

# On the Founder of the Skripou Church: Literary Trends in the Milieu of Photius

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THE CHURCH of the Dormition of the Virgin of Skripou (formerly Orchomenus) in Boeotia is well known both for its architecture<sup>1</sup> (typical of the post-iconoclastic religious style) and the inscriptions it bears. The latter have been studied in depth, mostly from a historical perspective in which they are considered as documents.<sup>2</sup> And yet, the analysis of the literary and cultural context in which they were composed will allow us to learn more about the conditions surrounding the building of the church and, especially, the personality of its founder, the *protospatharios* Leo.

<sup>1</sup> To the classic studies of M. Soteriou, “Ο Ναός τῆς Σκριποῦς τῆς Βοιωτίας,” *ArchEph* (1931) 119–157, A. H. S. Megaw, “The Skripou Screen,” *BSA* 61 (1966) 1–32, and D. Pallas, “Ἡ Παναγία τῆς Σκριποῦς,” *EESM* 6 (1976–77) 1–80, see most recently A. Papalexandrou, *The Church of the Virgin of Skripou: Architecture, Sculpture and Inscriptions in Ninth-Century Byzantium* (Ann Arbor 2000), “Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Word&Image* 17 (2001) 259–283, and “Conversing Hellenism: The Multiple Voices of a Byzantine Monument in Greece,” *JModGreekStud* 19 (2001) 237–254, who analysed the meaning of the pagan *spolia* found in this religious building as well as the performative value of the inscriptions.

<sup>2</sup> *CIG* IV 8685; J. Strzygowski, “Inedita der Architektur und Plastik aus der Zeit Basilios’ I,” *BZ* 3 (1894) 1–16, esp. 7–9; N. Oikonomidès, “Pour une nouvelle lecture des inscriptions de Skripou en Béotie,” *TravMém* 12 (1994) 479–493 (repr. *Social and Economic Life in Byzantium* [Aldershot 2004] ch. XXVII); M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts* I (Vienna 2003) 119 ff., from a formal and literary perspective; A. Rhoby, “The Meaning of Inscriptions for the Early and Middle Byzantine Culture,” in *Scrivere e leggere nell’alto medioevo* II (Spoleto 2012) 731–753, here 737 ff., from a functional perspective.

The church walls bear four inscriptions: the first is a single line along the apse, commending the souls of Leo and his family to the Virgin.<sup>3</sup> The second and third inscriptions are in the adjoining naves respectively, one dedicated to the apostle Peter<sup>4</sup> and the other to Paul.<sup>5</sup> These three were engraved *in situ* by a local workshop; they repeat the titles of the church's founder (*basilikos protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*), but use three different ways of dating (the emperors, the patriarchate of Ignatius, year 6382 of creation), showing that the church was completed in 873/4.

The fourth inscription is the most striking. It is placed by the east front, in the narthex, and contains a laudatory poem in twelve Homeric hexameters. Unlike the other inscriptions, which were carved in relief, the letters of this one were cut into the stone. Its palaeographic quality is different too: its poor

<sup>3</sup> Παναγία Θεοτόκε σὺν τῷ μονογενεῖ σου υἱῷ βοήθει τοῦ σοῦ δούλου Λέοντος βασιλικῷ πρωτοσπαθαρίου καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκειακῶν σὺν τῇ συνεύῳ καὶ τοῖς φιλάτοις τέκνοις αὐτοῦ ἐκ πόθου καὶ πίστεως μεγίστης ἀναστήσαντος τὸν σὸν ἅγιον ναόν. Ἀμήν. Ἐπὶ Βασιλείου καὶ Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Λέοντος τῶν θειοτάτων βασιλέων τῶν Ῥωμαίων, “Most Holy Mother of God, with your only-begotten son, help your servant Leo, imperial *protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*, who together with his wife and dear children, out of his desire and great faith, built your holy church. Amen. Under Basil, Constantine, and Leo, most divine emperors of the Romans.”

<sup>4</sup> Ἐκαλλιέργησεν τὸν ναὸν τοῦ ἁγίου Πέτρου τοῦ κορυφαίου τῶν ἀποστόλων Λέων ὁ πανεύφημος βασιλικὸς πρωτοσπαθᾶριος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκειακῶν ὑπὲρ λύτρου καὶ ἀφέσεως τῶν πολλῶν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτιῶν ἐπὶ Ἰγνατίου τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου. Ἀμήν, “Leo, the commendable *protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*, built the beautiful church of Saint Peter, the apostles' leader, for payment and remission of his many sins, under the Ecumenical Patriarch Ignatius. Amen.”

<sup>5</sup> Ἐκαλλιέργησεν τὸν ναὸν τοῦ ἁγίου Παύλου τοῦ ἀποστόλου Λέων ὁ πανεύφημος βασιλικὸς πρωτοσπαθᾶριος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκειακῶν ὑπὲρ λύτρου καὶ ἀφέσεως τῶν πολλῶν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔτους ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου ἑξακισχιλιοστῷ τριακοσιοστῷ ὀγδοηκοστῷ β'. “Leo, the commendable *protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*, built the beautiful church of Saint Paul the apostle for payment and remission of his many sins in the year 6382 of the creation of the world.”

engraving contrasts with the high quality of the (non-metrical) apse inscription.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, this inscription has only three spelling errors,<sup>7</sup> as opposed to the many errors in the others. Likewise, the stone is different (white marble rather than the grey limestone used for the other inscriptions). The verse outlines a panegyric on Leo written in epic terms and containing many mythic references:

Οὐ φθόνος οὐδὲ χρόνος περιμήκετος ἔργα καλύψει  
 σῶν καμάτων, πανάριστε, βυθῷ πολυχανδέϊ λήθης·  
 ἔργα ἐπεὶ βοόωσι καὶ οὐ λαλέοντά περ ἔμπης.  
 καὶ τόδε γὰρ τέμενος παναοίδιμον ἐξετέλεσ<σ>ας  
 5 μητρὸς ἀπειρογάμου θεοδέγμονος ἴφι ἀνάσσης  
 τερπνόν, ἀποστίλβον περικαλλέα πάντοθεν αἴγλην,  
 Χριστοῦ δ' ἐκατέρωθεν ἀποστόλω ἕστατον ἄμφω  
 ὧν Ῥώμης βῶλαξ ἱερὴν κόνιν ἀμφ<ι>καλύπτει.  
 ζῳοῖς ἐν θαλίησ<ι> χρόνων ἐπ' ἀπείρονα κύκλα,  
 10 ὦ πολύαινε Λέον πρωτοσπαθάριε μέγιστε,  
 γηθόμενος κτεάτεσσι καὶ ἐν τεκέεσσιν ἀρίστοις  
 χῶρον ἐπικρατέων τε παλαιφάτου Ὁρχομενοῖο.

No envy, no prolonged time will hide the achievements  
 of your efforts, o best of all, in the yawning abyss of oblivion,  
 since your achievements cry it even though they do not speak.  
 For you have completed this temple, sung by everyone,

<sup>6</sup> This rather poor palaeographic medium does not cohere with the high literary quality of the verses. A very similar example is the early tenth-century poem on the sarcophagus of Galakrenai, the monastery of the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos, whose poor lettering conflicts with a classicistic epigram. Its Nonnian hexameters commemorate Michael, the patriarch's *synkellos*, and they are remarkable for their use of Homeric tags, Nonnian phrases, and explicit borrowings from the *Palatine Anthology*; cf. I. Ševčenko, "An Early Tenth-Century Inscription from Galakrenai with Echoes from Nonnos and the *Palatine Anthology*," *DOP* 41 (1987) 461–468; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 120 and 349; Rhoby, in *Scrivere e leggere* 740 ff. On its lettering see C. Mango, "Byzantine Epigraphy (4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries)," in D. Harlfinger and G. Prato (eds.), *Paleografia e codicologia greca* (Alessandria 1991) I 235–249, esp. 246.

<sup>7</sup> Line 4 ΕΞΕΤΕΛΕCΑC, 8 ΑΜΦΗΚΑΛΥΠΤΕΙ, 9 ΘΑΛΙΗCΙC.

