The Distinction of Verse

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What is poetry – and, for that matter, what is prose? This question has met with different answers in every culture. The most simple distinction is based purely on form: poetry, structured as it is in verse lines, is "bound speech" (*gebundene Rede*), as opposed to "loose" prose, which continues without recurring patterns. But in almost any culture, this quality of bound speech is related to a number of cultural and social components that are felt to belong to poetry alone. Typically, poetry is speech that is more elevated, complex, and divine; it is related to the expression of individual or communal emotions, to mystical "enthusiasm" or transportation of the senses, to collective memory of nations, or other lofty subjects.

VERSE OR POETRY?

The interesting feature of Byzantine poetry is that none of these usual connotations seem to apply. Dense figurative language, introspection, lyrical expression, intense emotionality, subjects of great communal importance: in Byzantine poetry, these are all incidental features rather than defining ones. There is, however one important exception: liturgical poetry, which is, tellingly, written mostly in non-prosodical meter (on the term see below). This chapter will deal basically with learned poetry, and most of the discussed texts pertain to the middle Byzantine period.

Two examples may illustrate the unusual scope of Byzantine verse production. The first is a report of a juridical case, written (in the twelfth century?) by a certain *protekdikos* Andronikos (edited in Macrides 1985). As Ruth Macrides pointed out, the structure and purpose of the poem resemble those of a *semeioma*, a legal document, even if it is composed in verse. There are some self-referential statements that stress its poetic character, but it is certainly not more "literary" than its prose counterparts: "the verse form itself [is not] necessarily a determining factor in assigning the piece a literary rather than legal function" (Macrides 1985:165).

A second example is a didactic poem by the eleventh-century author Michael Psellos that purports to give a summary of the science of medicine (Michael Psellos, *Poem* 9). The

poem, counting more than one thousand verses, is eminently technical, resembling a list of glosses to medical terms. At one point, Psellos (closely following Galen, as in other parts of the poem) describes at length the different colors and odors of urine and their usefulness for diagnosing diseases. Poetry can hardly get more unpoetical than this. As if Psellos himself also realized this, he adds after this section that he composed the text in verse, so as to implant "a small taste" in interested readers, brought about by the graces (*charis*) of the meter (see vv. 529-538). The modern reader is left with the question what this *charis* is exactly, and why Psellos made the enormous effort of composing more than one thousand verses about diseases, foodstuffs, and urines in a meter that met not only prosodical, but also rhythmical demands.

Marc Lauxtermann has considered the issue of poeticality, focusing on didactic poetry (Lauxtermann 2009). He remarks that there is a conflict in our use of the term "poetry" when we describe Byzantine poetry, especially didactic poetry. On the one hand, one may posit that Byzantine didactic poetry is no poetry at all, since all of our usual parameters for considering something as "poetic" are absent. But if one simply equates poetry with "verse", retaining only the formal aspect, one can fruitfully investigate how this form engenders a specific "poetic" discourse. Lauxtermann concludes: "Byzantine didactic poetry is to be considered poetry for no other reason than that it is in verse" (Lauxtermann 2009:46). This statement can be taken as a starting-point for our essay.

PROSODY AND ACCENT

Any student of poetry in Byzantium should always be aware of the gap between the Byzantine theoretical conception of verse and the linguistic reality of the time. In ancient Greek the duration of vowels had a phonemic relevance. Ancient Greek poetry was prosodical, that is, built upon the distinction between syllables that were perceived as either "long" or "short". By the fourth c. CE, this distinction had fallen away, and the main distinction relevant to hearers was that between stressed and unstressed syllables. After such a major phonological change, Greek poetry could no longer be built naturally on the same premises. Prosody became thus a fossilized, purely intellectual feature. At the same time, from fairly early on, poetry (in varying degrees) did adopt rhythmical patterns, based on stress accent. These "living" features, however, were in principle not accepted by Byzantine teachers (and, consequently, most learned writers) as essential to what they called "poetry"; in their conception, "meter" (μέτρον) continued to equal prosodical meter.

