

Tuning the pen: poetry writing and patronage networks around the end of the Byzantine empire*

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The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople not only destroyed the Byzantine Empire as a political entity but caused the collapse of patronage networks vital to all aspects of Byzantine cultural life, including literary production. After 1453 authors had to seek sources of support under new lords and divergent cultural imperatives: Ottoman Constantinople, Crete, and humanist Italy became major centres of Greek poetic production and intellectual life. Through the analysis of poems by George Amiroutzes, Michael Apostoles, Bessarion, Andronikos Kallistos, and others, this article examines how these authors adapted their compositions to new communities, substantially transforming their (literary) identity.

Keywords: Poetry; Patronage; Ottoman Conquest; Crete; Italian Humanism

Ἐσεῖς βουνὰ θρηνήσετε καὶ πέτραι ῥαγισθῆτε, ...
διὰ τὸ ἐχάθη τὸ κλειδὶ ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης,
τὸ μάτι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς καὶ τῆς χριστιανοσύνης. ...
Σὲ ἑκαταπολέμησαν, Ἐπτάλοφε Κυρία,
καὶ σὲ ἑκαταδίκασαν τὰ ἄγρια θηρία, ...

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ἐσκότωσαν τὸν βασιλὲ οἱ σκύλλοι Γιαντζάροι, ...
 ἐφόνευσαν τοὺς ἄρχοντας, τοὺς βαρυρογεμένους,
 καὶ τοὺς ἀπομονάμενους νὰ πορπατοῦν ὡς ξένοι, ...
 νὰ χύνουν πολλὰ δάκρυα εἰς ἀλλοτρίους τόπους.¹

Lament you hills and burst you rocks, ... because the key of the entire *oikoumene*, the eye of the East and of all Christendom has been destroyed. ... The wild beasts have laid you waste, O Lady of the Seven Hills, they have condemned you. ... These Janissary dogs have dispatched the emperor, ... they have killed the lords, these well-paid authorities, and made those remaining wander like foreigners ... and shed abundant tears in far-away places.’

With these plaintive verses, the anonymous author of this famous *threnos*, lamenting the fall of Constantinople in 1453, bewails the loss of the city to the Ottomans. He sorrowfully recounts how the emperor and his court were killed, left to roam the city as fugitives, or forced into exile. And indeed, the *halosis*, the capture of the capital, marking the end of the millennial Byzantine Empire, changed the life of each and every Constantinopolitan, deeply affected the entire Greek-speaking community around the Mediterranean, and shocked the Christian West. The persistence over the following several centuries of the verse *threnoi*, often written anonymously and in the vernacular, rather than in archaizing, language, is the best-known example of the event’s impact on the Greek poetic tradition.² However, the Ottoman seizure of power – political, social, and cultural – in formerly Byzantine territories brought profound changes to literary composition in the learned idiom as well, influencing not only the choice of subject matter, but the language, style, and imagery employed. It goes without saying that literary conventions did not change suddenly; and yet, the *halosis* and the collapse of former patronage networks that had mediated cultural authority in the Byzantine world had a lasting impact on the way Byzantine authors approached their literary heritage, and indeed on expressions of identity in this post-Byzantine world.

This article examines how the conquest of Constantinople, including events in and around 1453, changed the composition of learned Greek poetry. Following the itinerary of many Byzantine intellectuals – from Constantinople to Italy via Crete – this essay offers a journey through the three centres of poetic production in the fifteenth century. It argues that the traditional patronage system collapsed when the Byzantine elite – the *archontes* lamented in the *threnos* quoted above – suddenly lost

1 *Threnos on the Fall of Constantinople*, vv. 3, 5–6, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, ed. G. Th. Zoras, *Περὶ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens 1959) 250–3.

2 On the laments, see M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd edn. rev. by D. Yatromanolakis and P. Roilos (Lanham, MD 2002) 86–90; A. Papayianni, ‘He polis healo: the fall of Constantinople in 1453 in post-Byzantine popular literature’, *Al-Masāq* 22 (2010) 27–44 (but without literary analysis).

their power, or indeed their lives, with the Ottoman conquest. Yet the collapse of those networks generated novel literary approaches, as writers adapted poetic predilections, experimented with their metrical choices, and tailored traditional topics to often deliberately ancient forms and modes of expression. Adapting poetic forms led to new expressions of identity for these writers as they sought support in new lands.

Constantinople

Those who survived the horrors of the three-day sack of Constantinople, recounted in numerous prose and verse laments, were not doomed by the establishment of Ottoman rule in the city, but found themselves in a precarious situation. Fortunately for them, the Ottoman sultan favoured religious tolerance towards his new Christian subjects, and – for pragmatic as well as ideological reasons – granted a certain freedom of faith to all of his subjects.³ Kritoboulos of Imbros (*ca.* 1400/10–after 1467/8), governor of that island under Mehmed’s rule, even called the sultan a ‘lover of the Hellenes’ in his panegyric account of the 1450s and 60s dedicated to Mehmed; in this he differed from most Byzantine (and indeed Western) writers, who described the sultan as a savage beast, or the Antichrist.⁴ Mehmed famously possessed a considerable collection of manuscripts and even funded a Greek scriptorium.⁵ We know that he ordered Turkish or Persian translations of some Greek works, but the degree to which he knew Greek is still debated.⁶ Some scholars have even seen him as a Renaissance prince, interested in the scientific and artistic achievements of various cultures, not least among them humanist Italy.⁷ Yet, for all his favourable inclinations toward Western and Byzantine culture, the early Ottoman court soon became a hotspot of Persian and especially Turkish literary production, fostering the emergence of this new (literary) language.⁸

3 H. Inalcık, ‘The policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek population of Istanbul and the Byzantine buildings of the city’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23/4 (1969/70) 229–49.

4 *Historiae* Γ 9.6, ed. D. R. Reinsch, *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae* (Berlin 1984) 128; see also *op.cit.* 35*. On attitudes towards Mehmed in Byzantine writers, see D. R. Reinsch, ‘Mehmed der Eroberer in der Darstellung der zeitgenössischen byzantinischen Geschichtsschreiber’, in N. Asutay-Effenberger and U. Rehm (eds), *Sultan Mehmet II: Eroberer Konstantinopels – Patron der Künste* (Köln 2009) 15–30.

5 D. R. Reinsch, ‘Greek manuscripts in the sultan’s library’, in A. Binggeli, M. Cassin and M. Detoraki (eds), *Bibliothèques grecques dans l’Empire ottoman* (Turnhout 2020) 105–18 (105–7 and 116–18); J. Raby, ‘Mehmed the Conqueror’s Greek scriptorium’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983) 15–34.

6 There is evidence that he had some command of Greek, but not of Latin, see Reinsch, ‘Greek manuscripts in the sultan’s library’, 111–2; and Raby, ‘Mehmed the Conqueror’s Greek scriptorium’, 24. Against his knowledge of Greek argues C. G. Patrinelis, ‘Mehmed II the Conqueror and his presumed knowledge of Greek and Latin’, *Viator* 2 (1972) 349–54. On translation activities, see M. Mavroudi, ‘Translations from Greek into Arabic at the court of Mehmed the Conqueror’, in A. Ödekan, N. Necipoğlu and E. Akyürek (eds), *The Byzantine Court: source of power and culture* (Istanbul 2013) 195–207.

