In his study on the Byzantine epigram, Marc Lauxtermann singles out the “book epigram” as a category apart. These poems, encountered frequently in Byzantine manuscripts, range from unpretentious scribbles of the scribe commenting on the text, to elaborate poetic ornaments which aspire to add to the value of the book. They form a kind of ‘paratext’ beside the main text of manuscripts.

Only seldom do distinctive features of this particular genre receive a scholarly treatment on their own. In earlier studies, they are merely collected, or investigated to determine the date or provenance of the manuscripts. More recently, however, a number of studies has focused on the verses themselves: their content, function, structure, lay-out, categorization, etc.

It is our intention to edit, translate and comment on some epigrams that we have come across during our extended research of eleventh-century manuscripts. All of them come from manuscripts containing the New Testament or

We wish to express our sincere gratefulness to the anonymous reviewer who has made some astute remarks and proposals, several of which we were glad to accept when revising this article for publication.


6 E.g. W. HÖRANDNER, Visuelle Poesie in Byzanz, JÖB 40 (1990) 1–42.

7 E.g. LAUXTERMANN (cf. note 1) 197–198.

8 We would like to thank the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) for enabling this research, which resulted in the collecting of 568 epigrams from 414 eleventh century manuscripts. It was supervised by K. Demoen and M. De Groote, and carried out by K.

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commentaries on it. Some of them are unedited, while the second one is a conflation of known epigrams and the third an unknown version of a previously edited poem. As this genre has a particular tendency to be reused and adapted, the texts presented here can be considered as a chronological cross-section in an extensive chain of recyclable material.

1. The four evangelists

Source: Paris. Coisl. 199, f. 9. This manuscript (328 folios) was written on parchment and measures 18.9 by 14 cm. The main text consists of the four Gospels (ff. 1–8v, 25–157v), the Acts of the Apostles (ff. 159–200), the Catholic Letters (ff. 200v–204v), Paul’s Letters (ff. 221–236) and the Apocalypse (ff. 311–325v). Devreesse dated the manuscript to the eleventh century. 9

Iambic verses
The publican has ceased taking tithe of goods
and now gently takes tithe of the genealogy of Christ.
Mark, the lion of the Word, writes about the baptism
and the whole miracle until the Ascension.
The ox of Christ, Luke, the ploughman,
writes about the birth of Christ, his miracles and Ascension.
The angler, having left the deep water below,
now writes about the depth of the higher contemplation.

Bentein, in close cooperation with F. Bernard. Since the completion of this article, our research group at Ghent University has been awarded a substantial grant by the ‘Hercules programme’ of the Flemish government, which will enable us to enlarge the collection and to construct a searchable database of Byzantine book epigrams. A first version of this database should be accessible online in the foreseeable future.

This poem, preceding the Gospels, has been written in honour of the four evangelists. Its structure is quite transparent: in each of the four distichs, the evangelist is mentioned directly or obliquely, and the typical features of his particular gospel are presented. Within this overall symmetry, the four distichs clearly fall into two types: Matthew and John are only indicated by a reference to their former profession (with a typical antithetical pun), whereas Mark and Luke are named and accompanied by their animal symbol. This could either be a matter of conscious variation or an indication of the combination of distichs from various sources.

The poem uses some fairly exceptional and high-brow words, such as "σπασταλεῦς" (v. 7; a most unusual denomination for John) and "ἀυλακεργάτης" (v. 5). On the other hand, the designation of Matthew as a τελόνης in the first verse of laudatory book epigrams is very common, cf. e.g. “Ματθαίου τόθε τούργον ἁριστοπόνοιο τελόνου". "Ὁ πρῶ τολόνης καὶ σχολάζων τοὺς φόροις", and “Τὸν ἐκ τελόνου θαυμασών θηγόρον". The poet also differentiates between the content of the four Gospels. The three synoptic ones are characterised by the events that mark their openings and endings. Book epigrams on the evangelists mention these features frequently, e.g. “καλληγραφῶν πάρεστι Λουκᾶς ἐνθαδέ". In the eighth verse “τὸ βάθος τῆς ἁνωθεριας” is used to refer to the theological heights of John’s gospel. In another laudatory epigram, “Τῆς εὐσεβείας θερμῶς ἅνθεγόρος”, Matthew is as well called “μόστα τῆς ἁνωθεριας”, which indicates that the formula was not exclusively associated with John.