The most widely used Byzantine meter, the dodecasyllable, is an excellent illustration of this tension. To start with, dodecasyllable is very rarely used in Byzantine times; the term was introduced in modern usage by Paul Maas (Maas 1903; see also Rhoby 2011 and Hörandner and Rhoby in this volume). Byzantines generally continued to use the term "iambs" or "iambic trimeter", the ancient prosodical meter from which the dodecasyllable evolved. But the dodecasyllable is clearly a syllabic verse, always counting twelve syllables. And, as often in European versification (see Gasparov 1996), the principle of isosyllaby was not enough to create a feeling of recurrence, after which poetry always strives. Increasingly, a regular stress pattern appeared in Byzantine dodecasyllables: the penultimate syllable received a stress, and certain combinations of stresses with caesuras (more appropriately to be called "verse pauses") were preferred or avoided (see also Lampsides 1972; Romano 1985). The dodecasyllable thus gradually became a syllabo-tonic verse. These developments set in with George of Pisidia (early 7th century), and were completed by the turn of the millennium. All the while, the prosodic structure of the iambic trimeter was sometimes meticulously upheld, sometimes wholly neglected; and most often, a compromise was found in which only the most eye-catching prosodic infringements were avoided. Simultaneously, hexameters and elegiac distichs continued to be written, although these rarely went beyond limited intellectual milieus after the sixth century, and were never, or only very slightly, adapted to new syllabo-tonic metrical needs.

Byzantine authors of the learned tradition were not alone in artificially preserving metrical principles that were no longer truly "alive" in the ear of the contemporary audience (see Gasparov 1996: 189-192 for similar phenomena in the Renaissance); still, it is remarkable how insistent they were in refraining from reflecting on, or defining, the components that were at the core of their own poetry.

Purely accentual meters did develop in Byzantium early on. Most liturgical poetry uses stanzas built on repeating accentual patterns, often very elaborate. These hymnographical meters, apart from a few exceptions, perhaps parodies (Mitsakis 1990), were strictly confined to liturgical purposes. The *politikos stichos,* first appearing in the tenth century, is another syllabo-tonic meter, but a stichic one (line-by-line) instead of strophic. Byzantines never considered these accentual meters as the continuation of ancient meters, not even as proper meters; at best, the *politikos stichos* was an *ametron metron,* a meter without meter (Hörandner 1985:280-5; on these meters, see Lauxtermann 1999 and Hörandner and Rhoby in this volume).

A challenge for future scholarship is to bring together these genres and meters and to describe the entire constellation of verse, synchronically as well as diachronically. The

politikos stichos is not worlds apart from the purposes and contexts in which dodecasyllabic verse was produced; and the fact that some middle Byzantine poets wrote both hymnographic and "secular" verse may indicate that these "genres" too belong more closely together than is commonly thought. The earlier *Handbuch* approach which neatly divided poetry into secular, vernacular, and ecclesiastic, needs to be replaced by a more inclusive approach.

BYZANTINE TERMINOLOGY

Perhaps we may call all the types of verse texts "Byzantine poetry", but it is highly improbable that Byzantines themselves would have used one consistent term to define these texts. It is important to be aware that our terminology collapses in the face of Byzantine terminology, which draws other boundaries. To understand better how they did define their own poetry, we can ask ourselves what terminology *they* used to refer to their texts in verse.

The Byzantines did not normally use the words ποίησις and ποιητής for their own poetry and poets. There is a mention of ποιηταί in the *Book of Ceremonies* (738.15), which perhaps refers to composers of deme songs, but, usually, ποίησις and ποιητής were terms exclusively reserved for ancient poetry; ὁ ποιητής (when not referring, as is usually the case, to God as "Creator") is a standard term for Homer, the ancient poet *par excellence*. For instance, Michael Psellos in a text to his pupils (*Minor Oration* 20.12), and Michael Choniates in a public speech (Or. 15: 265.21), introduce a Homeric quotation with the words "as in the Poet", assuming that their audience knows who "the poet" is.

The same picture emerges from Byzantine theoretical literature, regardless of when such technical treatises were composed. Ποίησις is emphatically ancient poetry: poetry to be read, interpreted and taught, but not poetry that is still composed. Such study of ποίησις (be it metrical analysis or interpretation of content) was integrated into the study of grammar, the first subject within the school curriculum, preceding the study of rhetoric, from which it differed in an essential way: unlike the study of poetry, the study of rhetoric focused on the composition, rather than the passive study of texts (see Papaioannou in this volume).

