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The Poetry of Theodore Balsamon

Form and Function*

Introduction

Theodore Balsamon, born in Constantinople between 1130 and 1140 and died after 1195, is mainly known for his canonical work, the commentary on the so-called nomokanon of fourteen titles. His life span corresponds almost exactly to the reigns of the Komnenian emperors Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) and Isaac II (1185–1195), stemming from the house of the Angeloi.1 Balsamon occupied high positions in the church hierarchy: he was deacon of the Great Church, and was later promoted to the positions of nomophylax and chartophylax (first secretary of the patriarch).2 He reached the climax of his career between c. 1185 and 1190, when he served as the titular patriarch of Antioch.3 The emperor Isaac II Angelos even considered the possibility of Balsamon’s election as patriarch of Constantinople, but eventually another candidate, namely Dositheos, former patriarch of Jerusalem from 1187 to 1189, was preferred; the latter served from 1189 to 1191. Balsamon also acted as the abbot of monasteries in Constantinople, he was the

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3 There are various opinions regarding the dating of Balsamon’s patriarchate, see Konstantinos Pitsakes, Το κόλπον γάμου λόγω συγγενείας εβδόμου βαθμού ιά μίατος στο βυζαντινό δίκαιο (Athens and Komotene: Sakkulas, 1985), p. 346, n. 84.
“first” (πρῶτος) of the Blachernai monastery, and later he served as the abbot of the monastery ton Zipon, to which two of his epigrams also refer (nos. 9 and 36, perhaps also 37, see below p. 117).\(^4\)

Balsamon’s major literary output is the aforementioned commentary on the *nomokanon of fourteen titles*, a collection of canon law, whose first version dates back to the reign of Herakleios in the seventh century.\(^5\) In the course of the centuries more material was added as well as prologues. Probably in 1177,\(^6\) Balsamon – as ordered by the emperor Manuel I – produced a first version of an additional prologue for the work and a commentary on the basis of previous sources. However, he did not cease adding to the commentary in the following years: as one can learn from the prologue book epigram on the commentary, the work is dedicated to the George II Xiphilinos, who served as patriarch of Constantinople from 1191 to 1198. Balsamon’s epilogue poem on the *nomokanon* is also preserved. Both will be discussed later in this paper (p. 115-117).

Balsamon’s preserved œuvre also encompasses further canonical treatises\(^7\) and letters\(^8\) which he exchanged with some contemporaries, among them Eumathios Makrembolites, a high judge, perhaps also the author of one of the four Komnenian novels,\(^9\) if Balsamon’s Eumathios


\(^6\) T roianos, Byzantine Canon Law, p. 181.

\(^7\) See, e.g., the list in Andreas Schminck and Dorotei Getov, *Repertorium der Handschriften des byzantinischen Rechts, Teil II: Die Handschriften des kirchlichen Rechts I (Nr. 328–427)* (Frankfurt/Main: Photios-Verlag, 2010), pp. 252–53.

\(^8\) Horna, *Epigramme* (see n. 10), pp. 212–15.

Makrembolites is indeed identical with the novel’s author of the same name. Macrembolites’ tomb epigram was also composed by Balsamon (see below pp. 120-121).

Balsamon’s poetry has already been mentioned a few times: more than 40 poems are transmitted under his name. They were edited by Konstantin Horna, a Viennese schoolteacher of Greek and Latin, in 1903. This solid study is also equipped with a thorough written introduction as well as with comments on language and meter, the dodecasyllable verse.

The epigrams’ content makes it clear that Balsamon was more than a canonist and a high clergy man: the wide range of his poetic output reveals that every now and then he also served as an author on commission, a profession which he shared with other authors, especially those of the middle of the twelfth century, e.g. Theodore Prodromos, John Tzetzes, Constantine Manasses and others, many of whom belong to the so-called “circle” of the famous sebastokratorissa Eirene, the emperor Manuel I’s sister-in-law.

Theodore Balsamon’s Poetry

Balsamon’s poetry is mainly transmitted in the Cod. Marc. Gr. 524, one of the most famous Byzantine manuscripts. The miscellaneous codex was put together by a scribe towards the end of the thirteenth century. Its content is very broad: it includes prose works, such as the Geoponica, a compilation of the tenth century; works by Michael Psellos, the famous Byzantine author of the eleventh century; and speeches by Arethas of Kaisareia, the bishop and scholar of the late ninth / early tenth century.


11 Ibidem, pp. 171–76.


In addition, the codex’ scribe also compiled an anthology of poetry from both known and anonymous authors of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. It is with Theodore Balsamon’s collection of poems that this anthology begins (following a collection of gnomes). 39 poems are preserved on folios 89r–94r; the collection is introduced by a long title which provides information about Balsamon’s career steps (χαρτοφύλαξ, νομοφύλαξ, πρώτος τῶν Βλαχερνῶν, πρωτοσύγκελλος and πατριάρχης Άντιοχείας). Interestingly enough, the scribe copied three more poems from Balsamon’s collection on fol. 9r. This is probably due to the fact that after fol. 94r no further space was available to copy the three missing poems, because on fol. 94v Constantine Manasses’ so-called Hodoiporikon, an account of a journey to the Holy Land in the middle of the twelfth century, begins. On fol. 9r, however, there was apparently still space available, because a long anonymous (still unedited) poem on toothache, consisting of 168 verses, only starts in the middle of the page. The three epigrams copied on fol. 9r (nos. 40–42 in Horna’s edition) have nothing in common, apart from the fact that they form the end of the collection copied on folios 89r–94r: the first one (no. 40) of the three poems, consisting of only three verses, refers to Moses; the second one (no. 41) tells about a young (or little) eunuch who wants


16 Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 178. The title of the first epigram (no. 1) is added to the main title without break.


19 Only the first two and the last two verses have been edited so far: Lampros, ‘Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ’, p. 12 (no. 37).
to begin schedography,\textsuperscript{20} and the third, the longest one (no. 42), consisting of 9 verses, is written for a basin in the public bath of the monastery \textit{ton Hodegon} in Constantinople.\textsuperscript{21} It is very likely that the last poem was meant to be inscribed on the object, as is the case with so many verses in the \textit{Marciana} collection.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the cod. Marc. Gr. 524, some of Balsamon’s poems are (also) preserved in other codices:\textsuperscript{23} this applies, of course, especially to the aforementioned epigrams on his nomokanon commentary, which has a broad transmission history in its own right.\textsuperscript{24} While the epigram mentioning the dedication of the commentary to the patriarch George Xiphilinos in its title (no. 39) was copied into the Marcianus (fol. 94r: \textit{Εἰς τὸ παρ᾿ αὐτοῦ συντεθὲν νομοκάνον πρὸς τὸν ἁγιώτατον πατριάρχην κύριν Γεώργιον τὸν Ξιφιλίνον} – “On the nomokanon compiled by him for the most holy patriarch George Xiphilinos”), the epilogue epigram (no. 44) is missing from this manuscript.

Another poem, not preserved in the Marcianus codex either, is published as no. 45 in Horna’s edition. It differs from the rest insofar as it is not written in dodecasyllables, but in 72 hexameters. Thus, Horna was tempted to deny Balsamon’s authorship of these verses.\textsuperscript{25} In my view, however, there is plenty of evidence to prove Balsamon’s paternity of the poem: 1) it serves as a book epigram of Balsamon’s nomokanon commentary because they are transmitted together, 2) in most of the manuscripts the poem is transmitted under the name of Balsamon,\textsuperscript{26} 3) Balsamon is mentioned in the last six verses, namely within the typical structure of

\textsuperscript{20} On schedography and this poem, see below pp. 139-140.  
\textsuperscript{21} See below pp. 134-135.  
\textsuperscript{22} Spingou, \textit{Words and Artworks}, passim. On Balsamon’s epigrams used as inscriptions see below pp. 126-138.  
\textsuperscript{23} Horna, ‘Epigramme’, pp. 177–78. Horna does not mention that no. 41 is also transmitted in cod. Par. gr. 2511, 76v (see below p. 139 n. 152).  
\textsuperscript{24} See the list of manuscripts collected at http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/1395/.  
\textsuperscript{25} Horna, ‘Epigramme’, pp. 177–78: “Ganz unmöglich aber scheint es mir, für Nr. 45 Balsamon verantwortlich zu machen”.  
\textsuperscript{26} Not only in the younger codices Vat. Ottob. Gr. 96 (fols 2r+) (sixteenth century) and 339 (fols 157v–) (sixteenth/seventeenth century) (and, very likely, also Escor. XII 18 [Andrés 178] [252r–253r] [sixteenth century]), as stated by Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 178, but also in the codices Laur. Plut. 5, 2 (fol. 5v) (fourteenth century) and Sin. Gr. 1609 (fols 12r–13r) (fifteenth century).
such (book) epigrams: salvation of the soul is requested as a reward for his work.\textsuperscript{27}

These last six verses of the epigram run as follows:

\begin{quote}
Τῷ δ᾿ αὖ Αντιοχείης ταπεινῷ πατριάρχῃ
Βαλσαμών Θεοδώρῳ, ὃς τῶνδ᾿ οὐρανίων
σωμάτων τολύπευσεν ἀπειρεσίους δυνάμεις
70 πλανήτων τε νόμων ὑποχθονίην κατάδυσιν,
πρὶν λάχε θρόνον Αντιοχείης πάρος κυδρῆς,
σωτηρίαν ψυχῆς· ταύτης γὰρ πέρι θρηνεῖ.
\end{quote}

For the humble patriarch of Antioch,
Theodore Balsamon – who achieved (to describe)
the boundless powers of these heavenly bodies
70 and earthly setting of wandering laws,
before he reached the throne of formerly glorious Antioch\textsuperscript{28} –
salvation of the soul because he mourns for it.

