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BYZANTINE EPIGRAMS ON THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE CASE OF GEORGIOS PISIDES

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Abstract: This article is dealing with issues of the Cross alongside the epigrams related to the Crucifixion written by a distinguished Byzantine scholar of the 7th century, Georgios Pisidis, focusing our attention and scope on particular aspects of those epigrams such as the possible influences and impact from literary texts previously and later written and most noticeable motifs.

Keywords: Byzantium, Byzantine Poetry, Byzantine Epigram, Cross, Crucifixion, Jesus Christ, 7th century, Georgios Pisides

Before delving into the study of those epigrams, I would like to make a short reference to the life and works of the poet so as to better clarify his overall contribution to byzantine literature.

Life

As regards his life, unfortunately, the relevant information on the life of the poet that are in our possession is inadequate and unclear whilst all the knowledge about him comes from his own works.¹ As indicated by his name (Pisides), he was probably born in Pisidia, western Asia Minor, as we are also informed for this by his successor scholar Michael Psellos (11th century).² His birthday is unknown (it could be the year 580),³ but his death can be placed around 631-634.⁴ Therefore, his poetic activity is closely linked to the general renaissance (literature, ethics, cultural and political)⁵ from the years of the reign of Heraklios (610-

¹ Tartaglia 1998, 39; 1959, 11-12.

² Dick 1985, 48 and 100-101; Colonna 1953, 20 (vv. 24-25).

³ Παῖδας 2011, 39.

⁴ Rosenquist 2008, 42.

⁵ In literature, there are noteworthy scholars, such as poet Sofronios from Jerusalem, historian Maximos Simokattes, theologian Maximos the Confessor as well as the powerful personality of Patriarch Sergios. In the military-political area, we meet the victorious battles against the Avars in Bosphorus (626) and the Persians (Chosroes II) in the southeast borders of the Byzantine Empire, with the main event being the restoration and rise of the Holy Cross in 629, which had been abducted by the Persians in 615 from Jerusalem.

640),⁶ the accomplishments of whom will be glorified in (iambic trimeter) verses,⁷ as will be shown next.

At some point he settles in Constantinople where he occupies a variety of different church ranks in the church of Hayia Sofia, among which the rank of the *deacon*, while he had also served as *skeuophylax*, that is a keeper of the Vessels, ecclesiastical *refferendarios*, *gerokomos*, that is director of old age home, and *orphanotrophos*, that is director of orphanages.⁸ Moreover, he enjoyed the friendship and protection of the proactive Patriarch Sergios (610-638).⁹ Studying the works of Pisides, one can grasp his range of education, both Christian- religious and classical. His verses were written with such skill which made writers of the 11th century wonder which of the two -Pisides or Euripides- was the greatest poet.¹⁰ In short, Georgios Pisides was on the threshold of the mid-byzantine era, constituting himself as one of the last classical poets and the main representative of the byzantine literature of that (transitive) era,¹¹ having important influence on later writers such as Theofanes the Confessor (8th-9th century), Theodosios the Deacon (10th century), Theodore Prodromos (12th century), Manuel Philes (14th century) and many more.¹²

Works

As it is already understood, the overall works of Georgios Pisides reflects the events of his era, the years of the reign of emperor Heraklios (610-640). The poetic activity of Pisides could be distinguished into two periods, the first between the years 610 and 630 and the second from 630 onwards.¹³

In the first period (610-630) there are works of secular nature, such as the (metrical) praises for emperor Heraklios drawing from his heroic deeds in the wars against Persians and Avars, works that have particular value for their historic references as well as being a characteristic feature of the byzantine praisal

⁶ Pertusi 1959, 12; Tartaglia 1998, 10.

⁷ In the years of Georgios Pisides, there was a highly evolved system of patronage on behalf of the poets, at least this is how it is met after 1000. Naturally, this does not exclude any requital that might have been expected by each patron. In the case of Georgios Pisides, of course, what needs to be noted is that when he wrote his lyrics so as to praise the deeds of emperor Heraklios, he was already famous enough so as to ask or even expect any return from his patron since he has no use for it. For more information on the relationships between poets and patrons see Lauxtermann 2003a, 34-45.

⁸ Tartaglia 1998, 39; Rosenquist 2008, 42; Παΐδας 2011, 39; Τωμαδάκης 1993, 39.

⁹ Pertusi 1959, 13; Tartaglia 1998, 39; *ΘHE*, vol. 4th, 472.

¹⁰ Tartaglia 1998, 38; Dick 1985, 40-50.

¹¹ Hunger 1978, II 590; Δετοράκης 2003, 207-208.

¹² Tartaglia 1998, 38; Pertusi 1959, 15.

¹³ Τωμαδάκης 1993, 39-40.

practice¹⁴ and that makes him the proponent and most important representative of the historic-panegyric epic, while from 630 onwards, Pisides had dedicated himself to religious poetry.¹⁵

The following works are part of the first period:¹⁶

Πρὸς Ἡράκλειον τὸν βασιλέα ἐπανελθόντα ἀπὸ Ἀφρικῆς καὶ βασιλεύσαντα καὶ κατὰ Φωκᾶ βασιλέως (610-611 or 619-620)¹⁷

The main theme is the arrival of Heraklios from Carthage to Constantinople so as to assume the ultimate rank (of state).