This ποίησις was so clearly seen and felt as a school subject, that it had the connotation of playful juvenile trifles. In his biography of Theodore the Stoudite, Michael the Monk (9th century) states that in his youth, Theodore was a diligent student of poetry (ποιήματα), "of which he did not accept the mythical, but only the useful aspects" (*Vita A* §2, *PG* 99.117C-D). This is probably a mere hagiographical *topos*, yet it indicates that Greek

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mythology was assumed to be a defining feature of the poetry learnt at school. In the prologue to his rhetorical handbook (11th century), Ioannes Doxapatres describes the trepidation of students who can finally leave behind "poetry" and all its marvelous tales, and proceed to the more useful and formidable art of rhetoric (*Commentary on Aphthonios' Progymnasmata* 81). The same trepidation was felt by Psellos (*Funeral Oration for his Mother* 841-2). And Ioannes Mauropous asks a younger pupil whether he has finally been freed from trivialities such as *schedos* and reading tragedians and comedians (*Letter* 74).

If ποίησις and cognates were avoided by Byzantines, how, then, did they refer to their own poetry? Andreas Rhoby has taken up this question in a recent contribution that considers the titles of poems in Byzantine usage (Rhoby 2015). *Logos* is the word that came most logically to the Byzantine mind when referring to a text, metrical or not. Sometimes, the adjective ἔμμετρος (metrical) is added to *logos*. This qualification corroborates Lauxtermann's observation that Byzantines saw only a formal difference between *logoi* that were versified and those that were not.

We may add some examples of self-labeling in poems: George of Pisidia says that he has honored his patron "with little words", and asks him to benevolently accept his "words", in both cases referring to his own poems (*Poem* 1.68 and *Poem* 2.36); elsewhere in the poems, naturally, the term *logos* encompasses much more. Likewise, Psellos asks in a poem to the emperor Michael IV that this *logos* be accepted as a gift (*Poem* 16.15). Such examples could be multiplied.

Στίχοι (lines) is even more widely used, both as a label in Byzantine manuscripts and sometimes in the poems themselves (Rhoby 2015). But στίχος is a neutral technical term. It could also refer to a line in a prose text–a letter, for instance (Michael Psellos, *Letter* 264, ed. Kurtz-Drexl 309.21). It merely indicates that verse is laid out line by line. Occasionally, other terms were used as well, such as ἔπος (mostly dactylic hexameter, but also, metonymically, verse in general), but this term is decidedly antiquarian, normally reserved for Homer's poetry (Rhoby 2015: 265). It never gained wide acceptance.

In manuscripts, book epigrams are often the only metrical texts in an otherwise prose environment. They seldom have their own title, but when they have, στίχοι and (to a lesser degree) ἐπίγραμμα are the usual terms. The frequently-recurring epigram for the evangelist Mark, for instance, that begins with Ὅσσα περὶ Χριστοῖο θεηγόρος ἔθνεα Πέτρος, is preserved in around 70 manuscripts. As far as we can tell, in eight cases it is headed by a lemma that contains the word στίχοι (mostly qualified as ἡρωικοί), and three times by ἐπίγραμμα (using data from DBBE 2015, consulted February 2016).

Byzantium not only lacked a specific term to denote its own verse production, it also had no concept of the "poet" fulfilling a role in society (on notions of authorship see further Papaioannou in this volume). Is he a wise man, a seer, a prophet, an entertainer, a solitary artist? Sometimes, Byzantine poets are called στιχοπλόκος (cf. infra), which again leads us to the technical, formal aspect of Byzantine poetry; the "verse line weaver" is nothing more than a "versificator". When Ioannes Geometres, a tenth-century author who composed both verse and prose, looks back on his life, he summarizes his literary achievements as follows: "my discourse was spontaneous, my mouth expressed wisdom, my mind was profound" (*Poem* 211, v. 15: ἦν λόγος αὐτόχυτος, σοφίης στόμα, ἦν νόος αἰπύς). The literary works he composed (be it poetry or prose) are subsumed under the notion of *logos*, followed by phrases that underline rhetorical invention, wisdom, and sharp wit.

Poetry and Logoi

The obvious conclusion is that the writing of poetry (apart from the purely technical metrical aspects) was considered as nothing more than a subfield of rhetorical composition. It is well known that already from Antiquity, poetry came more and more to be discussed as a form of rhetoric (Walker 2000). Poems (especially Homer) are regularly quoted as models for rhetorical techniques and genres, and poetry itself was more and more patterned after rhetorical structures (cf. further Papaioannou 2013: 103-105, 116-127; Rhoby 2015: 275-278 for poem titles derived from *progymnasmata*, the rhetorical school exercises). In a twelfth-century poem, an anonymous writer states that "he has read many verse lines of rhetors" (Pseudo-Psellos, *Poem* 98.49-50). Poets, both ancient and Byzantine, were essentially "rhetors".

