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The collection of articles presents the materials of the International Conference of Young Specialists held at the Faculty of History of St. Petersburg State University on October, 31 – November, 4, 2012. It deals with the actual problems of art history and theory from Antiquity to the present day. The articles by Russian and foreign authors (in Russian and in English) present the results of research in the art of the Ancient World, Byzantium, Medieval Russia, Western Europe from the Middle Ages to the 21 st c., Russian art from the 18th to the 21st cc., theory of art.

The edition is addressed to art historians, historians, art students and art lovers.

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The Poet and the Architect: a Consideration on Byzantine Epigrams

Affixing on buildings poems and prose compositions of variable length was a widespread custom of the Byzantine world. It is well known, that such a practice was particularly common not only for churches, monastery or graves, but also for civil buildings such as palaces, towers and fortifications' walls. You could also find poems or prose works left on different items such as reliquaries or icons, even if, very often, they were not necessarily composed to be inscribed, sculpted or painted, but simply to be part of the gift they referred to [35; 15; 31]. My paper deals with just few examples of dedicatory epigrams sculpted on sacred buildings, most of them found in the Constantinople area, in order to better clarify the link in Byzantium between written works, buildings and the audience it was addressed to. I think it is now necessary to clarify what I mean with the word "epigram", i.e. that kind of metric composition, already particularly diffused since Antiquity, which we find widely used also in the Byzantine world.

As properly defined by Lauxtermann [17], these compositions differ from any other poem realized in the Byzantine period, since they had a practical purpose. Their length could vary, according to their typesetting, from a single verse (*monosticha*) to more than twenty verses [30]. From a metric point of view, the dodecasyllable is the verse *par excellence* in Byzantine poetry, it is an evolution of the classical iambic trimeter, gradually substituting the hexameter and the elegiac couplet in the epigrammatic poetry and overall in the panegyric epic, at least since the 6th-7th cc. [30]. Usually, compositions were realized both in prose and verses and their quality differed according to the social position and erudition of the commissioner. But usually, epigrams in verses were written making use of a high level language and they had a precise structure composed by: the reason for the donation or the foundation, the introduction of the donor or founder and an invocation to God — focal point of the composition — to protect the donor-founder in the Last Judgement or to forgive all his sins [30]. The most famous epigram sculpted on a Constantinopolitan church is certainly the one we find in St. Polyeuktos, built in the first quarter of the 6th c. and completed in 527 [3] by the princess Anicia Juliana. As is well-known, the ruins of the building were found between April and May 1960, during some levelling works. After this discovery there had been excavation activities from 1964 to 1969 [13]. In this period several decorative sculpted elements of the building were found, including the niches on which the epigram was carved (Fig. 20). The text is very long, it is composed of 76 hexameters. It has been handed down to us by the *Anthologia Palatina* (I, 10) [36; 27; 8] where one of the *scholia* informs us that verses 1-41 had been carved inside the church, while the remaining had been placed on five stone slabs outside the narthex (vv. 42-46, 47-50, 51-56, 57-61, 62-76). It is a peculiar text, because of its length, since, after a period in which very short texts consisting of few verses had been preferred, longer compositions spread; but usually they were not anyway longer than twenty verses [1]. The greater length of some epigrams was justified by the argument treated, but most of it was due to the ecrastic issue.

St. Polyeuktos' epigram is exactly divided in two sections, they differ from each other also from a stylistic point of view: in fact the first part is dedicated to the celebration of the princess family and her lineage, while the second part describes the building comparing it to the Solo-

mon's Temple and exhorts the visitors to pray for her soul and for her progeny [37]. The Juliana's inscription is inserted in a smooth moulding surrounded by elegant twisting vine stems, and it is placed around the niches with peacocks. It is hence an integral part of the decoration, also because of the elegant shape of the letters: a capital Greek letter with elements that can be found both in the epigraphic and biblical capital. The bottom should have been painted with a blue brilliant colour, in fact, on the letters few traces of the pigments have been found: gold, green and red [9].

In the same period, in Constantinople, we know many other inscriptions on ecclesiastical buildings, two examples of which are represented by the Justinianic churches of Saints Peter and Paul and Saints Sergius and Bacchus.

Saints Peter and Paul's church, nowadays completely disappeared, was built in 519 by Justinian, before he became Emperor (and that's why we don't find any epithet near his name); the church was inside Hormisdas's Palace [2; 11]. We find this epigram in the *Anthologia Palatina* (I, 8). It consists of 7 verses, which glorify the Justinian's building and God as well [36; 27; 8: here this epigram is wrongly related to the church of the Holy Apostles].