7 See M. D. Baer, *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Kaliphs* (New York 2021) 96–112.

8 On the literary trends of Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire in the centuries pre- and postdating the fall, see A. Y. Ocak, ‘Social, cultural and intellectual life, 1071–1453’, in K. Fleet (ed.), *Byzantium to Turkey: 1071–1453* (Cambridge 2009) 353–422, and S. S. Kuru, ‘The literature of Rum: the making of a literary

These conditions provided little support for poetry in Greek to thrive. Poetry under Mehmed looked east, not west.

Due to these circumstances, very little Greek poetry survives from areas recently fallen under Ottoman control in the middle of the fifteenth century, and even less can be connected to patronage networks. The only Byzantine writer we know to have employed Greek as a poetic language at the Ottoman court was George Amiroutzes (*ca.* 1400–after 1469), a member of a community of Byzantine intellectuals and writers who had come to terms with the new regime, such as George Gennadios Scholarios, Theodore Agallianos, or Kritoboulos. As a Trapezuntine civil servant and intellectual, Amiroutzes was responsible for surrendering Trebizond to the Ottomans in 1461, and was later held in high esteem as a philosopher and man of letters at the court of Mehmed II.⁹ Amiroutzes' seven poems, extant in the seventeenth-century manuscript Athos, Mone Dionysiou 163, – two love quatrains and five encomiastic addresses – are unique in both form and subject matter.¹⁰

Most surprising to a reader familiar with Byzantine poetry are the two quatrains (Poems 5 and 6), addressed to an unnamed beloved and expressing the pleasure and pain of unrequited love. Amiroutzes employs motifs such as the glances of the beloved's eyes as arrows hitting the lover's heart, the delight in loving pain, or the appearance of the beloved in a garden, which are commonplace in Greek, Persian, and Turkish literatures. Some features, however, are more unusual, and resonate especially with an Ottoman courtly environment. Take Poem 6:

Εἰς οἶκον εἶδον σε ποτὲ κάτωθεν ἐκ τοῦ κήπου,
καὶ τῆ σκιᾶ, τοῖς ὄμμασι σοῦ προϊόντος, ἦλθον·
καὶθάμβος ἔσχε με εὐθὺς καὶ πόθος σὺν ἐκπλήξει.
Φεῦ οἶον φέρεις ἔρωτα, ἢ νίκας οἴας τρέφεις.

Once I saw you [going] to the house from the garden below,
and I fled into the shade, when you were passing by my eyes.
And immediately I was struck with amazement and longing for you.
Alas, what love you bring, or what victories you nurture.

As we learn from the masculine participle in v. 2 (σοῦ προϊόντος), the beloved addressee is male, probably a boy or a young man. Expressions of same-sex desire were very unusual in Byzantine poetry, but a commonplace in Persian and Turkish verses.¹¹ In Greek poetry,

tradition (1450–1600)', in S. Faroqhi and K. Fleet (eds), *The Ottoman Empire as a World Power: 1453–1603* (Cambridge 2013) 548–92.

9 On his life, see J. Monfasani, *George Amiroutzes: the philosopher and his tractates* (Leuven 2011) 5–12.

10 Ed. and commented B. Janssens and P. van Deun, 'George Amiroutzes and his poetical oeuvre', in B. Janssens, B. Roosen and P. van Deun (eds), *Philomathestatos: studies in Greek Patristic and Byzantine texts presented to Jacques Noret for his sixty-fifth birthday* (Leuven 2004) 297–324.

11 The editors suggested an autobiographical background of the poem with an alleged love affair of Amiroutzes with the widow of the last Duke of Athens, called Mouchliotissa, but this interpretation

homoerotic themes appear mainly in the ancient and late antique epigrams preserved in the *Greek Anthology*. And while the brevity of Amiroutzes' poems suggests an affinity with the epigrammatic form, a major difference to the texts in the *Greek Anthology* is Amiroutzes' formal choice of the political verse, otherwise unattested in Greek erotic epigrams. This metrical choice may relate Amiroutzes' poems to another Greek tradition, the late Byzantine romances, which deal with various aspects of courtly, but invariably heterosexual love.¹² A figure featuring prominently in these texts is the personified Eros shooting arrows to wound men and women and infect them with omnipotent desire. In fact, the references to arrows and the victories that the addressee celebrates link Eros to Amiroutzes' quatrains. However, his poems show also differences, most importantly in that the speaking voice is struck with desire for the shooter himself. In the case of Eros, we would expect a difference between the subject shooting and the object of desire.

Hence, while the ingredients evident in his poems are present elsewhere in the Greek literary tradition, Amiroutzes' specific combination of these elements in his poetry is unprecedented. These poems come much closer to a popular genre of Persian and Turkish poetry: the quatrain or *rubāʿī*, a four-liner mostly centred on the topic of love, often homoerotic desire.¹³ We need not assume Amiroutzes had any intimate knowledge of Persian or Turkish poetry, but only that as an intellectual at Mehmed's court with some knowledge of Persian and Turkish languages, he may have known about the general characteristics and themes of the literature of this 'age of beloveds' – as it is called by Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı – when, even in panegyrics, the main theme of poetry was love.¹⁴ His quatrains should then be seen as a literary

overlooks the masculine gender of the participle (Janssens and van Deun, 'George Amiroutzes and his poetical oeuvre', 318–19). On the beloved in oriental literature, including aspects of gender fluidity, see extensively W. G. Andrews and M. Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: love and the beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European culture and society* (Durham, NC 2005) 32–58.

12 The unusual rubric to the poems, ἐρωτικοί [sc. στίχοι] ('erotic verses'), possibly further links these poems with the romances, as this expression is otherwise only attested in some manuscripts transmitting the thirteenth-century romance *Livistros and Rodamne* (Στίχοι πρὸς ἐρωτικοί, tit., ed. P. A. Agapitos, *Λήγιση Λιβίστρον καὶ Ροδάμνης: Κριτικὴ ἔκδοσις τῆς διασκευῆς α* (Athens 2006) 257). However, it is impossible to know if the rubric to Amiroutzes' poems, found in a corrupt seventeenth-century manuscript, is original or a later interpretation of the text.

13 See A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, 'The flourishing of Persian quatrains', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Persian Lyric Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500: ghazals, panegyrics and quatrains* (London 2019) 488–568. As an example, take this Turkish quatrain by Nesimi: 'O thou whose beauty is without match in the two worlds. / Thy mischief-making brow is a bow, thy glance an arrow. / The perfume of ambergris comes from the dust of thy perfumed locks. / The Last Judgment came about; because of thy beauty the clamor broke out.' (K. R. F. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimi Fourteenth-Century Turkic Hurufi: with annotated translations of the Turkic and Persian quatrains from the Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa MS* (The Hague 1972) 116); note, however, that this poem can be interpreted both as a profane love poem and with regard to a mystical orientation towards God.