5 of the virgin Mother, the great sovereign who received God,  
 a delight, such a beautiful brightness gleaming all around,  
 on each side standing the two apostles of Christ,  
 whose holy dust the earth of Rome covers.  
 May you live in abundance through the endless cycle of time,  
 10 o highly praised Leo, greatest *protospatharios*,  
 rejoicing in your possessions and your excellent offspring  
 and ruling over the territory of Orchomenus of ancient fame.

This poem, praising the dedication<sup>8</sup> of the church of Skripou as an imperishable memorial to Leo's achievements, able to survive the passage of time, has been satisfactorily commented by other researchers.<sup>9</sup> On N. Oikonomidès' analysis of the four inscriptions, Leo would have been a wealthy landowner from Boeotia who had made a career in the Empire's capital, achieving the honorific titles (ἀξίαι διὰ βραβείου) of *basilikos protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*. The first allowed him to be a member of the Senate and to participate in the retinue of honour that accompanied the emperor at certain ceremonies.<sup>10</sup> The second highlighted the fact that he was based in Constantinople and related to the court, as he was identified as a *protospatharios* of first rank, as opposed to the *protospatharioi exotikoi*.<sup>11</sup> In the poem we do not find the full titles but only the expression πρωτοσπαθάριος μέγιστος (10), as neither βασιλικός nor ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκειακῶν can fit within the dactylic rhythm.

<sup>8</sup> While the verb ἀνίστημι in the apse inscription need not mean that the church was "rebuilt," καλλιεργῶ, employed in both aisles inscriptions, usually means that we are dealing with newly constructed buildings, as stated by Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 485.

<sup>9</sup> Papalexandrou, *Virgin of Skripou* 142–155; Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 483–485 and 489–493.

<sup>10</sup> *De caer.* pp.70, 72, 152, 174, 179, 542, 576, 604 Bonn; N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris 1972) 51.27, 53.24, 57.22, 63.10; P. Lemerle, "Roga et rente d'état," *REByz* 25 (1967) 78–83; Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 486.

<sup>11</sup> Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance* 51.30, 55.15; 299; *TravMém* 12 (1994) 488–489.

The construction of the church of Skripou also must be understood as a status symbol: a provincial man like Leo, who had been successful at court, wished to show off his personal wealth and his closeness to the emperor before his Boeotian countrymen.<sup>12</sup> This explains the repetition of his titles in all the inscriptions, which were placed low to make reading easier. Indeed, the words *basilikou protospathariou* of the first inscription are at the apex of the apse, the most sacred area of the church, and *basilikou* is written larger than the rest, underlining the connections between the donor and the emperor.<sup>13</sup>

The inscription in verse served also as an emblem of power, as it was a textual and visual symbol brought from Constantinople, where the practice of Homeric hexameters had been recovered during the second half of the ninth century.<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt that the text was composed in the capital, where it was most likely engraved by order of Leo.<sup>15</sup> This interest in

<sup>12</sup> R. Cormack, "Away from the Centre: 'Provincial' Art in the Ninth Century," in L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* (Aldershot 1998) 151–163; L. Bevilacqua, "Committenza aristocratica a Bisanzio in età macedone: Leone protospatario e la Panagia di Skripou," in A. C. Quintavalle (ed.), *Medioevo: i committenti* (Milan 2011) 411–420. On patronage see A. Cutler, "Art in Byzantine Society: Motive Forces of Byzantine Patronage," *JÖByz* 31 (1981) 759–787; V. Dimitropoulou, "Giving Gifts to God: Aspects of Patronage in Byzantine Art," in L. James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester 2010) 161–170.

<sup>13</sup> Papalexandrou, *Word&Image* 17 (2001) 267.

<sup>14</sup> In fact this fashion belonged exclusively to Constantinople, and was not cultivated by all the authors in the capital: see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 120.

<sup>15</sup> That would explain both the different technique adopted and the use of a type of marble that came from outside of Boeotia. Papalexandrou, *Virgin of Skripou* 151 ff., suggests that it was engraved in some place close to its final destination, e.g. Thebes. Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 490–491, had already considered the possibility that it was engraved in Corinth, the nerve centre of the region in the ninth century, although he did not rule out that it was engraved in Constantinople and carried by Leo as a luxury item manufactured in the capital.

ancient literature and culture may help us identify this figure. Prosopographical research on the founder of the church has looked for the coincidence of the name Leo with these titles. Thus, it has been concluded that a seal published in 1886 names to the same man.<sup>16</sup> Some seals published subsequently with the same name and titles of our founder are likely to have belonged to him.<sup>17</sup> It is even possible that another seal of his survives,<sup>18</sup> although in this case we would have to adjust the dating suggested by the editors slightly to the years immediately preceding the mid-tenth century. And a seal at Dumbarton Oaks also belonged to some Leo *basilikos protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*.<sup>19</sup>

All in all, there is little historical news to be obtained from both the poem and the seals attributed to the benefactor, and we can deduce very little about his private life. The term τεκέεσσιν (11) that includes Leo's children in the commendation to their father<sup>20</sup> states that they are the origin of their

<sup>16</sup> A. Mordtmann, "Περὶ βυζαντινῶν μολυβδοβούλλων," *parartema* of *EPhS* 17 (1886) 144–152, at 149, no. 19; F. Winkelmann, *Byzantinische Rang- und Ämterstruktur im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert: Faktoren und Tendenzen ihrer Entwicklung* (Berlin 1985) 124. Bees suggested identifying Leo with the *strategos* of Hellas: N. Bees, "Zur Sigillographie der byzantinischen Themen 'Peloponnes' und 'Hellas'," *VizVrem* 21 (1914) 200–203, no. 19. However, this has been disputed by A. H. S. Megaw, "The Skripou Screen," *BSA* 61 (1966) 23–25, and Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 485–486.

<sup>17</sup> G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals* I.2 (Basel 1972) 2130A, 2130. See *PmbZ* nos. 4500 and 4521; the rank of patrician given in both seals may have been an award received after the foundation of the church of Skripou.

<sup>18</sup> G. Zacos and J. W. Nesbitt, *Byzantine Lead Seals* II (Bern 1984) 212.

<sup>19</sup> J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art* III (Washington 1996), no. 39.6. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor T. Pratsch for granting me access to the pertinent entries of the *PmbZ* II (867–1025), forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> Homer uses τέκος, a poetic variant of τέκνον, to refer to a hero's children (*Il.* 3.160, 5.71; cf. *Aes. Sept.* 203, 677). Occasionally the term is also used of the offspring of an animal, such as eaglets: *Il.* 12.222.

father's joy and, at the same time, that they will be able to ensure the future patronage of the church he had built. Given the plural, we know that Leo had at least two children, probably male.

However, the literary side of the poem has gone rather unnoticed in the search to identify its author. The Macedonian Renaissance did indeed turn its sights on classic models to imitate and update.<sup>21</sup> But it is equally true that the number of cultivators of this new fashion was small and that the number of writers with the ability to write such an exquisite piece as the Skripou poem was even smaller.<sup>22</sup> In addition to its metrical correctness,<sup>23</sup> there are numerous learned references: 3 ἔργα ἐπεὶ βοόωσι καὶ οὐ λαλέοντά περ ἔμπης, cf. *Od.* 15.361 ὄφρα μὲν οὖν δὴ κείνη ἔην, ἀχέουσά περ ἔμπης; 5 μητρὸς ... ἴφι ἀνάσσης, cf. *Od.* 11.284 ὅς ποτ' ἐν Ὀρχομενῶ Μινυεῖῳ ἴφι

<sup>21</sup> P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris 1971); W. T. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival (780–842)* (Stanford 1988).

