Chapter 3

Gifts of Words: The Discourse of Gift-Giving in Eleventh-Century Byzantine Poetry

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In a panegyric for the emperor Constantine Monomachos, Michael Psellos draws the attention of the emperor to the various branches of learning:

> Philosophy, jurisprudence and the sophistic art, the first from heaven, the others from more earthly spheres, have now, as by agreement, come together for you, not to judge your deeds or to criticize them – for who is more correct than the rule itself? – but to see and admire them, and to bring words as a gift for the man who has elevated them.[1]

Psellos stresses that intellectual pursuits will not run counter to the interests of the emperor: they will not bring criticism, only admiration. In the scenario that he evokes, all the emperor has to do in support of learning is to accept the gifts that are brought to him spontaneously. It has to be noted that while the three branches of learning are quite divergent (with philosophy significantly taking the lead part) their gifts are only offered to the emperor in the form of 'words', implying that the literary form is the most convenient way to communicate learning.

This all sounds attractive and quite harmless. But at the same time, both parties more or less consciously understand that Psellos advances here a demand for material support for the benefit of intellectuals and their learning and teaching. Not without purpose, Psellos adds that the 'gifts of words' are intended for 'the man who has elevated them'. He advances the ideal of a cultivated emperor who partakes in the glory that learning can provide. As such, he is expected to appreciate this admiration, even to the degree that he 'elevates' it; in other words, that he provides adequate support to make the creation of these 'gifts of words' possible. The material price for this glory is not mentioned, but implicitly understood.

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[1] Michael Psellos, *Orationes panegyricae*, ed. G.T. Dennis (Stuttgart, 1994), or. 1, l. 22–28: φιλοσοφία δὲ καὶ νομοθετικὴ καὶ ἡ σοφιστικὴ τέχνη, ἡ μὲν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, αἳ δ' ἐκ περιπεζίων σφαιρῶν, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ συνθήματος εἰς ταὐτόν σοι ἥκασι νῦν, οὐχ ὥστε κρίνειν ἢ δοκιμάζειν τὰ σά – τίς γὰρ τοῦ κανόνος εὐθύτερος; – ἀλλ' ἰδεῖν καὶ θαυμᾶσαι, καὶ τοὺς λόγους δωροφορῆσαι τῷ τούτους ὑψώσαντι.

In this paper, I shall take a closer look at some of these 'gifts of words', explore the various ways in which poetry helped to give these gifts a form, and try to describe some of the implicit overtones that emerge when a poem presents itself or something else as a 'gift'. I will approach the concept of 'gifts of words' as a discursive construction, and not necessarily as the reflection of a historical cultural practice.

The Discourse of Gift-giving

Gift-giving is indeed a special kind of economic exchange, as both parties pretend that it is, in fact, not economic.[2] Both giver and receiver let it be understood that the gift is a spontaneous, gratuitous present and does not need to be reciprocated. However, in reality, it is very clear that both parties tacitly, or even unconsciously, agree that it does need to be reciprocated. This phenomenon of disguise has been referred to by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as 'méconnaissance', that is, the willing failure to recognize openly that material rewards are expected.[3] It is this tension between implicit material interests and professed disinterestedness that will inform my readings of some poems.

Some gifts can be real and tangible, others have a more symbolic, and thus more fluid value. This value is created and measured by the common presuppositions of the cultural context in which it takes place. With reference to the literary gift, we can observe that the eleventh century is generally considered a period when literature regained its former prestige;[4] the fragment of Psellos

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[2] On gift-giving as an anthropological phenomenon, see the seminal work of Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *L'année sociologique*, 1 (1925): pp. 30–186. Recent studies on gift exchange in Byzantium include Anthony Cutler, 'Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (2008): pp. 79–101 and Cecily J. Hilsdale, 'Constructing a Byzantine *Augusta*: A Greek Book for a French Bride', *Art Bulletin*, 87/3 (2005): pp. 458–483.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris, 1980), pp. 191–194. For a critique on this self-interested aspect, Mark Osteen, 'Questions of the Gift. Introduction', in Mark Osteen (ed.), *The Question of the Gift* (London/New York, 2002), pp. 1–41, here pp. 23–26.

[4] An influential expression of this view is to be found in Paul Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1977), p. 195.

we quoted at the beginning may testify to this impression of a general restoration of learning. A new class of young, talented people flocked to the many schools of the capital, received education in literature, and was eager to try to turn this acquired knowledge into opportunities for social networking and career building.[5] Literature strengthened the social cohesion of this newly formed class, providing a common background to set themselves off from other social strata. As I will argue, the giving of literature as a gift is part of this process of capitalizing on these acquired skills.

A precondition for this is the creation of a discourse that convincingly proposes the idea that literature, as a symbolic and immaterial gift, can be exchanged for other, tangible goods. Several works of Michael Psellos, who was arguably a pivotal figure in the integration of learning in society, contribute to the propagation of this discourse. Psellos frequently presents his orations as remunerations for other services. He describes the encomium for his friend Ioannes Mauropous as a 'debt that has been paid off',[6] and the encomium for his mother as something 'which I give as a fair debt redemption to nature, and which I bring in as a fitting contribution to her virtue'.[7] The fiscal vocabulary in this last example is striking, with words as ὄφλημα (debt) and the very technical term συνεισφορά ('joint contribution'). This demonstrates to what degree the Byzantines of this period (and particularly Psellos) were willing to consider literature as an element in the dynamics of social services.

