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INTERACTIVE INSCRIPTIONS:  
BYZANTINE WORKS OF ART AND THEIR BEHOLDERS

The interaction of word and image is an essential part of Byzantine culture<sup>1</sup>. Normally word and image, inscription and depiction, do correspond, and if they do not one has to question why. Was the inscription composed at a time when it was not yet clear what the object or the depiction would look like? Was the inscription mistakenly attached to an object or painted on the wrong wall? There may be several interpretations for the lack or inaccurate interaction of word and image<sup>2</sup>, but as long as only a few details about the interaction of the patron, the author of the inscription and the members of a certain workshop<sup>3</sup> are known it is difficult to answer these questions.

Within the field of Byzantine studies the value of inscriptions has long been underestimated although it is well known that epigraphy contributes a lot to other fields. It does not only help to learn more details about the object which they are attached to but also about the literary skills of the author or the craftsman who is responsible for attaching the letters. One such example are the peculiarities of the inscriptions found in the cave churches of Cappadocia<sup>4</sup>. A careful analysis of the linguistical value of these inscriptions would help us to learn more about the spoken language of this area in the middle Byzantine period.

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<sup>1</sup> James L. (ed.) *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*. Cambridge, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Maguire H. *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response*. Toronto, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Panayotidi M. *Village Painting and the Question of Local "Workshops" // Les Villages dans l'Empire byzantin (IV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle) / Ed. J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, J.-P. Sodini*. Paris, 2005, p. 193–212.

<sup>4</sup> de Jerphanion G. *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce, I–II*. Paris, 1925–1942; *Planches, premier — troisième Album*. Paris, 1925–1934; Rhoby A. *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken (= Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, vol. 1)*. Vienna, 2009, p. 275–303.

A subcategory within the genre of inscriptions is formed by the metrical inscriptions, which are normally called epigrams. However, the definition of the Byzantine epigram differs considerably from the interpretation of an ancient or a late antique epigram or what is considered today by the modern term “epigram”. In contrast to the ancient epigram, shortness and pun are no criteria for the Byzantine epigram. According to Marc Lauxtermann the Byzantine epigram is defined by its real or potential inscriptional use<sup>5</sup>. There are some Byzantine epigrams of considerable length, such as the long epigrams on the outer façade and inside the naos of the chapel of the Pam-makaristos church in Constantinople<sup>6</sup> or the now lost epigram of forty verses on the Messina sarcophagus (see below, p. 323f). Another example is the famous epigram on the outer west façade of the Skripou church (9<sup>th</sup> c.) in Orchomenos with which Amy Papalexandrou has dealt recently in detail (fig. 1)<sup>7</sup>. This epigram is also exceptional insofar, as it is written in the hexameter — in a metre which is hardly used for the Byzantine epigram. The main metre — and that refers to almost all literary as well as inscriptional epigrams — is the Byzantine dodecasyllable, derived from the ancient iambic trimeter: a metre which is defined by the constant number of twelve syllables — as the name states — and a regular stress on the penultimate<sup>8</sup>.

The importance of inscriptions on Byzantine works of art was already recognized by the Byzantine scholar Maximos Planudes at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In an epigram written in the name of the patron Theodora (Kantakuzene) Rhaulina (Palaiologina Komnene), niece of the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, Planudes states the following: “Inscriptions (ἐπιγραφαί) [or titles]<sup>9</sup> reveal the representations of things and persons in pictures”<sup>10</sup>. This epigram refers (among other things) to the erection of a church for to the so-

<sup>5</sup> Lauxtermann M. *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts. Vol. 1.* Vienna, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Ebersolt J., Thiers A. *Les églises de Constantinople.* Paris, 1913 (Reprint London, 1979), p. 229f.; Rhoby, op. cit. (n. 4), no. 215; cf. Talbot A.-M. *Epigrams in Context. Metrical Inscriptions on Art and Architecture of the Palaiologan Era* // *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 53, 1999, p. 75–90; p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Papalexandrou A. *Text in context: eloquent monuments and the Byzantine beholder* // *Word and Image*, 17, 2001, p. 259–283; Oikonomidès N. *Pour une nouvelle lecture des inscriptions de Skripou en Béotie* // *Travaux et Mémoires*, 12, 1994, p. 479–493; p. 483f.

<sup>8</sup> Maas P. *Der byzantinische Zwölfsilber* // *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 12, 1903, p. 278–323; Lauxtermann M. *The velocity of pure iambs. Byzantine observations on the metre and rhythm of the dodecasyllable* // *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 48, 1998, p. 9–33.

<sup>9</sup> On the meaning “title” cf. Liddell H. G., Scott R., Stuart Jones H., McKenzie R. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* Oxford, 1925–1940, s.v. ἐπιγραφή I 2.