The other inscription is carved in the *naos* of Saint Sergius and Bacchus' church, built by Justinian between 527 and 536 [2; 11]. The epigram is composed by 12 verses, in which the entire efrastic theme is completely lacking and Justinian's and his wife Theodora's virtues are exalted through the canonical prayer in order to ask God to protect the sovereigns [23, p. 205]. It is an epigram of high quality, in which we can find some resemblances to the St. Polyeuktos text, not only from the metrical point of view – they are in fact both composed by hexameters – but also from the linguistic point of view [11]. Both epigrams are perfectly inserted in the decorative *apparatus* of the two churches and they contribute to embellish the sculptural decoration of the buildings thanks to the elegance of the letters and the fine workmanship. The letter's frame used and the way to realise the inscription show that it is not only a sequence of signs¹ but it also has a great decorative value. Obviously this was only one of the roles of these epigrams.

Some traces of polychromy have been found on the letters and this shows that they were designed to stand out from the bottom in order to be read by anyone. St. Polyeuktos epigram constituted a *basilikos logos*, and this would mean that it was recited during the church's consecration [37]. Hence carving the epigram was a way to perpetuate the *basilikos logos*, all the more since we know, thanks to the *De Cerimoniis* of Constantine VII, that every holy Monday the emperor went in procession to the church of the Holy Apostles, passing in front of St. Polyeuktos' church [10, p. 43-45]. So a visitor entering the church, was firstly allowed to read its description and the praises of its builder compared to Constantine, and then to go inside to find the glorification of Juliana's ancestors and her buildings undertakings.

But who was able to read these epigrams?

Actually, these texts are particularly complex, they are written in hexameters, that was not a common language, showing prosody constraints, variable number of syllables, rhetorical figures and Homeric imitation. But considering the level of literacy in the Byzantine world this could be clearly understood. In fact, there were schools all over the Empire and not only in the main city, in which basically classical literature was studied, obviously including Homer, since the first classes [6]. Byzantine society was in fact characterised by a large bureaucracy together with a widespread aspiration to be part of it [7]. In the Greek east, in fact, literacy was widespread even in remote areas since the 4th and 5th cc. [7].

¹ Liz James has this opinion: [16].

Education was organised, as early as the 4th c., according to the liberal Hellenistic model divided into three levels [18]. The first one, the primary school, included the study of the alphabet, writing, reading and basic mathematics. The second one, however, was characterised by the practice of *diorthosis*, *anagnosis*, *exegesis* and *krisis*. Literary studies, therefore, were predominant and the student had to study a lot of classical authors and the most important texts were obviously those by Homer. Science subjects, a sort of medieval *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music theory), were mostly studied by those who wanted to pursue a career in science. The last level of education was, however, the one reserved for rhetoricians or sophists, but it was possible to find such schools only in big cities. State institutions intended for training of bureaucrats were present in several cities. Already in the 6th c., they survived only in Constantinople, Beirut and Alexandria. In the 7th c., however, there was a real collapse of education because of the decline of the urban life [18]. There was a slow recovery in the 8th c., but it affected only the conventional education in rhetoric and philosophy. An example is the story of the two brothers Theodore and Theophanes Graptoi. The two men, in fact, showed iconophile trends, so the emperor Theophilus condemned them to be branded on the forehead with iambic verses [5, p. 84]. It is clear that most part of the population had to be able to read these verses [7]. Few isolated attempts to establish a sort of state-supported university, according to the model of the university of Constantinople in 425, were realised by Bardas, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and Constantine IX Monomachos [18]. Only the study of law in the guild of notaries and the study of grammar and rhetoric by grammarians developed a continuous tradition just in Constantinople [7]. These changes in the literacy are visible also in the literary production: when in the 7th c. the school education in the Empire began to change, also the way to write epigrams changed [31]. The use of dodecasyllable was more and more preferred to the use of hexameters [a curious case is the epigram of the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Skripou: it is placed by the east front, in the narthex, and contains a laudatory poem in twelve Homeric hexameters: 26; 28]. This kind of verse was easier to read and it was also easier to adapt to it literary *topoi* since it did not request a sophisticated language [31]. A particular case is the epigram carved in the church of Theotokos Panachrantos built by Constantine Lips in 907 [24]. The inscription is carved on a cornice, that runs along the exterior of the three central apses of the church [19]. The inscription consists of three epigrams, separated by crosses. The first and the third epigram are composed in dodecasyllable, the middle one is in hexameters [32], probably because the church had a multiple dedication and each poem was addressed to a different patron [19; 32]. The inscription is a usual foundation epigram, in which we read that Constantine Lips dedicated a church to the Mother of God to secure himself citizenship in heaven [19]. The language of the epigram, however, is a high level one, and it was probably aimed at a learned audience². The monastery had a high *status* and it is reasonable to imagine that the imperial court was the recipient of the inscription [32]. It's important to highlight that, in Byzantine society, images and written works were closely referred to the people and this is true not only for monumental works: in the famous Holy Bible commissioned by Leo Sakellarios in the 10th c., we have many captions near each picture and in a *glossa* we can read that «the iambic verses in this code explain clearly and concisely the meaning of what is represented» [31]. As far as it is concerned to the main topic of this paper it is necessary to consider that dedicatory inscriptions, besides having a purely didactic task, offered not only the possibility to talk to posterity, but they were a more direct way to show the *status* and the social standing of the customer they were devoted to. It's clear that written words were considered