<sup>22</sup> References to a small group of hexameter authors at the end of the ninth century have survived thanks to their inclusion in Book 15 of the *Palatine Anthology*: Leo the Philosopher (15.12), Constantinus Siculus (13), Theophanes (14, 35), Anastasius Traulus (28), Ignatius the Deacon (29–31, 39), Arethas of Caesarea (32–34), Cometas (36–38, 40). See Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 107–114; F. Tisconi, “Il Tardoantico a Bisanzio. La ricezione della poesia tardoantica in alcuni epigrammi bizantini del IX–X secolo,” in D. Accorinti and P. Chuvin (eds.), *Des Géants à Dionysos: Mélanges de mythologie et de poésie grecques offerts à Francis Vian* (Alessandria 2003) 621–635; M. D'Ambrosi, “La produzione esametrica di IX–X secolo nell' *Anthologia Palatina*: Ignazio Diacono, Anastasio Questore, Cometa, Costantino Rodio,” *RCCM* 48 (2006) 87–122. Also, a poem of Leo the Philosopher, the intellectual and archbishop of Thessaloniki 840–842, has reached us under the title *Job, or On Indifference to Grief and on Patience*; as in the inscription of Skripou, its verses are Homeric hexameters with many classical features: see G. L. Westerink, “Leo the Philosopher: *Job* and Other Poems,” *ICS* 11 (1986) 193–222; H. Jacobson, “*Job's* Suffering in Leo the Philosopher,” *Byzantion* 57 (1987) 421; O. Prieto Dominguez, “*De alieno nostrum*: *El centón profano en el mundo griego* (Salamanca 2010) 120–171.

<sup>23</sup> Apart from the hiatus in 3 (ἔργα ἐπεῖ) and two short vowels that are stretched, 4 ἐξέτελεσ<σ>ας and 7 Χριστοῦ δ' ἐκατέρωθεν.

ἄνασεν;<sup>24</sup> 9 ζῳοῖς ἐν θαλίῃσι, cf. Hdt. 3.27 οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι εἵματα τε ἐφόρεον τὰ κάλλιστα καὶ ἦσαν ἐν θαλίῃσι; 9 χρόνων ἐπ’ ἀπείρονα κύκλα, cf. *Anth.Pal.* 9.468 μετ’ ἀπείρονα κύκλον ἀέθλων (and Bacchyl. 9.30 τοῖος Ἑλλάνων δι’ ἀπ[εῖ]ρονα κύκλον); 10 ᾧ πολύαινε Λέον, cf. *Il.* 10.544 ᾧ πολύαιν’ Ὀδυσσεῦ; etc.<sup>25</sup> This is not just about recovering old literary forms but is clearly a dialogue with them, as we can see in the phrase that closes the poem, παλαιφάτου Ὀρχομενοῖο. Although there were very few remains of the old city, the classical place name was used here, but the passage of time is clearly taken into consideration when it is described as παλαιφάτος, “legendary, of ancient story,” which had been used by the tragedians and Homer (*Od.* 9.507, 13.172, 19.163).

The use of verse inscriptions to celebrate the foundation of a church was not unique to the Skripou temple. Three years earlier (870/1) Ignatius the *magistor ton grammatikon* composed three short poems to celebrate the restoration and redecoration of the church of the Theotokos *tes Peges* in the outskirts of Constantinople.<sup>26</sup> After it suffered heavy damage in a terrible

<sup>24</sup> Praise of the Virgin from the place where she will receive worship (Orchomenus) is augmented by using the Homeric verb ἀνάσσω. This is a scholarly reference to Homer inspired by the mythical royal house of the region. The metrical position highlights this intertextual play, as the original Homeric *colon* is kept (*Od.* 11.283–285, ὀπλοτάτην κούρην Ἀμφίονος Ἰασίδαιο, / ὅς ποτ’ ἐν Ὀρχομενῷ Μινυεῖῳ ἴφι ἄνασεν, “Youngest daughter was she of Amphion, son of Iasus, who once ruled mightily in Orchomenus of the Minyae”). That said, ἴφι ἀνάσσης with the genitive of ἄνασσα (as in *Il.* 14.326 οὐδ’ ὅτε Δήμητρος καλλιπλοκάμοιο ἀνάσσης) is reinforced by the Homeric adverb ἴφι. There is no need to argue for a novel “Iphianassa” dedication to the Virgin Theotokos on the basis of the ritual epithet παντάνασσα used by Romanos the Melode (56.1.17 Θεοτόκε παρθένε, παντάνασσα) as do Oikonomidès, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 484, and Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 119.

<sup>25</sup> For parallels in several poems of the *Anth.Pal.* see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 120.

<sup>26</sup> These epigrams, mostly couplets and all in iambic trimeters, are preserved as *Anth.Pal.* 1.109–114. For this church see E. Gedeon, *Ἡ Ζωοδόχος*



earthquake in 869,<sup>27</sup> the emperor Basil I (867–886), together with his sons Constantine and Leo, took the reins of its rehabilitation (Theoph. Cont. p.323 Bonn). Like the *protospatharios* Leo, the imperial candidate Basil also commemorated the construction of a church, Saint Gregory the Theologian in Thebes, two years earlier (871/2), with a five-line poem.<sup>28</sup> For his part, the founder of the Theotokos church of the Lips monastery complex in Constantinople opted for an inscription consisting of two dodecasyllables, four hexameters, and two further dodecasyllables (in this order) when he funded its construction in the late ninth/early tenth century.<sup>29</sup> In a short hexametric

*Πηγή και τὰ ἱερὰ αὐτῆς προσαρτήματα* (Athens 1886); S. Bénay, “Le Monastère de la Source à Constantinople,” *EchOr* 3 (1899) 223–228, 295–300; M. Is. Nomides, *Ἡ Ζωοδόχος Πηγή* (Istanbul 1937); R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire Byzantin*<sup>2</sup> I.3 (Paris 1969) 223–228. About Ignatius the *magistor*, the author of these poems, see W. Wolska-Conus, “De quibusdam Ignatiis,” *TravMém* 4 (1970) 329–360, esp. 357–359.

<sup>27</sup> Sunday January 9 (the Feast of St. Polyeuctus) 869. To judge by the damage and by the sources that report forty days and nights of quaking earth, its magnitude must have been very great: Ps.-Symeon *Chron.* p.688 Bonn; *Vita Ignatii*, *PG* 105.549A; Georgius Monachus p.840 Bonn. See G. Downey, “Earthquakes at Constantinople and Vicinity,” *Speculum* 30 (1955) 593–600, here 599; G. Dagron, “Quand la terre temble...,” *TravMém* 8 (1981) 87–103 [repr. *La romanité chrétienne en Orient* (London 1984)]; N. Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East* (Cambridge 2009) 246; O. Prieto Domínguez, “El terremoto como mensaje divino en la literatura griega medieval,” in E. Suárez de la Torre (ed.), *Que los Dioses nos escuchen. Comunicación con lo divino en el mundo greco-latino y su pervivencia* (Valadolid 2012) 222–230.

<sup>28</sup> On this church see G. A. Soteriou, “Ὁ ἐν Θήβαις βυζαντινὸς ναὸς Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου,” *ArchEph* (1924) 1–26. On the inscription, Sp. Lampros, “Αὐτοκρατόρων τοῦ Βυζαντίου χρυσόβουλλα καὶ χρυσᾶ γράμματα ἀναφερόμενα εἰς τὴν ἔνωσιν τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν,” *Neos Ellenomnemon* 11 (1914) 94–128 and 241–254, esp. 126–127. *CIG* 8686 [E. Coughy, *Epigrammatum anthologia* III (Paris 1890) no. 311]: Τέρεμνον, ὄνπερ ὠραϊσμένον βλέπεις, / Βασίλειος τέτευχεν ἐκ βάθρων πόθῳ. / Δέχοιο τόνδ’ ἐμοῦ πονήματος δόμον, / τὸ γρήγορον φῶς τῶν Θεοῦ ἀγασμάτων, / ἀντεισάγων μοι ἀμπλακημάτων λύσιν.

<sup>29</sup> C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, “Additional Notes,” in Th. Macridy,

epigram the *patrikios* Constantine Lips offers this gorgeous church to the Virgin and in simple and direct language asks her to grant him a place in Paradise.<sup>30</sup>

All these inscriptions would play very similar roles: to memorialise the founder and to hail him by the proclamation and reading aloud of an unusual poetic text.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the differences between them are immense. In addition to the use of the dodecasyllable and the iambic trimeter,<sup>32</sup> which was far more common in the ninth century, their language and syntax are far simpler than in the Skripou text. That includes the hexameters of the Lips epigram, which have a lower style and literary quality. In all those compositions, the absence of Homeric features is accompanied by a complete absence of intertexts or references to the ancient literature.