Εἰς Ἡράκλειον τὸν βασιλέα καὶ εἰς τοὺς Περσικοὺς πολέμους καὶ ὅτε ἐξήρχετο ἀπὸ τῆς Πόλεως ἢ Εἰς τὴν κατὰ Περσῶν ἐκστρατεῖαν Ἡρακλείου τοῦ βασιλέως (622-623)¹⁸

The main theme is the first phase of the military campaign led by Heraklios against the Persians in 622.

Εἰς Βόνον πατρίκιον καὶ τοποτηρητὴν τοῦ βασιλέως (626)¹⁹

Εἰς τὴν γενομένην ἔφοδον τῶν βαρβάρων καὶ εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν ἀστοχίαν, ἣτοι ἔκθεσις τοῦ γενομένου πολέμου εἰς τὸ τεῖχος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως μεταξὺ Ἀβάρων καὶ τῶν πολιτῶν (626)²⁰

The theme is the siege of Constantinople by the Avars and the Persians in 626, an event that the writer experienced himself and thus, the value of his work as a historic source is immeasurable.

Αὐτοσχέδιοι πρὸς τὴν γενομένην ἀνάγνωσιν τῶν κελεύσεων χάριν τῆς ἀποκαταστάσεως τῶν τιμῶν ζύλων (630)²¹

The writer refers to the historic event of the crucifixion using 116 iambic trimeter verses.

Ἡρακλειάς, ἣτοι εἰς τὴν τελείαν πτῶσιν Χοσρόου βασιλέως Περσῶν (630)²²

The theme is the final victory of Heraklios against the Persian king Chosroes. Naturally, concerning their ideological context, it is obvious that the works of that era project the byzantine emperor as the representative of a celestial power

¹⁴ Hunger 1978, II 515.

¹⁵ Παῖδας 2011, 40.

¹⁶ Pertusi 1959, 15-16; Τωμαδάκης 1993, 40; Hunger 1978, II 515; Παῖδας 2011, 40-41.

¹⁷ *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*. Tartaglia 1998, 13-14.

¹⁸ *Expeditio Persica*. Tartaglia 1998, 15-16.

¹⁹ *In Bonum patricium*. Tartaglia 1998, 16.

²⁰ *Bellum Avaricum*. Tartaglia 1998, 16-17.

²¹ *In restitutionem Crucis*. Tartaglia 1998, 20-21.

²² *Heraclias*. Tartaglia 1998, 17-20.

on earth, that is God, thus supporting the widely acknowledged ideology regarding the Byzantine Empire.

The second period comprises the following works:²³

Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν (630)²⁴

It consists of 129 iambic trimeter verses regarding the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Κατὰ τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Σελήρου (after 630)²⁵

It consists of 726 iambic trimeter verses and expresses the opposition of the writer towards the heresy of monophysitism.

Ἐξαήμερον ἢ κοσμουργία (after 630)²⁶

It consists of 1910 didactic dodecasyllabic verses and its theme is the creation of the world. It is dedicated to Patriarch Sergios. (610-638).

Εἰς τὸν μάταιον βίον (after 630)²⁷

It consists of 262 verses, also referring to Patriarch Sergios (610-638).

Εἰς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον (after 630)²⁸

Epigrams (630-631);²⁹

Βίος καὶ πολιτεία καὶ ἀθλησις τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ ἐνδόξου ὀσιομάρτυρος Ἀναστασίου τοῦ μαρτυρήσαντος ἐν Περσίδι (approximately 631-634, in prose).³⁰

Epigrams

But what is exactly the byzantine epigram? The byzantine epigram,³¹ following the archaic and Hellenistic epigram with a number of differences and innovations in its form and its thematic, was adopted by the Byzantine scholars, making it the main body of lyrical poetry during the byzantine years.³² However, the influence of Christianity had been significant, since byzantine scholars have used this literary genre to project the fundamental principles of the new religious faith

²³ *ΘΗΕ*, vol. 4th, 472-473.

²⁴ *In Christi Resurrectionem*. *PG* 92 1373-1384; Tartaglia 1998, 21-22.

²⁵ *Contra Severum*. *PG* 92 1621-1676; Tartaglia 1998, 22-25.

²⁶ *Hexaameron*. Tartaglia 1998, 25-30.

²⁷ *In Alypium*. Sternbach 1893, 38-54; Tartaglia 1998, 31-32.

²⁸ *De vita humana*. Tartaglia 1998, 30-31.

²⁹ *Epigrammata*. Tartaglia 1998, 32-38.

³⁰ Pertusi 1958, 1-63.

³¹ Lauxtermann 2003a, 26-34 and 131-147.

