Abstract: Eleventh-century inscriptional material advances the changes that had gradually taken place in the previous, post-iconoclastic, era, and prefigures traditions that would become more firmly established during the twelfth century as well as in late Byzantium and beyond. Eleventh-century epigraphy employs an impressively wide range of artistic media, and a comparatively narrower range of inscriptional formulae. It displays diverse levels of formality. It places noticeable emphasis on visual appearance. The epigraphic presence of artists and craftsmen becomes more prominent, as they increasingly leave their names, and written records of their activities, in public texts. The proliferation of inscriptions set in the context of churches and monasteries can arguably be singled out as the most predominant feature of the overall epigraphic habit of this period. The eleventh-century material considered here shows that inscriptions can define space and symbolize ideology, authority, and status, that they can confirm religious tenets, show changes in religious practices, assume apotropaic significance, and be used to decorative ends.

A quotation from the eleventh-century Greek translation of the Eastern tale The Book of the Philosopher Syntipas gives us one of the most explicit descriptions of inscribed materials. By way of exploiting the motif of the role of philosophers in princely education, the story unfolds as the eponymous protagonist arrives at the royal palace as tutor to the son and heir of King Cyrus, and immediately announces the unconventional manner in which he intends to carry out his teaching duty:

‘You shall study and live in this house, my boy, until you fully master everything that I have represented [for you] on these walls!’

Syntipas’s idiosyncratic teaching method clearly attributes great importance to the epigraphic display of text and image. This point is emphasised even more strongly in the concluding chapters of the book, in which the philosopher’s young protégé describes his learning experience to his father in these words:

‘When you entrusted me to him, my teacher received me into his home and had immediately a new house built for me. He polished and white-washed the interior neatly and splendidly, and there he depicted (ἀνιστόρησε), spelled out in writing (γράφασεν διεσπερᾶτο) and outlined precisely (ἀκριβῶς ἀνετάξετο) everything he wished to teach me, and, moreover, he painted (ἀνεξωγράφησεν) the sun, the moon and the stars on the walls. He also inscribed (ἐνεχώραζε) […] the ten chapters of his wisdom, knowledge and teaching.’

* This paper was originally presented in 2011, at the Congress of Byzantine Studies in Sofia, as a contribution to the Round Table on Byzantine Epigraphy organized by Andreas Rhoby, to whom I wish to express my gratitude for his initiative to publish the present volume, as well as for his invaluable comments on this essay. I would also like to thank Sofia Kalopissi-Verti, Marc Lauxtermann, Georgi Parpulov, Günter Prinzing, Peter Schreiner, Mark Whittow, and Rebecca Gowers for their feedback and suggestions made on the final draft.

Research work for this paper has been carried out as part of my current project of studying middle and late Byzantine epigraphic cultures. During my term as a summer fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in 2011, I was able to examine hundreds of images of late antique and Byzantine Greek inscriptions from the DO Photographic Archive, many of which have helped elucidate eleventh-century epigraphic practices.


2 Ibid., 119, 1. 10 ff.: … παρασεβόν με από σου ὁ ἐμὸς διδάσκαλος καὶ εἰς τὸν αὐτού σῖκον ἀσημαγμόν, εὐθὺς οἰκίσκον νεωτή μου ἐδίσματο καὶ τούτων ἐσθενὸν κοσμίου περιχώσαι καὶ λειτούργητα κατασκεύασαι, πάντα ὡσα ἐμοί ἐκδηλάθημεν καὶ τούτων τοίχος ἀναστόρησεν καὶ γράφασεν διεσπερᾶτο τα καὶ ἀκριβῶς ἀνετάξετο, οὐ μην ἐλλά καὶ τόν ἠλλο καὶ τὴν σελήνην καὶ τοῦς
The content of the passage is less significant for its description of Syntipas’s course syllabus than for the terminology that it uses to designate successive stages in the arrangement of the monumental display of text and image. Similar descriptions found in other narrative sources tend to be less precise, and to frequently elude readers of Medieval Greek literature and epigraphers alike. This passage also serves as an apt reminder of the communicative and didactic functions of inscribed material. It aptly illustrates one of the most striking developments in medieval Greek epigraphy whereby the written word, and the inscribed word in particular, become increasingly supplemented with, or even entirely supplanted by, a wide range of non-verbal, often pictorial, equivalents. For all the explicitness of the passage, however, it would be misleading to suggest that the Story of Syntipas testifies to any specific inscriptive conventions: the realm of fictional literature does not purport to replicate genuine epigraphic norms, nor can it be mined with confidence for evidence of inscriptive or social realities, even when it employs recognizable literary topoi that may find some grounding in attested practices.