There is a further (fourth) argument to stress Balsamon’s authorship of the hexameter epigram on the nomokanon: in Byzantium it was not uncommon to equip publications with prologue and epilogue book epigrams, regardless of whether the work itself was in verse or in prose. There is evidence that these book epigrams are sometimes written in a meter differing from the meter of the work they introduce as a prologue or close as an epilogue.\textsuperscript{29} One such case is the dedicatory book epigram of Theodore Prodromos’ novel: while the novel is composed in dodecasyllables the prologue epigram consists of hexameters.\textsuperscript{30} A good example to compare is the verse chronicle of Constantine Manasses, composed


\textsuperscript{28} From this penultimate verse we also learn that Balsamon had apparently finished most of his work on the commentary on the nomokanon commentary before he was promoted to the bishopric of Antioch (in c. 1185, see above p. 111). The verses 69–70 are difficult to understand but they very likely refer to his canonical work.


in the middle of the twelfth century: the chronicle is introduced by a prologue poem in dodecasyllables and closes with a hexameter poem with acts as an epilogue.

As already pointed out, Balsamon’s verses served various purposes. However, it seems the collection of Balsamon’s poetry as it was copied into the Marcianus Gr. 524 does not represent the author’s entire collection, but rather the scribe’s or his commissioner’s taste. Not even all his poems from the nomokanon commentary are preserved in this manuscript, as shown above. Within the Marciana collection of Balsamon’s poetry there are only a few epigrams which belong together:

The epigrams 1–6 in Horna’s edition refer to Old Testament subjects; they were perhaps used as paratexts in illuminated manuscripts. Nos. 7 and 8 were probably meant to be inscribed on an altar or on an altar cloth, as can be told from the label Εἰς τράπεζαν ἔχουσαν ἱστορημένον τὸν δείπνον (“On an altar which has depicted the Last Supper”) of no. 7. No. 9 is of completely different content: the title tells us that it was written on Balsamon’s cell in the so-called monastery τῶν Ζιπῶν, presumably next to the entrance or directly on the door. The monastery, which, either located in Constantinople or nearby, has not been identified so far – we only assume that it was the monastery to which Balsamon retired after his time as titular patriarch of Antioch, is also mentioned in epigram no. 36.

32 In the recent edition by Lampsidis it was wrongly printed at the beginning of the chronicle: cf. Horandner, ’Topik’, pp. 332–33.
While epigram no. 9, attached to his cell, can be interpreted as a critique on the luxurious life of the patriarch – perhaps written due to his frustration at not having been installed as patriarch of Constantinople himself –, no. 36 with the title Εἰς τὴν μονὴν τῶν Ζιπῶν was probably not inscribed. It is addressed to the emperor Isaac II, but it is mainly a lament about the destructive power of time – χρόνος, a not uncommon symbol in Byzantium –, which would attack the monastery’s beauty. No. 37 also refers to Balsamon’s cell, perhaps located in the monastery ton Zipon, but it can also refer to another monastery to which Balsamon had to withdraw, perhaps in the time before the ascension of Isaac II.

Further epigrams can be classified as follows:

Tomb Epigrams

Within Balsamon’s collection there are four tomb epigrams, namely the nos. 11, 12, 13 and 19 in Horna’s edition. They are of different length, ranging from 16 to 37 verses, but still not too long to have perhaps served as tomb inscriptions. No. 11 is of specific interest insofar as it refers to the family grave which Balsamon had donated for himself and his family in

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On the evidence of long inscribed tomb epigrams, see Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein, p. 64.
the famous Hodegon monastery.\textsuperscript{44} It is very likely that the title of the epigram Εἰς τὸν τάφον ἐντὸς ὄντα τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς ἁγίας Ἄννης τιμωμένης ἐν τῇ μονῆ τῶν Ὁδηγῶν (“On the tomb which is situated inside the church of St Anna who is worshipped in the Hodegon monastery”) was coined by Balsamon himself,\textsuperscript{45} or by someone who knew the circumstances – e.g., a later compiler of his poetry –, because within the verses neither the Hodegon monastery nor the church of St Anna are mentioned. The Hodegon monastery played an important role in Balsamon’s life, because it was the place where he resided as titular patriarch of Antioch from 1185 to 1190.\textsuperscript{46} In the vv. 24 ff. Balsamon insistently asks the future rulers and patriarchs of Antioch to keep the grave safe from violence until the day of the Last Judgement.\textsuperscript{47}

Tomb epigram no. 12 refers to a certain Stephen Komnenos who was also buried in the complex of the Hodegon monastery, as the title reveals (Εἰς τὸν τάφον τοῦ σεβαστοῦ κυροῦ Στεφάνου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ ἐντὸς ὄντα τῆς αὐτῆς μονῆς – “On the tomb of the sebastos Stephanos Komnenos which is situated inside the monastery”). In this case too, one can argue with some plausibility that the title was coined by Balsamon himself because the name of the buried person is only revealed in the title and not in the poem itself. It was written to be inscribed on the tomb, because – as with many other inscriptive tomb epigrams – it starts with a typical direct address to the beholder: Βλέπων, θεατά (“look, beholder”).\textsuperscript{48} He is asked to look at κιβωτοτετράπλευρον ἐκ λίθου δόμον / καὶ θρηνοκατάκλυστον ἐκ λύπης τάφον (vv. 1–2), which suggests that the

\textsuperscript{44} Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 205.


author distinguishes between the stone coffin (ἐκ λίθου δόμος) built in the form of a quadrangular box⁴⁹ and the gravestone (τάφος)⁵⁰ “flooded by laments,” which was perhaps also equipped with a depiction of the deceased. As convincingly argued by Horna,⁵¹ Stephen Komnenos is in all likelihood identical with the individual of the same name mentioned in Balsamon’s nomokanon (II 120). In addition, it is also argued that Stephen, a high official at the court (σεβαστός), was the emperor John II’s (grand) nephew, who perhaps lived from 1127/31 to 1156/57 and for whom Nicetas Eugenianos wrote a prose monody.⁵² It seems that the epigram was produced long after Stephen’s and his wife’s (v. 5: διττοὺς σεβαστούς, εὐγενεῖς ὁμοζύγους) deaths, because their children are also mentioned (v. 6: καὶ παῖδας αὐτῶν) as being buried in the grave. The children are said to be Κομνηνοφυεῖς παππομαμμοπατρόθεν (“Komnenian born from the grandfather, the grandmother and the father”).⁵³ If παππομαμμοπατρόθεν is to be understood verbatim, it is inaccurate, since Stephen’s grandmother Eirene (from the side of his father) was not a Komnenian-born, but from Alania.⁵⁴ Thus, the term is rather to be understood in the sense of “Komnenian ancestry of several generations.”

Tomb epigram no. 13, perhaps to be dated around 1185,⁵⁵ on the aforementioned Eumathios Macrembolites is also equipped with a direct address to the beholder (v. 9: θεατά); moreover, it is composed in

⁴⁹ The hapax legomenon κιβωτοτετράπλευτος is difficult to translate. In Erich Trapp et al., Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994–2017), s. v. the translation “einer vierseitigen Kiste” is offered but I think it is more accurate to translate the verse as “a stone house (= coffin) looking like a quadrangular box.” In addition, one must not forget that the adjective also alludes to the original κιβωτός, i.e. Noah’s ark.

⁵⁰ The meaning “gravestone” is attested for the similar term ταφία, see Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie, Greek English Lexicon. Revised Supplement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s. v. and Trapp, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s. v. (ταφία).

⁵¹ Horna, ‘Epigramme,’ pp. 205–06.


⁵³ παππομαμμοπατρόθεν is a hapax legomenon but similar coined forms (e.g. μητροπαπποπατρόθεν, παπποπατρόθεν) are attested in other sources, see Trapp, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s. v.


⁵⁵ Jeffreys, Four Byzantine Novels, p. 161.
the first person. It is the deceased, the speaker’s “I”, who leads the readers and listeners through the poem. In this epigram, too, ancestry plays a crucial role: the speaker’s “I” traces back his origin to Constantine X Ducas and to his wife Eudocia Macrembolitissa; his paternal grandfather was their nephew (vv. 9–12).