³² Hunger 1978, II 588; Τρυπάνης 1990, 210; Παϊδας 2011, 100-103.

as well as praise holy people and events of the Holy Scriptures.³³ This happened because scholars knew the power of the epigram to the conscience of the average byzantine individual since humans can more easily remember speech in rhyme. Within this framework, the activity of Georgios Pisides as an epigram-writer³⁴ can be included, since he was a person of the transition era (from premature to mid byzantine period) who managed to leave a powerful mark onto the poetic world influencing future writers.³⁵ Pisides shows a determining turn towards tonic prosody, that is the writing of verses influenced by the tonic perception of poetical meter.³⁶ He had written in iambic trimeter with great skill, constituting him a point of reference and a model for future poets. He is also considered the one who introduced the byzantine dodecasyllabic verse,³⁷ – a purely byzantine creation – which comes as an evolution to the iambic trimeter.³⁸

Regarding the form of the byzantine dodecasyllabic verse, this is as follows:

Iamb= x – U –

x – U – | x – U – | x – U –

The poetry of Georgios Pisides allowed the archaic iambic trimeter to become byzantine without losing its prosody³⁹ and its characteristics are as follows:⁴⁰

- a) stable number of 12 syllables (byzantine dodecasyllabic verse),
- b) stable stress of the 11th syllable,
- c) caesura after the 5th (penthemimeres) or the 7th syllable (hepthemimeres),
- d) the stress of the 7th syllable is avoided before a hepthemimeres caesura.

Georgios Pisides, when writing his epigrams, enjoys the epigrammatic structure, keeping the style of traditional epigraphy, preferring in that way to express his thoughts in only a few verses⁴¹. His epigrams on the Cross and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ are also few verse-wise, as will be seen next, which are given in three codes-manuscripts.⁴²

³³ For the religious or holy epigram see: Κομίνης 1966; Παΐδας 2011, 142-144; Τωμαδάκης 1961, 3-10; Τωμαδάκης 1993, 27-33.

³⁴ Tartaglia 1998, 32-38.

³⁵ Tartaglia 1998, 38; Τωμαδάκης 1993, 41.

³⁶ Hunger 1978, II 590. For stress see: Hilberg 1900, 151-172.

³⁷ Παΐδας 2011, 41.

³⁸ Maas 1903, 278-323.

³⁹ Tartaglia 1998, 53-54.

⁴⁰ Maas 1903, 278-323; Lauxtermann 2003b, 177-189; Lauxtermann 1998, 9-33; Rosenquist 2008, 43; Παΐδας 2011, 41-42.

⁴¹ Tartaglia 1998, 32.

⁴² Tartaglia 1998, 43.

1) *Paris. suppl. gr.* 690 (12th century)

2) *Vat. gr.* 1126 (13th-14th century)

3) *Paris. gr.* 1630 (14th century)

Finally, these epigrams (along with other poems by the writer) have been published by Quercius⁴³ and Sternbach,⁴⁴ while Tartaglia⁴⁵ reproduces the publications of the previous two publishers changing the order of the epigrams.⁴⁶

Epigrams on the issue of the Cross and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

1)

*Εἰς τὸν σταυρόν.
Εἰσηῶεν ἐχθρὸς τὴν φθορὰν διὰ ζύλου,
ἐξῆξε Χριστὸς τὴν φθορὰν διὰ ζύλου.⁴⁷*

Translation

For the Cross.

The enemy has given (the world) its trespasses by means of the wood (of knowledge),
but Christ has removed the trespasses by means of the wood (of the Cross).

Remarks

This epigram, as most that will follow, refers to the Cross as it can be seen in the title itself (*Εἰς τὸν σταυρόν*). The first verse (*Εἰσηῶεν ἐχθρὸς τὴν φθορὰν διὰ ζύλου*) refers to the wood and by definition, the tree of knowledge of good and evil that existed in the Garden of Eden.⁴⁸ In the Garden of Eden, the human was unable to be worthy of God's command not to eat from the fruit of the tree of

⁴³ Quercius, Fogginius 1777.

⁴⁴ Sternbach 1891/2.

⁴⁵ Tartaglia 1998.

⁴⁶ Lauxtermann 2003b, 177.

⁴⁷ Tartaglia 1998, 476 (no. 31); Sternbach 1891/2, 57 (no. LVI); Hörandner, Grünbart 2003, 227.

⁴⁸ *Gen. 2,9: καὶ ἐξάνετειλεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς πᾶν ζῦλον ὡραῖον εἰς ὄρασιν καὶ καλὸν εἰς βρώσιν καὶ τὸ ζῦλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῶ παραδείσῳ καὶ τὸ ζῦλον τοῦ εἰδέναι γνωστὸν καλοῦ καὶ πονηροῦ.*

knowledge of good and evil.⁴⁹ Hence, God invented death as *κακίας καθάρσιον*⁵⁰ (*τὴν φθορὰν διὰ ξύλου*), that is the purifier against death. At this point, it is worth mentioning that that wood from Eden, the fruits of which human was unable to have, is the oldest type of the holy Cross.⁵¹ However, God later sends His Son to offer the wood of life to people through His Crucifixion as indicated by the second verse of the epigram (*ἐξῆξε Χριστὸς τὴν φθορὰν διὰ ξύλου*).