14 See Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*.

experiment undertaken in the new sociocultural circumstances in which Amiroutzes found himself.

The rest of Amiroutzes' poetical oeuvre comprises laudatory poems to Mehmed II. The author presents the sultan as the legitimate heir to the Byzantine empire (κληρονόμος, 1.19), calling him both by his Turkish denominations (such as Μεχμέτμπεϊ ['Mehmed bey', 2.15]; χάν ['khan', 3.2]; ἀμηνρᾶς ['emir', 1.tit; 2.tit; 3.tit]; μέγας αὐθέντης ['grand lord', 7.tit]), and by the traditional Byzantine appellations of the emperor (such as βασιλεύς [1.3; 1.17; 3.9; 4.8; 7.3]; and αὐτοκράτωρ [2.15; 3.1]).¹⁵ In adding that Mehmed was the emperor 'of the Hellenes' (cf. 1.12; 2.4; 7.20), 'of the Romans' (cf. 7.20), and 'of the *oikoumene*' (3.6), and by comparing the sultan to ancient Greek figures and enumerating his virtues, Amiroutzes seasons his poems with the well-established Byzantine encomiastic repertoire, while Christian undertones and imagery are largely absent, as one would expect in the praise of a Muslim.¹⁶ In short, what we find are slightly modified, secularized praises of a Byzantine emperor, repurposed for an Ottoman sultan. Yet Amiroutzes himself refers to the oddity of this literary endeavour, when he asks Mehmed not to be surprised upon hearing his voice: Μὴ ξενίζου τὴν ἐμὴν / ἐπακούων νῦν φωνήν· // οὐ γὰρ ἀλλοτρία σοί, / εἰ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς δοκεῖ, // ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνη γὰρ εἰμὶ / ἢ συνοῦσα σοι ἀεὶ ('Don't be astounded to hear my voice; for it is not alien to you – even though it might seem so to most people –, but I am this voice, always at your disposal', Poem 1, vv. 7–9). The propinquity between Amiroutzes and his sovereign urges the poet to sing the new emperor's praises. That he does so in Greek is presumably not only because it was the only language in which Amiroutzes was proficient enough to compose high-quality poetry, but also corroborates his argument that Mehmed was the legitimate heir of the empire; as D. R. Reinsch has argued, learned Greek was the only suitable language for a Byzantine writer to praise a rightful emperor.¹⁷

However, Amiroutzes' literary experiment goes beyond the choice of the *laudandus* to aesthetics: metre and sound. While five of the seven relevant poems are written in the dodecasyllable or in the political verse, the two staple metrical forms of Byzantine poetry, the other two are remarkable. In Poem 1 Amiroutzes deploys rhyming heptasyllables couplets with predominantly oxytone endings, a very rare metre in learned Greek,

15 See Janssens and van Deun, 'George Amiroutzes and his poetical oeuvre', 319–22; on Byzantine views of the Ottomans as legitimate heirs to the empire, see K. Moustakas, 'Byzantine "visions" of the Ottoman Empire: theories of Ottoman legitimacy by Byzantine scholars after the fall of Constantinople', in A. Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Images of the Byzantine World: visions, messages and meanings. Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker* (London 2011) 215–29.

16 See also D. R. Reinsch, 'Byzantinisches Herrscherlob für den türkischen Sultan: ein bisher unbekanntes Gedicht des Georgios Amirutzes auf Mehmed den Eroberer', in L. Burgmann, M. T. Fögen and A. Schminck (eds), *Cupido legum* (Frankfurt am Main 1985) 195–210 (202).

17 See D. R. Reinsch, 'Reichsidee und Sprache nach der Halosis: Georgios Amirutzes und Georgios Sphrantzes', in S. Kolditz and R. C. Müller (eds), *Geschehenes und Geschriebenes: Studien zu Ehren von Günther S. Henrich und Klaus-Peter Matschke* (Leipzig 2005) 329–36 (332).

though not uncommon in later vernacular poetry.¹⁸ The oxytone endings together with the rhyme, unusual in high register Greek, suggest that Amiroutzes aimed to produce a more accessible poem, suitable for a wider audience than previous laudatory poems to various authorities.¹⁹ Poem 2 is a quite different case. It is written in eleven-syllable-verse, a meter virtually non-existent in Byzantine poetry, but featuring prominently in modern Greek, and customarily attributed to Italian influence. However, the stress pattern sets Amiroutzes' verses apart from the Italian hendecasyllable, for he lays the stress on the final syllable (oxytone ending).²⁰ This is a remarkable choice, for the most important Byzantine meters, the dodecasyllable and the political verse, both have a paroxytonic ending; thus, imitating the Italian pattern with a stress on the penultimate syllable would have been very easy (and indeed, this became the dominant pattern in modern Greek eleven-syllable verse).²¹ Instead, Amiroutzes' meter reads like a catalectic dodecasyllable (an otherwise unattested form), with the caesura after the seventh syllable and mandatory stresses on the fifth and the eleventh syllables. A possible metrical parallel would be the rhymed eleven-syllable verse of Persian and Turkish poetry, common in various literary forms (among them the *mašnavī*, but also the *qašīda*, and the *ghazal*).²² Although the sample size of sixteen verses is not enough to allow for firm conclusions to be drawn, seen in the light of the love quatrains, an orientation on the part of Amiroutzes towards Eastern poetry in this case seems at least possible.

Whatever the case, the metrical variation in Amiroutzes' poems to Mehmed is itself noteworthy. We possess various multimetrical cycles for a single occasion from the Byzantine period. These were especially popular in the twelfth century, usually performed in the presence of their *laudandus* or *laudanda*, and they were themselves literary experiments intended to establish the poet's reputation as a skilled author.²³ Amiroutzes' poems, unfortunately, hardly give any information about their context, which makes it hard to establish if he wrote them to be performed as a cycle or as

18 M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: texts and contexts* (Vienna 2003–19) II, 291 and A. Rhoby and W. Hörandner, 'Metrics and prose rhythm', in S. Papaioannou (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Literature* (Oxford 2021) 407–29 (418).

19 The use of end rhyme as a structuring (rather than occasional) literary device in Greek poetry is first attested in the poems by the fourteenth-century Cretan author Stephanos Sachlikes, but a greater spread in Greek texts that found their way into written transmission can only be traced back to the later fifteenth century; see Rhoby and Hörandner, 'Metrics and prose rhythm', 419. On oxytonic endings, see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, II, 324.

20 On the Italian endecasillabo, see P. G. Beltrami, *La metrica italiana*, 5th edn. (Bologna 2011) 182–8.

21 The true success of the hendecasyllable in Modern Greek literature originated from sixteenth-century poets from Crete and the Ionian Islands; see G. Saralis, *Νεοελληνική μετρική*, 4th edn. (Athens 1991) 40–1.