Far less ambiguous is the notion that for a society in which the level of even basic literacy was quite low, Byzantium dedicated a remarkably versatile role to writing. This had direct bearing on the significance placed on inscriptions as well as on the strategies that had to be devised in order to convey the wide range of literal and symbolic meanings associated with the public display of writing. The present essay seeks to explore precisely these developments against the backdrop of eleventh-century epigraphic material, and in particular with reference to the following questions: What do the Byzantines themselves report about the use and significance of inscriptions? How much material, and of what kind, does actually survive? What evidence do we have of the connections between production and reception, and between patrons, artists and their targeted audiences? Most crucially, what do we know about the social function of inscribed texts?


Epigraphy remains one of the few woefully under-explored fields in Byzantine Studies, with a reputation that obstinately persists for being elusive and esoteric. It is therefore regrettable that important progress that has been made in the scholarship of the subject over the past decades has not so far been matched by any consensus over even the most fundamental issues such as the presentation and publication of primary material. Furthermore, there are very few comprehensive studies to help elucidate the epigraphic habits of distinct periods in Byzantine history, or, indeed, to assist in an effort to trace the diachronic development of individual epigraphic genres. At the same time, this very lack leaves scope for substantial progress through the study of general epigraphic practices within precisely defined chronological parameters. The same holds true for the study of eleventh-century inscriptions: because of their general neglect, even a cursory glance over a relatively limited amount of the extant evidence yields noteworthy observations.

What is immediately apparent is how the eleventh-century inscriptional material sits in the broader development of the Byzantine epigraphic habit. Rather than introducing any radically innovative practices, inscriptions produced within this timespan seem to advance the changes that had gradually taken place in the previous, post-iconoclastic, era, and to prefigure traditions that would become more firmly established during the twelfth century and later. Thus, the Byzantine epigraphy of the eleventh century cannot be easily separated from that of the preceding Macedonian and subsequent Komnenian periods, whose norms it continues and anticipates respectively, and from which it differs not so much in substance as in volume.

The eleventh-century material survives unevenly distributed. Commemorative inscriptions are fairly widespread, and have been found in the more obvious settings of modern-day Turkey, the Greek mainland and islands, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Syria and southern Italy, as well as in several less predictable locations such as Egypt and the Caucasus. The inscribed objects of the minor arts, on the other hand, tend to be detached from their original context, and confined to modern public and private art collections, predominantly Western.

A distinct feature to have emerged in eleventh-century epigraphy is the predominance of extant evidence from the various provinces over that from the Byzantine capital. Whereas this can be explained by the diverse fortunes that different parts of the empire subsequently suffered, having decisive bearing on the survival rates of material culture and, consequently, of epigraphic material, it is also possible to make the case for a discrepancy in the original production. The clearest proof of this can be found in the monumental epigraphy of the eleventh century. The number and the contents of donor inscriptions from this period that have come down to us show the Balkans, the Greek mainland and islands, and even South Italy abounding in inscri-
tional material, against a scarcity of similar evidence from Asia Minor. Whether eleventh-century Anatolia lacked peace, prosperity and ambitious building projects or it simply underwent extensive ruralisation, either way, the absence of useful archaeological data from this region, matches a dearth in the epigraphic record. The extent of the disparity in comparison with the evidence found in other parts of the empire becomes even more obvious if we contrast the handful of extant donor inscriptions from Anatolia in its entirety (with the sole exception of the somewhat greater amount of evidence from Cappadocia) with, for example, the number of comparable texts from the backwaters of the Greek mainland, the Mani: judging by what still exists in situ, the Peloponnesian province, whose remote position may have facilitated the survival, has generated at least twice as much material as the whole of Asia Minor.