True enough, one can find many instances in which Byzantines distinguished between poetry and prose. But how deep does this distinction go? In the introductory poem to the book presenting his "collected works", Ioannes Mauropous specifies that the *logoi* he had written throughout his life and from which he now makes a selection, were ἐμμέτρων, οὐκ ἐμμέτρων, "metrical and unmetrical" or "in verse and not in verse" (*Poem* 1, v. 27); again, a formal distinction. Elsewhere in this poem, Mauropous repeatedly uses the generic term *logoi* (without qualification) to refer to his works. Interestingly, Mauropous' secretary, a certain Isaias, returns to this feature when he attaches a kind of poetic blurb to Mauropous' collected works. He observes that Mauropous excelled in three genres (σκέλη): poetry, orations, and letters, while Demosthenes for example never put a verse on paper. Mauropous is thus praised because he masters all literary forms. Poetry matters simply because it is another form of

logoi, and someone mastering poetry is a versatile *logios* – but not necessarily a "poet". Likewise, in an encomium for his teacher and friend (*Panegyric* 17), Psellos praises Mauropous at length for his rhetorical abilities, but never singles out his poetry, or never describes him as a poet.

We see something similar in a remarkable poem of Theodore Prodromos (*Historical poem* 56). Theodore congratulates Alexios Kamateros, an important official, who already held two titles, on his promotion to *orphanotrophos*. Theodore had already praised him in prose form (as Hörandner notes, this must refer to a letter of his) and in the form of a *schedos*. Now, he also writes a poem to him. Among the arguments for doing so, he mentions that all good things come in threes, and the number of three genres matches Alexios' three titles. Apart from an "iambic" poem, Theodore also proceeds to write a praise in dactylic hexameters, elegiacs, and anacreontics.

Theodore's choice to write in poetry, and in different meters, thus appears to stem from a desire to be as exhaustive as possible. He wants to make variations on his praise in all forms acceptable to Byzantine learned writers (hence, not including *politikoi stichoi*). The plethora of meters displays Theodore's versatility and brings honor to the recipient. Here again, poetry plays a role because it is another form, but not for any reason beyond this form itself.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Byzantine meta-poetical discourse also includes the mass of theoretical literature about meter, often in the form of scholia or prolegomena to ancient treatises of grammar and meter (such as those of Dionysius Thrax and Hephaestion). This technical literature, often itself impossible to distinguish from (late) ancient scholia, takes ancient, and not contemporary, metrics, as its point of departure. This results in a disjunction between the discourse about poetry and the nature of poetry itself. One will search in vain for a discussion of the syllabo-tonic characteristics of the dodecasyllable (Hörandner 1995; Lauxtermann 1998; Valiavitcharska 2013:28-30). Instead, we are offered lengthy explanations about names of ancient prosodical feet, or (on a more advanced level) endless tips and tricks about how to distinguish long and short feet.

Nevertheless, metrical scholia and treatises do sometimes make a distinction between the iambic trimeters used by the ancients, admitting resolution in some metrical positions, and

the iambs "we", that is, the medieval poets, use, which can only count twelve syllables. For this type of iamb, Byzantine metricians use the term καθαρὸς ἴαμβος ("pure iambs"), suggesting that this is the form of iamb they preferred in their own practice (Lauxtermann 1998). Also, the examples they quote tend to be written in this "pure" 12-syllable iambic trimeter.

A key passage for putting Byzantine ideas about meter and poetry into perspective is to be found in a section "about meter" in the *Dialogue on grammar* by Maximos Planoudes (pp. 96-101). Planoudes' view is the traditional archaizing one, but at least he acknowledges the historical changes. He laments the pervasiveness of the iamb/dodecasyllable, which has taken on roles reserved for hexameter and elegiacs. He criticizes the habit of his contemporaries of taking stress accent as the only principle for meter, and denounces political verse and purely accentual dodecasyllables as "verse without meter", stating that "μέτρον (by which he clearly means prosodical meter) is the soul of a verse line". Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the role of accent, and advises to combine prosodical meter with accentual meter (μέτρον with ῥυθμόν), thus confirming the remarkable cohabitation of both in Byzantine (dodecasyllable) poetry.