<sup>10</sup> Lampros Sp. *Ἐπιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη* // *Neos Hellenomnemon* 13, 1916, p. 414–421; p. 416 (no. 2, vv. 1–2): Ἐπιγραφαί δηλοῦσι τὰς τῶν πραγμάτων / καὶ τῶν προσώπων ἐν γραφαῖς παραστάσεις.

called Hagios Andreas ἐν τῇ κρίσει — monastery in Constantinople<sup>11</sup>. One can easily imagine that the whole epigram of Planudes was preserved on one of the church walls. The epigram's third verse, which follows the two already mentioned ones, tells the following: "With the inscription I (Theodora Rhaulina) offer to learn who I am and from whom I descend and what is my fortune"<sup>12</sup>. In the following verses Rhaulina provides us with many details of her family. On the whole the epigram consists of 35 verses and one might ask whether it could have been possible to find all verses inscribed on one of the church walls — it certainly is.

As Alexei Lidov has already stated in many of his studies<sup>13</sup> an object of art can never be considered as a flat surface; it always has to be interpreted within its context and its role within the performance of beholder and their surroundings has to be analysed. The purpose of inscriptions is manifold: First, inscriptions are bearers of information — about the foundation process, the patron and his family or of a spiritual message. Thus, they are creating a dialogue with the beholder. Another purpose of inscriptions is the decorative function of words which must also be kept in mind. How could one explain inscriptions inscribed at places where they were hard to be read even for the literate — for example inscriptions on scrolls of saints in the dome of a church?<sup>14</sup>

In the following, some appropriate examples of inscriptional epigrams<sup>15</sup> through which the role of the (literate) beholders is displayed, will be presented; answering questions such as how the beholder is integrated into the performance will be attempted.

The already mentioned epigram of Skripou starts with an unmistakable hint for the reader: "Neither envy nor time eternal will obscure the works of

<sup>11</sup> On the monastery, situated in the south-western part of Constantinople, not too far from the Peribleptos monastery, see *Kidonopoulos V.* Bauten in Konstantinopel 1204–1328. Verfall und Zerstörung, Restaurierung, Umbau und Neubau von Profan- und Sakralbauten. Wiesbaden, 1994, p. 9f.

<sup>12</sup> *Lampros*, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 416 (no. 2, vv. 3–4): ἐπιγραφή δίδωμι καὶ γὰρ μανθάνειν / τίς καὶ τίνων πέφυκα καὶ τίος τύχης.

<sup>13</sup> E. g. *Lidov A.* Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and as a Subject of Cultural History // *Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* / Ed. A. Lidov. Moscow, 2006, p. 32–58; *Lidov A.* The Creator of Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture // *The Artist in Byzantium* / Ed. M. Bacci. Pisa, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> E. g. the epigrams on the scrolls of several prophets in the dome of the katholikon of the Maria Peribleptos monastery, Mistra (14<sup>th</sup> c.), ed. *Rhoby*, op. cit. (n. 4), no. 159–170.

<sup>15</sup> The material is taken from *Rhoby*, op. cit. (n. 4), *Rhoby A.* Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst (= Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, vol. 2). Vienna, 2010, and *Rhoby A.* Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein (= Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, vol. 3). Vienna (forthcoming).

your efforts, most wonderful one, in the vast depths of oblivion”<sup>16</sup>. The signal words with which the reader is confronted at the very beginning of the inscriptions are envy (φθόνος) and time (χρόνος). The combination of these two elements is very common in the Byzantine literature: One well-known example is Michael Choniates and his laments about Athens at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century: Choniates states that envy and time raged more against Athens as did Nebukadnezar against Jerusalem<sup>17</sup>. Thus, the literate who could have been familiar with this *topos* was informed right at the beginning of the inscription about what was going on: Neither envy nor time — the personifications of destruction — will obscure his (i. e. the founder Leon’s) efforts. There are dozens of Byzantine inscriptions using the same *topos* with different words, but one has to wonder why the hexameter was used for the Skripou inscription. This metre was certainly not to be understood by the majority of the readers, not even by many literates. Two things have to be said: First, the φθόνος — χρόνος combination 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 a sign of self-representation, of wealth and high social status. These elements were to count more than the attempt to make the text comprehensible for everybody. Besides, the information about the foundation process under Leon is also documented in three other inscriptions attached to the church<sup>18</sup>; they are composed in prose without any literary claims and therefore were easily to be understood by the average literate.

In the case of the Skripou church the signal for the beholder is only given by the text. But of course it can also be stressed by both the text and the depiction. One appropriate example is the depiction of the archangel Michael next to the entrance of a church (fig. 2). His function as guardian of the church is clearly underlined both by the text on his scroll and his appearance. The text on his scroll states that he — the soldier of God — will raise his sword against those who are entering the church with bad heart<sup>19</sup>. This statement corresponds with the depiction: the raising of the sword is clearly shown.