This passage, as well as the following verses, which are devoted to his career development, are introduced in vv. 7–8, in which the deceased presents himself as a painter who is going to σκιαφρασεῖν and στηλογραφεῖν – both verbs which describe the action of (verbatim) “depicting” – his ancestry and his fate on earth. In addition, in v. 6 the deceased Eumathios Macrembolites compares himself to a discus thrower who throws the τόμος out of his hole (τρυμαλία), i.e. his tomb. The term τόμος might refer to the tomb epigram itself, i.e. the piece of paper on which the verses were written. Alternatively, it might allude to Macrembolites’ literary activity (his novel?); a connection is perhaps also given to the meaning of τόμος as “(synodal) decision”, e.g. used in epigram no. 32, v. 28 with reference to the synodal decree of 1166.

No. 19 is also to be identified as a tomb epigram. In Horna’s edition the title runs as follows: Εἰς τάφον τοῦ σκευοφύλακος κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἁγίου Φλωρίτου. Only recently, the label Φλωρίτης has been included as hapax legomenon in the Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität (LBG) with the translation “Mönch im Kloster des Hl. Phloros”.

However, both Horna’s edition and LBG’s entry have to be corrected: the manuscript (Marc. gr. 524, fol. 90v) reads Εἰς τάφον τοῦ σκευοφύλακος κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἁγίου Φλωρίτου. In Horna’s edition the title runs as follows: Εἰς τάφον τοῦ σκευοφύλακος κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἁγίου Φλωρίτου. Only recently, the label Φλωρίτης has been included as hapax legomenon in the Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität (LBG) with the translation “Mönch im Kloster des Hl. Phloros”.

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56 On the three types of epitaphs (in the first, the second, or the third person), see Marc D. Lauxtermann, Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts, vol. I (Vie- na: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003), pp. 215–40.


58 Horna, ‘Epigramme’, no. 13, vv. 7–8: καὶ σκιαγραφῶ τὰ πατρικά μου γένη / καὶ στηλογραφῶ τὰς ἐπὶ γῆς μου τύχας. This is reminiscent—to a certain extent—of Theodore Prodromos’ dedicatory verses to his novel Rhodanthe and Dosikles, in which the author presents himself as a painter who “has depicted the image of Dosikles and Rhodanthe”: Agapitos, ‘Poets and Painters’, p. 175, I, vv. 6–7: χρώματα <ποικίλα> ταῦτα ἑαῖς ὑπὸ χείρεσι μάρψας, / εἰκόνα τὴν Δοσικλῆος ἐγράψατο καί τε Ῥοδάνθης. On the dedicatory verses of Prodromos’ novels, see also Jeffreys, Four Byzantine Novels, pp. 7–10.


60 On this epigram, see below pp. 136–138.

61 Trapp, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s. v.

62 Cf. Herbert Hunger, ‘Kanonistenrhetorik im Bereich des Patriarchats am Beispiel des Theodoros Balsamon’, in Oikonomides, To Βυζάντιο κατά τὸν 12ο αιώνα,
Ἀγ(ο)φλωρίτου. In English translation, the title therefore reads: *On the tomb of the skeuphylax John Hagiophlorites*. This John Hagiophlorites is also known from other sources: in 1166 he is attested as *chartophylax* of the Patriarchate, and in 1170 he was promoted to *megas skeuophylax*; the latter duty is also mentioned in Balsamon’s title of the epigram and in v. 5. A seal, to be dated between 1166 and 1170, calls him *chartophylax Megales Ekklesias*.⁶³ Since Balsamon himself held the post of *chartophylax*, he wrote the epitaph about one of his predecessors.⁶⁴ John Hagiophlorites also seems to have been the author of the so-called *Ekthesis*,⁶⁵ the official record of the synod in 1166, which dealt with Christ’s statement “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).⁶⁶ The synodal record’s text was also inscribed on plates, which were displayed in the Hagia Sophia. Balsamon’s epigram no. 32 deals with the inscriptions’ fate in the late twelfth century (see below p. 136).

Hagiophlorites is not a proper surname but indicates that John had a specific relationship to the monastery of St Phloros;⁶⁷ this “specific” relationship to the monastery seems to have been the fact that he spent the end of his life there as a monk with the name Dorotheos, as the end of the epigram reveals.⁶⁸ The location of the monastery is unknown;⁶⁹ there is a church of Sts Phloros and Lauros west of Constantinople, but

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⁶⁴ Hunger, ‘Kanonistenrhetorik’, pp. 52–53.

⁶⁵ His authorship is also attested for another synodal decree, see *ibidem*, pp. 53–59.


⁶⁸ Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 186, no. 19, vv. 23–25: κλῆσιν διπλῆν ἔσχηκας ἐκ τῶν πρακτέων, / Ἰωάννου μὲν τοῖς διακόνοις πρέπων, / Δωροθέου δὲ τοῖς μονασταῖς συμπρέπων. Horna (p. 210) rightly states that the first word in v. 24 appears as Ιουου’ (Horna Ιουου”) which seems to be a mistake by the scribe, since Ιωάννου perfectly fits the epigram’s content. Horna’s interpretation “das könnte Abkürzung für Ιουιου oder Ιουιου sein” is hardly probable.

it is less probable that Hagiophlorites refers to this. As is typical for the tomb epigram genre, the deceased is highly praised. In the case of Hagiophlorites the praise may also have been influenced by Balsamon’s personal respect for his predecessor in the ecclesiastic administration of Constantinople. Employing Old Testament imagery, he calls John ἡ τῶν γραφῶν γέφυρα (v. 9) and ἡ τοῦ λόγου πετροσφενδόνη (v. 13), which also refers to the deceased’s rhetorical skills. V. 20 alludes to John’s activity as a teacher at the Patriarchal School: σὺ ταῦτα, διδάσκαλε τῆς ἐκκλησίας. An interesting passage is represented by vv. 10–12: “Who will (now, i.e. after John’s death) divide the Red Sea of salty doctrines with his teaching cane and save the people who flee the tyranny?” As at the beginning of the epigram, Old Testament imagery is employed insofar as John’s authorship of decrees and his teaching activities are compared to Moses who guided the Israelites through the Red Sea. The passage about the people who flee the tyranny might refer to the “terror regime” of Andronikos I (1183–1185) – which would offer us a safe date for John’s death and the composition of the epigram –, but perhaps it rather refers to the opponents of the synodal decree of 1166 because the problems of this council continued to be discussed in the year afterwards. The vv. 14–16 seem to refer to theological discussions as well: the epigram’s author asks in a rhetorical question who should now – after John’s death – chase away the bunch of heretic conspirators (v. 15 τὰς αἱρετικὰς ἐκδιώξει φατρίας).

70 Ibidem, pp. 496–97.


72 Hunger, ‘Kanonistenrhetorik’, p. 53 translates as “rhetorisches Geschütz;” literally it means “slingshot of word(s).”


Book Epigrams

V. 26 (Ἀντιόχου γῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσης ἑω) of Balsamon’s aforementioned tomb epigram no. 11, which refers to his Antioch bishopric, also occurs in epigram no. 10 which can be identified as a book epigram.

It serves as the metrical prologue to a work by Balsamon which is lost. From the epigram’s title which reads Εἰς βίβλον τακτικὸν καὶ μηχανικὸν δοθὲν παρὰ τούτου τῷ βασιλεῖ κυρίῳ Ἰσαακίῳ (“On a book of tactics and strategies given by him to the emperor Isaac”), we learn that the work was dedicated to the emperor Isaac II, who was perhaps also the commissioner. In vv. 11–12 Balsamon asks the emperor to accept his book using the words δέξαι τολοιπὸν εὐμενῶς τοὺς ἰχθύας / τῆς ταγματικῆς ὀπλοδιδασκαλίας (“take well then kindly the fishes of the tactic warfare instruction”). The sea and fish imagery refers to the preceding verses in which this symbolic language is used as well: “Not into the deep well of uncertainty but into the red (sea)" of a gentle heart an old man (i.e. Balsamon himself) loosened the nets of his mind, when as archbishop he obtained the most deplorable throne of the land of Antioch but also of the entire east, and he sucked up the book of his writings, just like a fish dying out of the drought.”

There has been some discussion regarding whether the βίβλον τακτικὸν καὶ μηχανικὸν was indeed a book on warfare or if it was composed as a theological compilation with arguments against heresies and non-orthodoxies; the titles of the early twelfth-century dogmatic compilation Panoplia dogmatike by Euthymios Zigabenos and the Hiera hoplotheke by the mid-twelfth century author Andronikos Kamateros, which have similar war-like titles, make this assumption more probable.