It would be wrong to dismiss metrical treatises as fossilized exercises of armchair scholars, who are merely echoing ancient knowledge. Our perspective on these texts may change when we consider their manuscript context, and thus integrate their production and use in Byzantine culture. Mostly, these texts are to be found in manuscripts presenting an amalgam of didactic grammatical texts, suggesting that they were used as schoolbooks by the grammarian. The practical usefulness of these texts for students of poetic composition, however, remained limited. There is no Byzantine handbook on how to write poetry (at least none that corresponds with contemporary practice). There exist only some brief summaries, often themselves in the form of a poem. One such poem, transmitted under the name of Psellos (*Poem* 14), concisely enumerates the most important things a pupil should know about the dodecasyllable. It gives advice about which metrical feet should be used where in the verse line, and it also explicitly states that an iamb should count 12 syllables. Poems like this, now dispersed over various editions, provide a more realistic perspective on issues of literary composition and metrical technique than most texts in the commentary tradition do.

THE EURHYTHMICS OF BYZANTINE POETRY

While rhythm was undeniably the heartbeat of Byzantine poetry, Byzantines did not associate it with metrics. They treated rhythm from the perspective of rhetoric, applying it to poetry as well as to prose (Valiavitcharska 2013 and Hörandner and Rhoby in this volume). The most accurate contemporary description of rhythm in the dodecasyllable is part of a rhetorical treatise by Ps.-Gregorios Korinthios (Hörandner 2012b), lines 123-165 (περὶ στίχων ἰαμβικῶν). "Rhythm" here certainly covers more than the accentual pattern: it refers to a fluent, rapid, compact style, without hiatus. The key word is εὔρυθμος (eurhythmic). The author remarks that "iambs too are some sort of eurhythmical prose", a statement that clearly demonstrates how, for the Byzantines, the boundaries between poetry and prose are largely irrelevant because they are governed by the same rhythmical principles. The author is very clear about a defining feature of the Byzantine dodecasyllable: each verse encompasses one grammatical and semantic unit, hence avoiding enjambment. It is important to compress one thought into one line. The isosyllaby of verse lines, in that regard, can be considered as an extreme application of the principle of the rhetorical technique of isocolon.

The "eurhythmics" of Byzantine literature are frequently evoked in contexts of aestheticized savorings of texts by intellectual friends. But only rarely do these evocations explicitly distinguish between prose and poetry when they speak about musical qualities (and even then, poetry and prose always stand on a par). Examples are Anon. Sola, *Poem* 1, discussed by Hörandner and Rhoby, and a passage from one of Psellos' letters, where he insists that harmony is not only to be found in music, "but also in verse and prose" (*Letter* 189, ed. Sathas, 481.31: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἔπεσι καὶ λόγῳ πεζῷ).

In the poems themselves, rhythm is sometimes mentioned in high-pitched self-referential praise. In a poem to the nephew of the emperor, Manuel Philes describes how the sight and presence of his addressee induce him to write (*Poem* Escur. 91, vv. 25-27):

Καὶ λαμβάνω πτέρωσιν εἰς λόγους νέαν.

Κουφίζομαι δὲ πρὸς τὰ μέτρα τῶν στίχων,

Ἐν οἷς περικροτῶ σε τὸν γίγαντά μου·

I take new wings towards words,

and I am lifted to the measures of my lines,

in which I applaud you, my giant.

By virtue of its rhythm, verse transports our senses; it makes Philes (and his audience) so light that they are lifted up in the air. Philes exploits the ambiguity of the word *krotos*,

which is frequently associated with the rhythmical qualities of the dodecasyllable (see also Lauxtermann 1998), but more literally refers to clapping hands, as well. For Philes, the applause for the emperor and the beating rhythm of his verse are one and the same. Philes uses *krotos* very often; for him, it is almost a synonym for "verse", thus emphasizing its power to celebrate.

The Sense of Tradition

What place did Byzantines attribute to their poetry in a wider chronological perspective? Did they have some notion of a "poetic tradition", where one poet influenced, or emulated, the other? What are the models that shaped their idea of how poetry should look like?