Of course, none of the provisos stated above lessen the value of focusing on eleventh-century epigraphy. On the contrary, the ever-shifting political history, the increased social mobility, and, most significantly, the thriving intellectual life of the time, which saw the learned, the very guardians of the written word, as a part of the ruling elite, make it all the more important to undertake a vigorous exploration of what survives of the inscriptive traditions of the period, and of their continuing influence on Byzantine culture.

THE BYZANTINE VIEW

Middle Byzantine textual sources provide a wide range of evidence for the implicit and attested roles of inscriptions in Byzantium. Above all, eleventh-century epigrammatic poetry has recently inspired a flurry of academic activity and caused the traditional view of inscriptive verses to be reassessed and radically revised. No longer are these poems considered tedious and obscure, nor are they any more buried in inaccessible publications. Their updated critical editions have become, and continue to be made, available. These have prompted a rise in the scholarship that contextualizes this material, and proposes more productive interpretative strategies for investigating the intellectual networks, literary invention and patterns of patronage behind the creative spirit of the eleventh century. Verses that survive in their original epigraphic settings as well as...
in extant manuscript collections, allow us to be reasonably confident in the claim that inscriptional poetry, and inscriptions in general, were commonly displayed and thus frequently encountered in public, such that they may be used as genuine testimonies of a considerable culture of writing in the middle Byzantine period.

The flourishing of epigrammatic poetry is complemented by the keen interest that middle Byzantine historians show in the public display of texts. These authors, not unlike Procopius, Agathias and Malalas in the sixth century, incorporate inscriptions into their narratives, and they occasionally even claim for themselves the authority of autopsy. John Zonaras, for example, makes note of inscriptional evidence dating back to ancient Rome as part of his agenda to reconcile the Roman and Byzantine past for the benefit of his contemporary readership.12 His History includes discussions about the origins of inscribed architectural landmarks that could still be seen in his own time, although Zonaras’s knowledge of these monuments seems to have come from an anthology rather than from seeing this material in situ.13 Among his accounts, we find references to ancient buildings that carried engraved writing, such as the bridge over the Sangarios River and the Sophiane Palace, and to funerary epigrams for Julian the Apostle and Constantina, the wife of the Emperor Maurice.14 The eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes quotes inscribed material verbatim: his choices feature Justinian’s and Theodora’s dedicatory epigram from the interior of the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and, more bizarrely, the worthless barbaric iambs that the Emperor Theophilos had himself composed, and then ordered to be inscribed on the foreheads of the Graptoi brothers by barbaric tattooing.15

Unsurprisingly, for the fullest eleventh-century view on epigraphy, we must turn to the writings of the most charismatic intellectual figure of this period, Michael Psellos himself. Drawing on the more vernacular end of his expert range, this author teaches us that ancient statues can gain apotropaic powers if they have engraved seals (σφραγίδες) and written formulae (ἐγγράμματα) inserted into their cavities.16 It is very likely that Psellos’s σφραγίδες and ἐγγράμματα refer to inscribed amulets that are known to have been widely used in the middle Byzantine period, and in many cases have been associated with workshops based in the Byzantine capital.17 Psellos may have drawn his knowledge of this topic from folklore or from textual material on medicine, theurgy or magic, but his advice also very much resembles that found in Patria Konstantinopolis, the account of the attractions of Constantinople, dated to the late tenth century. Just as Psellos’ writings, this text too includes abundant evidence of what may be perceived as the attitudes of, or advice to, ordinary people in the Byzantine capital regarding still-ubiquitous ancient monuments and statuary, some of which