Moreover, Psellos emphatically presents literature as part of a direct exchange of commodities. In a letter to a friend who gives him a horse, he proposes that his friend accept the letter as a gift in exchange for the horse, even though the letter is worth much more: 'It would really be absurd … if I would want to exchange a letter (λόγος) for a horse (ἄλογον)'.[8] Exploiting the

[5] For these social shifts, see Hélène Ahrweiler, 'Recherches sur la société byzantine au XIe siècle: nouvelles hiérarchies et nouvelles solidarités', *TM*, 6 (1976): pp. 99–124.

[6] Psellos, *Orationes Panegyricae*, or. 17, l. 853: ὡς χρέος ἐκτετισμένον.

[7] Michael Psellos, *Encomium in matrem*, ed. U. Criscuolo (Naples, 1989), p. 85: τῇ φύσει τὸ δίκαιον ἀποδίδωμι ὄφλημα καὶ τῇ ἀρετῇ τὴν πρέπουσαν εἰσάγω συνεισφοράν.

[8] Michael Psellos, letter 171, ed. K. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη* (5 vols, Venice/Paris, 1876), vol. 5, pp. 434–438. The Greek text of the first sentence runs: Ἄλογον ὡς ἀληθῶς, σεβασμιωτάτη μοι κεφαλὴ Ἰασίτα, εἰ λόγου βουλοίμην ἀνταλλάττεσθαι ἄλογον.

polysemy of the words ἄλογον (horse, but also 'matter' in a philosophical sense) and λόγος (this letter, but also 'reason'), Psellos is able to represent his letter as a gracious, immaterial gift, more valuable than any material asset, at least for those people who appreciate the hidden charms of it.[9]

As a matter of fact, Psellos often describes such an exchange in his letters: he proposes to give *logoi*, and he expects deeds in return. In a letter to an unknown acquaintance, he asks him to do a favour, probably related to one of the monasteries that fell under Psellos' care:[10]

> So, let us in a certain way requite each other, and be reciprocally affected, me by giving words, you by giving me back deeds ... I have opened up with my mouth the sources of words in your favour, and you gush over me with your benevolence in a still greater stream, and by both, the bowl of friendship will become filled.

Psellos saw no obstacle in proposing that gifts of words (in this fragment clearly understood to induce social promotion) imply gifts of another, more pragmatic, kind. In the world of Psellos' letter corpus, words had their own special place in the intricate traffic of services and goods.

Poetic Gifts and Material Rewards

The rhetoric of 'words in exchange for things' comes to the surface again in poems of the period. And 'things' can also be cucumbers: poem 105 of Christophoros Mitylenaios is a poem about a cucumber-bed kept in a vineyard.[11] The poem is severely damaged; from the initial part, we can only infer that the poet addresses the vineyard keeper and asks for some of his cucumbers. The poet also mentions a short work that seems to be exchanged for the skills of the vineyard keeper (v. 7: σου τὴν τέχνην βραχεῖ λόγῳ), and a payment coming from encomia (v. 9: μισθὸν ἐξ ἐγκωμίων). The

[9] On the discourse of exchange in this letter, see Floris Bernard, 'Exchanging *Logoi* for *Aloga*: Cultural and Material Capital in a Letter of Michael Psellos', *BMGS*, 35.2 (2011): pp. 134–148.

[10] The letter is edited in Paul Gautier, 'Quelques lettres de Psellos inédites ou déjà éditées', *REB*, 44 (1986): pp. 111–197 (letter 31). Text: p. 184, l. 8–10 and p. 185, l. 15–17: Τρόπον οὖν τινα ἀντιδρῶμεν ἀλλήλοις καὶ ἀντιπάσχομεν, ἐγὼ μὲν λόγους διδούς, σὺ δὲ ἔργα ἀντιδιδούς ... Ἐγὼ μὲν πρὸς τὰς ὑπὲρ σοῦ τῶν λόγων πηγὰς ἀνεστόμωμαι, σὺ δὲ ἀνθυπερβλύζεις τὸ εὐγνωμονεῖν πλείονι ῥεύματι, καὶ γίνεται παρ' ἀλλήλοις πλήρης ὁ τῆς φιλίας κρατήρ.

[11] About this poem, see also C. Crimi et al., *Cristoforo di Mitilene, Canzoniere* (Catania, 1983), pp. 143–144 (A. Milazzo). In contrast to this interpretation, I do not think that the speaking voice in the poem is a fortuitous passer-by. Rather, it is (the persona of) the poet himself. And his words are not to be taken as a complaint about his avaricious nature, but as an element of genuine praise for the vineyard keeper defending his garden against robbers.

subsequent verses indeed appear as an encomium: the gardener is praised for his efforts to keep the vineyard (and the cucumbers) free from robbers and vermin. From verse 52, just after stating that he will remember the gardener until his death, Christophoros repeats his demand:

> πρὸ τοῦ θανεῖν δὲ ζῶντί μοι νῦν εἰσέτι
> ἐκ τοῦδε τοῦ σοῦ σικυηλάτου δίδου·
> ἤδη γὰρ οἶδα τῶν ἐπαίνων σοι κόρον,
> οὓς ἀντὶ μισθοῦ τῶν ὀπωρῶν εἰσφέρω·
>
> But before I die, give me now something
> of this cucumber-bed of yours while I still live;
> for I realize that by now, you have enough of the encomia
> that I contribute in return for the recompense of your fruits.

