυλογίας καὶ σιωπῆς, XIV Περὶ τῆς παμφίλου καὶ δεσποίνης πονηρᾶς γαστροῦς, and XIX Περὶ ὕπνου καὶ προσευχῆς, καὶ τῆς ἐν συνοδίᾳ ψαλμωδίας.

²⁹ This word occurs only in Aristophanes’ *Ranae* (92, 943) and subsequent lexica and citations referring to Aristophanes.

³⁰ This word, occurring first in Nicander’s *Alexipharmaka* (42), is used rarely, and only in contexts of elevated style.

³¹ The word recurs only in *Anth.Gr.* 6.63.4 and *IG* XIV 1003.7.

³² In Nicander twice (*Ther.* 692, *Alex.* 140) and Euphorion once (*SH* 451.I.17), and included by the lexicographers.

Equally noteworthy is the use of ἄζυξ (3) for “monk,” which never occurs in the *Scala Paradisi*: Climacus prefers the usual term μοναχός (e.g. PG 88 634B). Ἄζυξ does occur, however, in some other book epigrams such as Κλίμαξ κέκλιμαι καὶ τέθημαι τὴν χάριν.³³ Undoubtedly, the author used these uncommon words with the intention of maintaining a learned poetic register.

6. *Desire and exertion: John Climacus again*

Source: *Sinait.gr.* 422, f. 274. This manuscript (274 folios) was written on parchment and measures 21.2 by 16.5 cm.³⁴ The main text consists of John Climacus’ *Scala Paradisi* (ff. 1–274). Its colophon indicates that it was written at the end of the 11th century (a. 1099/1100) by the priest-monk Luke.³⁵ According to the Harlfinger catalogue, the manuscript is probably of Constantinopolitan origin.

Τόνος τέτευχεν ἀμβλύν, ὦ φίλος, πόθον,
 ἔρως δέδειχε τοῦ ποθουμένου κόπον·
 κόπω μίμησαι κὰν πόθῳ πλείστῳ φίλει
 καὶ πείραν πύθη ἀρρήτου θεωρίας
 5 αἰροῦσαν, ἐκτίλλουσαν σῆς ψυχῆς ἄλγη,
 τήκουσαν, καθαίρουσαν ἅπαντα ῥύπον,
 ἄγουσαν καὶ φέρουσαν πρὸς θεοπτίαν,
 εἰς ὑποποιῶν ἀναβάσεων βάθη
 τῆς ἀρχιφώτου μακαρίας τριάδος.

5 ἐκτείλουσαν *cod.*

Exertion has alleviated my desire, dear friend;
 love for what is desired has revealed the toiling(?).³⁶

³³ *Paris.Coisl.* 262, f. 150^v. Edited by J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Princeton 1954) 172.

³⁴ D. Harlfinger, D. R. Reinsch, and J. A. M. Sonderkamp, *Specimina Sinaitica: die datierten griechischen Handschriften des Katharinen-Klosters auf dem Berge Sinai* (Berlin 1983) 39.

³⁵ Cf. Vogel/Gardthausen, *Die griechischen Schreiber* 268.

³⁶ As the anonymous reviewer—for whose helpful comments we are grateful—rightly remarked, this line is hard to interpret, and its translation is uncertain. The verb δείκνυμι, in particular, seems to have an uncommon meaning here.

Imitate by toiling, love with the utmost desire,
 and hear about the experience of unutterable contemplation;
 it takes away and removes the sorrow of your soul,
 it dissolves and purifies all filth,
 it carries and brings you towards the vision of the divine,
 towards the depths of exalting contemplations
 of the blessed Triad, the source of light.

The first two verses, somewhat clumsily formulated, elude a straightforward interpretation, but it seems clear that the reciprocal relation between the concepts “desire” (πόθος/ἔρωος) and “toil” (κόπος/τόνος) is elaborated upon.³⁷ The desire for the divine enables the toil (2), which in its turn fulfils the desire (1).

Subsequently the poem invites the reader not only to put these concepts into practice (3) but also to read the work of Climacus, which has three main benefits: it takes away agony, it purifies, and it provides a vision of the divine.

The verses of this epigram may be called “unprosodic dodecasyllables”: while the accentual pattern is accurately maintained, the quantitative iambic structure is wholly neglected.

7. *Epilogue: scribe, author, and reader*

We conclude with a few remarks on the relationship these epigrams establish between the scribe, the author of the text adorned by the epigrams, and the reader. Recently, scholarly attention has turned towards the relation between the production of books and the ways of reading them,³⁸ and book epigrams can shed some light on this matter.

When the scribe addresses the readers, he mostly begs them to pray for him, to forgive him, and to remember him, thus

³⁷ These concepts are of course very common in book epigrams, especially in those in which the scribe refers to his own writing labor.

³⁸ E.g. C. Holmes, “Written Culture in Byzantium and Beyond: Contexts, Contents and Interpretations,” in C. Holmes and J. Waring (eds.), *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden 2002) 2: “How should the relationship between those who dictate, those who scribe, those who read and those who listen be understood?”

displaying his humility.³⁹ However, in some of the epigrams edited in this article—such as the fifth, for John Climacus—the message to the reader goes beyond that, as the reader is given moral and ethical advice grounded in the spiritual value of the book's content. This edifying content is restated in an epigrammatic style. Furthermore, as we have seen in the third poem, for Dionysius, epigrams can urge readers to treat with respect the texts they have before their eyes.

Accordingly, the praise for the author and the text exceeds its purely laudatory nature. It is also an appeal for imitation: reading the text, or imitating the life of its author, can guide the reader on his way to spiritual perfection. At the same time, the epigrams advise the readers how to read the text: just as in past times they have led others to spiritual well-being, they still do so now.

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³⁹ H. Hunger, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz: die byzantinische Buchkultur* (Munich 1989) 95–98.