By contrast, Skripou's poem is intended for an ideal reader who is able to recognise and understand its complex allusive play. Few Byzantines would fit this profile and, surely, all of

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“The Monastery of Lips (Fenari Isa Camii) at Istanbul,” *DOP* 18 (1964) 249–315, here 300 ff.; L. James, “‘And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?’ Text as Art,” in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge 2007) 188–206, esp. 191–194; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 164 and 340, no. 13; V. Marinis, *The Monastery tou Libos: Architecture, Sculpture, and Liturgical Planning in Middle and Late Byzantine Constantinople* (diss. Univ. Illinois 2004) 25–26; Rhoby, in *Scrivere e leggere* 738 ff.

<sup>30</sup> On Constantine Lips see A. Cutler and A. Kazhdan, “Lips,” *ODB* II (1991) 1232–1233; Marinis, *The Monastery* 23–31. I give the edition of Rhoby, in *Scrivere e leggere* 739 n.31: [- - - ἐ]κ πόθου / Μητρὶ θεοῦ νεὼν περικαλλέα Κωνσταντῖνος / [- - -]ον ὄλβιον ἔργον / οὐρανίων φαέων οἰκῆτορα καὶ πολιοῦχον / τὸν δεῖξον, πανάχραντε, προαίρεσιν ἀντιμετροῦσα. / Ναὸς τὸ δῶρον, ὃ μαθηταὶ τ[- - -].

<sup>31</sup> On the acclamatory value of these foundation texts see Papalexandrou, *Word&Image* 17 (2001) 279 ff., with interesting parallels. Cf. W. Hörandner, “Customs and Beliefs as Reflected in Occasional Poetry,” *ByzF* 12 (1987) 235–247.

<sup>32</sup> A. Rhoby, “Vom jambischen Trimeter zum byzantinischen Zwölfsilber. Beobachtungen zur Metrik des spätantiken und byzantinischen Epigramms,” *WS* 124 (2011) 117–142.

them would have lived in or had contact with Constantinople. Leo the *protospatharios* decided to imitate the beneficent action of the emperor Basil and rebuild a church in honour of the Virgin Theotokos at his place of origin.<sup>33</sup> His desire to show off his high status before his Boeotian countrymen led him to inscribe this refined poem, trying to share with them the socio-cultural interests of the capital.<sup>34</sup> We cannot know who composed the poem but we can know the person who commissioned it, Leo the *basilikos protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon*. The technical correctness and complex allusive meaning of the poem suggest that he was a man with extensive education who had a special interest in literature and was among the readers (maybe also among the poets) who since 850 cultivated a classicist poetry filled with references to the ancient world. This profile fits perfectly with the so far unidentified addressee of patriarch Photius' epistle 209, as we shall see below.<sup>35</sup> This let-

<sup>33</sup> Basil I was probably pleased with this foundation, since in his imperial policy for Greece there was decided encouragement and support for church building there, right up to the border with the Bulgarian kingdom, in order to establish Byzantine supremacy both real and symbolic. From this time come the buildings of Skripou, Thebes, Athens, Epiros, Kastoria, and Peristera (outside Thessalonike). See P. Vokotopoulos, *Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστική ἀρχιτεκτονική εἰς τὴν Δυτικὴν Στερεὰν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν Ἑπειρον* (Thessalonike 1975); Cormack, in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century* 152.

<sup>34</sup> As Oikonomidès rightly pointed out, *TravMém* 12 (1994) 489–493, the fact that the two side naves were devoted to Peter and Paul, the two Roman apostles, accords with the foreign policy promoted by Basil I since his accession. This policy aimed at rapprochement with the papacy, not only through the deposition of Photius and restoration of Ignatius as patriarch of Constantinople in 867, but also by promoting the worship of St. Peter, patron and predecessor to the pope of Rome; cf. V. von Falkenhausen, “San Pietro nella religiosità bizantina,” in *Bisanzio, Roma e l'Italia nell'Alto Medioevo* II (Spoleto 1988) 627–674.

<sup>35</sup> A good survey of the patriarch can be found in *PmbZ* no. 6253. On his family ties and his social network see O. Prieto Domínguez and P. Varona Codeso, “Deconstructing Photius: Family Relationship and Political Kinship in Middle Byzantium,” *REByz* 71 (2013, in press).

ter was addressed to “Leo the *protospatharios*.”<sup>36</sup> The absence of the title *epi ton oikeiakon* makes sense if we follow the explanation of Oikonomidès: rather than a title *per se* this implies a very high status in palace ceremonies.<sup>37</sup> There is no doubt that this was very important for Leo, and that is why he chose to repeat it in the three inscriptions closest to the apse; but for someone like Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople, this was irrelevant.<sup>38</sup>

*Ep.* 209 has traditionally been seen as a pious exhortation for Leo to study the Scriptures, rather than devoting himself exclusively to military duties; but in fact it contains abundant information about the personality of its addressee and the cultural environment of at least a part of the court.<sup>39</sup>

Λέοντι πρωτοσπαθαρίῳ· ἴσθι ὡς οὐ μόνον τῷ τληπαθεῖ Ἡρακλεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ λογίῳ Ἑρμῇ τὸ τῆς Ἀμαλθείας κέρασ οἱ ποιηταὶ ἐγχειρίζουσι· μὴ τοίνυν στρατείας καὶ πόνοις σωματικοῖς ὄλον σεαυτὸν διδοῦς τῶν καλῶν μαθημάτων ἀφίστασο, ἐκεῖθὲν σοι ῥεῦσαι μόνον τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν τοῦ βίου οἰόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς ἡμετέραις εὐγενέσι Μούσαις (αἱ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων τοσοῦτον διαφέρουσιν ὅσον ἐλεύθεροι φύσεις δούλων ἠθῶν καὶ κολα-

<sup>36</sup> See *PmbZ* no. 4525.

<sup>37</sup> Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance* 51.30, 55.15, 299, and *TravMém* 12 (1994) 488–489.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, neither the title *epi ton oikeiakon* nor any similar titles are found in any of the headings (*intitulationes*) of Photius’ 299 epistles: see B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, *Photii patriarchae constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia I–III* (Leipzig 1983–1987).

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the social circle to whom Photius addressed his letters see A. Kazhdan, *Speculum* 61 (1986) 896–897 and 62 (1987) 982–984. On his followers cf. a famous passage in his letter to Pope Nicholas I, *Ep.* 290.64–81. See also L. Canfora “Le ‘cercle des lecteurs’ autour de Photius: Une source contemporaine,” *REB* 56 (1998) 269–273, and “Il ‘reading circle’ intorno a Fozio,” *Byzantion* 68 (1998) 222–223. To the study of W. Treadgold, “Photios and the Reading Public for Classical Philology in Byzantium,” in M. Mullett and R. Scott, *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham 1981) 123–126, add A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)* (Athens 2006) 37–41, about the intellectuals who followed the patriarch.

κείας ἀλήθεια) δίδου κἄν ἐν μέρει τὰ σεμνὰ καὶ ἡδέα τῶν ἁσμάτων κατεπάδειν σοι. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ Ἀμαλθείας κέρασ καὶ τῷ Ἀχελῷ ποταμῷ, ὅτι τὴν ὑποκειμένην περιρρέων χώραν πάμφορον ἐργάζεται, τὸ ποιητῶν αὐτόνομον ἔθνος ἐτοίμως χαρίζονται, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπῳ μέγα τυχεῖν ὧν ἐκ φύσεως ἔχει καὶ τὰ ἄψυχα· τὴν δ' ἀληθῆ καὶ θεῖαν εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ πρέπουσαν, καὶ πρὸς ἣν ἡ Ἀμάλθεια παρατιθεμένη νόσος καὶ πενία εὐρίσκεται, ἐκ μόνων ἐστὶν τῶν θεῶν λογίων καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖθεν γεωργίας ἀμήσασθαι.