It is clear from these lines that Christophoros refers to this very poem when he mentions 'the encomia', since he represents the gardener becoming wary of his praises, which have by now continued for fifty verses. Consequently, the encomia and the 'short writing' mentioned in the beginning, which are said to induce an exchange, need to be understood as this poem itself.

The word μισθός, mentioned at least twice in relation to this very poem (verses 9 and 55), unmistakably refers to a monetary payment. The mercantile aspect of this exchange is also evident from the fact that this 'poetic currency' can be used cumulatively: the poem closes with the promise that if the cucumbers please him, Christophoros will write more praises.

Of course, the tone here is playful, and we should not be too quick to posit a mechanical barter economy where verses are sold for cucumbers – in fact, this is exactly what the discourse of gift-giving bypasses. This example is meant to indicate merely that the rhetoric of 'words for things' existed and found currency. Moreover, the poem can serve as a demonstration of the encomiastic power of a literary gift: in a real *tour de force*, Christophoros succeeds in giving the vineyard keeper the dimensions of a hero and a martyr. Notwithstanding the playfulness of the argument, I would

therefore suggest that there was some real value inherent in a literary service like this; that is, the power to give (or detract from) social renown and prestige.

In a second example, the tone is less playful and the stakes are higher. Poem 16 by Michael Psellos was very probably written for the emperor Michael IV, when Psellos was still a young man looking for a job opportunity in the bureaucratic system of the capital.[12]

Ἐμοί, κραταιὲ φωσφόρε στεφηφόρε,
μέλημα καὶ σπούδασμα καὶ βίος λόγοι,
ἐξ ὧν φανῆναι καὶ προκόψειν ἐλπίσας
πάντων κατεφρόνησα καὶ ζῆν εἱλόμην
τέως ταπεινὸν καὶ κεκρυμμένον βίον,
πόνοις ὁμιλῶν καὶ σοφῶν βίβλοις μόνον.

For me, mighty and torch-bearing emperor,
learning (*logoi*) is my care, my concern, my life.
It is from learning that I hope to be conspicuous and successful.
Therefore I neglected all other things and chose until now
to lead a humble and concealed life,
having contact only with the toils and the books of scholars.

In the middle of the poem, Psellos states that he wants to come to the emperor's assistance in these difficult times. The poem closes with a rather explicit request (vv. 15–17):

δέδεξο λοιπὸν οἰκέτου δῶρον λόγον·
σὺ δ' ἀντιδοίης τὴν κατ' ἀξίαν δόσιν
τοῖς σοῖς με πάντως συμβαλὼν νοταρίοις.

[12] W 16.

So, accept now this poem as a gift from a servant;
but you, may you give me a reward of equal value
by recruiting me as one of your secretaries.

This poem is emphatically identified as a gift (v. 15: δῶρον) consisting of a λόγος. This is immediately connected with a direct plea to reward this gift with a job as a secretary. Psellos makes clear that the reward must be something of equal value (v. 16: τὴν κατ' ἀξίαν δόσιν). This reward is also described as a counter-gift (v. 16: δόσις) that needs to be 'given in return' (ἀντιδοίης). Here, Psellos points to the inherent ethics of gift-giving; that is, that every gift supposes a counter-gift, with the expectation that a lasting gift exchange will arise. The expectations about the crude economic mechanics of gift exchange are stated here in an unusually explicit manner. It should be noted that Psellos' gift worked: he did obtain a position as a secretary in the administration of Michael IV, as we learn from his *Chronographia*.[13]

However bluntly this poem may express its expectations, it also reveals some presuppositions that are only applicable to 'gifts of words'. In the first part of the poem, Psellos emphasizes his dedication to intellectual values. With the toils he spent on the *logoi*, he hoped to be conspicuous and to be successful. This clearly reflects the career possibilities that could be gained by exhibiting competences in learning. These competences and skills are represented here as the result of ascetic-like devotion; indeed, they are a hard-earned acquisition, because one has to lead a laborious, hidden life to master them. Unlike other assets, intellectual assets cannot manifest themselves directly: an amount of investment, in terms of time and in terms of social isolation, is needed before one is able to play out these assets. These investments are not evident, so they surely had to be emphasized. This poem itself then, also called a *logos* (l. 14), is a token of these investments, and provides ample proof that Psellos mastered all the intellectual competences needed for a responsible position.

[13] See Psellos, *Chronographia*, book V, §27.