In some inscriptions the beholder is addressed directly; they are unmistakably called to take part in the performance.

If the beholder is addressed directly they are sometimes literally called “beholder” (θεατής). One representative example is the beginning of a long epigram which is incised on the back and the side panels of a small reli-

<sup>16</sup> *Oikonomidès*, op. cit. (n. 7), p. 483f.: Οὐ φθόνος οὐδὲ χρόνος περιμήκετος ἔργα καλύψει / σὼν καμάτων, πανάριστε, βυθῷ πολυχανδεῖ (πολυχανδεῖ *Oikonomidès*) λήθης.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Rhoby A.* Reminiszenzen an antike Stätten in der mittel- und spätbyzantinischen Literatur. Göttingen, 2003, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> *Oikonomidès*, op. cit. (n. 7), p. 481–483.

<sup>19</sup> *Rhoby*, op. cit. (n. 4), no. 91: Θεοῦ στρατηγός εἰμι· τὴν σπάθην φέρω· / τείνω πρὸς ὕψος· ἐκφοβῶ Θεοῦ φόβῳ· / καταφρονητὰς ἐκδιχάζω συντόμως.



quarry of Saint Marina (10<sup>th</sup> / 11<sup>th</sup> c.) kept in the Museo Correr at Venice (fig. 3). The epigram starts with Ζητεῖς, θεατά, τίνος ἡ χεὶρ τυγχάνει (“You ask beholder, whose that hand?”). In the following verses one is informed that the relic belongs to Saint Marina<sup>20</sup>. Why was this information inscribed on the object? The object was not displayed in the public but was in private hands. It was rather worn as encolpion, as is proven by the ring at the top. Thus, the inscription was only read by the owner of the reliquary themselves and people around them. The owner of the reliquary was well aware that it bore the relic of Saint Marina. So why the inscription? The explanation is that one should not search for a practical use of the inscription. Here again the inscription functions as adornment and sign of high social status. Since the dodecasyllables of this epigram are of good quality one knows that it was a professional poet who was commissioned to compose nice verses on the subject of Saint Marina. That the poet knew his profession is also proven by the fact that one has to study the inscription very carefully to discover that the owner of the reliquary was a lady probably also called Marina. The text has to be read carefully insofar as the female owner of the object is only indicated by the use of a female participle (ζητοῦσα) later in the inscription.

Opening an inscription — primarily a metrical one — with the direct address ζητεῖς (“you ask”) is a fairly well attested *topos*. There is a metrical donor inscription in the church of St. Barnabas (12<sup>th</sup> c.) near Preveza which starts with a similar statement: Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, τίς ὄνπερ βλέπεις / σεπτὸν δόμον τέτευχεν ἐξ αὐτῶν βάθρων (“You ask to learn, man, who commissioned to erect the sacred church which you see from its foundations?”)<sup>21</sup>. The whole epigram consists of five verses and at first seems not to be of high literary value. However, when looking at the form of the epigram one soon discovers that its main information is given in the middle, precisely in verse 3: the name of the patron, of the one who erected the church: Konstantinos Maniakes.

A similar structure is to be found in an epigram which was once written on a tower (13<sup>th</sup> c.) in Dyrrachion (Durrës), but does not exist any more: Μαθὼν, θεατά, τίς ὁ πήξας ἐκ βάθρων / τὸν πύργον, ὄνπερ καθορᾷ, κτίσμα ξένον, / θαύμαζε τούτου τὴν ἀριστοβουλίαν (“Learning, beholder, who erected the tower from its foundations, [the tower] which you see, this wonderful building, admire

<sup>20</sup> *Rhoby*, op. cit. (n. 15), no. Me 81; *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261*. New York, 1997, no. 332: Ζητεῖς, θεατά, τίνος ἡ χεὶρ τυγχάνει; / μάρτυρος ἦδε Μαρίνης τῆς ἁγίας / ἥς τὸ κράτος ἔθλασε δράκοντο<ς> κάρας.

<sup>21</sup> *Mamaloukos B.* Παρατηρήσεις σε μια βυζαντινὴ κτιτορικὴ ἐπιγραφή ἀπὸ τὴν Ἡπειρο // *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaologikes Hetaireias*, IV 18, 1995, p. 195–200: p. 196.

the excellent decision” [i. e. the excellent decision to build this tower])<sup>22</sup>. This metrical founder’s inscription consists of three parts: in the first three verses the beholder is addressed directly, the middle of the epigram (verses 4–8) is devoted to the presentation and the praise of the founder / patron, the end of the epigram is devoted to the date which is given in verse shape<sup>23</sup>. As a result, this epigram must have been composed by a very skilled author, as can also be seen by the distinguished vocabulary (ἀριστοβουλία in v. 3, βριαρόχειρ in v. 8, etc.). Unfortunately it is not known where the inscription was originally attached. Could it really be read by a θεατής as is stated at the beginning?