To the *protospatharios* Leo. Bear in mind that not only to the long-suffering Heracles,<sup>40</sup> but also to the scholarly Hermes<sup>41</sup> the poets entrust the horn of Amalthea: therefore, don't turn away from good teaching and don't devote yourself wholly to military obligations and corporal suffering in the belief that happiness in life flows from them alone. Instead, devote yourself also to our noble Muses (who differ from the Greek ones so much as the free natures differ from the customs of slaves and truth from flattery) even though you are just partly bewitched by their solemn and sweet songs. It is right that the autonomous race of poets readily ascribes the horn of Amalthea even to the river Achelous,<sup>42</sup> since it makes the surrounding territory fruitful by flowing through it. And it is no great thing for man to obtain what even soulless things have from nature. But the happiness that is true and divine and fitting for man, and compared with which Amalthea is found to be sickness and (spiritual) poverty, can only be collected from the tillage of the divine words and the hereafter.

<sup>40</sup> Palaeph. *De incred.* 45; Strab. 10.2.19; Dio Chrys. 63.7.

<sup>41</sup> A tradition attested again only in Hesychius' *Lexicon* α 3410, Ἀμαλθείας κέρασ· τὸ πάντων ἐπιτυγχάνειν. ἐπειδὴ οἱ εὐχόμενοι τῇ οὐρανία αἰγὶ ἐπιτυγχάνουσιν· ἢ ὅτι Ἑρμῆς Ἡρακλεῖ ἔδωκε τὸ κέρασ, ὅταν τὰς Γηρυόνου βοῦς ἔμελλεν ἐλαύνειν, "Horn of Amalthea: to achieve everything, since those who pray to the celestial goat achieve it. Or because Hermes handed the horn to Heracles when he was going to take away the cattle of Geryon."

<sup>42</sup> Soph. *Trach.* 9–21; Diod. 4.35.3–4; Apollod. 2.7.5; Ov. *Met.* 9.1–88; Hyg. *Fab.* 31. The river Achelous (now the Aspropotamos) was the natural border between Acarnania and Aetolia in the classical period.

This is a singular epistle among all the letters of Photius,<sup>43</sup> who did not usually articulate a whole letter around mythological elements, as in this one.<sup>44</sup> To better understand its meaning we must reconstruct the personality of the addressee: without doubt Leo was a man of action who aspired to achieve recognition from others through great efforts. In this regard, the parallel with Heracles is obvious.<sup>45</sup> The horn of Amalthea

<sup>43</sup> On the nature of Photius' epistle collection see B. Laourdas, "Παράτηρήσεις ἐπὶ τοῦ χαρακτήρος τῶν ἐπιστολῶν τοῦ Φωτίου," *EEBS* 21 (1951) 74–109; A. Wittig, "Zu den Briefen des Patriarchen Photios," *Ekklesia kai Theologia* 10 (1989–1991) 163–179; R. Salvemini, "Aspetti letterari dell' Epistolario di Fozio," *AFLB* 40 (1997) 191–208; N. G. Wilson, "Fozio e le due culture. Spunte dall'epistolario," in L. Canfora et al. (eds.), *Fozio. Tra crisi ecclesiale e magisterio letterario* (Brescia 2000) 29–44; G. Cortassa, "Lettere dell'uomo di lettere," *Humanitas* 58 (2003) 123–139; Kazhdan, *A History* 25–36; J. Schamp, "Photios, maître de l'art épistolaire," *Epistulae antiquae* 5 (2008) 309–325.

<sup>44</sup> Since it is not an exegetic or ecclesiastic writing, the fact that it was included in the *Amphilochia* (*Quaestiones ad Amphilochium*), the collection of theological essays intended for his friend Amphilochus, metropolitan of Cyzicus, is surprising. Cf. *Amphiloch.* 107: Διὰ τί τῷ τληπαθεῖ Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ τῆς Ἀμαλθείας κέρασ οἱ ποιηταὶ ἐγχειρίζουσι; On Amphilochus of Cyzicus see *PmbZ* no. 223.

<sup>45</sup> Photius regularly built his letters upon behaviour models that were easy to understand for their addressee. Thus, when he wrote *Ep.* 217 to Nikephoros, he used the winged love image to ask the philosopher monk to come to visit him more quickly. Similarly, when during his second patriarchate he addressed the *spatharokandidatos* Staurakios to censure his avarice, he used the image of the lead fish that never touches any other animal and also knows how to govern both its own waters and others when the shoal is forced to emigrate (278). As in 209, there are occasions when Photius is subtler and does not openly explain the parallelism, leaving it to his addressee to decipher the true meaning of the letter. Such is 254, sent to the *spatharokandidatos* Basil (*PmbZ* no. 954), which contains a short essay about the magnet (also named Lydian or Heracleian, after the places where it had been discovered) and its capacity to attract iron. Photius concluded that in the same way as these stones attract, spiritual love can attract souls, thus encouraging Basil to come to him.

represents the realisation of earthly triumph,<sup>46</sup> pursued by the *protospatharios* Leo through his military service, as did Heracles. However, Photius offers him a different model, Hermes, who stood out for his love of knowledge and in whose steps Leo must follow to achieve happiness. He has only to turn to Hermes for a behavioural standard on his way towards excellence. In this respect, Leo does not have to pursue Hermes' pagan wisdom, the wisdom of classical Greece transmitted through literature, but Christian wisdom. In fact, the real message of the epistle is clear: devote yourself to our noble Muses (the Christian ones), who are the ones appropriate for free men and who seek the truth. On the basis of the tripartite contrast chosen by the patriarch, he argues this superiority since, unlike his noble Muses, those of classical Greece (who obviously are not noble) are appropriate for slaves, men who thoughtlessly maintain an old custom that must be banished, as it only leads to flattery. The truth sought by free men can only be achieved through the Christian Muses.

Leo obviously was not on military duty all day long, since he would be unable to understand the many references of this letter if he was not extremely learned. Likewise, Photius' underlining that his addressee liked Christian poetry only partly (κἂν ἐν μέρει τὰ σεμνὰ καὶ ἡδέα τῶν ἁσμάτων κατεπάδειν σοι) shows that Leo had a well-defined taste distinct from such compositions. While the terms ἄσμα and ἡδύς chosen by Photius clearly refer to poetry, it is difficult to say which type of poetry he meant. Perhaps he meant hymnic poetry, whose metrical pattern has a quite different cadence than does dactylic hexameter (so, according to the *protospatharios*, it would not be properly ἡδύς). Perhaps he was thinking of the biblical para-

<sup>46</sup> According to the definition provided by Photius himself, *Lex.* α 1105: Ἀμαλθείας κέρας· τὸ πάντων ἐπιτυγάνειν, ἐπειδὴ οἱ εὐχόμενοι τῇ οὐρανίᾳ αἰγὶ ἐπιτυγάνουσιν (after Hesychius), but also citing Aristophanes (fr.707 *PCG*), ἡ μὲν πόλις ἐστὶν Ἀμαλθείας κέρας, σὺ μόνον εὔξαι καὶ πάντα παρέσται, “the city is the horn of Amalthea, you only ask and everything is available.”

phrases written in Homeric hexameters by the empress Eudocia, which clearly are σεμνά, and which he reviewed in *Bibliotheca* cod. 183–184. Photius may have in mind both sorts of composition. Either way, he highlighted its edifying content, τὰ σεμνά,<sup>47</sup> even when its expression was not as pleasant, ἡδέα,<sup>48</sup> as classical pagan poetry.

Leo's preference for the ancient literature over the Christian appears to be more than just a personal taste. On the one hand, this inclination is a natural consequence of his lifestyle, as Leo was a layman who was not overly concerned with religious issues. On the other, his literary taste would have been grounded in one of the main trends of the second half of the ninth century, classicism. In fact, the choice of the image of Heracles, the quintessential warrior, to start this epistle probably reflects not just the title *protospatharios* held by Leo, but also Heracles' place of origin and the ancient legends about him

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Photius' definition in his *Lexicon*: σεμνά· τὰ ἄρρητα μυστήρια· οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἡσύχου καὶ καταστόγνου, “solemn: the unutterable mysteries; and with calm and with a sad expression.”