In the case of this poem or Christophoros' cucumber-poem, we do not need to think that poet and recipient seriously believed that the poem in itself sufficed as a means of payment in return for cucumbers or a post as a secretary: other factors will probably have played a greater role. But I would argue that the presentation of the transaction as a poetic gift of words creates a particularly graceful aspect, and permits both participants to think of it not as an economic transaction, but as an act of aesthetic admiration. The rhetoric of 'gifts of words' only works because the recipients are supposed to attach an extraordinary value to the beauty of words and to the amount of intellectual energy and talent that is needed to achieve that beauty. The poems themselves are the place where the social or economic exchange finds an adequate and refined expression.

Dedicating Gifts: Poetry as a Paratext in Mauropous

Poetry not only serves to be presented as a gift; it also serves to present other things as a gift. Poem 55 of Ioannes Mauropous in fact combines both.[14] The poem is dedicated to Zoe and Theodora, the two nominal empresses during the reign of Konstantinos Monomachos. The poem, as printed in the modern edition, begins with these two verses:[15]

> Δισσαῖς ἀνάσσαις αὐταδέλφαις Αὐγούσταις
> δώρημα κοινὸν ἐξ ἑνὸς δούλου τόδε.
>
> To the two sisters Augustae and mistresses,
> this shared gift from one servant.

[14] On the circumstances of delivery of this poem, see also Floris Bernard, 'The Circulation of Poetry in 11th-Century Byzantium', in Savvas Neocleous (ed.), *Sailing to Byzantium. Papers from the First and Second Postgraduate Forums in Byzantine Studies. Trinity College, Dublin, 16–17 April 2007 and 15–16 May 2008* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2009), pp. 145–160.

[15] L 55.1–2.

In *Vat. Gr.* 676, the manuscript that preserves the works of Mauropous and reflects faithfully the way the poet wanted his works to appear,[16] we see that these two lines are written in an epigraphic majuscule, making them stand out from the rest of the poem (fol. 26^{v}). Normally, this eye-catching font is only used for titles and, in particular, for accompanying 'book epigrams'.[17] Its use at this point makes clear that these two lines need to be seen as a *paratext*; that is, a text that intends to present the main text and steer the presuppositions with which the reader embarks on reading the main text.[18]

As such, this poem (let us call it 55a) presents the poem proper (55b) as a gift. Moreover, a separate use of 55a only makes sense if we suppose that the poem as a whole was, just as other dedicated objects, offered to its patrons physically. Here we can imagine poem 55b offered in the form of a small roll, with 55a as an elegant distich attached to it in some way or another. This physical aspect of the 'gift of words' is important to keep in mind.

We see here, in contrast to the previously discussed poems, that gift and dedication are neatly separated from each other. The dedication takes the form of an epigram; that is, a text that provides a framework of how to understand the gift proper, by stating giver, receiver, and often also the expectations that underlie the giving of the gift. This might imply that the poetic gift does not always refer to itself explicitly as a gift, while many poems did function in such a way. Poem 55b is an example: when we take away the epigram 55a, there is no explicit indication to be found that it was intended as a gift.

The function of a poem as the presentation of the gift, rather than the gift itself, emerges more clearly in poem 27 of Mauropous. It is indicated in the title as a πρόγραμμα for Mauropous' oration for the Dormition of the Theotokos (or. 183), and it is imbedded in a small series of *programmata* in the collection (28–31). The word πρόγραμμα can be taken quite literally: the poetic

[16] On Mauropous' poetry collection, see Marc Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 2003), pp. 62–65.

[17] Cf. Herbert Hunger, 'Minuskel und Auszeichnungsschriften im 10.-12. Jahrhundert', in Jean Glénisson, Jacques Bompaire and Jean Irigoin (eds), *La paléographie grecque et byzantine* (Paris, 1972), pp. 201–220.

[18] The notion of *paratext* has been propagated by Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987).

dedicatory inscription might have been physically affixed before the main text as it appeared in the manuscript. In contrast to an ἐπίγραμμα, it was written *before* the dedicated object instead of *on* it, but all the same it functioned as a *paratext*, and would provide a visually marked indication of the circumstances of the gift.[19]

In the *programma*, Mauropous presents the oration as a garland for the Theotokos, and asks her to allow him to crown her with it; but he adds the following precaution (L 27.24–29):

> εἰ δ' οὖν, τὸ δῶρον δεξιᾶς σῆς ἀξίου,
> αὐτή τε σαυτὴν εὐπρεπῶς τούτῳ στέφε·
> ἢ μᾶλλον εὐπρέπειαν αὐτὴ τῷ στέφει
> προσψαύσεως σῆς ἀξιουμένῳ δίδου.
> ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς λόγοις σε τιμῶντας μόνοις
> ἔργοις σὺ πάντως ἀντιτίμησον πλέον.
>
> If not, [sc. *if I cannot crown you myself*] deem this gift worthy of your right hand,
> and crown yourself with it, in dignity.
> Or rather, attribute dignity to this garland
> by deeming it worthy of your touch.
> As for us, who have revered you with words only,
> reward us at any rate more, with deeds.

The poem concludes (vv. 34–36):

> ταύτην ἀμοιβὴν τοῦ πόθου καὶ τοῦ λόγου
> λάβοιμεν ἐκ σοῦ, καὶ τὸ τῆς δόξης στέφος,
> κἂν ταῦτα μεῖζον ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐλπίσαι.