14 Zonaras III 459, 174–175, 198, 68 (Büttner-Wobst).
15 Skylitzes quotes Justinian’s and Theodora’s epigram in the context of his praise of Basil I for his building and restoration of churches in Constantinople: Synopsis historiarum 161–162 (Thurn). On the tattooing of the Graptoi brothers: … καὶ τοὺς μετέχους αὐτῶν ἐπιγραφήναι βαρβαρικῶς ἐκκενθῆσαν σῶς συντέθεσα κληρος ιματισκος. Skylitzes then proceeds to quote the verses verbatim: 62, l. 77–63, l. 88. Cf. on the Graptoi Theodores and Theophanes PmbZ # 7526 (esp. 414 and 416, n.17) and # 8093 (esp. 594 and 595 n. 17)
16 Epist. 187 (Sathas), 474; cf. C. Mango, Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder. DOP 17 (1963) 61.
carries inscribed texts. However, Psellos could certainly do better than merely show off his familiarity with popular superstition: indeed, one of his letters unmistakably demonstrates how an imperial request to interpret the text of what seems to have been an inscribed herm or a plaque depicting scenes from the Odyssey, when issued to an imaginative story-teller with a strong penchant for classicizing allusion, could prompt an epigraphic construal with an epic twist, interspersed with Homeric quotations, featuring the choice of mythological personae dramatis, and could even provide an excuse to boast some esoteric pharmacological knowledge. Here, however, we are clearly dealing with an author and antiquarian who excercises textual subjectivity and source manipulation and most certainly not an intellectual who assumes the role of a genuine épigraphiste.

When considering general trends in eleventh-century epigraphy—a mine of wealth for modern-day epigraphists—, it is important to remember that the operative range of any inscribed text frequently surpasses the artificially imposed limits of chronology and topical relevance. The example of inscriptional verses dating back to this period offers a case in point. The upsurge in their production was undoubtedly prompted by the efforts of the tenth-century scholars such as Gregory Magistros and Constantine Kephalas to collect and preserve older epigraphic poetry, as well as being directly inspired by the still standing epigraphic monuments from the previous centuries that must have constituted visible landmarks in all the major cities of the empire, Constantinople no less than elsewhere. Moreover, not all poetry inscribed at this time was necessarily composed in the same period; the example of the epigrams by the ninth-century poet Theodore of Studios found in the eleventh-century churches of the Basilian monastery of Grottaferrata in Italy and of the Nea Mone on Chios reminds us that epigrams from the pens of authors like Gregory of Nazianzus, Theodore himself or, for example, the eleventh-century poet Christopher of Mitylene, as well as the fourteenth-century epigrammatist Manuel Philes, constituted the canon of Byzantine ecclesiastical poetry. Rather than remaining forever anchored to the setting and occasion that had inspired their composition, these poems, along with a number of religious verses, tituli and excerpts from liturgical books, became part of the standard and often reproduced repertoire of Byzantine church epigraphy, and the regular fixtures of its enduring inscriptive habit.

All this prompts us to consider the timeless character of inscriptive material, which can inhabit parallel literary and spatial landscapes without necessarily originating in the same historical moment. More significantly, the literary evidence considered here shows epigraphic culture as a complex phenomenon in terms of both its authors/commissioners and the readership/audiences that it addresses. There is no doubt that the

20 On the work of compilers, see: Lauxtermann, Byzantine poetry 73–74.
impetus for the close reading and recording of inscriptions in the eleventh century emerged from a specific intellectual milieu, from the class of the *pepaideumenoi*. Scholars like Skylitzes, Zonaras and even Psellos show themselves very much alert to the ancient and early Byzantine inscriptional heritage. They make it their task to gather and study this epigraphic material, even if their interests seem to be predominantly inspired by their own sense of cultural identity, and their antiquarian tastes in Byzantine written culture. The same class of the learned, or at least the literate, constituted the group in which we should look for the authors, and in many cases, commissioners, of the majority of newly composed Byzantine inscriptions. As to the Byzantines who were on the receiving end of epigraphic messages, they made up a much broader, and more versatile, category, consisting not only of readers, but also of an audience acutely aware of the power and significance of inscribed texts. There is no doubt that Byzantine epigraphs, like many other kinds of writings, were occasionally read out to the members of viewing public, and that the participants in such ‘performances’ could instigate their oral and aural promulgation, which was probably more widespread than we generally believe.