Within Balsamon’s collection there are some more book epigrams, among them the already mentioned ones on the nomokanon. Nos. 28 and 34 were used as prologue epigrams for two typika, i.e. foundation charters of monasteries, one for the so-called Chrysokamariotissa monas-

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75 Cf. no. 19, v. 10.
tery (no. 28), and the other for a female monastery as the title tells us: Εἰς τυπικὸν γυναικείας μονῆς (no. 34). Also v. 6 of this epigram reveals that the text refers to nuns: Ἐδὲμ πύλας ἤνοιξε ταῖς μονοτρόποις (“It [i.e. the τόμος δὲ βραχὺς τυπικογράφου νόμου = v. 4] opened the gates of Eden for the nuns”). Unfortunately, the original typika are not preserved any more. From the book epigram on the typikon of the Theotokos Chrysokamariotissa monastery, whose position is unknown (either in Constantinople or in its hinterland), 79 we learn that the renewer of the monastery, Andronikos, a high official under the Angeloi, who is also known from a preserved seal, 80 stemmed from the house of the Rogerioi who were of Norman origin (vv. 5–6 ... οὗ γένος / ἔστι περιβόητον ἐκ Ρογερίων).

Balsamon’s epigram no. 31 was also composed for a monastery. It is of very specific content as it refers – as the title tells us – to a bitter orange tree which was killed by winter frost (Εἰς νέραντζαν τῆς μόνης τῶν Ἀργυρῶν καυθεῖσαν ὑπὸ χειμῶνος). The monastery τῶν Ἀργυρῶν, otherwise unknown, was also either located in Constantinople or in its hinterland. 81 Interestingly enough, in the poem the bitter orange tree is not mentioned at all. The verses are addressed to the winter, which is attacked as being pitiless with the garden’s charm. The very well-known and widespread motive of φθόνος (“envy”) is employed as well: it forms an unholy alliance with the cold ice and the winter frost (vv. 23–24: ἀλλά, 84
ψυχρὲ κρύσταλε καὶ γέρον φθόνε / καὶ χε ιμερινὴ παγετοξυμμαχία.

However, the poem has a positive ending: the light of spring will extinguish the envious snowflakes and hide the army of vengefulness, and nature’s charm may shine again!  

Also, in this case one can easily assume that the title was coined by Balsamon himself. He could have been asked – perhaps by the monks – to compose a poem during a very hard winter period which destroyed the monastery garden’s beauty, among the victims a very beautiful bitter orange tree, perhaps the highlight of the garden. It is a matter of fact that in the twelfth century bitter lemons were still very exclusive fruits. They are not attested before the eleventh century, and it is not clear if they were then imported to or harvested in Byzantium.

A second epigram which deals with fruits is no. 30. It refers to a vine with grapes at the cell of the patriarch (Εἰς ἀναδενδράδα πατριαρχικοῦ κέλλιου ἔχουσαν σταφυλάς). It seems to have been composed when Balsamon served as a high official in the patriarch’s entourage. The content of the verses, however, does not show any connection with the patriarch; it rather warns against excessive enjoyment of the grapes.

Inscriptional Epigrams – Epigrams Referring to Depictions

The biggest group within Balsamon’s poetical oeuvre is formed by epigrams referring to fresco depictions, icons and objects of minor arts. They all had the potential to serve as inscriptions, and some of them may indeed have been inscribed. It is possible that they were not all used as inscriptions because Balsamon was also an author who produced several epigram versions on the same subject. This practice is, for example, attested by the codex Athon. Meg. Laur. Ω 126, which at the end contains eight short dedicatory epigrams devoted to a silver bowl (Εἰς κρατῆρα ἀργυροῦν στίχοι) that

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85 Verbattim "chilly war alliance", see Trapp, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s. v. ("frostiges Kriegsbündnis").
86 Horna, 'Epigramme', no. 31, vv. 26–29: ὅσον γὰρ ἤδη τοῦ φθόνου τὰς νιφάδας / ἔαριναὶ σβέσουσι λάμπαδουχίαι / καὶ στρατιὰν κρύψουσιν αὖ μνησικάκως, / καὶ τοῦ φυτοῦ λάμψειειν ἡ χάρις πάλιν.
was commissioned by Constantine Dalassenos, the governor of Antioch.\textsuperscript{89} As demonstrated by Henry Maguire, the epigrams were written by at least two authors, one of them being a eunuch (no. IV, tit. Ἀλλα· εὐνοῦχου). Maguire also rightly stated that the epigrams were most likely trial pieces, from which the commissioner was supposed to choose one.\textsuperscript{91} Theodore Stoudites’ collection of inscriptive iambs is also full of verses which were created to serve as inscriptions. His fourteen epigrams for crosses (nos. 47–60) may indeed all have been inscribed, but Stoudites may also have written them as “supply” for later inscriptive use.\textsuperscript{92}

In Balsamon’s œuvre this is true for epigram no. 18 which is available in three variants, each of them consisting of six verses: it presents verses to be inscribed on a golden cup with the depiction of the famous scene of the judgement of Paris who offered the golden apple to Aphrodite, while Hera and Athena had to come away empty-handed (tit. Εἰς χρυσοῦν κωθώνιον ἔχον ἱστορημένας τρεῖς θεὰς, τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, τὴν Ἡραν, τὴν Αθηνήν, καὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον διδοῦντα μήλον).\textsuperscript{93} The commissioner of the verses is Andronikos Kontostephanos whose name is mentioned in only one of the three versions of the epigram, but very prominently (no. B, vv. 4–5: καὶ κλάδος ἐσφαίρωσε Κοντοστεφάνων / κλεινὸς μέγας δούξ, Ἀνδρόνικος τοὔνομα – “and it (the apple) was made globe-like by the branch of Kontostephanos, the famous Megas Dux, named Andronikos”).\textsuperscript{94} It was perhaps this version which Kontostephanos picked in the end, if we assume that he was looking for the version which best served his ambitions of self-fashioning.\textsuperscript{95} The Kontostephanoi were


\textsuperscript{94} Horna, ‘Epigramme’, no. 18B.

\textsuperscript{95} On this topic generally Stephen Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare. With a new preface} (Chicago and London: The University of Chi-
a famous aristocratic family, also represented as addressees in Theodore Prodromos’ poetry of the mid-twelfth century. It is highly likely that the present Andronikos Kontostephanos is Andronikos Kontostephanos, son of Anna Komnene (daughter of John II) and Stephanos Kontostephanos, who is, for example, mentioned in Prodromos poem no. 50 (v. 20). Interestingly enough, Andronikos Kontostephanos’ cup and its verses (στιχίδια) are also mentioned in a letter from Balsamon which was sent to the aristocratic commissioner. 

Apart from the other examples of epigrams mentioned above, which were probably produced in order to serve as a pool from which donors could chose, there is another striking example which is the closest to Balsamon’s cup series: four anonymous epigrams, preserved in the same cod. Marc. gr. 524 (fol. 109v–110v), refer to a cup as well. The title – with very similar wording – states that the epigrams were to be inscribed on a cup on which the Virtues were depicted (Εἰς κωθώνιον ἔχον εἰκονισμένας τὰς ἀρετάς); from version no. 3 we learn that it was a golden bowl (χρυσοῦς κρατήρ). The names of the donors, Eirene Komnene and her mother Sophia, are mentioned in versions nos. 1, 3 and 4, while in no. 2 there is only a reference to Sophia. In comparison with Balsamon’s series, there is a difference in length: whereas versions no. 1 and 2 consist of three verses, nos. 3 and 4 encompass four verses. The commissioner of the epigrams could have been Eirene Dokeiane Komnene (c. 1110 – after 1143), daughter of Sophia Komnene, who died c. 1130. She is also attested as the commissioner of other epigrams preserved in the Marcianus.

An example of an epigram composed to be inscribed on a cup is also given by the verses which are preserved on a still existing golden beaker kept in a museum in Skopje. It consists of four verses, is to be

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100 Barzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, vol. I, pp. 301–03 (no. 61).
101 Ibidem 169–72 (no. 29).
102 See the references *ibidem* 302.
dated to the twelfth century and mentions the donor, a certain Adrianos Palteas.\textsuperscript{103}

Two versions of one epigram are also provided by the numbers $20A+B$ of Balsamon’s epigrams, referring to a depiction of the archangel Michael with fifteen verses each, and $24A+B$, referring to an icon of Theodore Stratelates with 17 verses each. The title of no. $20A$ suggests the assumption that the verses were painted next to the archangel’s depiction. The latter’s placement is of specific interest: the title reveals that the archangel was depicted in the perfume shops of the Great Church (Εἰς τὸν ἀρχάγγελον Μιχαήλ μετὰ ξίφους ἱστάμενον εἰς τὰ μυρεψικὰ ἐργαστήρια τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας ἄνωθεν τῆς ...— “On the archangel Michael with sword standing upright in the perfume shops of the Great Church above ...”).\textsuperscript{104} Depictions of the archangel Michael with drawn sword are very common in Byzantine churches – in many cases next to the entrance\textsuperscript{105} – but such depictions in secular buildings are otherwise not attested. Perfume shops are attested in Constantinople in the middle – e.g., in the Book of Eparch of the city\textsuperscript{106} – and late Byzantine period;\textsuperscript{107} the μυρεψικὰ ἐργαστήρια in the title of Balsamon’s epigram seem to have specialized in the production of perfume for the Hagia Sophia which

\textsuperscript{103} Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst, no. Me 11 and fig. 27.