[19] For the mutually complementary meanings of ἐπίγραμμα and πρόγραμμα, see also Lauxtermann, *Poetry*, p. 30.

> May we receive from you that reward for our desire and our words,
> and also the wreath of renown,
> even if hoping this lies beyond our limits.

The poet is keen to underline the spiritual nature of the exchange that takes place here. All the poet has to offer are his words and his well-intended feelings. The word *pothos* (translated as 'desire') is important here: it refers to the intention and the personal devotion that motivate the gift, in contrast to its intrinsic, 'real' value. Elsewhere in the poem, Mauropous states that it is not this garland of words that is worthy of the Theotokos, but the *pothos* that underlies the act of giving, and that gives strength to this oration (vv. 13–16). The *pothos* conceals still more of the economic nature of the exchange, as it is presented as an act inspired by spontaneous intentions. This does not prevent the poet from expressing the recognizable motif of claiming deeds in exchange for words (v. 28).

The fact that the gift consists of words, lifts the gift exchange up to a more prestigious level. It is rather with a defiant tone that Mauropous asserts that his gift consists of 'only words' (v. 28): every suggestion of a material offering is avoided. In poem 28, a *programma* to an oration for the commemoration of the angels (or. 177), this aspect is elaborated to a further degree: the argumentation goes that even if Mauropous were able to give something of material value, he would still only give a gift with the appropriate intentions (v. 5: σὺν προθυμίᾳ), and since he feels only love for words and learning (vv. 7–9), he can only offer a gift consisting of words. We see in both poems how Mauropous underlines the spiritual quality of his gift, while at the same time asserting himself as a devotee of intellectual values.

It must be noted that the gift-giving is performed on the level of a religious relationship. In fact, the discourse of gift exchange was very appropriate for the expression of the relationship between man and God: the idea of ἀντίδωσις or ἀμοιβή, the reward that one receives in the life hereafter for the good deeds done on Earth, is seminal to Byzantine religious thinking.

Another important aspect of gift-giving that is revealed in poem 27, is Mauropous' claim that the Theotokos is able to bestow dignity on the gift and the giver merely by accepting the gift. The

slightest touch of her hand (v. 27: προσψαύσεως) will confer glory on the gift and its donor. What Mauropous hopes for, as he says in the second to last line (v. 35), is 'the wreath of renown'. I am convinced that this aspect can be extrapolated to gifts on a more mundane level: if a gift is accepted by a recipient who holds a higher hierarchical position, this acceptance aggrandizes the giver as well, because his or her gift was deemed worthy of the attention of the mighty. The request for renown (v. 35: δόξα) thus might have repercussions that extend into the context of the initial readers and hearers of the poem. Mauropous' oration was, we may presume, read out in a public place before many important officials. Therefore, the wish for renown is at the same time the wish for an appreciative reception of the oration by the contemporary (and maybe also subsequent) hearers (and readers).

Psellos and Strategies of Giving

This aspect of dignity attributed to the donor of the gift if his or her humble present is accepted, recurs in other poems. The long didactic poems of Michael Psellos are, with one exception, dedicated to emperors. These dedications are to be found in the lemmata above the poems in the manuscripts, but the name of the dedicatee differs from manuscript to manuscript.

Accordingly, poem 1, on the inscriptions of the psalms, bears a dedication to Monomachos in the titles of some manuscripts and to Michael Doukas in others. As Westerink observes, it is probable that Psellos dedicated the same poem to different emperors: he used the same text, but attached a new dedication for the new emperor.[20] But there is more: the *lemmata* in a third group of manuscripts of poem 1 do not mention a dedication to an emperor at all.[21] The text in these manuscripts also differs substantially from the text in the other manuscripts: whenever the main text has an address to the emperor (for example, v. 1: δέσποτά μου), this group of manuscripts

[20] Leendert G. Westerink, *Michael Psellus. Poemata* (Stuttgart/Leipzig, 1992), p. 1. See also the discussion by Hörandner elsewhere in this volume.

[21] These are *Vat. Pal. gr.* 383, *Athen.* 799, *Mosqu. gr.* 388, and *Boston. Houghton gr.* 3. The last of these, however, exhibits some deviant readings with regard to the other three. Westerink did not follow this group of manuscripts for the establishment of his text.

supplants this with a general address, apparently to a group of students (in this example: φιλόλογοι). Moreover, these manuscripts leave out the last portion of the text (from v. 292 to the end). Significantly, this portion is an epilogue to the main text, where the poet addresses the emperor (whoever that was) personally, and also clearly dedicates the poem as a gift: 'I have summarized this for you by way of introduction, my lord, and now I offer it to you as a proper gift, crown-bearer.'[22]

It might be interesting to note that the group of manuscripts that leave out all mention to any emperor agree in their deviant readings with the oldest extant fragment that is transmitted; that is, in the *Bodl. Clarke 15*,[23] which was written in 1078 while Psellos was still alive.[24] This fragment also ends just before the final dedicatory verses. The evidence from the *Bodl. Clarke 15* may confirm that the manuscripts that do not include a dedication reflect an older version of Psellos' poem, or at any rate, a version nevertheless authored by Psellos.