A poem transmitted under the name of Psellos, but written probably in the late 12th century, is one of the very few texts that gives us something that resembles a "canon" of Byzantine poets (pseudo-Psellos, *Poem* 68; see also Hörandner and Paul 2011). The poem, in political verse, is a polemic against a certain monk named John, who had written a pamphlet in verse against our poet. The poet states ironically that John seems to be superior to everything written before, and he then comes up with a quite disparate list of ancient philosophers, rhetors, poets, and church fathers; even Saint Paul is not absent. But among the more "modern" Byzantines, only poets are mentioned: Psellos, Pisides, Mitylenaios, Theophylact of Ochrid, and Leo (Choirosphaktes or perhaps Leo Philosophos). It is especially the technical aspect of versifying that is at stake here: poetry as a part of grammatical education. It is about being a *stichoplokos*, a "verse weaver" (v. 28 and 85), and it seems that it is in those domains that the poets from past centuries stand as models. As the context makes clear, respecting prosody and putting the right accents belong to the same area of expertise for our poet.

Another rare example of naming Byzantine authors along with ancient ones is to be found in the treatise by Ps-Gregorios Korinthios mentioned before, notably in the section on model authors for several rhetorical genres (ll. 73-110), but also in that on iambs (ll. 162-165: Pisides, Callicles and Ptochoprodromos alongside Gregory of Nazianzus, Sophocles and Lycophron).

These texts show us that we should not write off the idea that Byzantines saw their own poetry in a historical perspective, and that Byzantine poets could make claim to a posthumous reputation based upon their poetical merits. But for the Byzantines, there was no

straightforward line going from Homer over the lyric and tragic poets, continuing through Gregory of Nazianzus and George Pisides to poets like Christopher Mitylenaios. Byzantine poets were rather compared to the rhetorical craft of prose writers, and in terms of authority of knowledge and wisdom, it is the figure of the evangelist or theologian that stands central.

GREGORY, THE POETICS OF RESTRAINT AND THE BIBLICAL MODEL

There is no Byzantine pamphlet or *ars poetica* declaring an aesthetic (or other) program for writing verse (cf. Conley 1995). One text, however, can be considered as a manifesto about poetry and its proper use: εἰς τὰ ἔμμετρα ("on his own verses") by one of the most influential authors in Byzantium, Gregory of Nazianzos (poem 2.1.39; White 1996: 1-9). It does not really discuss generic and metrical matters, or stylistic, intertextual and aesthetic aspects of poetry: one cannot call it a proper *ars poetica* (despite Milovanović-Barham 1997). Yet, it includes at least three issues that pertain to Byzantine poetry in general.

First, the poem proclaims moderation in writing and in worldly ambitions – the two are tightly connected. Gregory takes issue with people who write "without measure", adroitly profiting from the ambiguity inherent to the Greek word μέτρον, meaning both "meter" (in verse) and "measure", "balance" (also in a moral sense). Gregory does not oppose poetry as such to prose as such, but rather corrects unmeasured writing of poetry. Moreover, the metrical *logoi* (v. 63) to which the poem appears to be a proem (McGuckin 2006: 205-210) deal with the same topics as Gregory's other writings – several are even versifications of his own prose (v. 24 and 64).

Second, Gregory stresses the pedagogical characteristics of verse (cf. Simelidis 2009: 24-30 and 75-79 on the actual use of Gregory's poems in the Byzantine school curriculum). One main advantage of "bound speech" is said to be its mnemonic quality, an aspect that is surely important for didactic poetry. Moreover, meter is delightful and playful (τερπνόν and παίζω are used repeatedly), and hence a perfect vehicle for the didactic purpose.

Lastly, Gregory brings up an authoritative argument in favor of writing verse (v. 82-89): the fact that the Bible also contains many poetical texts (πολλὰ μετρούμενα). If we want to identify an ultimate model for Byzantine poets, we might indeed do better to turn our gaze to a work that does not belong to our standard list in literary history: the psalms, ascribed to the poet-king David. They were perhaps the quintessentially poetic corpus to the Byzantine mind, in which the power and impact of poetry, of metrical songs, were the greatest. In the

dozens of Byzantine epigrams on David and the Psalter, preserved in hundreds of manuscripts (see Parpulov 2014: 216-244), David is typically called "our" (i.e. the Christian) Orpheus; and the didactic aspects and the spiritual effectiveness of the psalms are often linked to their sweetness (τερπνότης, ἡδύτης), melodiousness and, remarkably often, rhythm (εὐρυθμία in at least six different poems). The Byzantines may not have understood the formal principles behind the Hebrew poetry, yet for them, the psalms served as the model of accomplished metrical texts.