\textsuperscript{104} The end of the title fol. 91r of the Marc. gr. 524 is completely illegible.

\textsuperscript{105} Very often with epigrams on scrolls held by them: e.g., Andreas Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken (= Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, vol. 1) (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), no. 91; generally Piotr Ł. Grotnowski (transl. by Richard Brzezinski), Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010). One should mention that the emperor Isaac II chose the church of the Archangel Michael at Sosthenion on the European side of the Bosporus as his resting place. The dedication of the monastery to the “first” of the angels (arch-angelos) provided a pun for Isaac’s family name Angelos: see Kallirrooe Linardou, “A Resting Place for ‘the First of the Angels’: The Michaelion at Sosthenion”, in Simpson, Byzantium, 1180–1204: ‘The Sad Quarter of a Century’?, pp. 245–59.


was there used for the oil burning in the lamps. There might be a discrepancy in the description of the position of the archangel’s depiction: while in the mutilated title it is stated that the archangel is positioned above something (ἀνωθεν ...), v. 6 of version A states ἔστης πρὸ θυρῶν ἐνθάδε ξιφηφόρος.

Epigram no. 29 refers less to a depiction of a saint in a private house but rather to a portable icon kept there: according to Balsamon’s title (Εἰς ἅγιον Δημήτριον εὑρεθέντα παρά τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς τὴν σίκιν τοῦ ἀποστάτου Σθλαβοπέτρου), the depiction of St Demetrios was found in the “house” of the apostate Peter the Slav, who unambiguously is Peter of Bulgaria, who together with his brother Asen rose up against the Byzantine Empire in the late twelfth century. It seems to be the icon which was rescued by Peter and Asen or their associates from Thessalonica, which was plundered by the Normans in 1185; the epigram refers to the Byzantines’ military successes of 1186 when the icon was found in the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo and from there brought back to either Thessalonica or Constantinople.

The concluding vv. 38–40 reveal that the epigram was commissioned by the emperor Isaac II, probably after his successful return from Bulgaria (αὐτοκράτωρ γέγραφε πιστό σοι [i.e. St Demetrios] τάδε, / ἄναξ Ἰσαάκιος Αὐσονοκράτωρ, / ἐξ Ἀγγελικῆς ὀσφύος κατηγμένος – “the pious emperor commissioned to write this for you, lord Isaac, ruler of the Au-


109 Alternatively, ἄνωθεν ... might also refer to the position of the verses and not of Michael’s depiction. However, as a still existing inscriptive epigram reveals, ἄνωθεν and πρό are not necessarily mutually exclusive: in the church of Sts Theodoroi (a. 1263/64) near Kaphiona on the Mani a (not fully preserved) epigram starts with the verse Πρό της τυλικής γραφῆς σε τὴν Θ(εο)ύ τυλίκη. It refers to depictions of the Hypapante and the Eisodia above the door: Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, pp. 233–34 (no. 137).

Epigram no. 14 refers to a depiction of the Mother of God in the Hodegon monastery, most likely the famous icon of the Theotokos Hodegetria, which was carried each Tuesday through the streets of Constantinople and placed at the altar of a different church for the celebration of Mass. From the content it is not entirely clear if the verses were positioned directly next to the depiction of the Mother of God or were inscribed next to the monastery’s entrance telling the entrants what they could expect to see in the katholikon. Alternatively, the verses might simply have been a reflection on the Hodegetria icon and someone who was tempted to see it. The verses 1–5 run as follows:

Ἂν τῶν Ὁδηγῶν τὴν μονὴν ἰδεῖν θέλεις
καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ παντοπροσκυνουμένην
tῆς κοσμολαμποῦσης Ὁδηγητρίας χάριν,
ἀνοίξων ὡδὶ τὰς νοητὰς σου κόρας
καὶ τῆς πρὸς <αὐτ>ὰς ἀξιωθῆσῃ θέας.

If you want to see the Hodegon Monastery
and the grace therein worshipped by all
of the Hodegetria who shines the world,
open here your mental eyes,
and you will be honored with the sight reflected in them.

The crucial passage is v. 4 in which the addressee is invited to open his νοηταὶ κόραι. The same expression is also employed by a contemporary source, namely an oration by George Tornikes on the patriarch George Xiphilinos (1191–1198) delivered on 20 March, 1193. In the so-called Dialexis of (Pseudo-)Gregentios of Taphar, to be dated to the tenth century, the expression is combined with ὄμματα. From the parallels cited it is conceivable that the term “mental eyes” encompasses
more than mere “gazing” at the monastery, its church and its depictions. It involves the use of the “spirit,” i.e. the application of all senses. As a reward “you will be honored (ἀξιωθήσῃ) with the sight reflected in the ‘mental eyes.’” By doing so, as is told by the vv. 6–9, the monastery’s visitor and beholder of the depiction of the Mother of Gold respectively would see the Mother of God herself, who, like the δεσπότης (the Lord?), is accustomed to cultivate the rustic ears of corn and reveal the rewards which bring salvation from diseases. The verses hint at the healing properties of the holy water in the monastery and the gratitude that was addressed to the icon of the Hodegetria. The epigram ends with the author’s metrical signature Θεόδωρός σοι Βαλσαμὼν ταῦτα γράφει (v. 10). The form of this verse is a topos, which is sometimes employed in other poems on commission, especially those attributed to Manuel Philes. If the epigram was indeed once inscribed the inscriptional version possibly consisted only of the vv. 1–9, while v. 10 was only part of the written epigram as it was sent to his addressee. Balsamon may have composed the epigram when he resided in the Hodegon complex in his capacity as titular patriarch of Antioch (see above, p. 111); the addressee of the verses might have been the monastery’s abbot.

The epigram’s title deserves some remarks as well: in Horna’s edition it reads Εἰς τὴν ύπεραγίαν εἰκονισμένην Ὁδηγήτριαν …… παντέχιον. In the apparatus Horna states: post ὁδηγήτριαν aliquot verba, quae legere not potui. This is indeed true: the letters in the lacuna on fol. 90v are not decipherable. However, by taking a closer look at the manuscript


116 Horna, ‘Epigramme’, no. 14, vv. 6–9: ἴδῃς γὰρ αὐτὴν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν μητέρα / κἀνταῦθα θαμίζουσαν ὥσπερ δεσπότην / τοὺς χωριτικοὺς καλλιεργοῦσαν στάχυς / καὶ σῶστρα μηνύουσαν ἀρρωστημάτων. In v. 7 the ms. (cod. Marc. gr. 524, fol. 90r) transmits δεσπότιν with something written above the iota (perhaps added by a later hand?) which might be identified as an iota.

117 See below p. 134.


119 E.g., Man. Phil. carm. E23, v. 23 (I, p. 203 Miller): Φυλής Μανουήλ ταῦτα θαρροῦντος γράφει; E23, v. 22 (I, p. 118 Miller = Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein, no. TR76): ὡς σῶστρα μηνύουσαν ἀρρωστημάτων. In v. 8 the ms. (cod. Marc. gr. 924, fol. 90v) transmits δεσπότιν with something written above the iota (perhaps added by a later hand?) which might be identified as an eta.


121 I sincerely thank Foteini Spingou who provided good images of the folio.
the last word seems to read …αντείχιὸν (sic), not παντέχιον.\textsuperscript{122} In a short note Angelidi and Papamastorakis refer to Balsamon’s epigram with the words “On an Icon of the Hodegetria which was at Panteichion, outside Constantinople.”\textsuperscript{123} It is indeed tempting to link the word with this toponym which designates a location on the coast of the Propontis, c. 20 km southeast of Chalkedon.\textsuperscript{124} But how can a connection between this location, the Hodegon monastery and the icon of the Hodegetria be explained? No source is preserved, which can testify to a possible temporal stay of the icon at Panteichion, except for the fact that in modern times a church of the Theotokos Hodegetria is attested at this location. The word might also be explained differently: παντείχ - might also stem from an otherwise not attested adjective παντείχιος, coined in a manner similar to ἐντείχιος, ἐπιτείχιος and προτείχιος,\textsuperscript{125} and refer to the walls (of Constantinople). Thus, the epigram’s title might be seen in connection with an event which took place in 1187: when the army of the rebelling general Alexios Branas was approaching Constantinople\textsuperscript{126} “he (i.e. the emperor Isaac II) carried up to the top of the walls, as an impregnable fortress and unassailable palisade, the icon of the Mother of God taken from the monastery of the Hodegoi where it had been assigned, and therefore called Hodegetria,” as Nicetas Choniates tells in his history.\textsuperscript{127} It is the passage “up to the top of the walls” (ἄνω τῶν τειχέων) to which παντείχιος might refer, perhaps meaning that the “all (i.e. the entire city) was equipped with walls.”