It is therefore probable that poem 1 existed initially as a separate text that did not contain any reference or dedication to an emperor. This initial state is reflected in a branch of manuscripts that also comprises the oldest preserved fragment (the one from the Clarke manuscript).[25] The addresses to a wider public of *philologoi* may indicate that Psellos used the poem in his capacity as a teacher at a private school, which makes it in this respect comparable to the didactic poems of Niketas of Herakleia, some of which are obviously directed to a group of pupils.[26] But when Psellos later got in contact with the emperor, he would have considered it appropriate to wrap this poem as a gift by

[22] W 1.292–293: Ταῦτ' εἰσαγωγικώτερον, ἄναξ, σοὶ συνοψίσας | δῶρόν σοι προσαγήοχα οἰκεῖον, στεφηφόρε.

[23] The fragment in the *Bodl. Clarke* 15, unnoticed by Westerink, is to be found on fol. 1^{r}–2^{v}, and transmits verses 262 to 291. See Thomas Gaisford, *Catalogus sive notitia manuscriptorum qui a cel. E.D. Clarke comparati in bibliotheca Bodleiana adservantur* (Oxford, 1812), pp. 57–58, where Psellos' authorship is ignored. For this manuscript, see the contribution of Marc Lauxtermann in this volume. I am grateful to Niels Gaul for drawing my attention to this manuscript.

[24] Psellos at any rate died after 1076, possibly as late as 1092; see Apostolos Karpozelos, 'When did Michael Psellus die?', *BZ*, 96 (2003): pp. 671–677.

[25] I am grateful for the advice of Prof. Wolfram Hörandner, with whom I discussed this possibility at the conference.

[26] See the contribution of Wolfram Hörandner in this volume. See also Jean Schneider, 'La poésie didactique à Byzance: Nicétas d'Héraclée', *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, 58 (1999): pp. 388–423, esp. pp. 416–423.

adding a separate dedication at the end of the poem and inserting an address to the emperor in the text itself. The mere feat of dedicating such a poem to the emperor, and having it accepted, would have enhanced the reputation and prestige of Psellos as a teacher and a figure with influence at court. In this case then, the operation of turning a poem into a gift poem is carried out by providing an epilogue, the exact counterpart of a *programma*.

Books as Gifts

Whatever the spiritual connotations of the literary gift, it may have also entailed a tangible aspect. As we have seen with regard to poem 55, the gift of words was also offered 'in hard copy'. The literary gift is therefore able to combine the immateriality of words with the tangible value of its written form, eminently so in the most valuable literary gift: the book. Books were a frequent gift in Byzantium and, as can be expected, many of these books contain an epigram at the beginning or at the end that dedicates the book.[27] I will single out one of them.

The famous manuscript *Paris. Coisl.* 79 contains excerpts from homilies of Ioannes Chrysostomos and displays several miniatures at the beginning of the manuscript, accompanied by epigrams.[28] One of these miniatures (on f. 2bis, *olim* 1r) shows a monk pointing with a staff to the book placed on the lectern. This monk, who is identified as Sabbas by an inscription above his head, is clearly represented as the donor of the book. The figure on his right, an emperor sitting on a throne, is identified by an inscription as Nikephoros Botaneiates. However, there are indications that the book was first intended to be given to Michael Doukas, and underwent some modifications upon the ascent to the throne of Nikephoros and his marriage to Maria of Alania.[29] Moreover, it has been suggested that Sabbas added the epigrams and adapted the miniatures after the book had been

[27] This is testified by the many examples that are to be found in the database of book epigrams compiled by Klaas Bentein; see the contribution of Demoen and Bentein in this volume.

[28] On these epigrams, see also the contribution of Anneliese Paul in this volume.

[29] So Joannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 112–118.

produced by someone else.[30] This scenario makes clear that the initiative for the creation of this work of art did not come from the emperor, but from courtiers who wanted to do him a favour.[31]

Above the miniature mentioned, we find the following epigram:[32]

ὕψους ἀνάκτων εὐκλεὴς σκηπτουχία
ταῖς ἡδοναῖς θέλχθητι ταῖς ἐκ τῶν λόγων
καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τέρφθητι καὶ χαίρων κρότει
σοῖς οἰκέταις βράβευε χεῖρα πλουσίαν.

Oh you famous sceptre-bearer of the height of rulers,
be charmed by the delights from words,
rejoice at heart, applaud gladly,
and reward your servants with a generous hand.

In this case, explicit mention of donor and recipient was not necessary, since the miniature provided those identifications. The epigram complements the image, stating the expectations implied with the gift. The words 'generous hand' (χεῖρα πλουσίαν) do not leave much room for imagination: our poet expects some financial recompense for his services. Again, this poem distances itself from the main text by means of its physical outlook: the epigraphic style of the majuscule letter highlights its use as a *paratext*.

It has to be noted that while this book in itself was a precious, even sumptuous gift, the pleasure that the gift can bring is here said to be provoked by words. The reward that is projected is therefore a logical consequence of the admiration that these words provoke, not a remuneration of the material value of the book.