22 See J. T. P. de Bruijn, 'Mathnawī. 2 in Persian' and B. Flemming, 'Mathnawī. 3 in Turkish', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: new edition*, vol. 6 (Leiden 1991) 832–7.

23 See N. Zagklas, 'Metrical polyeideia and generic innovation in the twelfth century: the multimetric cycles of occasional poetry', in A. Rhoby and N. Zagklas (eds), *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: texts and contexts* (Turnhout 2018) 43–70.

self-standing units. It is nonetheless clear that he penned his verses to impress his audience and gain social recognition. Although improving one's status through poetry was common at the Ottoman court, the question of how successful such an endeavour was in Amiroutzes' case is hard to answer. For even if Mehmed knew some Greek, we would not expect him to understand highbrow literature; and it is out of the question that a wider Ottoman audience would have been able to appreciate the innovative metrical variation that Amiroutzes employs. Hence, I would suggest that his poems were written, at least in part, for a Greek audience.²⁴ In this light, we can view Amiroutzes' encomiastic poems as not only designed to please the sultan, but also to reinforce the latter's status among remaining Byzantine educated elites. The political impact of the poems on the Greek community would thus have been more beneficial to Mehmed than any gratification he may have enjoyed from his subject's flattering words.

Crete

Most Byzantines with intellectual and literary ambitions turned towards the West some time around 1453. Many of them first fled to Crete, which became a hub of information, gossip, and intelligence after the Ottoman conquest, and the place from which the news about the capture of the city spread into the West.²⁵ The island had been under Venetian dominion since the Fourth Crusade with the name of the Kingdom or Duchy of Candia, but, after many struggles, by the fifteenth century the Greek and the Italian urban population got along well, with Italian aristocrats becoming important patrons for Greek literati and manuscript producers. What is more, beginning in the fourteenth century and continuing over the next two centuries, a growing number of native Greek Cretans composed poetry in the vernacular and led Greek literature into a new direction by incorporating hitherto neglected themes (such as romantic love) and using novel forms (such as drama).²⁶ This literary development, however, was more or less unaffected by the sociocultural upheaval around 1453, and had little influence on the authors coming from the former Byzantine Empire.

One of the key figures of the cultural exchange and transfer between Constantinople, Crete, and Italy was Michael Apostoles (c. 1420/25–1478), a native of Constantinople, who moved to Crete after the *halosis*, where he became a teacher and scribe, and with the support of Cardinal Bessarion sought a position in Italy, ultimately without success.²⁷ His longest extant poetic work consists of his synaxarial verses, a series of

24 Kritoboulos of Imbros, in the dedicatory preface to his *Histories* addressed to Mehmed, states that the reason for writing in Greek was that it is understood in the entire West, thus exhibiting a similar orientation towards a Western audience, while dedicating his work to the Ottoman sultan (*Letter* 3.14–25, ed. Reinsch, *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae* 5; see also *op. cit.* 20*).

25 M. Philippides, 'The fall of Constantinople 1453: classical comparisons and the circle of Cardinal Isidore', *Viator* 38 (2007) 349–83 (376).

26 See fundamentally D. Holton (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge 1991).

27 On his life, see R. S. Stefec, *Die Briefe des Michael Apostoles* (Hamburg 2013) 5–20.

133 epigrams relating to various church feasts.²⁸ As Apostoles states in a dedicatory letter prefacing the collection, the poems were written ‘at the behest’ (τούπιτάγμα) of Emmanouel Adramytenos (+1485), the poet’s former pupil who later sought the company of the humanists in Italy.²⁹ Since Apostoles had earlier received payment from Adramytenos’s father for service as a teacher, it is unlikely that the composition of the epigrams was a gift, however friendly the dedication. By offering his pupil a work as long and as elaborate as the synaxarial epigrams, Apostoles must have expected some kind of remuneration—whether in the form of a financial donation, or of continuing employment as a teacher, intellectual, or scribe.

In his dedication letter, Apostoles writes that his patron had asked him to compose epigrams about the Saints, and that, surpassing his addressee’s wish, he composed for each Saint two dodecasyllables, one hexameter, and one elegiac distich (with some exceptions in the number of verses), intended to clearly demonstrate that ‘we did more than those before us’.³⁰ This claim refers to the tradition of synaxarial verses, prototypically represented by the eleventh-century poet Christopher Mitylenaios, who composed dodecasyllables and hexameters, as well as verses in hymnographical forms, for each feast.³¹ Apostoles’ most important literary innovation is the addition of elegiac couplets, a decidedly erudite meter in Byzantium mostly associated with classical learning, to those dodecasyllables and hexameters. In his synaxarial verses, the dodecasyllables usually offer a basic outline of the life and example of the venerated Saint, the hexameters name the date of the feast, while the elegiac couplets – more recherché in both subject and the Homericizing form – elaborate on some qualities or events connected to the Saint.

Apostoles’ synaxarial poems are deeply embedded in and reflective of the social and political context of Crete, since they venerate specifically Cretan saints and take a deliberately positive stance towards the Venetians.³² At times, they show a deeply political concern, for instance in Epigram 75, celebrating the Akathistos hymn:

28 B. Laourdas, ‘Μιχαήλ Ἀποστόλη, ἀνέκδοτα ἐπιγράμματα’, *Ἐπιτηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 20 (1950) 172–208. The edition is unreliable; based on a comparison with the sole manuscript transmitting the poems, Par. gr. 1744, I have tacitly changed punctuation and accentuation where necessary, and noted further changes in the footnotes.

29 *Letter* 107, l. 15. Having honoured him in his early years, Apostoles fell out with him later, even addressing a lampoon against him and a second Emmanuel, allegedly gay men (see R. S. Stefec, ‘Eine Schmähchrift des Michael Apostoles’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107 (2014) 851–76). While we do not know the reason for their discord, it is not unlikely that Adramytenos owed Apostoles money for his services.

30 ὡς ἂν τι φανεῖμεν πλέον τι πεποιηκότες τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν (*Letter* 107, l. 18). The edition of the poems by Laourdas is misleading insofar as it suggests that the overall (mostly) five verses form one coherent text (often, there are no strong punctuation marks after the second and third verse). In the autograph manuscript, however, we find clear breaks and punctuation marks after the end of the dodecasyllables and the hexameter respectively, while all three textual units start with a red initial.

31 Various other authors, among them renowned literati such as Theodore Prodromos and John Chortasmenos, emulated these highly popular poems. On Apostoles’ imitation of these authors, see E. Follieri, *I calendari in metro innografico di Cristoforo Mitilineo*, 2 vols. (Brussels 1980), I, 240–50.

32 See Laourdas, ‘Μιχαήλ Ἀποστόλη ἀνέκδοτα ἐπιγράμματα’, 204.

‘Τί μή³³ πάναγνε καὶ θεοῦ μήτηρ λόγου
καὶ νῦν ἔσωσας σὴν ἐρυμένην πόλιν;’

‘Οὐ μοι αἰεὶ τι μέλει φιλέειν ἀμετάκλιτον οὔσαν·
τύνη δ’ αἰτίη³⁴ ἐστὲ καὶ ἄλλοι χείρονες ἄλλων
οἷς ὄρ’ οὐδὲ μίη³⁵ τῆς μετανοίας ἦν.’