In that way, there is a contradiction established (*ἐξάγω / ἀντ-εισάγω, ἐχθρὸς / Χριστός*⁵²), where, on the one hand there is the wood of insubordination which seeded death and on the other hand, the wood of the cross that seeded life and imperishability. The former led the human to death but with the holy wood, they were resurrected. In Eden, the wood brought about nudity and necrosis; the wood of the cross has offered *τῆς ζωῆς τό ἔνδυμα*, that is life itself, defying death. It is about an antithesis, or better yet a recurrent theme, which is met in epigrams several times related to the Cross and the Crucifixion by other epigram-writers

⁴⁹ *Gen. 3,22-24: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς Ἰδοὺ Ἀδάμ γέγονεν ὡς εἶς ἐξ ἡμῶν τοῦ γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν, καὶ νῦν μήποτε ἐκτείνῃ χεῖρα καὶ λάβῃ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ φάγῃ καὶ ζήσεται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. καὶ ἐξάπεστειλεν αὐτὸν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς ἐργάζεσθαι τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήμφθη. καὶ ἐξέβαλεν τὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ κατώκισεν αὐτὸν ἀπέναντι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς καὶ ἔταξεν τὰ χερουβιμ καὶ τὴν φλογίνην ῥομφαίαν τὴν στρεφομένην φυλάσσειν τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς.*

⁵⁰ Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, *Λόγος ἐπικήδειος εἰς Πουλχερίαν*, PG 46 col. 876D: *Οὐδέ γάρ ἄλλο τί ἐστὶν ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων ὁ θάνατος, εἰ μὴ κακίας καθάρσιον.*

⁵¹ Σάκκου 2005, 27.

⁵² Papagiannis 2003, 227.

such as Theodore Stoudites (8th-9th century),⁵³ Nicholas Kallikles (11th-12th century),⁵⁴ Theodore Prodromos (12th century),⁵⁵ Eugenios Panormites (12th century),⁵⁶ Nicholas Idrountinos (12th-13th century),⁵⁷ Manuel Philes (13th-14th century)⁵⁸ and many others, known or anonymous.⁵⁹

It is worth mentioning that this opposition is also met in various ecclesiastical hymns/troparions,⁶⁰ which refer to the Passions of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵³ *Οὗτος πεπηγὸς ἐν τόπῳ τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ / ἤνησε κόσμῳ ζωτικὴν εὐκαρπίαν.*
(Speck 1968, 202-203 [no. LI])

⁵⁴ Tit.: *Τοῦ Καλλικλέους στίχοι εἰς τὸν καλὸν σταυρὸν τὸν κοσμηθέντα παρὰ τῆς πορφυρογεννήτου κυρᾶς Εὐδοκίας*
Ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τρυγᾷ σε τὴν ζωὴν, Λόγε, / κᾶν Εὔα τρυγᾷ τὴν φθορὰν ἀπὸ ξύλου, / καὶ προσκυνοῦσα σὼν παθῶν τὴν εἰκόνα / εἰς ἀπαθῶν αἰτῶν σε λιμένα φθάσαι, / σὺν συζύγῳ τῆ καὶ τέκνοις τηρουμένη. / Ἐξ Εὐδοκίας ταῦτα, πορφύρας κλάδου.
(Romano 1980, 105 [no. 27], 147 [Italian translation], 181 [commentaries]; Frolow 1961, 317-318 [no. 312]; Sternbach 1904, 319).

⁵⁵ Tit.: *Εἰς τὴν ἀπάτην Ἀδάμ*
Δαίμων, φθόνος, γύναιον, ἠδονῆς ξύλον / ἀπεκδύουσιν, ἐξ Ἐδέμ πέμπουσί με· / Θεός, πόθος, γύναιον, ἔντιμον ξύλον / ἐπενδύουσιν, εἰς Ἐδέμ πέμπουσί με.
(Papagiannis 1997, [Teil 2: Text und Indices] 12-13 [no. 9a]).

⁵⁶ Tit.: *Εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν*
Καὶ φυτὸν ἄλλο καθορᾶν πάρεστί μοι / καὶ δευτέρου θάνατον Ἀδάμ ἐν ξύλῳ· / ὁ πρῶτος εἰσήγαγε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, / ἀλλ' οὗτος ἀντήνεγκε τὴν σωτηρίαν. / Θεὸς γὰρ ὁ δρῶν ταῦτα πανσθενεῖ κράτει, / κᾶν ἢ ξυνορις παρθένων τῶν ἐνθάδε / ἔστη κατηφής, δυσφοροῦσα τῷ πάθει, / καὶ συστενάζει τάξις ἢ τῶν ἀγγέλων.
(Gigante 1964, 96 [no. XIII]; Sternbach 1902, 434 [no. XIII]).

⁵⁷ Tit.: *[Εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν]*
Σταυρῷ παλάμας τὰς σὰς ἀπλώσας, Λόγε, / ἤνωσας ὄντως τὰ διεσπῶτα πάλαι· / ἐν μνήματι δὲ συσχεθεῖς καὶ σινδόνη / τοὺς δεσμίους ἔλυσας, ὡς Δαυὶδ λέγει.
(Longo, Jacob 1980-1982, 199 [no. 19.18, f. 37^v]).