The prosodic technique of this poem concurs with the principle of visibility: the quantity of the vowels is respected, except for dichrona (cf. e.g. v. 8 βάθος

10 The association of the evangelists with the four living creatures mentioned in Ez. 1:10 and Ap. 4:7 is attested as early as the second century, with Irenaeus’ Against Heresies (3.11.8). Although there was some inconsistency in the beginning, by the end of the fourth century a fixed representational order was established: Matthew was symbolized by the angel or human, Mark by the lion, Luke by the ox and John by the eagle. Cf. O. Böcher, Evangelistensymbole, in: “Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart II (1999) 1734–1735.

11 Athous Lavr. A 21, f. 78; Gotting. Theol. 28, f. 6v; Mosq. Len. Bib. 12, f. 1v; Petropolit. Gr. 249 Granstrem, f. 13v; Vatic. Gr. 757, f. 2; Vindobon. Suppl. Gr. 50*, f. 24. Edited by Föllier (cf. note 2) 79. The book epigrams mentioned in this article are referred to by their initial verse, according to the usage of I. Vassis, Initia Carminum Byzantinorum. Berlin/New York 2005, an invaluable reference work that was obviously very useful for the compilation of the database.


15 Athen. Gr. 2, f. 8v. Edited by KOMINIS (cf. note 2) 263–264.
with long ω, and proper names (v. 5 Λουκᾶς). We have not accentuated the particle δὲ in v. 3, following the manuscript. According to the accentual rules of the dodecasyllable, the seventh syllable just before the verse pause cannot have an accent. For that reason, many scribes regarded words as δὲ in that position as an enclitic, and consequently did not accentuate it. 16


Source: Vindobon. Theol. Gr. 302, f. 16r. This manuscript (367 folios) was written on parchment and measures 18 by 13 cm. The main text consists of the Acts of the Apostles (ff. 18r – 101r), the Catholic Letters (f. 101v–140v), Paul’s Letters (ff. 141r – 312) and John’s Apocalypse (ff. 314r – 353v). Hunger dated the manuscript to the middle of the eleventh century. 17

Δουκᾶς ἡμόθυμος, ἀκεστορίχ ἐπίστωρ,
ὅσσα περὶ Χριστοῦ θειόρῳ ζήνη Παύλος
κηρύσσεων ἐδίδασκεν ἀπὸ στομάτων ερώτημαν,
ἐνθάδε πάντ’ ἐπάγειρε καὶ ἐν σελίδεσθαι ζῆθηκε.
5 τούνεκα <καὶ> μερόπεσσαν εὐάγγελος ἄλλος ἐδείχθη.

5 καὶ addidimus, nixi Il. IX.159, XIII.728 et Greg. Naz. passim, coll. ceteris versionibus huius carminis

Gentle-hearted Luke, versed in the knowledge of medicine,
has collected here and put on paper all the things
about Christ that Paul, divinely inspired,
priached and taught to the gentiles, with his highly-praised mouth.
Therefore he appeared to the mortals as another evangelist.

This epigram is not entirely new: the first verse is also the initial verse of numerous epigrams in honour of Luke the Evangelist. 18 The remainder of our

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poem forms an epigram of four verses that is equally widespread in contemporary New Testament manuscripts, and normally accompanies the gospel of Mark. Our scribe made only two noticeable deviations from the original: he changed “Πέτρος” into “Παύλος” (v. 2) and “Μάρκος ἔγραψε” into “πάντ’ ἔγραψε” (v. 4). By doing so, the praise is awarded to Paul and Luke, instead of Peter and Mark. This way, the scribe succeeds in fitting this existing poem into its new context. Since our poem precedes a text of the Acts of the Apostles, this combination and adaptation of two traditional poems – which indeed often occur in the same manuscript – lead to the composition of a new one, but now in honour of Luke and his acts, and of Paul, the protagonist in these acts.