\textsuperscript{122} Interestingly enough, when Horna’s edition was integrated into the database of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.php, with site licence) the word was changed to πάντεχνον, which, however, does not solve the passage either.

\textsuperscript{123} Angelidi and Papamastorakis, ‘The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria’, p. 380.

\textsuperscript{124} Cf. Friedrich K. Dörner, Pantichion, in Paulys Realencycloädie der classischen Altertumswissen-schaften, 18/3 (1949), pp. 779–80. I sincerely thank my colleague Klaus Belke for providing me with a printout of the lemma “Panteichion” to be published in his forthcoming volume Bitblynien und Hellespont (= Tabula Imperii Byzantini 13).

\textsuperscript{125} On these words Trapp, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, s. v.

\textsuperscript{126} On Alexios Branas and his rebellion, see Brand, Byzantium confronts the West, pp. 80–82 and passim. Mention of Alexios Branas is also made in Alicia Simpson, Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), passim.

Also the epigram which follows in the manuscript (no. 15) is devoted to the healing capacity of the κοσμοπροσκύνητος¹²８ (“worshipped by the world”) Hodegetria (icon). It is addressed to the church’s visitor who need not be scared of the ancestral curse (v. 4 προπατορικὴν μὴ πτοηθῇς κατάραν), i.e. original sin, when looking at the pure virgin Hodegetria who lets flow tears of orthodoxy (v. 3 καὶ σταγόνας βλύζουσαν ὀρθοδοξίας). He or she may rather scoop from her the dew of life which cures diseases and redeems the sins. This epigram, too, could have been inscribed next to the Hodegetria icon or somewhere else in the monastery. But the verses may also have been a mere reflection about the healing power of the Hodegetria, again perhaps addressed to the monastery’s abbot.

Within the series of epigrams with the potential to be inscribed, no. 27 is of interest insofar as the title informs about secular painting, of which, unfortunately, only a few examples are preserved from Byzantium. The epigram’s heading runs as follows: Εἰς τὸν ἱστορηθέντα βασιλέα κῦριν Ἰσαάκιον ἐντὸς τῆς ἁγίας θεοτόκου τῆς Ꭺδηγητρίας (“On the emperor Isaac depicted inside the holy bath of the saint Theotokos Hodegetria”). These verses,¹²⁹ too, were perhaps composed while Balsamon was residing as titular patriarch of Antioch in the Hodegon complex. In the text we read that the emperor’s achievement was primarily his order to have the bath and its heating renewed, after “all destructing” (v. 3 ἁπαντοφθόρος) χρόνος had caused damage.¹³⁰ The bath called ἅγιον λοῦμα in the title was a vaulted structure as v. 1 reveals: Τὸ σφαιροειδὲ τοῦ θερμοκεντρίον (“This heating in the form of a globule”). There has been some speculation as to whether this bath and the public bath (δημοσιακὸν λουτρόν) mentioned in the title of epigram no. 42 may have incorporated parts of the old Baths of

¹²８ This compound is also attested in the epigram inscribed on the cross of the famous staurotheke of Bessarion, ed. Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, no. Me79; see also idem, ‘The Textual Programme of the Cross of Bessarion’s Staurotheke and its Place within the Byzantine Tradition’, in Holger A. Klein, Valeria Poletto and Peter Schreiner (eds), La stauroteca di Bessarione fra Costantinopoli e Venezia (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2017), pp. 113–131. Despite the fact that the word is only attested in these two texts, however, there seems to be no connection between them.


¹³⁰ Blaming the χρόνος (often paired with φθόνος “envy”) for destruction is a very widespread topos in Byzantium: see Rhoby, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein, pp. 322–23, n. 1179.
Arcadius (Arcadianae), which seem to have been located in the area of the Hodegon monastery. The epigram, despite its length of 27 verses, seems to have been inscribed either in the bath itself or at the entrance, highlighting the emperor’s achievement: interestingly enough, in the epigram Isaac II is not mentioned directly by his name but he is circumscribed as πιστὸς βασιλεύς, Ἀγγέλων προστάτης (“pious emperor, leader of the Angeloi”) (v. 19). The epigram’s end is also devoted to the ruling family of the Angeloi: the bathers are addressed with “Bath ye, then, become clean, and putting off all evil-doing, pray that the imperial angel-protection (Ἀγγελοπροστασία) may enjoy long life.” This devotion to Isaac reinforces the assumption that the verses were placed next to the depiction of the emperor mentioned in the epigram’s title. However, in the verses themselves a depicted image of the emperor is not mentioned at all. This indicates that the title seems to be original, i.e. Balsamon’s work, because it contains information which is not given by the verses.

Epigram no. 43, only transmitted in cod. Vat. gr. 165, fol. 282’, refers to a depiction of Isaac II as well: he is depicted sitting on a horse, wearing a crown and holding his unsheathed sword, as the title tells: Εἰς τὸν βασιλέα κῦριν Ἰσαάκιον ἀνεστηλωνένον εἰς εἰκόνα μετὰ στέμματος καὶ γυμνῆς σπάθης. Unfortunately, neither the title nor the verses reveal where this depiction existed. It could have been in the Hodegon monastery as well, but since it is explicit praise of Isaac and his
ascension to power in 1185 it might have been inscribed next to the enormous depiction of the equestrian emperor in the palace.

No. 26, which is the third epigram in Balsamon’s collection referring to a bath, is either used as an inscription or composed in order to serve as mere reflection. Both the title (Εἰς τὸν θείον ναὸν τοῦ οἶκου τοῦ λογοθέτου τὸν ποτὲ ὄντα λουτρόν) and the verses reveal that a former bathhouse in the house of a logothetes, whose name is not mentioned, was transformed into a church (vv. 3–4 εἰς ψυχοσωτήριον ἀμείβει πόλον / τὸν θερμολουτήριον ἀνθρώπων δόμον). Churches in private houses were not uncommon in Byzantium: the church in the house of the sebastokratissa Eirene, the emperor’s Manuel I Komnenos, sister-in-law, where her salon of literati met, may serve as an example from the twelfth century.

The content of epigram no. 32 is different: it consists of fifty verses which refer to the aforementioned (p. 122) inscribed edict of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos. The edict inscribed was issued in the course of the Council of 1166 which dealt with a passage in the New Testament (John 14:28 “My Father is greater than I”); it was copied on marble slabs which were on display in St Sophia of Constantinople. For ecclesiopolitical reasons the inscribed plates twice found themselves at risk of removal after Manuel’s reign: first under Andronikos I, and later during the reign of Isaac II, because it was argued that the misfortunes of the empire were due to the recognition of Manuel’s “heretic” dogma. Isaac, however, remained steadfast and preserved the inscribed plates. Balsamon’s encomiastic epigram highlights Isaac’s fortitude by using warfare imagery, insofar as he calls the inscribed edict a rocky elo-

137 Berger, Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit, p. 128.  
138 Jeffreys, ‘The Sebastokratissa Irene as Patron’.  
140 What one sees there today are casts, because the originals were removed from St Sophia church in 1567 in order to serve as the ceiling of the porch of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent’s tomb (türbe): see M. Restle, Istanbul, Bursa, Edrine, Iznik. Baudenkmäler und Museen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), p. 271.  
quent sword (v. 5 πέτρινον εύστομον ξίφος) and a double-edged dagger (v. 8 μάχαιρα 
διστομουμένη). In the first four verses the inscribed plates are praised: with the opening v. 1 Ὁ λίθος οὗτος λυχνίτης ἐστὶ λίθος Balsamon stresses the stone’s value by alluding to an alleged Parian origin because – according to Pliny’s Natural History – λυχνίτης λίθος is the ter-
minus technicus for the most valuable marble, namely Parian marble.143 However, λυχνίτης is also the term for red tourmaline, a precious gem-
stone, which is known for glittering.144 It is this feature of the stone to
which the verses following the beginning of the poem allude: the state-
ment that “the stone shines like the light of the sun” (v. 2 λάμπει γὰρ ὡς φῶς ἡλιακῆς ἀκτίνος) may indeed refer to the effect when the slabs
with the edict inscription were irradiated by the light of the sun. This
effect is repeated in vv. 41–43: the inscribed slabs are compared with
the λίθος ἄνθραξ which, likewise, is a glittering gemstone of red color.145 The ones looking at the stone without winking (v. 42 ἀσκαρδαμυκτί), but
with desire, are resplendent by the boundless light.146 The Byzantines
were aware of such light effects, especially in the Hagia Sophia, as other
sources reveal.147

In v. 34 Balsamon even quotes a direct – although fictitious – speech
by the emperor Isaac, namely “στῶμεν”, in the sense of “we are steadfast”
and we do not allow the evil to have the plates removed.148 Whether
Isaac indeed said this, is less important. With this intervention, Bal-
samon added a dramatic element to the epigram.