⁵⁸ Tit.: *Εἰς τὴν προσκύνησιν τοῦ τιμίου καὶ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ.*
Σταυροῦ παρ' ἡμῖν προσκυνούμενον ξύλον / Τὸ καταραθὲν ἐξ Ἀδάμ θραύει ξύλον· / Ὁ γὰρ κόρος παρῆλθεν ἐξ ἁσιτίας.
(Miller 1855-57, II 175 [no. CXLVI]).

⁵⁹ Second half of the 10th century:
Ξύλον τὸ λῦσαν τὴν φθορὰν τὴν ἐκ ξύλου / κοσμεῖ Ῥωμανὸς εὐπρεπῶς τῷ χρυσίῳ· / Χ(ρι-στοῦ)ς γὰρ αὐτῷ κόσμος, οὐ τὸ χρυσίον.
(Rhoby 2010, 239-241 [no. Me 70], 505 [im. 41]; Hörandner 2007, I 120 [im. 10], 121; Caravita 1869, I 396, 395 [sketch]; Πασπάτης 1877, 137; Frolow 1961, 266 [no. 205]; Willard 1976, 59 and im. 4; Koder 1985, 30 [note 47]; Lauxtermann 2003c, 42; Guillou 1996, 30-31 [no. 25]).

⁶⁰ *Διὰ βρώσεως ἐξήγαγε τοῦ παραδείσου ὁ ἐχθρὸς τὸν Ἀδάμ· διὰ σταυροῦ δὲ τὸν ληστήν ἀντεισῆγαγε Χριστὸς ἐν αὐτῷ...*

2)

*Εἰς σταυρόν ...
Τούτων ἀπάντων τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰς τέχνας
ὁ σταυρὸς ἡμαύρωσεν ἀρρήτῳ λόγῳ.⁶¹*

Translation

For the Cross...
The words and arts of all of those
the Cross has weakened with unspeakable speech.

Remarks

The particular epigram, again referring to the cross given its title (*Εἰς σταυρόν ...*), underlines the power that it has towards any art and word (*Τούτων ἀπάντων τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰς τέχνας* – verse 1), making them weak and powerless. Not to mention that this is realized through an unspeakable manner, that is purely with the act of Crucifixion!

3)

*[Φιλοσόφων] εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν.
Ὦ θαῦμα, θαῦμα, τῇ σαθρᾷ ξύλου φύσει
τὸ στερρόν ἐζέκοψε τῆς ἀπιστίας.⁶²*

Translation

[Of the philosophers] for the Crucifixion
Oh miracle, miracle, with the lame nature of the wood
it cut through the toughness of infidelity.

Remarks

This epigram, again referring to the wood of the Crucifixion (*εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν*), mentions the lame nature of the first wood (*τῇ σαθρᾷ ξύλου φύσει* – verse 1), that is the one in Eden, which caused the fall of human from it. However, Christ as the new Adam helps the human get back into heaven with His Cross. In this manner, while the first wood offered bitterness making the human nature lame, there comes the second wood to offer *γλυκεράν ζωήν*, that is cherished life, in a

⁶¹ Tartaglia 1998, 476 (no. 32); Sternbach 1891/2, 57 (no. LXXVIII); Hörandner, Grünbart 2003, 223.

⁶² Tartaglia 1998, 476 (no. 33); *PG* 92, Γεωργίου Πισίδη, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἴαμβοι τινες πανταχόθεν συνειλεγμένοι, col. 1736A; Sternbach 1891/2, 62 (no. LXXVIII^b); Hörandner, Grünbart 2003, 223.

miraculous fashion (Ὁ θαῦμα, θαῦμα – verse 1), interrupting the toughness of previous lack of faith toward God (τὸ στερρόν ἐξέκοψε τῆς ἀπιστίας – verse 2).

The title is worth mentioning on account of its problematic nature since it is a later addition (this is why the word Philosophers is in brackets)⁶³ in order for its meaning to be understood. In more detail, these two epigrams initially (numbers 2 and 3) were considered one epigram, indicating that *Τούτων ἀπάντων* (epigram no. 2, verse 1) refers to the scholars-philosophers of the time of Christ, insinuating of course the Scribes, Archpriests and the Pharisees.⁶⁴ For this reason, the word Philosophers is added in the title of the second epigram after they were divided in order to show that it is about their words and arts (the Philosophers, *Τούτων ἀπάντων* – that is of the Philosophers – *τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰς τέχνας*, epigram no. 2, verse 1).

4)

*Εἰς τὸν σταυρόν.
Σκόπησον ὄντα δεσπότην ληστῶν μέσον,
ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅμοιον ἢ λόγοις ἢ πράξεσιν.⁶⁵*

Translation

For the Cross
Observe the Christ who is among the thieves,
but who is not like them either in words or actions.

Remarks

Another epigram referring to the Cross judging from the title (*Εἰς τὸν σταυρόν*). The epigram starts with the verb *Σκόπησον*, which helps us understand that the particular one is addressed to the audience prompting them to observe Christ on the Cross between the two thieves on their crosses. It could be an epigram that accompanied an icon of the Crucifixion of Christ and in this way, the prompting words of the writer can be justified. Pisides, essentially, prompts the audience to compare the two thieves with Christ, emphasizing the superiority of the latter toward the formers.