A similar inscription, but unfortunately one preserved only in fragments, is attached to a tower of the castle of Skopje: Νέαν πόλιν, ἄνθρωπε, θαυμάζεις βλέπων / καὶ τερπνὸν ὥράισμα... (“You admire the new town, man, seeing the lovely adornment...”)<sup>24</sup>. The beholder — i. e. the public, addressed as ἄνθρωπος<sup>25</sup> — is in this case not asked to admire the achievement; in this case one would expect the imperative θαύμαζε. It is already a matter of fact: the one looking at the tower is admiring it. At the beginning of v. 3, which is not fully preserved since the rest of the inscription is entirely missing, the familiar rhetorical question is posed: ζητεῖς δὲ τίς ἤγειρε... (“You ask who erected...”).

The direct address to the beholder is not restricted to architecture or objects of minor arts; for instance they can also be found in metrical legends on seals. A such example is preserved on a seal (11<sup>th</sup> c.) of the Shumen collection: Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, σήμαντρον<sup>26</sup> τίνος (“You ask to learn, man, whose this seal?”)<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Ed. Katsaros B. Λόγια στοιχεῖα στὴν ἐπιγραφικὴ τοῦ «Δεσποτάτου». Λόγιοι καὶ διανοούμενοι κατὰ τὸν 13ο αἰ. στὴν Ἠπειρὸ μὲ βάση τίς ἑμμετρὲς ἐπιγραφές τοῦ χώρου // Praktika Diethnous Symposiou gia to Despotato tes Epeirou. Arta, 1992, p. 517–544: p. 525.

<sup>23</sup> σύν τοῖς ἑκατὸν ἑπταδικοῖς ἐγκύκλοις, / τριπλῇ δεκάδι καὶ μοναπλῇ τριάδι / τρισκαίδεκάτης ἰνδικτιῶνος δρόμου. Only rarely we encounter epigrams in which the date is given in verse shape: for some more examples cf. Rhoby A. The structure of inscriptional dedicatory epigrams in Byzantium // La poesia tardoantica e medievale. Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Perugia, 15–17 novembre 2007 / Ed. C. Burini De Lorenzi, M. De Gaetano. Alessandria, 2010, p. 309–332.

<sup>24</sup> Ed. Miljukov P. Christianskija drevnosti zapadnoj Makedonii // Izvestija Russkago Archeologičeskago Instituta v Konstantinopol’e, 4, 1899, p. 21–151: p. 127f.

<sup>25</sup> ἄνθρωπος as address of the beholder is sometimes used besides θεατής and ξένος. The latter normally means “stranger”, but is also used as reference to the pilgrim, cf. Hörandner W. Zur Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der byzantinischen Dichtung — am Beispiel des Gedichts auf das Pantokrator Kloster in Konstantinopel // Die poetische Ekphrasis von Kunstwerken. Eine literarische Tradition der Großdichtung in Antike, Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit / Ed. Chr. Ratkowitsch. Vienna, 2006, p. 203–219: p. 209f.

<sup>26</sup> On σήμαντρον as a term for seals cf. Seibt W. Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich. 1. Teil: Kaiserhof. Vienna, 1978, p. 317.

<sup>27</sup> Jordanov I., Zhekova Z. Catalogue of Medieval Seals at the Regional Historical Museum of Shumen. Shumen, 2007, no. 528.

Especially in inscriptions attached to tomb stones the beholder becomes an essential part of the interaction and of the performance respectively: They are invited to stop and look at the tomb. However, of course the tomb stone is not the object to be looked at but it is the buried person who has to be noticed. One such example is a verse inscription on a sarcophagus (13<sup>th</sup> c.) from Berroia: Ὁράτε, θνητοί, τουτονί γε τὸν τύμβον· / ἐν τούτῳ κεῖται δομέστικος ἐκεῖνος / ὥπερ κλήσις μὲν ὑπῆρχεν Ἰωάννης / κτλ. (“Look, mortals, at this tomb. Here lies the domestikos, who is called Ioannes” etc.)<sup>28</sup>.

The order to stop and direct one’s gaze to the tomb is even better expressed in another tomb epigram (14<sup>th</sup> c.), which is only partly preserved in a museum of Berroia: Ἀνθρῶπε, δεῦρο στήθι καὶ σκόπει τάδε / καὶ τοῦ βίου θαύμασε τὰς μεταβολὰς / καὶ τὴν κατ’ ἐχθρῶν τῆς ψυχῆς εὐανδρίαν / κτλ. (“Man, stop here and look at this and admire the changes of life and the braveness of the soul against the enemies”).<sup>29</sup> Interestingly enough, similar expressions are also to be found in Medieval Latin tomb inscriptions as *Sta viator* or *Siste gradum, viator* ...<sup>30</sup> A comparative study of Latin and Greek tomb inscriptions is highly desirable, because there are more consistencies and similarities than one thinks<sup>31</sup>.