SURVIVING EVIDENCE
In addition to the frequent textual references to middle Byzantine epigraphic culture, we also have a considerable body of inscriptive material from this period that still survives today. This material can be found *in situ* and/or in various publications, although these are not always readily available. The sole exception concerns metrical inscriptions, whose editions are far more accessible now than it was the case hitherto. In many ways, the accessibility of eleventh-century inscriptions is akin to that of Byzantine epigraphic material in general: at best, they are dispersed in publications covering a wide spectrum of research strands, but some still remain unpublished, and therefore unknown to a wider scholarly readership. The investigation that has been carried out for the purpose of this essay considers several hundreds securely dated inscriptions. A more vigorous search could undoubtedly yield a substantially greater body of material. However, even incomplete coverage allows for plotting the broad outlines of the eleventh-century epigraphic output reflecting an impressive geographic spread right across and even outside the territories of a Byzantine Empire that finds itself in a significantly expanded state after the death of Basil II in 1025. Paradoxically, in spite of the lasting reputation of this emperor as anti-intellectual and unsupportive of writing culture, the memory of Basil II informed the eleventh-century epigraphic habit in several significant ways.

THE EPIGRAPHY OF RELIGIOUS PATRONAGE
The historian John Skylitzes reports that in the aftermath of the successful military campaigns against Bulgaria in 1018, Basil II toured Greece, and arrived at Athens on a visit, which was purposely staged as a pious thanksgiving for the imperial victories on the battlefield. On this occasion, according to the same author, the emperor adorned the Parthenon, then the Church of the Mother of God, with magnificent and expensive dedications. It would not be out of place to propose that this act of imperial endowment of the Athenian shrine

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23 Corpora with a considerable amount of eleventh-century material include: ASDRACHA, Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines; RHODY, I, II and III; Guillo, Recueil des inscriptions; G. De Jerphanion, Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce, I-II. Paris 1925–1942.


of the Theotokos may have been epigraphically commemorated. The staging of Basil II’s *eucharisteria* and his donations to the Church of the Virgin Atheniotissa occurred at a time when religious patronage emanating from the highest social strata would have been acknowledged in writing both in official documents and by means of publicly displayed texts. The eleventh century was marked by exceptionally strong self-awareness among donors, who increasingly commissioned epigrams to immortalize their philanthropic activities, much more so, it seems, than in the earlier period. Moreover, even though surviving evidence of corresponding epigraphic and documentary records of donor activities is sparse, it nonetheless suggest that practice of displaying official donation documents on the walls of churches had probably already become the norm by the eleventh century. A reference left by Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, the Spanish high official who took part in an embassy to the court of Timur in Samarkand in the early fifteenth century, when he also visited Constantinople, can be read in confirmation of this view. De Clavijo reports having seen on the walls of the Panagia Peribleptos the paintings of the castles and towns that its founder, the Emperor Romanos III Argyros, had bequeathed to the church in the eleventh century, alongside the inscribed documents that confirmed this grant. Furthermore, we know that the testament of Nikodemos for the Monastery of *Nea Gephyra* in the Southern Peloponnesus was originally carved on a column. It stated that the foundation was established in 1027 in order to protect a newly built bridge over the Eurotas River. The inscription was still *in situ* in 1730, when it was recorded and subsequently published, but has since been lost. Likewise, the typikon of Nikephoros Erotikos for the Monastery of the Mother of God and the old age home, founded between 975 and 1000 on Mt Tmolos to the west of Lydian Philadelphia in modern-day Turkey. This document survives only as a monumental inscription and confirms that the epigraphic display of monastic typika was considered a suitable means to preserve and promulgate this type of legal material in the eleventh century.