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[30] Carmen-Laura Dumitrescu, 'Remarques en marge du Coislin 79: Les trois eunuques et le problème du donateur', *Byz*, 57 (1987): pp. 32–45.

[31] Ibid., p. 34.

[32] The poem is edited in Spatharakis, *Portrait*, p. 108.

Exquisite Gifts

In many of the foregoing examples, the use of poetry can be explained from the tradition of the epigram.[33] The poetic outlook of these epigrams helped to recognize them as *paratexts*, and, applied to gifts, it made sure that they were perceived as the dedication of the gift. As such, these epigrams naturally belong to the long tradition of the genre of the dedicatory epigram, of which the conventional structures are tailored to actual needs.

However, the use of poetry in connection with gifts may have another motivation that is harder to pin down: poetry also adds a particular touch to a gift, whether the gift itself is poetic or not. This particular touch is one of a refined taste, a sense of common celebration that only a few could appreciate.

This common celebration of gifts finds otherwise its foremost literary expression in epistolography: letters express gratitude for received gifts, or accompany gifts sent to a friend. In fact, quite a few poems by Christophoros are perfectly comparable with these kinds of letters. Poem 43 thanks his friend Niketas Synadenos for the gift of bandages for his sore feet. Poem 45 accompanies a gift of fresh jars (with aromatic wine?)[34] for a friend in summertime; also here, the poet proclaims the *pothos* with which the gift is given. Poem 64 accompanies a book (and perhaps more – the poem is greatly damaged) given to *protopapas* Ioannes. Poems 66 and 67 accompany the gift of a golden apple for a certain Eudokia, written on behalf of a friend. Poems 87 and 88 reject in a playful sophistic manner first a gift of grapes and then a gift of figs from a friend. Poem 94 thanks a certain Leo for the *mesisklia* he has sent;[35] from a fragmentary line, we can infer that Christophoros thanks Leon for the affection (K 94.4: στοργή) he has shown with this gift. Poem 110 is coupled with some wine sent to a certain Kosmas. Poem 117 is sent along with some perfume of roses to the monk Athanasios, suggesting that Athanasios might pass the gift along to other friends.

[33] See also the 'epigrammatic habit' described by Paul Magdalino elsewhere in this volume.

[34] For the question of the exact content of the gift, see Crimi, *Canzoniere*, pp. 89–90.

[35] It is not known what these μεσίσκλια are, cf. *LBG*, s.v. 'μεσίσκλια': 'eine Speise?'.

These poems, except maybe for the enigmatic pair 66 and 67, are conceived as letters that accompany or respond to gifts sent from afar: the titles frequently use the verb 'send' (ἀποστέλλω or πέμπω) in reference to the gifts, although the poems themselves designate them more expressly as 'gifts' (δῶρον: K 45.1, K 117.1, δόσις: K 43.6). The poems display the same conventional motives as letters written to thank people for gifts, such as the joy of receiving (see K 45.3: σὺν ἡδονῇ … δέξαι καρδίας), and *ad hoc* explanations of the hidden meaning of gifts (so 43, 87, 88, and possibly implied in K 64.2 κεκρυμμένην).

However, two 'gift poems' join the discourse of 'gifts of words' with these conventions of friendly, elegant gift exchanges, by focusing on the poem as an autonomous gift. Poems 115 and 124 are both written (perhaps not by accident) on the occasion of popular celebrations. These are the *broumalion*, celebrated in November, and the *kalandai*, the first days of the year.[36] Both celebrations (which were officially condemned) included exuberant merrymaking and masquerades. They were also appropriate moments to exchange gifts.

Poem 124 is written on the occasion of the *kalandai*. The poem is badly damaged: only the even-numbered verses are extant. From its fragmented title, we can only conclude that it was addressed to a friend on this festive first day of the year. In verse 2, Christophoros refers to 'salutations for friends' (δεξιώσεις πρὸς φίλους). In verse 6, he unveils the gift he is to present to his friend. 'Here you are, I give you these words as a gift' (ἰδοὺ δίδωμι τούσδε δῶρα τοὺς λόγους), and in verse 8, he specifies, 'I create rhythms of words with my writing pen' (γραφῆς καλάμῳ ῥημάτων τελῶ κρότους). In the next readable verse, he asks his friend to accept these words on this festive day of the *kalandai* (K 124.10: ἐν τῇ καλανδῶν προσδέχου νουμηνίᾳ), and he concludes his poem by stating that nothing in life is better than this gift: ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἔχει τὶ βέλτιον τούτου βίος.

Words are the kind of gift Christophoros declares he is giving. We can assume that the gift in question is in fact this very poem. The word κρότος (K 124.8) may refer to the beating rhythm of

[36] For these feasts, see *ODB*, s.v. 'Broumalion' and 'Calends'. See also poem 18 of Psellos, written on the occasion of the *kalandai*.

verse,[37] and the words τούσδε τοὺς λόγους (K 124.6) may point to this very poem and not to another piece of literature, as Crimi suggests;[38] this may be concluded from the present tense of τελῶ κρότους (K 124.8). In any event, the proud declaration of Christophoros that he gives verse as a gift, while he was conscious that others gave material presents at this festive occasion, indicates the exquisiteness that poetry maintains with respect to other forms of gifts. There might also have been (perhaps more explicitly so in the lines that are now lost) an *antithesis* between the rattling and clapping by celebrants of the *kalandai*, and the poetic rhythm that Christophoros creates, both designated with the word κρότος. In this case, the sound of poetic rhythm is, of course, considered superior.