In short, on the one hand, there is Christ, on the face of whom the sinless nature is realized through complete happiness, while on the other hand, there are two thieves, on the face of whom their sinful acts and mortal nature are reflected. At this point, one should not forget that one of the two thieves receives absolution

⁶³ Tartaglia 1998, 477 (note 36); Papagiannis 2003, 223 (note 25).

⁶⁴ *Mat.* 23 and 26 · *Luc.* 14 and 18.

⁶⁵ Tartaglia 1998, 476 (no. 34); Sternbach 1891/2, 65 (no. XCVIII).

and enters the serenity of Heaven⁶⁶, keeping the good intention of an otherwise sinful human nature and emphasizing the mercifulness of God⁶⁷. On the contrary, the other thief, in his ignorance, refuses to eat from the fruit of the life-giving wood of the Cross, thus surrendering to the sinful nature falling completely to eternal death.

5)

Ἄλλα.

*Σταυρὸς ἐγὼ κόσμοιο φύλαξ πέλω ἤματα πάντα,
σώματος ἀθανάτοιο φέρων ἰσότημον ὀπωπὴν.⁶⁸*

Translation

Different (epigram)

I, the Cross, am the eternal guard of the world,
because I bear the equivalent image of the immortal body.

Remarks

This poem also refers to the Cross but with a particularity. The Cross itself is speaking taking on a metonymic nature (*Σταυρὸς ἐγὼ* - verse 1) and addresses the audience, emphasizing its status as the eternal guard of the world (*κόσμοιο φύλαξ πέλω ἤματα πάντα* – verse 1). All of this occurs because the cross is equal to Christ whose body was onto it (*σώματος ἀθανάτοιο φέρων ἰσότημον ὀπωπὴν* – verse 2). Essentially, this particular epigram shows the two central themes, which are met in future epigram-writers:

1) The theme according to which the cross is presented as the ultimate guard and protector of the world. Illustrating this:

8th-9th century, 759-826, Theodore Stoudites

*Εἰς ναοῦ εἴσοδον· εἰς σταυρόν
Ἔχων με φρουρὸν μὴ πτοοῦ κτύπους φόβων·
καυστήρ γάρ εἰμι φρικτοειδῆς δαιμόνων.⁶⁹*

8th -9th century, 759-826, Theodore Stoudites

⁶⁶ *Ἐύλον ἐξεδίωξε τὸν Ἀδάμ, σταυρὸς ἀντεισήγαγε τὸν ληστήν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν* (Τροπ. μακαρισμῶν, Κυρ. Μυροφ.)

⁶⁷ *Σταυροῦσαι καὶ παράδεισος πάλιν ἀνοίγεται, καὶ ληστής πρὸ πάντων χαίρων εἰσέρχεται. Θνήσκεις, Ἰησοῦ μου, καὶ ἐχθρὸς ὁ πλάνος θανατοῦται, ὁ νεκρωθεὶς Ἀδάμ ζωοῦται δέ. Δόξα τῇ πολλῇ εὐσπλαχνίᾳ σου* (Τροπ. γ' ὠδῆς, ἦχος πλ. α', Τετ. πρωί).

⁶⁸ Tartaglia 1998, 478 (no. 35)· Sternbach 1891/2, 65 (no. XCIX).

⁶⁹ Speck 1968, 199-200 (no. XLVII).

- Σταυρός φιλάγων ἀσφαλέστατος φύλαξ.*⁷⁰
 11th-12th century
*Ἐν σοὶ πεποιθώς, σταυρέ, τοῦ κόσμου φύλαξ,
 πολλῶ πόθῳ τέτευχε σὸν θεῖον τύπον
 ὁ Πανθήριος εὐτελῆς σὸς οἰκέτης.*⁷¹
- 13th-14th century
*Ὅπλον γένοιο καὶ φύλαξ, ὦ στ(αυ)ρέ μου,
 Βαραγγοπούλ(ω) σεβαστῶ Γεωργίῳ.*⁷²

2) The theme according to which the Cross is personified and is addressing the audience with verses, gives a directness and vivacity to the poetic speech. This theme is also met in future epigram-writers, such as Theodore Stoudites. (8th-9th century, 759-826):

*Εἰς ναοῦ εἴσοδον· εἰς σταυρόν
 Ἔχων με φρουρόν μὴ πτοοῦ κτύπους φόβων·
 καυστήρ γάρ εἰμι φρικτοειδῆς δαιμόνων.⁷³
 Τυπῶν μέ τις, καὶ μόνον ἔμπου δακτύλῳ,
 εὐθὺς τὸν ἐχθραίνοντα δαίμονα στρέφει.⁷⁴
 Πᾶς ὁ γράφων με καὶ γράφειν Χριστὸν θέλε,
 ἐπεὶ περ αὐτὸς συμπέπλεκταί μοι πάθει·
 ἐμοῦ γὰρ ἐχθρὸς καὶ καθαιρέτης πέλει
 ὁ μὴ γράφων ἐκεῖνον, εἰ καὶ με γράφει.⁷⁵*

In the particular epigram, the Cross is speaking, referring to its representation with Christ.