‘Why, all-holy mother of God the Word,
did you not also this time save the city you protect?’

‘I do not always care to treat her with affection, as she is unbending.

It is your fault and that of others even worse,
who had not even a single moment of repentance.’

Here, the Mother of God is addressed in direct discourse, as the speaking voice asks her why she did not save Constantinople as she had done before – an allusion to the Akathistos hymn’s origin as a hymn of thanksgiving for the salvation of Constantinople in the siege of the city in 626. The Theotokos replies that the inhabitants of the city were themselves responsible due to their lack of repentance, a reference to a common explanation of the fall of the city as a punishment from God for the Constantinopolitans’ sins. This epigram not only alludes to the Akathistos hymn, but is also reminiscent of the so-called Paraklesis epigram, an anonymous text found in monuments all over the Byzantine world from the twelfth century onwards. It consists of a dialogue between Christ and the Theotokos, in which she asks for the salvation of humanity, and which her Son duly grants out of His mercy:³⁶

‘Τί, μήτηρ, αἰτεῖς;’ ‘Τὴν βροτῶν σωτηρίαν.’
‘Παρῳργισάν με.’ ‘Συμπάθησον, υἱέ μου.’
‘Ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐπιστρέφουσι.’ ‘Καὶ σῶσον χάριν.’
‘Ἐξουσι λύτρον.’ ‘Εὐχαριστῶ σοι, Λόγε.’

‘What do you desire, mother?’ ‘The salvation of humankind.’
‘They have provoked my anger.’ ‘Have mercy, my son!’
‘But they do not repent.’ ‘Even so, save them by your grace.’
‘They will find salvation.’ ‘I thank you, Logos!’

Apostoles’ epigram also presents a dialogue, but between the Theotokos and an unnamed interlocutor. It inverts the popular Paraklesis epigram, since in Apostoles’ text the Theotokos *denies* salvation due to the unforgivable sins of the people. In this way,

33 Ed. μοι Laourdas, but read μή following the manuscript (Par. gr. 1744, f. 48^v).

34 Ed. τύνη δ’ αἰτίη.

35 Ed. ὄρ’ οὐδεμίη, but read ὄρ’ οὐδὲ μίη following the manuscript (f. 49^r).

36 On this epigram and its transmission, see A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* (Vienna 2009) 329–41 (with critical edition) and Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, I, 166–70.

the Paraklesis epigram serves as a hypotext, a critical but silent background, enhancing the severity of the adjudged guilt in Apostoles' epigram and demonstrating the author's adaptation of the Byzantine poetic tradition.

Other epigrams have a remarkably personal tone. The most 'autobiographical' piece is the Epigram 49 on the feast of Saint Peter in Chains (January 16), which celebrates the apostle Peter's liberation from prison after he had been taken captive by Herod Agrippa, King of Judaea. Instead of recounting the sufferings and liberation of Peter, Apostoles describes how his old house in Constantinople was neighbour to the Chapel of Saint Peter, close to Hagia Sophia.³⁷ Now, Apostoles laments, his house is surrounded by the 'Huns' (i.e. the Turks) and, in Saint Peter's chapel they ululate (ἀλαλάζουσιν, v. 7), likely a reference to the muezzin's call to prayer.³⁸ Using the same form as in the other epigrams and even extending the last section by composing three couplets, rather than a single one, Apostoles adds gravity to his own sufferings during and after the fall of Constantinople. He sets these not only alongside those of Saint Peter, but also the travails of other Saints, who are the subjects of pain in the rest of the synaxarial cycle.

The concrete function of the synaxarial verses is hard to establish. The personal character of some of the epigrams make it doubtful that they were used as book epigrams in a liturgical manuscript as, for instance, Mitylenaios' verses were; in any case, no manuscript featuring his verses as book epigrams has come down to us. It thus seems that the epigrams were an innovative literary achievement, a novel way of writing a synaxarial cycle in dodecasyllables, dactylic hexameters, and elegiac couplets, with reference to his and his addressee's (second) home Crete and to the latest political events, that he expected to appeal to his patron.

A remarkable parallel to the synaxarial verses can be found in some funerary verses of Apostoles for his most important patron, Bessarion (1403–1472), the erstwhile Byzantine metropolitan and later Latin patriarch of Constantinople and cardinal of the Catholic Church. In Par. gr. 1744, Apostoles' autograph manuscript transmitting the synaxarial epigrams, they originally have the following structure: two dodecasyllables explaining the death of Bessarion as *causa scribendi*; one hexameter with the (wrong) date of death; and two elegiac distichs designed as tomb inscriptions with references to the body lying in the tomb.³⁹ This choice of form and content, which is in full parallel to the synaxarial epigrams, literarily elevates Bessarion to the same level as the

37 On this church, see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. Première partie, Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique. Tome III, Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd edn. (Paris 1969) 398–9.

38 On the term 'Huns' for Turks, see K. Durak, 'Defining the "Turk": mechanisms of establishing contemporary meaning in the archaizing language of the Byzantines', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 59 (2009) 65–78 (74).

39 The hexameter with the death date is crossed out in a later correction and replaced with one distich giving another (still incorrect) date of death. For the text, see Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique ou description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés en grec par les grecs aux XVe et XVIe siècles*, vol. 1 (Paris 1885) LXV; however, the edition is misleading in its reconstruction: it relegates the original hexameter to a footnote,

orthodox Saints. Yet, it not only incorporates him into a Byzantine tradition, but proves the deep connection that we find between Crete and Italy and Apostoles' endeavours to associate with scholars in Italy.⁴⁰ It seems that Apostoles' poetry, though deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition of religious verse composition in particular, was written with an eye on a novel poetic trend established by Byzantine scholars in Italy: the composition of fully classicizing Greek poetry in the new literary haven of the West.

Italy

Most of the intellectuals of Byzantine origin who arrived in Italy after 1453 hoped to gain positions as Greek teachers to the Italian humanists.⁴¹ But while these devotees of antiquity revered ancient Latin literature for its own sake, they studied Greek less out of an interest in Greek culture *per se* than instrumentally: better to understand the Latin language and literature, as well as to translate ancient and patristic works from Greek into Latin, for an avid readership who lacked the competence to read these texts in the original.⁴² More importantly, they hardly took any interest in medieval Greek literature at all. This holds true even for the arguably most important and influential Latin proponent of Hellenism in the West, Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481). Having spent seven years in Constantinople in his youth, even serving as a secretary to the emperor John VIII Palaiologos, from 1427 onwards until the end of his life he taught Greek in Italy.⁴³ Filelfo was in contact with nearly all accomplished scholars of Greek in Italy and beyond, as well as other Italian humanists. Yet, when conversing with Byzantine intellectuals, he was interested in their classical learning as well as the fate of his former residence Constantinople, but not in their medieval literary heritage. He was also one of the first Westerners to compose a substantial amount of Greek verse, addressed to scholars both Greek and Latin, and even Mehmed II, and arranged by

while it presents the dodecasyllables together with the distich (the correction with the wrong date) as Epigram 1; it then presents the two following distichs as Epigram 2.