A similar epigram from Messina, which unfortunately is not preserved any more, once consisted of forty verses inscribed on a sarcophagus (12<sup>th</sup> c.). This epigram is also equipped with the same structure. Right at the beginning, the beholder, who is called ξένος, i.e. the visitor or pilgrim who is coming to the church and the tomb, is directly addressed. The performance is determined not only by the tomb stone, the buried and the beholder, but also by the church where the sarcophagus is displayed. The surroundings of the tomb are part of this interaction, too, as is clearly stated by the first three verses of the tomb inscription: Τὸν ναὸν ὅστις τοῦτον εἰσῆεις, ξένε / δεῦρο πρόσελθε, τόνδε τὸν τάφον σκόπει / ἀνδρὶ γὰρ ἔνδον οὐ κλέος μέγα φέρει (“Whoever enters this church [= reference to the church], stranger, come here and look at this tomb; it [i.e. the tomb] does not provide big fame for

<sup>28</sup> Papazotos *Th’ H Béroia καὶ οἱ ναοὶ τῆς* (11ος — 18ος αἰ.). Athens 1994, no. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Papazotos, op. cit. (n. 28), no. 10; cf. also Rhoby A. Eine Inschrift auf einem Sarkophagdeckel aus Beroia in der Chronik des Georgios Sphrantzes // *Byzantion*, 77, 2007, p. 394–398.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Rhoby A. Zur Überlieferung von inschriftlich angebrachten byzantinischen Epigrammen. Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung von Wort und Bild in Byzanz // *Fragmente. Der Umgang mit lückenhafter Quellenüberlieferung in der Mittelalterforschung. Akten des internationalen Symposions des Zentrums Mittelalterforschung der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien*, 18–21. März 2009 / Ed. Chr. Gastgeber et al. Vienna, 2010, p. 225–238.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ševčenko I. *Inscriptions East and West in the First Millennium: The Common Heritage and the Parting of the Ways* // *Essays in Honor of Roman Szporluk. Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe* (= *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 22, 1998). Cambridge, Mass., 2000, p. 527–537.

the [buried] man”)<sup>32</sup>. The third verse of the epigram clearly expresses the intention of the inscription: it is not the outer façade but the man inside who is worth being praised. The following verses are devoted to the praise of the dead with great details. However, the inscription differs from similar ones insofar as the visiting beholder is addressed again in v. 28: Σὺ δ’ ὅστις εἶ καὶ τόνδε τὸν τάφον βλέπεις / τὸ τοῦ βίου μάταιον ἐνθα μανθάνων (“You, whoever you are and who looks at the tomb / learning here the vanity of life”). Again, the last verses of the epigram are devoted to the date (see above). Forty verses is a considerable length for a tomb inscription: Could one really expect the whole inscription to be read? Would the beholder / reader have been able to come to v. 28 where they are addressed again? It is not known where and how the inscription was attached to the tomb. But is it possible that the position of v. 28 was closer to the beholder than the beginning of the inscription?

As was shown by the last example, although the beholder is asked or even required to look at a building, a work of art or a tomb stone, it is not the object which they are asked to admire but the inner value — with respect to tombs, the buried person. A very good example which strengthens this observation is preserved on a cross reliquary (12<sup>th</sup> c. ?) which is kept in Saint Peter, Rome. At the end of each cross arm a round badge is attached bearing an inscription, which runs as follows: Ὅρα τί καινὸν θαῦμα καὶ ξένην χάριν / χρυσὸν μὲν ἔξω Χριστὸν ἐν<δον> δὲ σκόπει (“Look, which new miracle and wonderful grace; behold the gold outside but Christ inside”)<sup>33</sup>. What is the purpose of this address? The beholder is required not to look at the fading outer matter, although it is golden; Christ, who is represented with a particle of the True Cross inside, is the real value of the object and that is more than gold; one should also note the pun between χρυσόν and Χριστόν. There are two more details in the first two verses of this epigram which should be noted: Two different verbs for “to behold” are used, namely ὅρα (beginning of v. 1) and σκόπει (end of v. 2). And it is certainly not at random that the first verb is used to the beginning of v. 1 and the second verb at the end of v. 1 and the second verb at the end of v. 2. Also the back sides of the four badges are adorned with inscriptions: They can only be read when the cross is taken out of its reliquary. The inscription on the back — two more verses — inform about the purpose of the foundation: ὁ καὶ τέτευχεν ἐκ προθύμου καρδίας / Ἰωάννης λύτρωσιν αἰτῶν σφαλμάτων (“Ioannes produces that with his distinguished heart asking for

<sup>32</sup> *Guillou A.* Recueil des inscriptions grecques médiévales d’Italie. Rome, 1996, no. 192. The verses remind us on a passage of a tomb epigram of Manuel Philes, ed. *Miller E.* *Manuelis Philae carmina*. Paris, 1855 (Reprint Amsterdam, 1967), p. 279,21–280,22 (no. XCVII): Ὅστις ἂν ᾗς, ἄνθρωπε, τὸν τάφον σκόπει, / καὶ τοῦ βίου μάνθανε τὴν ἀπιστίαν.