The same argument, but in a converse way, is to be found in poem 115, bearing the title 'To his friend Nikephoros, who sent him biscuits during the time of the *broumalion*'. Instead of accompanying a gift, it comments upon the gift of his friend:

> Ἐκ ῥημάτων με δεξιοῦ, μὴ πεμμάτων·
> ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἡδὺ βρουμάλιον οἱ λόγοι,
> ὡς προσκυνητῇ καὶ λατρευτῇ τοῦ λόγου,
> τῶν δὲ σταλέντων πεμμάτων τίς μοι λόγος;
> λοιπόν γε τοίνυν σύ, γλυκὺς Νικηφόρος,
> ἀφεὶς τὸ πέμμα καὶ πλατύνας τὸ στόμα
> τὰ δ' οὔατα γλύκαινε καὶ μὴ τὸ στόμα,
> ταῖς ἡδοναῖς τέρπων με τῶν σῶν ῥημάτων.[39]
>
> Greet me with words, not with biscuits!
> Words are for me a sweet *broumalion*,

[37] See Marc Lauxtermann, 'The Velocity of Pure Iambs. Byzantine Observations on the Metre and Rhythm of the Dodecasyllable', *JÖB*, 48 (1998): pp. 9–33, esp. pp. 24–25.

[38] Crimi, *Canzoniere*, p. 164.

[39] I adopt Crimi's conjecture τὰ δ' οὔατα at line 7, see Crimi, *Canzoniere*, p. 156.

as I am a devotee and worshipper of words.
What do I gain by the biscuits you sent me?
So, my sweet Nikephoros, as for you,
leave the biscuits and open wide your mouth,
sweeten my ears, and not my mouth,
by entertaining me with the pleasures of your words.

Nikephoros is rebuked – in a playful way, of course – for not living up to the intellectual ideal. Again, 'normal' material gifts are contrasted, and found inferior, to the immaterial literary gift that is presented here as a source of purely intellectual pleasure. The slight protestation against material gifts in favour of literary gifts (as in poems 115 and 124) was already a *topos* in epistolography.[40] The idea concords with the claim of Mauropous in poem 28, the *programma* to the oration for the angels: instead of material gifts, his love for learning incites him to give words. Moreover, 'delights of words' (K 115.8: ἡδοναῖς τῶν ῥημάτων) is the expression that also occurs in the book epigram of Sabbas. Christophoros does nothing other than appeal to a widely accepted idea.

In these two poems, Christophoros implies that the taste for words is not shared by everybody: only a literary gift is suitable for him, as he is a 'devotee and worshipper of words' (K 115.3), and as 'nothing is better in life' (K 124.12). This refined taste is seen as the hallmark of a distinct type of individual: the true intellectual. Only this type of intellectual is able to recognize the value of those gifts, a value that is not measurable by evident material standards. This mutually shared appreciation of the signification of such a gift forges exclusive bonds that hold the intellectual elite together.

The poetic form of these gifts adds to this value. The sheer amount of labour invested in the composition of prosodic verse would testify to the time and energy one is willing to give to someone else. The effort to curb verse in the obsolete quantitative prosodic pattern, at first sight needless, can be considered a token of the *prothumia* or *pothos* with which a gift is given. Christophoros asserts

[40] Apostolos Karpozelos, 'Realia in Byzantine Epistolography X–XIIc', *BZ*, 77 (1984): pp. 20–37, here pp. 20–21.

the metric artistry of this undertaking in a conscious way: 'I produce rhythms of words with my writing pen' (K 124.8). It appears that his intention is to polish his letters to such a degree that he shapes them in poetry, turning them into still more valuable gifts.

In conclusion, the discourse of 'words as a gift' is a powerful one that celebrates the common taste of these circles of intellectuals and confirms the relevance of their skills.[41] Even in quite blunt proposals for exchange, as in Psellos' poem 16, there is a strong appeal to an appreciation of the labours needed to master these skills. The stress on the artistic quality and spiritual signification of the poetic gift permits these poets to project it into a graceful sphere of exchange where gifts and counter-gifts are represented as spontaneous acts of admiration, compelled by a shared sensibility to the delights of *logoi*. The powerful people in society, although perhaps not the most intellectually sophisticated, nevertheless partake of the prestige that accompanies these exchanges, if only by accepting the gift (and, obviously, by creating the appropriate material framework to make these gifts possible). The discourse of the gift of words, moreover, permits the creation of bonds, but also exclusions. While evoking a paradisiacal world of mutually appreciated aesthetics, it also helps to guard this paradise against the boorish intruder. Poetry, therefore, is not only an innocent pastime of government officials; it is also a social tool that does not fail to be effective.

[41] On the sociological impact of 'taste', and the process of making intellectual or cultural skills socially relevant, see Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979).