The 50 verses were either inscribed next to the slabs or functioned as
a performative epigram which was recited in front of the edict inscrip-
tion on specific occasions. In order to make the inscription’s slabs firmly

142 μάχαιρα is a very general term for any kind of melee weapon: see Taxarchis G. Kolias, Byzantinische Waffen. Ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den An-
fängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie
143 Sonja Schönauer, Untersuchungen zum Steinkatalog des Sophrosyne-Gedichtes
des Meliteniotes mit kritischer Edition der Verse 1107–1247 (Wiesbaden: Beerenverlag,
1996), p. 130*.
144 Ibidem.
145 Ibidem, p. 105*.
146 Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 195, no. 32, vv. 41–43: ὡς λίθον οὖν ἄνθρακα τούτον τὸν
λίθον στῶμεν καὶ μετὰ πόθου βλέπων καταγχαίσθης ὑπὸ φωτὸς ἀπλέτου.
147 See especially Pentcheva, ‘Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics’.
148 The same στῶμεν is also employed in epigram no. 20B, v. 8, in which the word is
put into the archangel’s Michael mouth.
fixed – at least in a metaphorical sense – the epigram tells that images of
the apostles Peter and Paul were set up on either side (vv. 39–40).

Like no. 27 (see above, p. 134), the epigram is very much devoted to
the praise of Isaac and also ends with the plea to grant him a long reign.
Here it is not the visitors of the church, who are asked for this favor, as
was the case with the bathers in no. 27, but Christ himself (v. 47 σὺ δὲ,
κράτας τοῦ θεοῦ πατρός λόγε). The divine momentum is also included
in v. 9, in which Balsamon states that “one could call the stone also slabs
written by God” (εἴπῃ τις αὐτὸν (sc. λίθον) καὶ θεογράφους πλάκας).Vv.
32–33 are also reminiscent of a verse (19) in epigram no. 27: while there
the emperor is circumscribed as πιστὸς βασιλεύς, Ἀγγέλων προστάτης,
here he is characterized as ... βασιλεὺς Ἀγγελος πρωτοστάτης / μέγας
Ἰσαάκιος Αὐσονοκράτωρ.

Poems on Schedography

The topic of a further group within Balsamon’s poetic œuvre is schedog-
raphy (σχεδογραφία), a teaching method on word analysis and syntax,
based on epimerismoi and extremely popular in the twelfth century, although it was also criticized. Three epigrams (nos. 23, 25 and 41)
are addressed to a “little eunuch” (nos. 23 and 25 εὐνοχόπουλος / no.

149 On schedography and its function, see, e.g., Panagiotis A. A
gapitos, ‘Learn-
ing to Read and to Write a Schedos: the verse dictionary of Paris. Gr. 400’, in Stephanos Efthymiades, Charis Messis, Paolo Odorico and Ioannis Polemis (eds), “Pour une poé-
tique de Byzance.” Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo-
chéleniques et sud-est-européennes, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2015),
pp. 11–24; idem, ‘Literary haute cuisine and Its Dangers: Eustathios of Thessalonike on

150 On eunuchs in Byzantium, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, The Perfect Servant, Eu-
of Chicago Press, 2003); Shaun Tougher and Ra’anan S. Boustan (eds), Eunuchs in An-
tiquity and Beyond (Cardiff: Classical Press of Wales, 2002); Shaun Tougher, The Eu-
nuchs in Byzantine History and Society (London: Routledge, 2008); Charis Messis, Les
eunuques à Byzance, entre réalité et imaginaire (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo-

151 On eunuchs in Byzantium, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, The Perfect Servant, Eun-
of Chicago Press, 2003); Shaun Tougher and Ra’anan S. Boustan (eds), Eunuchs in An-
tiquity and Beyond (Cardiff: Classical Press of Wales, 2002); Shaun Tougher, The Eu-
nuchs in Byzantine History and Society (London: Routledge, 2008); Charis Messis, Les
eunuques à Byzance, entre réalité et imaginaire (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo-
41 εὐνουχοποιούμενον) who wants to begin a study of schedography. As in other epigrams, Balsamon uses warfare imagery in order to describe the use of schedography: in no. 25 he employs words like μάχη, νίκη, and ξίφος, and he tells his addressee, whom he addresses as τέκνον (vv. 1, 3 and 11), to put on the “three-fold defence” (v. 11 τριπανοπλία) to be ready for the “fight” with schedography.

In epigram no. 41 Balsamon proves to be quite humoristic. The verses, full of intentionally coined hapax legomena, run as follows:

Eἰς εὐνουχοποιοῦμενον ἄρξασθαι μέλλον σχεδογραφίας
Τὴν κνηδοχορτόπλουτον εὐνούχων φύσιν
ἀκριδομικτόβρουχος ἁρπάσοι φύσις
eὐνουχοποιοῦμενον ἡμῶν δὲ σκέποι
θεοῦ τρισυπόστατοι ἁγία φύσις

5 ὡς μάννα σιτίζουσα τοὺς λόγους
καὶ πλεκτάνας λύουσα τῶν σχεδοπλόκων.

On a little eunuch who wants to start with schedography
The eunuchs’ nature rich on stinging nettle and grass
may be rescued by the nature consisting of grasshoppers and bushcrickets,
but our little eunuch may be sheltered
by the holy nature of three persons of God,
which feeds him the words like manna
and untightens the wreaths of the composers (i.e. the weavers)
of σχέδη.

In this epigram, as well as in no. 25, Balsamon does not necessarily make mere fun of eunuchs at the court, whose social situation had deteriorated under the Komnenoi because an ideology which venerated manliness had become dominant. Both poems are written with some kind
of irony,154 which not only refers to “his” (no. 41, v. 3 εὐνουχοπουλίδιον ἡμῶν) eunuch, who was perhaps employed in his household, but also to the teachers employing schedography, the σχεδοπλόκοι, as he calls them in no. 41, v. 6. In vv. 1–2 Balsamon perhaps alludes to a riddle which might have been deciphered in his time but is unknown today. The pun in these verses might also be evidence for the fact that the epigrams no. 23 and no. 41 were performed among other literati, in a so-called theatron or any other intellectual gathering. This also applies for epigram no. 23 which is entitled Στίχοι ἐκδοθέντες τῷ εὐνουχοπούλῳ (“Verses published for the little eunuch”). While nos. 25 and 41 are not openly directed against the method of schede and schedographers, in epigram no. 23 the tone is less friendly: the eunuch is unambiguously told to refrain from “fatted” schedography (v. 6 τῆς μὲν σιτιστῆς ἀπέχου σχεδουργίας). A shrewd character may solve the “tight wattled and manifold schede” (v. 10 τὰ στεγανόπλεκτα ποικίλα σχέδη), but a ἄνηβος (“someone not yet come to man’s estate”) in education and years (v. 12 ἐν λόγοις ἄνηβος … καὶ τοῖς χρόνοις) – the term refers to Balsamon’s little eunuch – should store up the easily comprehensible, not the enigmatic schede (v. 13 εὔληπτα θησαυρίζε, μὴ γρίφα σχέδη). This may express attitudes towards schedography which are not very different from Anna Komnene’s assessment of this teaching method: Anna was not – as often argued – completely against schedography but rather against the form employed in her time;155 the same seems to be true for John Tzetzes, Nikephoros Basilakes and Eustathios of Thessalonica.156 Verses 14–15, which form the end of epigram no. 23, are again full of Balsamon’s irony: “If you have digestive problems due to fat dishes, eat the lard of laughing instead of the food” (εἰ γὰρ ἀπεπτεῖς ἐκ λιπαρῶν σιτίων, φάγῃς στέαρ γέλωτος ἀντὶ βρωσίμου).

It may be mentioned that two further epigrams in Balsamon’s collection deal with his eunuch (nos. 21 and 22). In no. 21 the author compares him to a diligent ant which, although little in size, does not at all offer little work. Also in this epigram, Balsamon addresses him as τέκνον


154 On “irony” in Byzantium, see the contributions by Efthymia Braounou, such as ‘Irony as a Discursive Practice in Historiography: A Byzantine Case in Point’, Medioevo Greco, 16 (2016), pp. 35–71.


(v. 7). No. 22 is entitled “On a tall cupbearer, as if written by the little eunuch” (Εἰς ἐπικέρνην μακρόν, ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐνουχοπούλου). It is no coincidence that it consists of twelve verses, as does no. 21, because it has an intentional parallel structure:

No. 21

*Μυρμηκοφυὲς ἐνδεδυμένος δέμας, 
*μυρμηκοτραφεῖς οὐκ ἔχεις ἐργασίας·
οὐ γὰρ κοπιᾷς, ὡς τὰ μυρμήκων γένη,
κατὰ γραϊδίων δε συντρόφων φύσιν
κατὰ δὲ φαυλότατα Σατύρων γένη

No. 22

*Γιγαντοφυὲς ἐνδεδυμένος δέμας
*γιγαντοτραφεῖς οὐκ ἔχεις ἐργασίας·
οὐ γὰρ κοπιᾷς, ὡς γίγας,
κατὰ δὲ φαυλότατα Σατύρων γένη
τὰς δειπτοτικὰς *δειπνοφιλοτησίας,
κατὰ δὲ φαυλότατα Σατύρων γένη

5

*μυρμηκοφυὲς τοὺς ξενοτρόφους κόπους.
*πιθηκοκεντρίῳ.