This poem is written in dactylic hexameters, which is rather unusual. These verses, albeit prosodically correct, show some peculiarities in their versifying technique: all but three of the feet are dactyls. This evolution towards a hexameter without or with only one spondee is typical of later Byzantine hexameters, and marks the end of an evolution discernible from Late Antiquity onwards. This conformity also extends to the caesura: the caesura in this poem always falls κατὰ τὸν τρίτον τροχαίον. The vocabulary and morphology are distinctly epic; some words, however, do not occur in Homer but only in later hexametric poetry (e.g. σελίς, which appears well after Homer).

3. Commentary on the Praxapostolus

Source: Paris. Coisl. 26, f. 1v. This manuscript (381 folios) was written on parchment and measures 29.8 by 23.3 cm. The main text consists of Ps.-Oecumenius’ Commentary on the Praxapostolus (ff. 2–379). It apparently belonged to the great Lavra (cf. the note on f. 1v: βιβλίον τῆς τετάρτης θέσεως). Halkin dated the manuscript to the tenth or eleventh century.


20 The dodecasyllable is by far the dominant meter for book epigrams. Out of the 568 epigrams that our database contains, 518 are written in dodecasyllables.


See the beauty of these writings
– how lovely and wonderful, how full of knowledge it is –
and take it unhindered, use it readily,
for it enriches the mind on the way to virtue.
The law gives instructions and so does nature before the law;
of these the light of grace is the completion.
So it befits to take abundantly, as from honey,
from the sweetness contained here.

This epigram (more specifically seven of its verses) can be found at the beginning of various manuscripts containing John Georgides’ Gnomologium (s. X). When removing the sixth verse of our text one notices the acrostic “iyam- mou”, which of course could refer to Georgides. Thanks to Paolo Odorico, however, we know that the poem was originally written by another John, the author of the so-called Florilegium Marcianum, an anthology probably dating from the first half of the ninth century. He wrote it as “una nota di lettura” on the Catena in Proverbia Salomonis (preceding the Florilegium in the Codex Marcianus). Georgides, basing his own work on the Florilegium, took over this epigram which was written a century earlier.

Our scribe most probably copied the epigram from one of the tenth- or eleventh-century manuscripts of Georgides’ Gnomologium: they have the identity of this John still remains obscure, cf. Odorico, 17–25. The title of the Florilegium Marcianum is coined by Odorico. It refers to the sole surviving manuscript, the Codex Marcianus Graecus 23.

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23 Georgides poem has been edited in P. Odorico, Il prato e l’ape: il sapere sentenzioso del Monaco Giovanni. Wien 1986, 119: ἵδιν τὸ κάλλος ἐδε τῶν γεγραμμένων ὡράιον, ὡς θαυμαστόν, ὡς γνώσιν γέμον, ἀνεμποδίστως προσλαβὼν χρῶ προφρόνως· Νοῦν γὰρ πιαίει εἰς καλὸν ὁδηγίαν.

24 Odorico (cf. note 23) 18.


same deviations from the “original” in the *Florilegium Marcianum*: ἀνεμπο-
δίστας instead of ἀσυνδώδιστος (v. 3) and μέγα instead of μέτα (v. 8).27

It is clear that the addition of the sixth verse was done by our scribe: besides
cutting through the acrostic, it contains the only visible prosodic errors of the
poem (the fourth, eighth and tenth syllable fail to be long). This intervention is
exemplary for the attitude of scribes towards these poems: they felt entitled to
add or leave out elements, according to the new context of the epigram.
Preceding a commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, the inserted verse
highlights the Christian message of grace spread by the apostles and
superseding the teachings of nature and the law (v. 5), subject of the Old
Testament Proverbs to which the original version of the poem was related. This
poem is therefore exemplary for the procedure of recycling that is so common
in book epigrams.