<sup>48</sup> Even if Photius was not acting as a literary critic on this occasion, his use of this word has the technical (i.e. rhetorical) meaning that is usual in his *Bibliotheca*. Cf. τὴν δὲ φράσιν οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμοῦ οὔτε ἡδὺς οὔτε λαμπρότητι χαίρων, “in his style [Eusebius] is not by any means pleasant or brilliant” (*Bibl.* 13, 4b.1–2); τῷ τραχεῖ δὲ τοῦ ὄγκου, ὅσα περὶ συνθήκην καὶ ἀναπαύσεις, τὸν λόγον ὑποβάλλων οὐδ' ἡδὺς εἶναι σπουδάζει τῇ ἀκοῇ, “having given over his speech to harsh vanity, regarding its construction and pauses, [Maximus the Confessor] does not manage to be sweet to the ear” (192,156b.30–32). For Photius as a literary critic see L. R. Van Hook, “The Literary Criticism in the *Bibliotheca* of Photius,” *CP* 4 (1909) 178–189; G. Hartmann, *Photios' Literaturästhetik* (Leipzig 1929); E. Orth, *Die Stilkritik des Photios* (Leipzig 1929); G. L. Kustas, “Photian Methods of Philology,” *GreekOrthTheolRev* 7 (1961–1962) 78–91, and “The Literary Criticism of Photius: A Christian Definition of Style,” *Hellenica* 17 (1962) 132–169; T. Hägg, *Photios als Vermittler antiker Literatur* (Stockholm 1975); W. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (Washington 1980); D. Afinogenov, “Patriarch Photius as Literary Theorist. Aspects of Innovation,” *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995) 339–345.



that, to a large extent, link Leo to him.<sup>49</sup>

According to Pausanias, there was a temple in honour to Heracles near Orchomenus.<sup>50</sup> It is not by chance that just as the end of the fifth verse of the Skripou inscription (ἴφι ἀνάσσης) recalls *Od.* 11.284 (ὅς ποτ' ἐν Ὀρχομενῶ Μινυείῳ ἴφι ἄνασσεν) to vindicate a heroic lineage, the ninth verse (ἀπείρονα κύκλα) also contains features of Bacchyl. 9.30 and *Anth. Pal.* 9.468, where Heracles' divinisation is precisely the subject,<sup>51</sup> with Heracles, as in the Skripou poem, addressed in the

<sup>49</sup> Myth is a resource used in other of Photius' letters, e.g. *Ep.* 97, addressed to Anthony, archbishop of Bosphorus (*PmbZ* no. 565), during his first patriarchate: Photius says that from *Inhospitable* (Ἄξεινος) the sea was renamed *Hospitable* (Εὔξεινος) by the Milesians, and could now be known as *Pious* (Εὐσεβής) thanks to Anthony's piety. With this wordplay he encourages the archbishop to press the conversion of the Jews in the region. Also, in 47 and 158, sent to the *comes* Alexander (*PmbZ* no. 189; the title signals the procurator of the Opsician theme), the patriarch denounces him by contrasting him with his namesake, Alexander the Great. Although the latter was a pagan, he was benevolent, while the *comes*, despite being a Christian, mistreats the innocents and will be punished for that. In view of these frequent conceptual games inspired by the activities and works of Photius' addressees, one wonders whether the choice of Heracles as the main motif for *Ep.* 209 may also have hidden a reference to the literary work of the *protospatharios* Leo (maybe a poetic text about this son of Zeus?).

<sup>50</sup> A similar legend links the fertility of the Orchomenus' plains with Heracles' victory over the river Cephissus, Paus. 9.38.6–7: σταδίου δὲ ἀφέστηκεν ἑπτὰ Ὀρχομενοῦ ναός τε Ἡρακλέους καὶ ἄγαλμα οὐ μέγα ... Θεβαῖοι δὲ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν Κηφισὸν φασιν ὑπὸ Ἡρακλέους ἐς τὸ πεδῖον ἀποστραφῆναι τὸ Ὀρχομένιον· τέως δὲ αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸ ὄρος ἐς θάλασσαν ἐξιέναι, πρὶν ἢ τὸν Ἡρακλέα τὸ χάσμα ἐμφράξαι τὸ διὰ τοῦ ὄρους, “Seven stades from Orchomenus stands a temple of Heracles with a small statue ... Thebans say that the river Cephissus was diverted towards the plain of Orchomenus by Heracles, which until then ran under the mountain into the sea, until Heracles closed the opening through the mountain.” This legend is also very similar to Heracles' fight with the river Achelous, which is echoed by Photius.

<sup>51</sup> Not only their common content links these classical texts with our poem, but the expression ἀπείρονα κύκλα in the ninth verse appears on only these two occasions in Greek literature.

second person.<sup>52</sup> That the church's donor is addressed directly by the poet is very unusual, and invites us to think that it could be a classical reference, perhaps to *Anth.Pal.* 9.468.<sup>53</sup> Short poems that commemorate some pious act such as the foundation or reconstruction of a church always follow a pattern: the donor, in the first person, addresses the Virgin Theotokos or the saint to whom the church is dedicated, invoked to remember this pious act on Judgement Day and intercede for him with God.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, in epigrams commemorating the founder of public works (a city wall, a bath, a road, a bridge, etc.) the benefactor is commended in the third person, and there is never an invocation to divinity.<sup>55</sup> Both models

<sup>52</sup> σῆς ἀρετῆς ἰδρῶτι καλὴν ἀπέδωκεν ἀμοιβὴν / σὸς γενέτης, Ἥρακλες, ἐπεὶ πόνος ἄσπετον εὖχος / ἀνδράσιν οἶδεν ἄγειν μετ' ἀπείρονα κύκλον ἀέθλων.

<sup>53</sup> Considering the use of the second person, Oikonomidès, *TrautMém* 12 (1994) 491, suggested that the inscription was perhaps a present from a friend who had a good position at the court. It is strange, however, that the author of such a present would remain anonymous and would not feel tempted to make any reference to himself.

<sup>54</sup> An example is the memorial poem of the church of Saint Gregory the Theologian in Thebes. For this church see Soteriou, *ArchEph* (1924) 1–26. For the structure of these compositions see A. Stylianos and J. Stylianos, “Donors and Dedicatory Inscriptions, Supplicants and Supplications in the Painted Churches of Cyprus,” *JÖByz* 9 (1960) 97–128; S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-century Churches of Greece* (Vienna 1992); A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung I Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* (Vienna 2009), “The Structure of Inscriptional Dedicatory Epigrams in Byzantium,” in C. Burini De Lorenzi and M. De Gaetano (eds.), *La poesia tardoantica e medievale* (Alessandria 2010) 309–332, and *Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst* (Vienna 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 158–166. A good example is the inscription commemorating the reconstruction of the Chalkis road in Euboea, sponsored by the *protospatharios* Theophylact in the late ninth century, after the Arab raid in the 870s: *CIG* 8801, with T. E. Gregory, “Chalkis in Greece,” *ODB* I (1991) 407; E. Malamut, *Les îles de l'Empire byzantin, VIII<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* I (Paris 1988) 222. Similar examples have been gathered by

seem to merge in the Skripou poem, but their combination is not entirely original. The key is found in *AnthPal.* 9.468, which holds a dialogue with the Skripou inscription and serves as its literary reference. As we saw, these are three verses addressed to Heracles, to praise him because he has achieved an unsurpassable reputation through his relentless efforts. Indeed, the composition is an *ethopoia*,<sup>56</sup> a scholarly exercise to imagine what can be said to Heracles after his deification. Obviously, the delicacy of the composition dedicated to Leo proves that the author<sup>57</sup> had an excellent education, and it should not surprise that he was inspired by a properly scholastic genre of the time. However, in this case, there was no need to create a

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Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 340–342, nos. 20–42, and by Rhoby, in *Scrivere e leggere nell'alto medioevo* 742–752.