<sup>33</sup> *Rhoby*, op. cit. (n. 15), no. Me110; *Guillou*, op. cit. (n. 32), no. 55.

forgiveness of the sins”). For whom was the information on the back side? Who else but the patron was allowed to take out the cross and to read the inscription? It is interesting to observe the difference of the literary quality of the two parts of the epigram: Whereas the visible inscription is of high spiritual meaning the other part is merely a standardized statement of the purpose of the donation of the cross.

Normally the signal words addressing the beholder are positioned at the beginning of the inscription. However, in an epigram (13<sup>th</sup> c.) incised in the ciborium in the abbey of Santa Maria di Cervate near Lecce the beholder is not addressed straight at the beginning of the epigram (fig. 4) but in v. 4<sup>34</sup>. However, it is not known if this is only by accident or intentionally, the address to the beholder — ὁρῶν, θεατά, δόξαν ὑψίστῳ νέμει (“looking at that, beholder, distribute your glory to the Highest [i.e. God]”) — is more or less in the middle of the whole performance, and that way the central message of the inscription was perhaps easier to read for the literate beholder than it would have been, had it been placed at the beginning.

Some of the most popular Byzantine verses of inscriptional epigrams are the ones preserved on the scroll of or next to John the Baptist. They refer to his beheading ordered by Herodes Antipas and to the madness of this ruler. The basic structure is relatively stable. The epigram normally consists of four verses with some shorter and longer variants. All these epigrams preserved on many frescoes and icons from both the Byzantine and the post-Byzantine period start with Ὁρᾷς — “you see”, for example: Ὁρᾷς οἷα πάσχουσιν, ὦ Θεοῦ Λόγε / οἱ πταισμάτων ἔλεγχοι τῶν βδελυκτέων (“You see what they suffer, oh Word of God, those who reprove the abominable crimes”). With the direct address ὁρᾷς, the beholder, who in this case is Christ himself, is confronted with the disaster which happened to John the Baptist right at the beginning of the epigram. Ὁρᾷς is more than simply “You see”, it is rather “You are forced to see” or “You cannot escape, you have to see”. In a similar example preserved in the church of Sveti Nikita (FYROM) (fig. 5) the text on the scroll of John the Baptist (depiction: 15<sup>th</sup> c.) starts with Ὁρᾷς, θεατά, τὴν μανίαν Ἡρώδου (“You see, beholder, the madness of Herodes”).<sup>35</sup> Right above the scroll one can see the cut head of John the Forerunner. The first three words are the signal words: ὁρᾷς, θεατά and μανίαν.

So far, only the literate beholder and their chance to become part of the performance have been treated. But what about the illiterate? Which role did inscriptions play for them? Were they of any significance for them at all? As was briefly mentioned before (p. 319), one should not un-

<sup>34</sup> Guillou, *op. cit.* (n. 32), no. 171.

<sup>35</sup> Rhoby, *op. cit.* (n. 4), no. 8.

derestimate and forget the decorative and the magic function of the inscriptional word.

What about the illiterate or semi-literate beholder of inscriptions and works of art? What about the one who is not able to understand Ζητεῖς θεατά... (“You ask, beholder...”) ? Were there any inscriptional conventions they were familiar with? So called acronyms, the combination of some letters — normally accompanying a cross — probably formed the entrance of the illiterate to the inscriptional performance. Due to the studies of Christopher Walter at least fifteen different formulae are known of. The best known and most common one being of course IC XC NI KA (= Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς νικᾷ)<sup>36</sup>. For some acronyms the solution is not certain, there are more possibilities. And perhaps it was a challenge for the beholder to decipher the cryptogram. But can it be assumed that people were familiar with all these signs? For instance, what about the letters at the end of the famous inscription above the depiction of the Maria orans (14<sup>th</sup> c.) in the narthex of the Panagia Asinou church on the island of Cyprus (fig. 6)? This epigram<sup>37</sup> is one of best known examples for the non accurate interaction of word and image: the epigram states that Mary is holding Christ with her arms (βρεφοκρατεῖται) but in fact her arms are raised up. Already the first editors<sup>38</sup> of the inscription tried to find solutions for this strange combination of letters, but none are satisfying. What can be learned is that the letters were not put there at random — as one encounters sometimes, simply in order to fill left space with decorative letters; but on the contrary, the letters following the two verses of the epigram do fulfil a certain purpose. One has to notice the subtle combination of dots and star-like signs between the letters. In all likelihood, no one will ever be able to decipher this part of the inscriptions successfully. But was the medieval beholder able to do it (both the literate and the illiterate)?<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion: What can be learned from these examples? Word and image form an important symbiosis. However, also the beholder is actively urged to become a partner of this performance, both the literate and the illiterate. The Byzantine beholder is not only attracted by the actual content of the inscription but also by the magic power of the inscriptional word in general. Inscriptions form the connection between the beholder and the dead