4. A series of epigrams for Paul

Source: Vatic. Gr. 363, ff. 239, 257v, 272v, 284, 289. This manuscript (337 folios)
was written on parchment and measures 20 by 16.3 cm. The main text consists
of the four *Gospels* (ff. 5–161v), the *Acts of the Apostles* (ff. 166–210), the
*Catholic Letters* (ff. 211–231) and Paul’s *Letters* (ff. 240–335). Devreesse dated
the manuscript to the eleventh/twelfth century.28

No 1 (f. 239)

Βροντής γεγονόστερον Παῦλος ἡχήσας
tὴν βροντοθυγόφωνον πνεύματος χάριν,
ἄπασαν ἐμβρόνητον σκεδάζει πλάνην.
Τοῖς πιστοῖς ἡδύφθογγον μουσή[ι]ουργεῖ μέλος,
5 σέβειν τριλαμπές μονοκρατές τε φάσος.  
Ῥήτωρ πυρόπνους ὄφη τῆς ἐκκλησίας
tὸν Χριστὸν κηρύγας τε πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει.

1 γεγονόστερον cod. 2 βροντοθυγόφωνον cod. 4 μουσιοῦργεῖ cod. 5 σέβειν sciripsimus:
ήθειν vid. cod. 6 ἐκκλησίας: ζ n.l. 7 κηρύγας te sciripsimus: κηρύγας cod.

*Paul, resounding with the thunder-voiced grace of the Holy Spirit,
a sound louder than the thunder,*

27 Cf. Odorico (cf. note 23) 16: “ἀσυνδώδιστος” (v. 3) was probably changed by Georgides
into the more usual “ἀνεμποδίστος”. “μέγα” is a simple reading error for “μέτα”.
drives away every thunderstruck error.
For the pious he creates a sweet-sounding song,
to worship the light with triple brightness that rules solely.
He showed himself to be a fire-breathing orator of the church,
and the proclaimer of Christ for the whole world.

No 2 (f. 257v)

"Εξουσιας ἁγίων, διεσκέδασσας ζώφων,
tέτμηκας προθέλομεν εἰδώλων πλάνην.
Pίστιν κατεφύτευσας ἐνθεσσάτην
πυρπνοῦς ἐπεσεν βάλλον τοὺς πόρρω
5 ἀγχεμάχοις βέλεσιν τοὺς δεύρο σφάττων,
Παύλε, πυρφόρον τοῦ παρακλήτου στόμα.

You have dissolved the mist, you have dispersed the darkness,
you have rooted out the error of idolatry.
You have planted a faith that is most full of God,
pushing forward the people of the future with fire-breathing words,
and slaughtering those of the past with hand-to-hand weapons,
Paul, fire-bearing mouth of the Holy Spirit.

No 3 (f. 272v)

Ὁ ἀντὶ Σαῦλου κεχρηματικῶς Παύλος
τὴν κλήσιν καταλήλον ἐργοῖς δεικνύει.
Τὸν πρὶν εἰς παῦλαν μεταρρυθμίζων σάλον
γαλλήνειάν τε τῷ Χριστῷ κατεστάλη.

He who has taken the name “Paulus” instead of “Saulus”
shows by his works that his name is appropriate.
By changing his former tossing into rest
and stillness, he has found serenity in Christ.
How greatly did the all-powerful everlasting force arm the leader since after having traversed the whole world he prompts all to honour the trinity.

The lyre of the Paraclete, inspired by the Holy Spirit, resounding very harmoniously, cut into pieces the disorder and swarm of digression. Being in tune, he threw it into darkness, he made an end to it with his sound, so that not in the least he has allowed the error to stay. He drove it out, destroyed it, utterly demolished it. Everywhere he built churches for God, planted faith with a pious mind. Paul, the divine and heavenly cicada,
the brilliant and light-bringing sun.
Shining with all orthodox doctrines,
he leads the people he has saved towards the Lord.

In the Vaticanus Graecus 363 these five epigrams precede Paul’s letters. Most likely they were all written by a single poet, since they share a remarkable number of characteristics regarding content, use of language and metrical features.