<sup>56</sup> On the *ethopoia* see E. Amato and J. Schamp (éds.), *ETHOPOIA. La représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l'époque impériale et tardive* (Salerno 2005). On the first examples of *ethopoiiai* in hexameters, in papyri and inscriptions and codices, see J. A. Fernández Delgado, “Hexametrische *ethopoiiai* auf Papyrus und anderen Materialien,” in A. Bülow-Jacobsen (ed.), *Proceedings XX International Congress of Papyrology* (Copenhagen 1994) 299–305. It is interesting that Christian *topoi* share little of this type of *progymnasma*. A striking exception is Cain’s *ethopoia* (*What would Cain have said when he killed Abel?*) analysed by J.-L. Fournet, “Une éthopée de Caïn dans le Codex des Visions de la Fondation Bodmer,” *ZPE* 92 (1992) 253–266. Together with the case we are discussing, a significant group of *ethopoiiai* are in the *Palatine Anthology* (9.126, 449, 451–480).

<sup>57</sup> Strzygowski, *BZ* 3 (1894) 9, attributed its composition to a member of the circle of Photius. In the same sense see C. A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry* (Oxford 1951) 256. This tempting idea has been recently repeated by A. Paul, “Dichtung auf Objekten. Inschriftlich erhaltene griechische Epigramme vom 9. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert: Suche nach bekannten Autorennamen,” in M. Hinterberger and E. Schiffer (eds.), *Byzantinische Sprachkunst. Studien zur byzantinischen Literatur gewidmet W. Hörandner* (Berlin 2007) 241, and also by Rhoby, in *Scrivere e leggere nell'alto medioevo* 737. The characteristics of the epigram itself indeed coincide with the intellectual and aesthetic interests of Photius and his milieu, although authorship cannot be proved with the extant information.

literary fiction but to evoke a context of acclamations when acknowledging a man of high rank.<sup>58</sup>

It is not unreasonable to assume that at some stage Leo himself, whose love of Antiquity is evident, wanted to be like Heracles. This voluntary comparison must have come to the notice of Photius, who decided to write this epistle to replace this model with a more productive one from his point of view as patriarch. Nevertheless, Photius decided to use the classical culture in the same way as Leo did, thus elaborating a letter that was impossible to understand for those who did not have an extensive knowledge of the ancient world and were used to this type of parallelism.<sup>59</sup> In fact, the way the final exhortation is built shows that our *protospatharios* took an active interest in cultivating classical literature: τὴν δ' ἀληθῆ καὶ θεῖαν εὐδαιμονίαν ... ἐκ μόνων ἐστὶν τῶν θεῶν λογίων καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖθεν γεωργίας ἀμύσασθαι. While the term γεωργία seems to have been especially favored in edifying texts,<sup>60</sup> it can also refer to the cultivation of pagan or heretical literature,<sup>61</sup> which according to Photius included all the works of classical culture.

<sup>58</sup> We have mentioned the performative value of these foundational texts which served also to acclaim the benefactor; see Papalexandrou, *Word&Image* 17 (2001) 279 ff. Another sign of this use is in the ninth verse, where ἐν θαλίῃσι seems to refer to Hdt. 3.27: οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι εἵματά τε ἐφόρεον τὰ κάλλιστα καὶ ἦσαν ἐν θαλίῃσι, “the Egyptians wore their finest garments and were in festivities.”

<sup>59</sup> This is the case with Leo's identification with Heracles. The same can be said of the intentional use of literary elements traditionally linked to the *protospatharios*' homeland (Orchomenus), such as the river Achelous or the Muses, worshiped on Mount Helicon in Boeotia. See P. W. Wallace, “Hesiod and the Valley of the Muses,” *GRBS* 15 (1974) 5–24, here 22–24; A. Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia I–IV* (London 1981–1994).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Phot. *Epist.* 132.70, ἡ τῶν θεῶν γραφῶν γεωργία; 164.34, ἡ τοῦ Παύλου γεωργία.

<sup>61</sup> Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexikon* s.v. 4, “cultus of pagan worship” citing *Acta Philippi* 119, παραίτησαι τὰς μυσάρὰς καὶ κακὰς θυσίας τῶν εἰδώλων, αἵτινές εἰσιν γεωργία τοῦ ἔχθροῦ. Cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 230, 272a.23, τῆς Ἀπολιναρίου φρενοβλαβοῦς γεωργίας πικρόν ἐστι βλάστημα.

The references to the ancient world, which here is despised by the patriarch, are combined with direct criticism of the poets in the same way as Plato did,<sup>62</sup> and especially for being a race outside of the established conventions (τὸ ποιητῶν αὐτόνομον ἔθνος): poets sing the success of Heracles and Hermes, but they also praise the river Achelous, denigrating man's nature.<sup>63</sup> It is the mention of the river Achelous that serves as an example of the arguments against this type of creation, as it is awarded the cornucopia by the poets, even though Heracles had defeated Achelous in their struggle to marry Deianira (Soph. *Trach.* 9–21). In other words, the poets award an inanimate being defeated by such a renowned hero as Heracles (the only one who ascended to Olympus) with a happiness that is not conceded to the victor. Ultimately Photius' rejection of the poets is based on their denial of the Christian anthropology, as they grant an inert being such as a river the triumph

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 387B: ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα παραιτησόμεθα Ὅμηρον τε καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιητὰς μὴ χαλεπαίνειν ἂν διαγράφομεν, οὐχ ὡς οὐ ποιητικὰ καὶ ἡδέα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀκούειν, ἀλλ' ὅσῳ ποιητικώτερα, τοσοῦτῳ ἦττον ἀκουστέον παισὶ καὶ ἀνδράσιν οὓς δεῖ ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, δουλείαν θανάτου μᾶλλον πεφοβημένους, "We will beg Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we cancel those and all similar passages, not that they are not poetic and pleasing to most hearers, but because the more poetic they are the less are they suited to the ears of boys and men who are destined to be free and to be more afraid of slavery than of death" (transl. Shorey). All the arguments in this Platonic passage are featured in the patriarch's epistle: the Homeric verses are pleasant; the free man must not take delight in poetry since it is a form of slavery, etc. Thus Photius shares Plato's contempt for poetry, but his alternative is not philosophy but the iconodule Christian religion.

<sup>63</sup> This criticism can be compared to his reflection in the *Bibliotheca* when he praises the empress Eudocia for not following the poets' practice in her biblical paraphrases, even when she used Homeric verses: οὔτε γὰρ ἐξουσία ποιητικῆ μύθοις τὴν ἀλήθειαν τρέπων ἠδύνειν σπουδάζει μεираκίων ὄτα, οὔτε ταῖς ἐκβολαῖς τὸν ἀκροατὴν διαπλανᾷ τοῦ προκειμένου, "There is no attempt to deform the truth with fables and use poetic licence to charm the ears of young readers, nor is the listener distracted from the main theme by digressions" (183, 128a.13–16).

and happiness that are denied to many men, who are created in the image of God.<sup>64</sup> Photius insists, however, that this is not real happiness, as the fortune represented by the horn of Amalthea is temporary and, as it is an earthly success, comes with disease and leads only to spiritual poverty. In contrast, the happiness offered by the patriarch is imperishable and truly is appropriate for a man because it is divine (θεία). The only stricture is that this happiness can be reached only through the cultivation of Holy Scripture and the transcendental issues (τῶν θείων λογίων καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖθεν), in which Photius enthusiastically encourages Leo.