<sup>36</sup> Walter Chr. The Apotropaic Function of the Victorious Cross // *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 55, 1997, p. 193–220.

<sup>37</sup> Rhoby, op. cit. (n. 4), no. 233.

<sup>38</sup> Peristianes I. K. Μονογραφία τῆς ἀρχαίας πόλεως καὶ ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἀσίνης [vñv Ἀσίνους]. Leukosia, 1922, p. 10; Buckler W. H. The Church of Asinou, Cyprus, and its Frescoes // *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 83, 1933, p. 327–350: p. 336.

<sup>39</sup> A new attempt to read the cryptogram is given by Moutafov E., Rhoby A. New ideas about the deciphering of the cryptic inscription in the narthex of the Panagia Asinou (Phorbiotissa) church (Cyprus) // *Medioevo Greco*, 12, 2012, in print.

matter and that way the matter / the mere object becomes a live part of the interaction. A significant example for this interpretation, also quoted by Amy Papalexandrou in her article about eloquent monuments and the Byzantine beholder<sup>40</sup>, is a funerary epigram of Arethas of Caesarea on his sister's death, preserved in book XV of the Greek Anthology (no. 339): The last verses run as follows: Πάντων γὰρ αὐτῆς οὐδαμῶς λάθοι στόμα / καλὸν φερούσης νουθέτημα τῷ βίῳ / εἰ δ' οὖν, λαλήσει καὶ γραφὴ πάντων πλέον / αὕτη παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν τάφον τεθειμένη ("For the mouths of all can by no means forget her who have so good an admonition by her life. But if they do, this inscription placed beside her tomb shall speak more than all")<sup>41</sup>.

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ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫЕ НАДПИСИ:  
ВИЗАНТИЙСКИЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ ИСКУССТВА И ИХ ЗРИТЕЛИ

Широко известно, что взаимодействие слова и образа в византийской культуре вездесуще. За последние годы этому аспекту посвящен ряд публикаций, в частности, недавнее исследование: *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* / Ed. L. James. Cambridge, 2007. Едва ли существует икона, объект прикладного искусства, печать, монета или изображение святого в церкви без сопровождения текста — как минимум, нескольких букв. В большинстве случаев образ и сопровождающие его слова соотносятся между собой, а если нет, стоит задать вопрос, почему. Возможно, это зависит от взаимоотношений между художником, автором сопровождающего текста (если речь идет о чем-то большем, чем *nomen sacrum*) и донатором.

Ценность надписей для интерпретации образов долго недооценивалась, в основном из-за того, что такая дисциплина, как византийская эпиграфика, все еще остается в разделе «вспомогательных дисциплин», несмотря на ее вклад в другие области знания: просопографию, лексикографию, лингвистику и другие.

Особую подкатегорию в жанре надписей составляют метрические надписи (эпиграммы). Эпиграммы — больше, чем просто текст, сопровождающий произведение искусства или образ. Текст эпиграмм обладает самостоятельной ценностью. Эпиграммы, в первую очередь написанные византийским додекасиллабическим стихом, следуют определенным

<sup>40</sup> Papalexandrou, op. cit. (no. 7), p. 283.

<sup>41</sup> Beckby H. *Anthologia Graeca*. Buch XII–XVI. Munich, 1958, IV, p. 283f.

правилам просодии, с учетом правильного числа слогов, с риторическими фигурами и т. п. Таким образом, авторам эпиграмм, которые должны были быть написаны на произведениях искусства, следовало обращать внимание на два требования: во-первых, они должны были соблюдать упомянутые конкретные правила эпиграммы; во-вторых, в идеале они должны были учитывать форму носителя эпиграммы, на которой ее собирались написать.