*Μονόστιχον. Εἰς σταυρόν
 Βροτοὺς δαδουχῶ καὶ σκοταρχοῦντας φλέγω.*⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Speck 1968, 208-209 (no. LVIII); Hörandner 2007, 117-118, im. 6 (115); Bandini 1764-1770, I 481.

⁷¹ Epigram on the cross made from precious metal/enamel. Rhoby 2010, 238-239 (no. Me 69), 505 (im. 40); Frolow 1961, 299 (no. 276); Schlumberger 1900, II 68 (im.); Cavedoni 1847, 18, 9f (sketch); Guillou 1996, 30 (no. 24); Hörandner 1998, 309 (no. 24).

⁷² Epigram on the cross made from precious metal/enamel. Rhoby 2010, 197-198 (no. Me 31), 468 (im. XXXII); Segall 1938, 174 (no. 277); and table 52 (no. 277; Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art 1986 (L. Bouras), 195 (no. 214) and im. 214; Greek Jewellery 1999 (A. Ballian), 354 (no. 132), 355 (im.); Ὁρεῖς Βυζαντίου 2002 (Α. Δρανδάκη), 184 (no. 96) and im.; Greek Treasures 2005 (A. Ballian), 140 and im.; 2007, I 120, 119 (im. 9); Cormack, Vassilaki 2008 (A. Ballian), 415 (no. 145), 184 (no. 145 [im.]).

⁷³ Speck 1968, 199-200 (no. XLVII).

⁷⁴ Speck 1968, 207-208 (no. LVII).

⁷⁵ Speck 1968, 209-210 (no. LIX).

⁷⁶ Speck 1968, 210-211 (no. LX).

Here the Cross is presenting itself as the light which, on the one hand, enlightens the mortals and on the other, burns the lords of darkness, that is the demons.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the particular epigram is written in exameter verse,⁷⁷ in contrast with the rest which are written in byzantine dodecasyllabic verse, as well as being the only one from the epigrams on the Cross that has oxytone verse ending (*σώματος ἀθανάτοιο φέρων ἰσότιμον ὀπωπήν* – verse 2), in contrast with the more usual paroxytone verse ending. It could perhaps be about an epigram written before 623, in the early productive days of the poet.⁷⁸

6)

*Εἰς τὴν εἰκόνα σοῦ Χριστοῦ
Ἐλευθερώσας πάντας εἰδώλων πλάνης
στηλογραφεῖται Χριστὸς ἑσταυρωμένος.*⁷⁹

Translation

For the icon of Christ
After He liberated all (humans) from the illusion of the idols
Christ on the Cross is depicted.

Remarks

As it is easily understood from the title of the epigram (*Εἰς τὴν εἰκόνα σοῦ Χριστοῦ*), it is about an epigram that revolves around the icon of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It could accompany some icon of the Crucifixion since *στηλογραφεῖται Χριστὸς ἑσταυρωμένος* (verse 2). Obviously, the writer's goal is to clarify that indeed, Christ has come to earth and sacrificed Himself as the son of God for the good and the liberation of humanity from the bondage of illusion and evil (*Ἐλευθερώσας πάντας εἰδώλων πλάνης*).⁸⁰

7)

*Εἰς προπύλαια τῆς Θεοτόκου.
Σταυρὸς προλάμπων τῇ μονῇ τῆς Παρθένου
ὁδοῦς ἀγνίζει τῶν μενόντων ἐνθάδε.*⁸¹

⁷⁷ Tartaglia 1998, 478 (note 37).

⁷⁸ Lauxtermann 2003b, 180-181.

⁷⁹ Tartaglia 1998, 492 (no. 85); Sternbach 1891/2, 53 (no. XXXIV).

⁸⁰ *Πρὸς Κορινθίους α' 15:4. ...ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁματιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη, καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς,*

⁸¹ Tartaglia 1998, 492 (no. 84); Sternbach 1891/2, 52 (no. XXVII).

Translation

In the propylaea (meaning, of the temple) of the Virgin Mary
The Cross is shining in the convent of the Virgin Mary
purifying the paths of those who live here.

Remarks

As we are informed by the title of the epigram, it is about verses written for the protection of a temple, in this case the one of the Virgin Mary, and more particularly, for those in it as illustrated by the typical expression *τῶν μενόντων ἐνθάδε* met in similar epigrams (verse 2).⁸² At this point, it should be noted that similar verses have been written in many temples in Constantinople (monasteries also) of the Virgin Mary.⁸³

As an illustration, some future similar epigrams are put forward:
8th-9th century 759-826, Theodore Stoudites

*Χαίροις, φυλακτῆρ οὗ παρεδρεύεις τόπου·
σκέποις ἀσινῶς τοὺς μένοντας ἐνθάδε.*⁸⁴

Here the case is about a whole monastery (*οὗ παρεδρεύεις τόπου*) and not just a temple.

8th-9th century, 780-850, Ignatios Magistros of Grammaticon

*Ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ*⁸⁵, εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν
Ὁ νεκρὸς Ἄδης ἐξεμεῖ τεθνηκότας,
κάθαρσιν εὐρῶν σάρκα τὴν τοῦ δεσπότητος.⁸⁶

⁸² It is worth noting that similar lyrics were written for non-religious buildings (such as gates or even simple lodgings). Some examples are put forward:

1) 11th-12th century, 1050-1100:

Σταυρὸς φυλάττει τὴν πύλην τῆς εἰσόδου / καὶ τρέπει πᾶσαν πλάνην τοῦ διαβόλου.