THE (IN)FORMALITY OF GRAFFITI

Some modern scholars believe that it was during the same visit of Basil II to Athens in 1018 that one of the emperor’s Varangian guards incised the long and now illegible runic *grafitto* on the flanks of the Lion of Piraeus, the statue which stood at the entrance of the eponymous harbor until Francesco Morosini had it transferred to Venice in 1688. It is impossible to prove who exactly inscribed the sculpture, and when—unconventional epigraphic practices tend to defy precise contextualization—but the fact remains that the...
eleventh-century inscriptions show an increased use of informally executed texts that have frequently been defined as graffiti. Although the perceived character of these public texts as unofficial and even subversive has so far discouraged modern scholars from examining them in any significant detail, the numerous examples of extant graffiti from the Holy Land, Constantinople, Ephesus, Cappadocia and Athens render study of such material of paramount importance for our understanding of Byzantine written culture in general.31 Due to the early publication of Orlandos and Branouses, the Athenian material has been best, even if still incompletely, explored. The edition of the Parthenon corpus as well as Ladas’s publications of similar material from the Hephaisteion (the Church of St George)32 show that the majority of dated graffiti come from the middle Byzantine period, and seem to suggest that Athens underwent something of a boom following the visit and patronage of Basil II. This momentous event may also have encouraged a revival of religious life, and, consequently, an expansion of religious epigraphy, which clearly thrived in this period. More pertinently, the visual impact of the surviving inscriptions makes the word ‘graffiti’ something of a misnomer: while they unquestionably feature on monuments that were originally not designated to carry such graphic display, still, many of these texts, far from being casual scribblings and scratches, reveal careful execution and, moreover, a thoughtful choice of content and style of presentation.33 Some graffiti consist of personal names, and may have been intended as mementos of visits to the most venerated Athenian shrine. Many texts, however, present invocations to holy figures, to the Theotokos in the first place, on behalf of the members of the clergy and local community, who clearly wished to inscribe themselves into, and thus stay permanently associated with, the religious foundations that were of the utmost significance to them.

THE COMMEMORATIVE EPIGRAPHY OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

The third piece of evidence that connects Basil II with the epigraphic practices of the eleventh century can be verified with a higher degree of certainty than the previous two. Peculiarly, it dates to a much later time. It comes from a fourteenth-century account about the discovery of the emperor’s remains, which had been laid to rest in the Constantinopolitan suburb of Hebdomon in 1025, and were then found intact more than two hundred years later, soon after the re-conquest of the Byzantine capital in 1261. The report comes from the pen of George Pachymeres, who relates it in his History, stating that the emperor’s burial was identified by a lengthy inscription labelling it as belonging to ὁ Βουλγαροκτόνος Βασίλειος.34 The epitaph, made up of se-


32 LADAS, Βυζαντινοὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ‘Θεσσαλονίκης’ ἐπιγραφαὶ 84. Cf. on the Church of St. George most recently Ch. BOURAS, Βυζαντινή Αθήνα 10ος–12ος αἰ. Athens 2010, 180–184 and passim (see Index).

33 E.g., ORLANDOS – BRANOUSES, Τὰ χαράγματα τοῦ Παρθενώνος, no. 89; RHoby III, no. GR20. The autopsy of the Parthenon material carried out in July 2014 during the Summer Workshop in Byzantine Epigraphy (organized at the British School of Athens by Ida Toth and Andreas Rhoby) confirmed that much of what still survives in situ was probably intended as formal epigraphic display. The current research project on the medieval inscriptions of the Parthenon directed by Maria Xenaki on behalf of the École française d’Athènes promises to significantly advance our knowledge of this subject.

34 Pachymeres, History 175–177 (FAILLER). Pachymeres also reports that Michael VIII Palaiologos had the remains subsequently transported to their permanent resting place in the Monastery of the Saviour in Selymbria.
venteen twelve-syllable verses, and transmitted in several Palaiologan manuscripts, exemplifies the genre of commemorative epigraphy in several ways: in spite of its poetic form, it makes use of a simple idiom and therefore communicates its message clearly; it uses the first person singular by way of lending voice to the illustrious honorand (ἔγῳ δὲ Βασιλεῖος, πορφύρας γόνον); its deictic language refers explicitly to the location of the imperial mausoleum (ιστημί τύμβον ἐν τόποι γῆς Ἐβδόμου); and finally, it prompts perpetual commemoration by inviting the viewer to pray on behalf of the deceased (καὶ νῦν ὀρῶν, ἁνθρώπε, τόνδε τὸν τάφον / εὐχαίς ἀμέιβου τὰς στρατηγίας ……).35