Oύτω σε, τέκνον, ἐκ κακῆς ῥαθυμίας
λιμὸς κατέσχε γνωστικῆς εὐπραγίας,

10

*μυρμηκοφυὲς τοὺς ξενοτρόφους κόπους.
*πιθηκοκεντρίῳ.

No. 22 might indicate that the eunuch and the cupbearer, most likely both employed in Balsamon’s household, had a polemic relationship. However, both epigrams with their intentional parallel structure might also have been composed as a rhetorical exercise, highlighting the possibilities one has when playing with words, especially *hapax legomena*, which were only coined for these two poems (18 new words, indicated by *, in no. 2.1 mainly from the stem μυρμηκ-, in no. 2.2 especially from the stem γιγαντ-).

As to schedography, there is one more poem by Balsamon (no. 16) in which this method is mentioned. It consists of 20 verses addressed to a metropolitan of Philippopolis who is the author of a work entitled Ἐξαγωγή, which was perhaps of theological content. Balsamon opens the poems with the statement that straying like some Odysseus he sailed through the Charybdis of schedography (v. 2 σχεδουργικὴν χάρυβδιν) because of ignorance (ἐξ ἀμαθίας). He continues with “or (sailing) the

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158 Galli Calderini, ‘Orientamenti tematici negli epigrammi di Teodoro Balsamone’, p. 182. Translates εὐνοχοπούλος and εὐνοχοπούλιδιον as “un giovane eunuco.” However, since the opposite equivalent ἐπικέρνης μακρός refers to the height (of the cupbearer), the cited diminutives describing the eunuch most probably refer to height as well and not to age.
ebb of the night-battle I could not see the easily accessible day” (vv. 3–4 ἢ μᾶλλον ἀμπώτιδα νυκτομαχίας, / οὐκ εἶχον εὐπρόσιτον ἡμέραν βλέπειν). This passage employing sea and sailing imagery, with which Balsamon also seems to allude to Thucydides’ description of a nightly attack by the Athenians against Syracuse in the Peloponnesian War (7, 44),161 is continued with some more sardonic remarks about schedography: when looking into a small schedos (?) (v. 9 σχεδάριον)162 of a friend he found a garden of Hermes flooded by the Sirens (v. 10 σειρηνοκατάκλυστον Ἑρμοῦ κηπίον)163 through which he hoped to trample down his straying and to benefit from its conveniences (vv. 11–13). “So much grace crowns the σχέδος, so much I take the grapes, which let flow honey, from the grapevine of David164 in it (i.e. the σχέδος):”165 with these words Balsamon continues his poem, employing garden imagery. However, the poem ends with some hidden allusions which were perhaps only understandable for the author and his addressee: “When friends are blind towards friends, I do not know: I also do not pray for seeing for those who are sharp-sighted regarding the passions of the friends and who tend to blindness regarding their own fate.”166 The verses might refer to some bad experience Balsamon had with a friend inclined to schedography, perhaps the one mentioned in v. 9, into whose σχεδάριον Balsamon had a look.

Although the poem deals with schedography and does not have any connection with its title at first sight, it may have served as a prologue

161 Thucydides’ ekphrasis of the night-battle is also mentioned in the pro gymnasmata collections of early rhetoricians, e.g. Aphthonios: Michel Patillon, Corpus Rhetoricum. Anonyme, Préambule à la rhétorique. Aphthonios, Progymnasmata. En annexe: Pseudo-Hermogène, Progymnasmata. Textes établis et traduits (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008), pp. 148, ll. 4–7 (ch. XII 2); νυκτομαχία is also used metaphorically: in one of his letters Theodore Stoudites speaks about the νυκτομαχία αἱρετική of his time (no. 507, 3 Fatouros).

162 This term is difficult to explain: according to the dictionaries σχεδάριον is either a “sketch”, a “rough draft” or a “short document.” For the meaning, which is very likely employed here, namely “small σχέδος”, there are no further attestations to the very best of my knowledge.

163 The reference to Hermes is due to the ancient God’s responsibility for rhetoric; it is also employed in two other poems by Balsamon dealing with schedography (no. 21, v. 4 and no. 25, v. 6).

164 This statement seems to allude to psalm 127 (128), 3: ἡ γυνὴ σου ὡς ἀμπέλος εὐθηνοῦσα ἐν τοῖς κλίτεσι τῆς σικίας σου. Οἱ υἱοὶ σου ὡς νεόφυτα ἐλαιῶν κύκλῳ τῆς τραπέζης σου.


166 Ibidem, vv. 17–20: εἶπε δὲ τυφλωττόνον εἰς φίλους φίλοι, / οὐκ οἶδα· καὶ γὰρ εὔχομαι μηδὲ βλέπειν / τοὺς δεξιοδερκείς πρὸς τὰ τῶν φίλων πάθη / καὶ τυφλοπαθείς πρὸς τὰς ἱδιὰς τύχας.
book epigram to the Ἐξαγωγή of the metropolitan of Philippopolis. This is a common practice: book epigrams, serving as metrical prologue or epilogue, either preserved as poems of known authors or anonymously are very widespread. Both Balsamon and the metropolitan might have been opponents of schedography, or Balsamon tried to warn his addressee of the dangers of this teaching method.

Conclusion

As seen by the preserved evidence, the surviving poems of Balsamon, mainly in the cod. Marc. gr. 524, only seem to present a selection of verses composed for a wide variety of purposes. One can easily imagine that only the tip of the iceberg of his epigrams and poems have come down to us: his poetic work is as broad as that of other authors of the twelfth century and beyond.

Nevertheless, once contextualized, Balsamon’s poetry offers an interesting insight into the life at court and in the patriarchate at the end of the twelfth century. It is a valuable source for the period of Isaac II, for whom he may have served as court poet. In addition, it offers details about the monastic life, the equipment of monasteries, and ecclesiastical matters of the time. More importantly, his collection of poems reflects some features and trends of late twelfth-century poetry. Moreover, some subtle mentions in the verses also allow us to perceive the author’s thoughts, his humor and, sometimes, his irony and sarcasm. Balsamon’s rich vocabulary, very often coined ad hoc and for one specific purpose, is one of his stylistic devices by which he might have attracted his commissioners. However, he was not a “begging-poet” like his predecessors in the middle of the twelfth century (Theodore and the anonymous Manganeios Prodromos, Constantine Manasses, John Tzetzes) or Manuel Philes in the fourteenth century; he was a high clergy man, who even served as the titular patriarch of

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167 This is testified to by the numerous attestations in the “Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams” (DBBE): http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/.

168 I do not agree with Horna, ‘Epigramme’, p. 177 who claims that Balsamon himself was responsible for the collection of the epigrams nos. 1–39.

Antioch, hired for specific occasions. Balsamon’s verses also reveal that even towards the end of the “long” twelfth century (1081–1204), which has often been described as a mere period of decline, poetry was still a viable means to communicate and interact with one’s environment.

List of Balsamon’s poems discussed in this article (numbers according to Horna):
1: p. 114
2: p. 117
3: p. 117
4: p. 117
5: p. 117
6: p. 117
7: p. 117
8: p. 117
9: pp. 117-118
10: p. 124
11: pp. 118-119
12: pp. 119-120
13: pp. 120-121
14: pp. 131-133
15: p. 134
16: pp. 141-143
17: p. 135 n. 132
18: pp. 127-128
19: pp. 121-123
20: pp. 129-130
21: pp. 140-141
22: pp. 140-141
23: p. 140
24: p. 129
25: pp. 139-140
26: p. 136
28: pp. 124-125
29: p. 130

170 Thanks to studies by Alicia Simpson (e.g. Simpson, Byzantium, 1180–1204: ‘The Sad Quarter of a Century’) and others this view is now revised.
Abstract

Theodore Balsamon (1130/1140 – after 1195), high official of the Byzantine church, and from c. 1185 to 1190 titular patriarch of Antioch, is mainly known for his canonical work, the commentary on the so-called nomokanon of fourteen titles. In addition, more than 40 poems are transmitted under his name. The wide range of his poetic output, which is mainly transmitted in the cod. Marc. Gr. 524 (a manuscript from the end of the thirteenth century), reveals that occasionally Balsamon also served as an author on commission for the court (especially in the reign of Isaac II) and the aristocracy. His poetry contains epigrams with the purpose to be inscribed (e.g. tomb epigrams, dedicatory epigrams), but also book epigrams, and, interestingly enough, poems on schedography, a popular teaching method in the twelfth century. Theodore Balsamon’s verses do not only offer interesting insights into the life at court and in the patriarchate at the end of the twelfth century, but they also reveal that poetry was still a viable means to communicate at the end of the twelfth century, which is very often described as a period of decline.