(Lucà 1991, 335)

2) 9th century, Stephanos Kapitolites:

Tit.: *Εἰς τὴν πύλιν τῆς χαλκῆς ὑποκάτω τοῦ σταυροῦ*

*Ἄφωνον εἶδος, καὶ πνοῆς ἐξηρμένον, / Χριστὸν γράφεισθαι μὴ φέρων ὁ δεσπότης. / Ὑψη γειρᾶ,
ταῖς γραφαῖς πατουμένη, / Λέων σὺν νιῷ τῷ νέῳ Κωνσταντίνῳ. / Σταυροῦ χαράττει τὸν τρισόλβιον
τύπον, / Καύχημα πιστῶν, ἐν πύλαις ἀνακτόρων.*

(Millet 1910, 103; PG 99, Theod. Stud., *Refutatio poem. Iconoclastici*, col. 437 C)

⁸³ Tartaglia 1998, 492 (note 90); Janin 1969², 156 and so on.

⁸⁴ Speck 1968, 206-207 (no. LVI).

⁸⁵ *Εἰς τὸν ναὸν τῆς παναγίας Θεοτόκου.*

⁸⁶ Beckby²1964, I 174 (no. 111); Waltz 1957, 42 (no. 111); Lauxtermann 2003a, 182-3.

Finally, in those verses we meet the theme according to which the Cross with its sparkling shine (*Σταυρὸς προλάμπων* – verse 1) lights up the paths and souls of faithful Christians cleansing them from sin and evil (*ὁδοὺς ἀγνίζει τῶν μενόντων ἐνθάδε*). It is a rather usual theme in similar epigrams, such as:

8th- 9th century, 759-826, Theodore Stoudites

*Ὡ σταυρέ, φῶς μου, λάμπε μοι παντὶ χρόνῳ
πόρρω διώκων τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸ σκότος.*⁸⁷

11th century, John Bishop of Euchaites/John Mauropous

*Εἰς τὴν θήκην τοῦ τιμίου ξύλου τοῦ βασιλέως
Σταυροῦ πάλιν φῶς, καὶ πάλιν Κωνσταντῖνος.
ὁ πρῶτος εἶδε τὸν τύπον δι' ἀστέρων,
ὁ δεύτερος δὲ τοῦτον αὐτὸν καὶ βλέπει,
καὶ χερσὶ πισταῖς προσκυνούμενον φέρει.
5 ἄμφω παρ' αὐτοῦ τὸ κράτος δεδεγμένοι,
ἄμφω σέβουσιν αὐτὸν ὡς εὐεργέτην.*⁸⁸

Concluding Remarks

With Georgios Pisides, we find ourselves in a transitional period for byzantine poetry since he can be regarded as the last representative of its archaistic nature. Simultaneously, Georgios Pisides introduces the iambic meter in byzantine poetry, which is a meter that will prevail throughout the byzantine period and will constitute the distinctive meter of byzantine scholar poetry. As for his epigrams on the Cross and the Crucifixion of Christ, these have a few verses (they consist of two verses) while they are written in byzantine dodecasyllabic (iambic trimeter) aside from one (epigram no. 5), which is also written in hexameter. Studying the verses of these epigrams, we can easily distinguish the wide education but also the deep knowledge of the writer on the context of religious and ecclesiastical texts, from which he gets ideas, meanings, images, words and expressions to form his own verses.

Thus, we meet themes such as the one of the comparison of the wood of heaven which offered death, bitterness, nudity and necrosis to the human nature with the one of the Crucifixion of the Christ which offered the human life and

⁸⁷ Speck 1968, 202 (no. L); Rhoby 2009, 326 (no. 226), 327 (memorandum).

⁸⁸ De Lagarde, Bollig 1882, 34 (no. 58); Hörandner 2007, I 112-113; Frolov 1961, 271 (no. 212); *PG CXX*, vv. 1172.

imperishability by defying death. Another interesting theme is the antithesis among the faces of the thieves on the cross and the one of the crucified Christ as well as the theme according to which the Cross itself is presented by addressing the audience and is presented with similar value as the one it bears, that is of the crucified Christ. Finally, the epigrams which accompanied icons of the Crucifixion (epigram no. 6) or were located at the entrance of a temple (epigram no. 7) are also worth mentioning.

In conclusion, it is about a remarkable poet and epigram-writer, who composes exemplary and innovative verses in meter, something demonstrated by the significant influence he had on subsequent epigram-writers (Theodore Stoudites, Nicholas Kallikles, Theodore Prodromos, Eugenios Panormites, Nicholas Idrountinos, Manouel Philes and many others).

Abbreviations of scientific Journals and Series

BNJ = *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher*
BZ = *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
DOP = *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
JÖB = *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*
PG = *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*
RSBN = *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*
ΘHE = *Θρησκευτική καὶ Ἡθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*
WSt = *Wiener Studien*

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