It is by relating the dedicatory poem of the Skripou church to Photius' epistle 209 that we can identify the benefactor with the recipient of the letter. From a prosopographical perspective this is a useful conclusion, as it increases our information about a figure who had been rather obscure despite the important role he played in the stimulation of the socio-religious life of the Boeotian region. Furthermore, this identification has an immediate effect on Photian studies, since we can now identify another of his addressees, who was certainly one of his followers during his first patriarchate. In fact, by connecting *Ep.* 209 with the building of the church of Skripou by Leo we can determine the date when Photius wrote it. So far, no date for the letter has been suggested. In view of this identification it seems unlikely that Photius wrote it during his second patriar-

<sup>64</sup> See Phot. *Amph.* 5.29: ὁ ἀνθρώπινος καὶ κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ πεπλασμένος νοῦς. The whole letter is certainly a criticism of secular poetry. The traditional view was summarised by B. Baldwin, "Photius and Poetry," *BMGS* 4 (1978) 9–14, who wrote that Photius completely rejected the poetic genres because of their immoral and inappropriate content for Christianity and his own personal taste. See also Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 105; Kazhdan, *A History* 17. Accentuated polarisation probably was setting in between the reading of classical secular poetry vs. the cultivation of its models; for according to Arethas of Caesarea (ca. 860–935) every scholar knew works such as Sophocles' *Ajax*: see S. B. Kougeas, *Ὁ Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ* (Athens 1913) 142. However, in the ninth century, very few took the step of composing poetry according to the classical models.

chate (877–886), when the church of Skripou was already built and the *protospatharios* Leo, at least for the general public, had already given himself to the Christian Muses.<sup>65</sup> Nor could it be written during the last period of Ignatius' patriarchate (873–877), when Photius had just become again a friend of the emperor Basil and gotten settled at court as tutor to the crown princes,<sup>66</sup> since the date of the church (873) indicates its consecration and so presupposes that the construction started a few years earlier, just when Photius was enduring the greatest hardships in his exile.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the most plausible date is during his first patriarchate (858–867). In this case, *Ep.* 209 could easily have been one of the key factors that led Leo to build the church of the Dormition of the Virgin of Skripou, and to follow the example set by the emperor Basil I. In fact, Leo's desire to please the sovereign led him to replicate the ecclesiastical policy promoted in Constantinople, which not only looked to be reaffirmed in Greece,<sup>68</sup> but also tried for a rapprochement with the pope of Rome (cf. the side chapels dedicated to Paul and Peter)<sup>69</sup> by deposing Photius and restoring Ignatius, who is

<sup>65</sup> As seen above, the three inscriptions of the apse show the donor's piety. Likewise the poem, which celebrates power, privileges, prosperity, and literary culture in praising Leo's earthly merits, introduces the church as Leo's greatest spiritual achievement.

<sup>66</sup> Theoph. Cont. pp.276–277.

<sup>67</sup> Phot. *Ep.* 79, 86, 98, 115, 174, 188.

<sup>68</sup> See 176 above.

<sup>69</sup> We also find this scheme in chapels dedicated to various saints in the Nea Church in Constantinople (built by Basil I inside the Great Palace between 876 and 880): see R. Guiland, "L'Eglise Nouvelle," *Byzantinoslavica* 12 (1951) 224–231; Janin, *La géographie* 361–364; P. Magdalino, "Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I," *JÖByz* 37 (1987) 51–64. On the multiple dedication of the Nea cf. *Vita Basil.* 83. For this and similar examples see Cutler, *JÖByz* 31 (1981) 759–787, here 786; G. Babic, *Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines: Fonction liturgique et programmes iconographiques* (Paris 1969); S. Curcic, "Architectural Significance of Subsidiary Chapels in Middle Byzantine Churches," *JSAH* 36 (1997) 94–110.

named in one of the inscriptions. As we have seen, the *protospatharios* Leo must have been one of many around Photius during his patriarchate—one of those who did not take long to turn their backs on him when Michael III passed away and Basil ordered his exile.<sup>70</sup>

The rarity of *Ep.* 209, whose content collides head-on with the rhetorical and slightly fossilised forms which characterised the Byzantine patriarchal epistolography during this period, is a sign that the author knew his addressee well and that this was not just another of his pastoral letters calling for the observance of Christian morals by their recipients.<sup>71</sup> As Photius and Leo had already gotten to know each other, and in view of the interests of the *protospatharios*, there is an obvious place for them to have possibly interacted: the school of Magnaura.<sup>72</sup> In the

<sup>70</sup> The patriarch's epistle collection is a good testimony of the extremist attitude shown by some laymen in Constantinople, who decided to support the Ignatian faction after Photius' condemnation. Thus for example the patrician Manuel, who was present in the anti-Photian synod of 869 (Mansi XVI 18B, 309D) and who was the recipient of Photius' *Ep.* 226, where the former patriarch accuses him of plotting his murder. Similarly, in *Ep.* 5, addressed to the Peloponnesian *protospatharios* and *strategos* John (*PmbZ* no. 3310), and 124, addressed to the *protospatharios* Theodotus (*PmbZ* no. 7970), Photius asks why they have exchanged the eternal things for the temporal ones and heaven for hell, betraying him. On Ignatius' followers see F. Dvornik, *The Photian Schism. History and Legend* (Cambridge 1948) 132–158; P. Stephanou, "La violation du compromis entre Photius et les Ignatiens," *OCF* 21 (1955) 291–307; P. Karlin-Hayter, "Gregory of Syracuse, Ignatios and Photios," in A. Bryer-J. Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm. Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Birmingham 1977) 141–145.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. H.-G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich 1990) 204–205.

<sup>72</sup> See Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme* 159 ff.; P. Speck, *Die kaiserliche Universität von Konstantinopel* (München 1974). This higher school would have been led by Bardas after he was made caesar on 22 April 862, cf. P. Varona Codeso, *Miguel III (842–867). Construcción histórica y literaria de un reinado* (Madrid 2010) 141–151. According to the chroniclers, the school of Magnaura was run by Leo the Philosopher (Theoph. Cont. p.192.14–23; Genesis 4.17), on whose work see n.22 above. A grammar professor in this school was Cometas (Theoph. Cont. p.192.20), a well-known poet of the



second half of the ninth century this was the only place where such an extensive education as that shown by Leo could be obtained. Also, Photius in all likelihood served as a professor there before being promoted to the patriarchate.<sup>73</sup> The letter reflects this personal relationship and refers to Leo's rural origin: at the close Photius encourages him to collect the true happiness with the help of the right cultivation—of the afterlife. As a major landowner, the *protospatharios* Leo owed his wealth to the agricultural exploitation of his lands in Boeotia, surrounding the enclave of Skripou.

This correspondence between the patriarch and Leo provides us with a better understanding of the intellectual preoccupations of the *protospatharios*, who had a strong interest in classical culture and poetry. In view of the intertexts evoked in the Skripou poem and the literary skills that must be attributed to the recipient of Photius' epistle, it seems clear that Leo did not just commission the church's foundational poem but was actively involved in its writing. And yet, the testimonies preserved are not enough to allow us to be certain of the author of these twelve verses, and while it is clear that the founder of the Skripou church and letter 209's addressee are the same, we

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*Palatine Anthology* who brought out an edition of Homer, probably transliterated into miniscules with accents and breathings: cf. Lemerle 166–167; F. M. Pontani, “Lo scoliaste e Cometa,” in *Studi in onore di Aristide Colonna* (Perugia 1982) 247–253; B. Baldwin, “The Homeric Scholarship of Cometas,” *Hermes* 135 (1985) 127–128; G. Cortassa, “Cometa e l'edizione di Omero in minuscola (AP XV.38),” *Prometheus* 23 (1997) 222–228; F. Ronconi, *La traslitterazione dei testi greci. Una ricerca tra filologia e paleografia* (Spoleto 2003) 56–59. On the classicist trend emerging in the poetry of the time see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry* 107–114.

<sup>73</sup> So the *Old Slavonic Life of Constantine-Cyril*: see F. Dvornik, “Photius' Career in Teaching and Diplomacy,” *Byzantinoslavica* 34 (1973) 211–218. The Continuator also seems to refer to the management of the Magnaura school: κατέστησεν ἐννόμως τότε καὶ κανονικῶς τὸν σοφώτατον Φώτιον ἐπὶ τὴν σχολάζουσιν καθέδραν τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων (Theoph. Cont. p.277.16–18). See also L. Simeonova, *Diplomacy of the Letter and the Cross. Photios, Bulgaria and the Papacy, 860s–880s*. (Amsterdam 1998) 27–28.

cannot affirm or deny that the *protospatharios* Leo himself composed the poem destined to immortalise his pious work.<sup>74</sup>

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