All epigrams concentrate on Paul, emphasising his spiritual value for mankind. He is described as the man who repels error. In this context the verbs that are used to mention his deeds are very warlike: σκεδάζει (poem 1), ἔλυσας, διεσκέδασας, τέτμηκας, βάλλων, σφάττων (#2), καθώπλησε (#4), διέκерςε, ἐξόφωσέν, ἦρεν (#5), etc. He is even called “general”, “leader” in the fourth epigram. The imagery of light and fire is used frequently: τριλαμπές μονοκρατές τε φῶς, πυρίνους (#1), πυρπόδος ἔπεσιν, πυρφόρον … στόμα (#2), λαμπροφανῆς ἡλίου καὶ φωσφόρος, ἐκλάμπων (#5). There is an emphasis on Paul’s eloquence in the first (μουσουργεὶ μέλος, ῥήτωρ), second (πυρφόρον στόμα) and fifth (λόρα, τέττιξ) epigram. The “musical” imagery to refer to Paul’s eloquence reminds of the many laudatory epigrams on David, such as “Ἡ μουσική μὲν Ὄρφεως λόρα”.29

The language of the poems is throughout quite conventional, with a few notable exceptions. The form γεγονότερον (poem 1, v. 1), if correct, is an unattested alternative for γεγονότερον, coined by analogy. The hapax βροντοφθογγόφωνον (#1, v. 2) belongs to the kind of compounds that are not uncommon in Byzantine poetry. All verses typically have twelve syllables, easily recognisable verse pauses and a paroxytonic accent at the end, but the author does not take into account any prosodic rules. Note also that the half verse πίστιν κατερύττεσας is used twice, with minor variations: in the second (v. 3) and fifth (v. 8) epigram.

These constatations demonstrate that this series of epigrams for Paul is a coherent unity, conceived by one and the same author. It is highly unlikely that the scribe of the Vaticanus Graecus 363 was this author. Not only did he make a considerable number of orthographical and grammatical mistakes, at times he failed fully to understand the text. In the epigram on folio 257v, for example, a later hand has made a sign indicating that in the fifth verse one should not read δεύρως φάττων (as the scribe wrote), but δεύρω σφάττων.

Other obvious failures to understand the text correctly lead to some problematic passages, where the original text can only be reconstructed hypothetically. In poem 3, v. 4, for instance, the manuscript has the non-existing

form καταστέλλει. An active present form καταστέλλει – at first sight the most obvious correction – would be difficult to connect with γαλήνειαν, for grammatical reasons (the particle τε would be superfluous), and semantic reasons (the verb καταστέλλει can mean ‘bring to rest’ when used with an object with negative value, which is obviously not the case here). We suspect καταστάλη to have been the original form. In the passive voice, the verb can mean ‘come to a rest’, as it does for instance in John Chrysostom’s Exp. in Ps. 55.356. Our reading and interpretation of poem 5, v. 4, is even more hesitant: the proposed reconstruction, with forms of ἀρμόζω (intransitive, ‘be in tune’) and τὸ ἡχοῦς (a rare neuter), continues the metaphor of Paul as a lyre (see v. 2). Yet, we do not exclude the possibility that the manuscript reading εἱρμόωςας derives from an athesauriston εἱρμόω, equally with a musical meaning.

It seems, then, that we are dealing here with an earlier collection of epigrams in honour of Paul, lost to us in its original form. Our scribe had recourse to this collection in an attempt to adorn the text of Paul’s letters, as a poetic accompaniment and afterthought to a prose text, in the same way that epigrams adorn iconographical representations of religious subjects.

Abstract

The article offers an edition, translation and commentary of eight so-called book epigrams. They all stem from eleventh-century manuscripts containing the New Testament or commentaries on it, more specifically the Paris. Coisl. 199, the Vindobon. Theol. Gr. 302, the Paris. Coisl. 26, and the Vatic. Gr. 363. While most of them are unedited, the second one is a conflation of known epigrams, and the third an unknown version of a previously edited epigram.

Although book epigrams are frequently encountered in Byzantine manuscripts, the genre has not received much attention. In the track of the recently increasing interest in manuscripts as cultural artifacts in their own right, our commentary focuses on the relationship between epigram and manuscript, and the process of copying. It also discusses textual problems, structure, content, function, vocabulary, and metrical features of the poems.

The analysis is enriched by parallels from other, mostly contemporary, book epigrams, which were collected during an ongoing database project at Ghent University. The comparison shows, among other things, that the material belonging to this genre is ‘recyclable’: it is constantly re-used, sometimes with slight but meaningful modifications.