² Liz James, instead, suggests that the epigram was not legible: [16].

particularly important in Byzantine society and it's for this reason that commissioning epigrams was a very common practice. For example, in the twelfth century, Alexios Contostephanos, a high official of imperial court, commissioned many epigrams to the famous poet Theodoros Prodromos. It's important to specify that these epigrams were not celebratory works. The poet composed four tetrastichs [14, n. 52] on the sword of the officer, which probably had to be engraved on the hilt [12]. Theodoros composed another very long epigram for Alexios for the presentation of an icon of Christ [14, n. 53]. Probably this poem had to be written in a corner of the icon and it is essentially a votive poem. These examples that seem to go beyond the aim of my paper are important to better understand the culture in which the carved epigrams are conceived. Going back to the object of our research, it's not possible to ignore the most productive representative of the Byzantine poetry, i.e. Manuel Philes (ca. 1270/1275–1332/1345), who worked in Constantinople as a professional poet, writing didactic poems and occasional poems³, which were usually composed for an event or for inscriptional use [25]. One of the very few Philes' epigrams still visible on the object (in this case the building) for which it was designed and to which it was devoted is the epigram he realised for the Pammakaristos' church [4]. These epigrams [21, n. CCXIX, p. 115–116] are realised in three different ways: carved stone, mosaic tesserae, blue and gold paint, so they had both a decorative and organizational function. They were, in fact, sculptural detail to the exterior cornice and ornament to the interior ones (Fig. 21) [33]. The 23 verses of Manuel Phile's epigram are still carved on the outer cornice: while the verses on the west façade have been deleted by the later building of an ambulatory, only the 13 verses on the south façade can still be read [33]. The letters are an integral part of the building decoration, as well as the windows and the other architectural elements [22]. In this epigram there is a clear celebrative intent for the founder Glabas and his wife, whose soul is entrusted to God and to visitors' prayers; there is no any description of the church. Entering the *parekklesion*, the visitor would have passed through the narthex into the chapel proper and, in the conch, he could then have read a three-line epigram framing the image of Christ [29, p. 402–403]. With these verses the widow reminds the visitor about her patronage of the chapel and that she had built the *parekklesion* in order to save her husband's soul [33]. The third inscription, 27 lines long [22], painted in gold letters on a blue background, decorates the lower and the upper cornices of the church interior [29, p. 307–310]. It was an epitaph on the death of Glabas, praying for Christ's blessing upon him. However, all the epigrams served a commemorative and intercessory purpose: they also encouraged the visitor to pray for the soul of the deceased [33].

In this period, many are the epigrams composed by Philes for instrumental purposes and many of them are epitaphs. Another one that is worth considering is the poem composed for the monastery of Prodromos of Petra in Veroia founded by Theodoros Sarantenos [21, LXXV, p. 247–249]. It is a very long composition (60 verses) and it also should have been carved inside the church. Also in this case, despite the length of the composition, we have not a description of the building, but the justification of the foundation together with a long celebration of the virtues of the founder, ending with the ritual prayer to God and with a warning to the visitor to follow the example of Sarantenos [34].

This very short analysis, far from being exhaustive, has therefore brought to light some meaningful aspects that could be worthwhile to investigate more thoroughly.

The habit of writing epigrams remains unchanged over the centuries, adapting the shape of the text to social and educational changes that occurred; the inscriptions carved inside buildings

³

The 1078 poems of Philes were published by Emmanuel Miller and Emidio Martini: [21; 20].

become part of the decorative system, but at the same time they are means to propagate social and intellectual status of the donor. A final observation concerns the style of the composition, that even if composed for a specific building, the epigram is, anyway, rich of *topoi* and of standardized elements. A more accurate analysis of a greater number of epigrams would induce new knowledge about their technique of composition and the relationship between them and their own commissioner.

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