40 His interest in metrical experimentation is further shown in a book epigram on the Ps.-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* (G. de Andrés Martínez, 'Unos versos ineditos a la Batrachomyomachia de Miguel Apostolios', *La Ciudad de Dios* 174 (1961) 157–61 [160–1]). The peculiarity of this poem is explained in the rubric, as they are at the same time political verses and hexameters (στίχοι οἱ αὐτοὶ ἠρωικοὶ καὶ πολιτικοί). However, the metrical features of this epigram are delicate and need a critical edition to be fully explored, a task which Maria Tomadaki is currently undertaking.

41 Literature on the topic is vast. Suffice it to mention some recent publications which also list older literature: F. Ciccolella and L. Silvano (eds), *Teachers, Students, and Schools of Greek in the Renaissance* (Leiden 2017); F. Ciccolella, *Donati Graeci: learning Greek in the Renaissance* (Leiden 2008); G. Abbamonte and S. Harrison (eds), *Making and Rethinking the Renaissance: between Greek and Latin in 15th–16th century Europe* (Berlin 2019); H. Lamers, *Greece Reinvented: transformations of Byzantine Hellenism in Renaissance Italy* (Leiden 2015).

42 F. Ciccolella, 'Through the eyes of the Greeks: Byzantine émigrés and the study of Greek in the Renaissance', in Abbamonte and Harrison, *Making and Rethinking the Renaissance*, 9–25.

43 On Filelfo, see J. de Keyser (ed.), *Francesco Filelfo, Man of Letters* (Leiden 2019) and S. Fiaschi (ed.), *Filelfo, le Marche, l'Europa: un'esperienza di ricerca* (Rome 2018) with further literature.

the author in a collection entitled *Περὶ ψυχγωγίας*.⁴⁴ The characteristics of his poetry provide a useful comparative example to the verses by Byzantine literati. Filelfo employed an eclectic use of phonetics, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, where linguistic phenomena from more than two millennia of Greek literature are mixed (from epic to drama; from ionic to attic; from lyrical poetry to prose).⁴⁵ The meter of his poems is either the elegiac couplet or the Sapphic stanza – a surprising innovation, given that no Sapphic stanzas in Greek were composed during the entire Middle Ages. However, the Sapphic stanza had a long pedigree in Latin literature into the medieval period, with Filelfo's Greek Sapphic stanzas showing a strong adherence to the metrical patterns of Horace in Latin.⁴⁶ His Greek poems thus prove his strong inclination towards classical literature, where the Latin metrical tradition transgressed linguistic boundaries and interfered with the Greek language. In his literary preferences, Filelfo was a typical representative of Italian humanists, and in some letters emphatically reinforced his Latinity, which in his opinion could only benefit from engagement with the Greek classical heritage.⁴⁷

None of the Byzantine intellectuals in Italy left a collection of Greek poems as large as that of Filelfo. What little poetry they produced after the fall of Constantinople was mostly connected to scribal activity, since the copying of manuscripts was a much more remunerative occupation than the composition of new poems; but these poems were also written for members of the Greek communities, rather than for humanists. This should come as no surprise, since the most important patrons of poetry, such as Bessarion, had Byzantine origins themselves, while Italians sought only language instruction or textual exegesis from emigrés, not new literary production. However, the textual evidence we have shows a remarkable adherence to humanist tastes, even among literary communities where no Latin was involved in the production or primary consumption of the poems. In this way, poetry mirrors broader cultural developments within the community of 'Byzantines' (in the sense of originating from the former empire's territories), where individuals not only abandoned their orthodox confession, but also increasingly ceased presenting themselves as 'Romans'. Instead, they proved themselves to be 'Hellenes' in their adherence to the ancient Greek heritage, and increasingly became 'Greeks' by belonging to a community of intellectuals with similar lives and careers.⁴⁸

44 G. Cortassa and E. V. Maltese, *Francesco Filelfo: De psychagogia (Περὶ ψυχγωγίας): editio princeps dal Laurenziano 58, 15* (Alessandria 1997).

45 See Cortassa and Maltese, *Francesco Filelfo. De psychagogia (Περὶ ψυχγωγίας)* 9–22.

46 See J.-L. Charlet, 'Les mètres sapphiques et alcaïques de l'antiquité à l'époque humaniste', *Faventia* 29 (2007) 133–55 (on Filelfo 138–9 and 147), and J.-L. Charlet, 'La métrique latine de Filelfo: Épopée, satire, élégie, ode', in de Keyser, *Francesco Filelfo, Man of Letters*, 191–238 (217–9).

47 See H. Lamers, 'Hellenism and cultural unease in Italian Humanism: the case of Francesco Filelfo', in de Keyser, *Francesco Filelfo, Man of Letters*, 22–42 (29–35).

48 The malleability of identity in Renaissance Italy has been studied extensively by Lamers, *Greece Reinvented*, by whose admirable work my descriptions are inspired.

Without doubt, the best-known and most influential Greek in Italy around the middle of the fifteenth century was Bessarion, a native of Trebizond, proponent of church union at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, and later cardinal of the Catholic Church.⁴⁹ His own poetic oeuvre is small, but indicative of the trends of his time. Between the mid-1420s and the 1430s, he penned at least five verse epitaphs for various noblemen and women from Constantinople and Mystra, probably commissioned works, as was common with this genre.⁵⁰ Some peculiarities in their argumentation, mostly the use of philosophical (and especially Platonic) concepts, as well as scientific vocabulary, link them to the intellectual environment in Mystra, where the mastermind George Gemistos Pletho (c. 1355/60–1452/1454) enthusiastically taught Platonic philosophy.⁵¹ Two of these epigrams relate to the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos and his wife Helena, who were depicted on twin textiles, once in their imperial dress, once in monastic garb, with the epigrams pondering this ambiguity.⁵² The textiles – and thus the epigrams – were, according to the rubric, commissioned, and offered to them, by their son Theodore II (c. 1395–1448), despot of the Morea (ἐξ ἀναθήματος τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς υἱοῦ αὐτῶν κῦρ Θεοδώρου).⁵³ From a chronicle, we learn that in 1435, at a time when Bessarion was staying in Mystra, Theodore sent a ‘remarkable gold embroidered object’ (ἀξιόλογόν τι πρᾶγμα χρυσοκλαδαρικόν), as well as the ‘steles’ (τὰς στήλας), to Constantinople, to be placed at his parents’ tomb – in short, steles and the very embroidered cloth to which Bessarion’s verses belong.⁵⁴ It is obvious that his epigrams were part of his patronage

49 Scholarship on Bessarion has flourished lately; see with further literature C. Märtl, C. Kaiser and T. Ricklin (eds), *“Inter Graecos Latinissimus, inter Latinos Graecissimus”*: Bessarion zwischen den Kulturen (Berlin 2013); S. Mariev (ed.), *Bessarion’s Treasure: editing, translating and interpreting Bessarion’s literary heritage* (Berlin 2021); and A. Gutkowski and E. Prinziavalli (eds), *Bessarione e la sua accademia* (Rome 2012).