USES OF POETRY

We have here looked chiefly at the intrinsic qualities of poetry. But another way of understanding the special character of poetry would be to focus on the uses of poetry in Byzantine society. Poetry provided space for cultural, social and emotional expressions that were mostly absent from prose. We will briefly sum up some of the more striking ones.

Poetry was the preferred medium for "inscriptions", in a very broad sense. Verses (almost always dodecasyllables, see Rhoby 2009:38, Rhoby 2011) were used for thousands of epigrams inscribed on buildings and objects. Magdalino proposed the term "epigrammatical habit" to refer to the strong tendency in Byzantium to attach metrical verse to all kinds of objects (Magdalino 2012:32). Several questions can be asked as to why poetry appealed so much to the Byzantines in this respect. Did poetry create a sense of value added to the inscribed object? Did its visual layout command the attention of the viewers? Did it enable viewers to give themselves a rhythmical voice to the object, when they read these inscriptions aloud (see e.g. Papalexandrou 2001)?

Book epigrams are also a kind of inscription: these epigrams treat the manuscript as an object, clarifying the roles of patron, scribe and reader. Among the many thousands of extant book epigrams, there are several examples in which the border between poetry and prose is blurred: they typically retain some features of the dodecasyllables, such as the paroxytonic ending, but tend to ignore others (alternative appositions of *kola* for instance sometimes result in less or more syllables than 12). In these texts, often produced by rather uneducated scribes, we may detect some of the poetic features that were ingrained in the Byzantine mind.

Book epigrams also make clear to what degree Byzantines thought verse fit for "paratexts". Often, the dedication of a book will mention specific details such as the identity of the scribe in a prose notice, but the "real" dedication, expressing the motivations for the

patronage of the book, will be put in verse (Bernard and Demoen forthcoming). Poetry was extremely well suited for prefaces: Rhakendytes, for instance, had his treatise on rhetoric preceded by an introductory poem. Poetry, it can be tentatively concluded, is the privileged medium for fringes, borders, façades.

Paraphrases, metaphrases, and synopseis are another area which can enrich our understanding of the distinction between poetry and prose (and between poetic genres in relation to each other). Byzantine literature counts numerous texts of this kind, and they are very often in verse. It would certainly be a rewarding investigation to see how these poetic texts relate to their "parent" text, and what role meter and rhythm play in that process.

Related to this is the fact that poetry was considered very appropriate for didactic purposes (Hörandner 2012a). For the *politikos stichos*, it has long been established that its use was connected to clarity, a simple vocabulary, and (perhaps surprisingly) conciseness (Jeffreys 1974). We may also recall that the linguistic register that dominates Byzantine dodecasyllables from George of Pisidia onwards was defined by simple syntax and a vocabulary that is rarely far-fetched. Perhaps verse was also suitable for informative texts because of the visual appearance of verse texts, which effectively resemble reference lists of glossed terms (see Bernard 2014:238-240). Also the mnemonic aspect may be important here, as well as the practice of a classroom of students declaiming verse together with their teacher. A wider survey will surely result in more secure findings.

Verse also allowed for subjects or expressive modes that were otherwise avoided or even taboo. Sex and scatology are present in poetic texts, even well before the Ptochoprodromic poems (Magdalino 2012). When we remarked above that the poems on versification were more direct than their turgid prose counterparts, we can extrapolate this to other domains as well.

The paradoxical conclusion can be reached that actually, in the relationship between prose and poetry in Byzantium, the opposite of what we would expect is true: poetry is simpler in style and diction, it is more closely related to the mundane and the everyday. It is this and other paradoxes that scholars will have to address and refine in the future.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Marc Lauxtermann's studies on meter and contexts of poetry are the main starting point for anyone interested in Byzantine poetry and poeticality. Lauxtermann 1998 considers the

question of meter and rhythm in the dodecasyllable. Lauxtermann 1999 is an in-depth study of rhythm in Byzantine verse, while Lauxtermann 2008 is a shorter essay concerned with questions of poeticality and diverging definitions of "poetry". Lauxtermann 2003 considers contexts of poetry. Wolfram Hörandner 1985 discusses Byzantine perspectives on meter and rhythm. Hörandner 2008 is an excellent overview of poetic genres. Valiavitcharska 2013 focuses on rhythm, both in poetry and prose. Bernard 2014 considers the issue of Greek terminology with respect to the Byzantines' own poetry, as does Rhoby 2015.

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