Византийские произведения искусства представляют собой не просто результат взаимодействия слова и образа. Во многих случаях существенную роль играл и зритель. Произведения искусства создавались, чтобы «удовлетворять» зрителя — и спонсора, и широкую аудиторию, если оно выставлено на всеобщее обозрение, или и тех и других. Во многих надписях, особенно в эпиграммах, зритель напрямую включается в представление: буквально он называется θεατής (*зритель*), но в более простом смысле ἄνθρωπος (*человек*), θνητός (*смертный*), ξένος (*гость/чужой*) и т. д. В эпиграмме на реликварии святой Марины зритель назван: Ζητεῖς, θεατά, τίνας ἢ χεῖρ τυγχάνει (*Ты спрашиваешь, зритель, чья это рука?*). В последующих стихах зрителю сообщают и о реликвии руки святой, и об акте дарения реликвария. Метрическая надпись от имени донатора в церкви в Эпире начинается со схожего вступления: Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, τίς ὄνπερ βλέπεις / σεπτὸν δόμον τέτευχεν ἐξ αὐτῶν βαθρῶν (*Ты просишь сообщить тебе, человек, кто распорядился воздвигнуть эту святую церковь, которую ты видишь с ее основания?*). Как и в надписи на реликварии святой Марины, в следующих стихах зрителю сообщали о донаторе. Вопрос, обращенный к зрителю, — это риторическая увертюра к основному тексту надписи, а именно — к упоминанию донатора. Его имя составляет главное содержание эпиграммы, оно содержится в середине надписи, в третьей строфе из пяти.

Прямое обращение к зрителю встречается не только на объектах прикладного искусства или общественных зданиях. Подобные метрические надписи можно встретить и на печати, например: Ζητεῖς μαθεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, σήμαντρον τίνας (*Ты хочешь узнать, человек, чья [это] печать?*). Зрителя приглашают взглянуть не только на внешний облик предмета, но и исследовать его внутреннюю, невидимую ценность. Представительный пример — византийский крест, который хранится в соборе святого Петра в Риме. Стих 2 призывает зрителя: χρυσὸν μὲν ἔξω Χριστὸν ἔν<δον> δὲ σκόλει (*Взгляни на золото снаружи, но на Христа внутри!*). Золотая оболочка — тленная вещь, а реальной ценностью обладает крест Христа внутри реликвария, то есть фрагменты Честного Креста внутри драгоценного креста византийской работы.



В некоторых надписях к зрителю не обращаются напрямую как к θεατής, ἄνθρωπος и т. п. Есть другие слова-указатели, по которым грамотный зритель мог понять, что его приглашают быть активным участником надписи-действия. Пример — знаменитый текст на свитке Иоанна Предтечи, присутствующий на многих византийских и особенно пост-византийских иконах и фресках, посвященных обезглавливанию Иоанна Иродом. Он открывается словами: Ὁρᾷς οἷα πάσχοουσιν, ὦ Θεοῦ Λόγε / οἱ πταισμάτων ἑλεῦχοι τῶν βδελυκτέων (*Видишь пострадавших за Слово Господне, тех, кто осуждал омерзительные преступления*). Слово-указатель — Ὁρᾷς. Это видно по его особому месту в начале текста, на которое обращает внимание каждый, кто смотрит на эту сцену и понимает безумие Ирода, обезглавившего Иоанна Предтечу.

Первостепенная задача предлагаемой работы — подчеркнуть важность надписей, особенно надписей-эпиграмм, для интерпретации византийских произведений искусства. Вспомним высказывание К. Манго, сделанное в 1972 г. (*The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453. Sources and Documents*, 182): «Они (т. е. эпиграммы) дают изобильный и почти не исследованный источник информации для историков искусства».

Во-вторых, данная работа акцентирует внимание на многомерном представлении произведений искусства: зритель — не пассивный гость, который просто «смотрит» на предмет или изображение, потому что уже через несколько мгновений он неизбежно превращается в активного участника перформанса.



1. Church of Skripou, Orchomenos, hexameter inscription:  
after *Oikonomidès N.* Pour une nouvelle lecture des inscriptions de Skripou  
en Béotie // *Travaux et Mémoires*, 12, 1994, p. 479–493: tab. IV



2. Church Hagios Georgios tou Bounou, Kastoria: after *Rhoby A.* Byzantinische  
Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken. Vienna, 2009, fig. XXVII



3. Reliquary of St. Marina, Museo Correr, Venice: after *Guillou A. Recueil des inscriptions grecques médiévales d'Italie*. Rome, 1996, tab. 75 (no. 79a)



4. Ciborium, abbey of Santa Maria di Cervate, near Lecce: after *Guillou A. Recueil des inscriptions grecques médiévales d'Italie*. Rome, 1996, tab. 164 (no. 171)



5. John the Baptist, church Sveti Nikita, Banjane: after *Rhoby A.* *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken.* Vienna, 2009, fig. VII, p. 441



6. Mother of God, church Panagia Asinou, Cyprus: after *Rhoby A.* *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken.* Vienna, 2009, fig. 87