50 On these poems, see S. Ronchey, ‘Bessarione poeta e l’ultima corte di Bisanzio’, in G. Fiaccadori (ed.), *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo: Catalogo della mostra* (Naples 1994) 47–65. Ed. *op. cit.* 65 (epitaphs on the ambassador Michael Amiroutzes and Kleopa Malatesta [+1433]), S. Lampros, *Παλαιολογία καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, 4 vols (Athens 1912–30), III, 281–3 (Manuel II Palaiologos [1350–1425] and his wife Helena Dragaš [c. 1372–1450]) and Lampros, *Παλαιολογία καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, IV, 94–5 (Theodora Tocco [+1429], wife of the later emperor Constantine XI).

51 See Ronchey, ‘Bessarione poeta’ 58–60.

52 This double image connected to double epigrams has a parallel in the tomb of Michael Tornikes and some epigrams by Manuel Philes (see, on the inscriptional epigrams, A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein: Nebst Addenda zu den Bänden 1 und 2* [Vienna 2014] 643–50, and, on Manuel Philes, K. Kubina, *Die enkomiasische Dichtung des Manuel Philes: Form und Funktion des literarischen Lobes in der frühen Palaiologenzeit* (Berlin 2020) 251).

53 Lampros, *Παλαιολογία καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, III, 281.

54 *Short Chronicle* 7.29 (ed. P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, 3 vols. [Vienna 1975–79], I, 71). In *op. cit.*, II, 448, the author suggests that the report refers only to the steles, while the cloth was commissioned later. However, the term χρυσοκλαδαρικός (‘gold embroidered’) refers explicitly to a textile (see *LBG* s.v.). On the tomb, see also N. Melvani, ‘The tombs of the Palaiologan emperors’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 42 (2018) 237–60 (248–50). Theodore had these objects sent to Constantinople fifteen years before his mother’s

relationship with Theodore in Mystra, and both the literary guise of these dodecasyllable epigrams and the patterns of patronage underlying their production are perfectly in line with Byzantine traditions.

These details stand in stark contrast with Bessarion's (in any case, few) later poems. His epitaphs for Pletho are emblematic in this regard: they comprise one and two elegiac couplets respectively, and employ Homeric language.⁵⁵ Appropriately for his decidedly Hellenic, un-Orthodox teacher (but very unlike other Byzantine epitaphs, including his own), Bessarion's verses lack any reference to Christian salvation and the afterlife, as the first epitaph illustrates:⁵⁶

Γαῖαν σώματι, ψυχῇ δ' ἄστρα Γεώργιος ἴσχει,
παντοίης σοφίης σεμνότατον τέμενος.

George holds the earth with his body, but the stars with his soul,
a most reverend temple of all wisdom.

Bessarion exclusively lauds Pletho's wisdom and virtue, modelling his verses after the epitaph for Plato by his pupil Speusippus.⁵⁷ Tellingly, in an epitaph that Bessarion composed for himself, also an elegiac couplet with certain similarities in thought and phrase to that for Pletho, Bessarion states that his soul would take refuge with God immortal – a sentiment befitting a cardinal:

Τοῦτ' ἔτι Βησσαρίων ζῶν ἄνυσσα σώματι σῆμα·
Πνεῦμα δὲ φευξέεται πρὸς θεὸν ἀθάνατον.⁵⁸

I, Bessarion, erected, when I was still alive, this monument for my dead body.
My spirit shall flee to God immortal.⁵⁹

By honouring Pletho in a purely Hellenic, pre-Christian fashion, Bessarion reveals how his reverence for classical learning and literature as well as his deep respect for his former teacher outweighed their theological and ecclesiastical differences. At the same time, the outward form of his auto-epitaph, later inscribed on the cardinal's tomb at

death, adhering to a common Byzantine practice of building and embellishing a tomb before the death of its future resident (see S. T. Brooks, 'Commemoration of the Dead. Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration [Mid-Thirteenth to Mid-Fifteenth Centuries]', PhD thesis New York University 2002, 157–9).

55 Ed. L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann: Funde und Forschungen: 3: Aus Bessarions Gelehrtenkreis* (Paderborn 1942 [repr. 1967]), III, 469.

56 See, with critical edition, J. Irmscher, 'Die Epitaphie auf Georgios Gemistos Plethon', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994) 187–92 (188); in his letter to Plethon's sons, too, Bessarion praises the latter in purely secular and Hellenic terms.

57 *Greek Anthology* 16.31: Σῶμα μὲν ἐν κόλποις κατέχει τόδε γαῖα Πλάτωνος, / ψυχῇ δ' ἰσόθεος τάξιν ἔχει μακάρων ('The earth embraces this body of Plato in its womb, but his god-like body lines up with the blessed', ed. H. Beckby, *Anthologia graeca*, 2nd edn., 4 vols. [Munich 1965–8], IV, 318).

58 Ed. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, 458–60.

59 Trans. Lamers, *Greece Reinvented*, 115n80.

the Church of the Santi Apostoli in Rome, reveals an adherence to ancient models even in a Christian context, a phenomenon which permeates the poetic production of the Greeks in fifteenth-century Italy.

While Bessarion had already established himself as a churchman in Italy after the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–39), other Byzantines came to Italy only after the capture of Constantinople. Representative of this group is Andronikos Kallistos, a Greek émigré who left the city in the aftermath of 1453, seeking (with limited success) employment as teacher in Italy and relying, as Apostoles had, on Bessarion's patronage.⁶⁰ His few extant poems exemplify the change that Greek poetry underwent when its authors migrated to the West. The first extant reference to Andronikos comes from an autograph manuscript copied in 1449, Vat. gr. 1314, which includes a variety of mainly ancient texts, among them the Pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*. At the end of this text, Andronikos added a book epigram in praise of the (spurious) author.⁶¹ The poem's line of thought is simple, arguing that Homer was the best of poets and sweetened everything with his honey-drenched tongue. Surprisingly, it is written in dodecasyllables, not in Homeric hexameters as it would befit the poet in whose honour it is written; nonetheless, it features two cases of epic language in the uncontracted forms *μουσάων* and *καλέουσιν* (vv. 2 and 7), proving a certain ambition to adapt the epigram to the work of Homer. As we shall see, after his resettlement in Italy, Andronikos modified his poetic choices significantly.

The codex Marc. gr. 198, copied by Andronikos Kallistos in the mid-1460s, contains the final Greek version of Bessarion's Platonist treatise *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, a polemical response to George of Trebizond's Aristotelian attack on Platonists, *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*.⁶² The scribe prefaced the copy with a 49 verse book epigram in honour of Bessarion, in which Andronikos argues that Bessarion completed Plato's work in his treatise and advises anyone interested in Platonic philosophy to read it.⁶³ He also explains that the cardinal's work puts an end to the falsehoods advanced by Trebizond's *Comparatio*, 'by hindering the bane of writings from slaying the truth' (*παύσας γραμματολογῶν νημερτοκτασιάων*, v. 32), an erudite reference to Bessarion's (and Plato's) intellectual antagonist. Using two *hapax legomena* in a hexameter of three words, Andronikos chose an effective and learned

60 On his life and books, see P. Botley, 'Greek literature in exile: the books of Andronicus Callistus, 1475–1476', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 72 (2018) 181–96 (with further literature).

61 Ed. *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams* 31298 (<https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/types/31298>) retrieved 2022-11-28.

62 See E. Mioni, *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum codices Graeci manuscripti: Thesaurus antiquus: 1: Codices 1–299* (Rome 1981) 310.

63 Ed. É. Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres grecques de Francois Filelfe* (Paris 1892) 220–1. On the controversy and the evolution of the treatise over time, see J. Monfasani, 'Cardinal Bessarion's Greek and Latin sources in the Plato-Aristotle controversy of the 15th century and Nicholas of Cusa's relation to the controversy', in A. Speer and P. Steinkrüger (eds), *Knotenpunkt Byzanz: Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen* (Berlin 2012) 469–80 (470–5).

way of highlighting his disgust for this adversary. In accordance with the philosophical nature of the book, Andronikos promises to pray to God for Bessarion by referring to God as ‘immortal ruler of the Olympus’ (ἄμβροτον ἀρχὸν Ὀλύμπου, v. 47) to grant the cardinal a long life, using a conventional formula for good wishes, but transferring it to an ancient way of approaching the divine. This epigram, written some fifteen years after the one for the *Batrachomyomachia*, shows a stronger adherence to antiquity than the earlier one in dodecasyllables. While the later epigram is typical also of other poems dedicated to Bessarion in this period, when it comes to its classical metre and themes, the contrast between these two book epigrams is emblematic of the evolution of Greek poetry after its relocation from Byzantine Constantinople to humanist Italy.

Andronikos further wrote an epitaph in elegiac distichs for Bessarion, in which he stresses his double identity as Greek and Latin, calling him ‘shepherd of the Nicaeans,⁶⁴ ruler of Rome, voluble in holy matters’ (ποιμὴν Νικαίων. Ῥώμης ἱερόστροφος ἄρχων, v. 1), ‘great glory of the Hellenes and the Ausonians’ (κῆδος ἄρ’ Ἑλλήνων. Αὐσονίων τε μέγα, v. 4), ‘Hellene’ and ‘Latin’ (cf. v. 11, Ἕλλην and Λατῖνος).⁶⁵ The epitaph was not used for Bessarion’s tomb, on which his own verses were inscribed (as we have seen), but they show the transformation of this intellectual, born and raised in the Byzantine Empire as an Orthodox cleric, who after his conversion and assimilation to the Western Church and society, was ascribed by his compatriot Kallistos with a purely Hellenic, non-Orthodox and non-Byzantine identity.⁶⁶ This approach to the cardinal’s identity differs significantly from the attitude shown in Apostoles’ funerary verses, composed in Crete, which refer to Bessarion almost as an orthodox saint, and employ not only dactylic meters, but also dodecasyllables. With the transition of Bessarion, a ‘Byzantine’ intellectual, to Italy, he adopted a new identity: Hellenic in almost exclusive cultural appropriation of the ancient heritage, Latin in Christian denomination, and Greek in belonging to the community of Greek-speaking literati who had sought their fortunes in Italy.

Novel poems for new patrons

Writing Greek poetry after 1453 became a more marginal, but nonetheless persistent literary practice. However, the trends illustrated in this article show how deeply the *halosis* and the subsequent collapse of the traditional patronage system affected poetry

64 Bessarion was appointed bishop of Nicaea in 1437, see S. Kolditz, ‘Bessarion und der griechische Episkopat im Kontext des Konzils von Ferrara-Florenz’, in Märkl, Kaiser and Ricklin (eds), *Inter Graecos Latinissimus*, 37–78 (39–40), and kept using this designation for the rest of his life.

65 Ed. *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams* 5168 (<https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/types/5168>, retrieved 2022-11-28).

66 Note that while earlier writers had used the term ‘Ausonians’ to refer to themselves (i.e., Byzantines or *Rhomaioi*), Kallistos changed the referent back to its original meaning: the Ausonians as a people from Italy, *pars pro toto* understood as (Western) Romans. This change therefore signified an abandonment of the conventional associations of the Byzantines with the Roman Empire.

writing. The new patrons – Mehmed II in Amiroutzes' singular case, Greek and humanist scholars in Crete and Italy – were honoured with new forms. Leaving aside Amiroutzes, the major change was the almost complete abandonment of the distinctively Byzantine metres in Italy, even for poetry written for readers within the Greek community. This is not to say that the authors entirely forsook Greek traditions in their poetry. On the contrary, traditional subjects, images, and forms figure importantly in these texts. And while the adoption of hexameters was hardly a wholesale innovation, the strong prevalence of dactylic verse as well as epic language and literature in humanist Italy is indicative of the changing interests of the patrons, both Italian and Greek, in this new context. Most Greek poets addressed themselves to their peers in Italy, while poems for Italian patrons were the exception. The literary taste of the leading intellectuals and patrons of their new country of residence thus had an important impact on the Greek minority group, who now favoured poems in a style calculated to please a good humanist.

It goes without saying that the developments illustrated above are general trends rather than strict rules. Not all authors made the switch from a more traditional Byzantine to a deliberately antique way of writing poetry. Book epigrams, in particular, furnish examples of short formulaic dodecasyllable texts which fit in seamlessly with earlier examples of such texts. Certain (mostly remote) places – such as, unsurprisingly, Mount Athos or the Meteora monasteries – were not as shaken literarily by the capture of Constantinople as the ones surveyed here. Epigrams there remained purely traditional. At the end of the fifteenth century, there was a remarkable revival of epigrammatic writing in a consciously Byzantine guise, so that many surviving epigrams could just as well come from the tenth, the fifteenth, or the eighteenth centuries.⁶⁷ This return to the earlier epigrammatic tradition, however, occurred only after a caesura of several decades after 1453, during which we find almost no epigrams transmitted from the areas under Ottoman dominion – no doubt due to the lack of patrons capable of funding suitable buildings or objects.⁶⁸

In sum, although the change in literary trends was not (and generally is not) as abrupt as that of the regime in Constantinople, the impact of the Byzantine political collapse on Greek poetry production is remarkable. When they had to secure new patrons, Greek authors found novel ways to please these lords, transforming their self-conception so substantially that, even within the Greek community, their poetry was transformed into a style appreciated in the new places where they lived, and by the new regimes they found themselves serving.

67 A. Rhoby, *Postbyzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung (PBEiÜ): Incipitarium und Checklist* (Vienna 2020) 3 and passim.

68 This is the result of a survey of A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung*, 4 vols. (Vienna 2009–18).

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