The eleventh-century witnessed a considerable change in the nature of provision for religious institutions. A significant number of new monastic foundations increasingly benefited from private patronage. This in turn gave rise to the phenomenon of aristocratic burial (pace Mango), and instigated noteworthy developments in middle and late Byzantine epigraphic traditions.36 Some of the extant eleventh-century foundation documents confirm that wealthy families endowed monasteries and churches by way of protecting their private possessions. A few specify that the land donated to a monastery should continue to be held by the members of their respective families, and, in several cases, that their establishments should serve as family tombs, around which memorial prayers are to be regularly said by monks.37 Consequently, middle Byzantine funerary chapels feature abundant inscrip tional material of both a commemorative and dedicatory content. They display elaborate sepulchral iconography that commonly represents the deceased in supplication to holy intercessors, and monumental themes such as the Deesis and Anastasis.38 It therefore seems justified to assume that inscriptions celebrating the lives of patrons found in these establishments may have been read out in the same way as the prayers requested in their foundation documents. The evidence of donor inscriptions from the Mani and Cappadocia certainly suggests that some kind of perpetual prayer was being requested, and probably took place in privately funded religious institutions.39 However, we possess nothing similar to the twelfth-century epideictic poem honoring John II Komnenos and his wife Irene, whose inscrip tional and performative contexts have been confirmed beyond any doubt. The manuscripts that preserve the poem clarify its purpose as having been to perpetuate the memory of the imperial couple for their joint patronage of the


37 See, for example, how the typikon of Michael Attaleiates for his Almshouse in Rhaidestos and the Monastery of Christ Panoik- tiron in Constantinople secures that his foundation is administered as family property, in: Thomas – Constantinides Hero, Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, no. 19, chapters 10, 17, 22, 23, 37, 39. Chapter 31 of the same typikon is dedicated to the required commemoration, as are several sections of Gregory Pakourianos’s typikon for the Monastery of the Mother of God Petritzonitissa in Bačkovo, which specify who should receive memorial services, and what these should include: ibid., no. 23, chapters 12, 21, 27, 30.


39 For the use of the inscriptive formula η ἐπιστολής εὐχέσθῃ ἡ κατ’ αὐτούς/αὐτῶν (νεκτὶ καὶ καὶ μέρος ἐπιστολῆς) in donor inscriptions from the Mani, see: Kalopissi-Verti, Epigraphic evidence in Middle-Byzantine Churches of the Mani 340, 342–343; likewise, Cappadocian evidence features expressions such as ἀναγινόσκοντες εὐχέσθῃ αὐτοῦς/ὑπὲρ αὐτ[ίς]. Jerphanion, Les églises rupestres II, no. 182, 309, no. 186, 334.
Pantokrator Monastery. These sources also attest that the verses were originally inscribed—indeed, we know that it could still be seen painted on the walls of the church in the sixteenth century—and also report that the poem was delivered annually before the congregation to commemorate the foundation of the monastic complex in 1139–1143.

As to eleventh-century funerary epigraphy in general, verse compositions are found only seldom, while the majority of extant prose obituaries continue to employ the standard expressions, whose most familiar form includes the phrase ἐκοιμήθη ἐπελειώθη (ἐν εἰρήνῃ κυρίῳ) ὅ δοῦλος ὢν δοῦλη τοῦ θεοῦ (followed by the name and titles/offices of the deceased. See, for example, plate no. 1). This formula tends to be accompanied by more precise dating according to the Byzantine era, and can also note the induction, day, and month of death. Most corpora with middle Byzantine material also feature other types of commemorative epigraphs consisting of acronyms and nomina sacra, of tomb labels θῆκαι/τάφοις followed by a name in the genitive case, and more generally of devotional texts such as invocations κύριε βοήθει μακάριε and ἀνάπαυσε/μνήσθη, and of ex-votos such as ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς, but also of some rather more antiquated expressions as ὑπὲρ ἀναστασίας and ἔνθα (κατὰ)κείμενα. These texts, in many instances, give no dating indications and cannot be securely attributed to the eleventh century even when marking monuments that have been identified as belonging to this century. By virtue of their formulaic character they acquire a timeless aspect typical of many Byzantine memorial practices, than of those of the post-Byzantine world.

Although these characteristics can be identified as the most commonplace in funerary epigraphy of any period, it is also true that the number of commemorative inscriptions in general had significantly decreased since the sixth/seventh century, and that in the eleventh century these texts almost exclusively featured in ecclesiastical or monastic settings. This means that they predominantly pertained to the members of secular or church hierarchies and/or monastic communities, that is, largely, to the most privileged strata of Byzantine society. Ordinary people presumably continued to be buried in uninscribed graves. If any grave markers would have been used, they would probably have been made of wood or even ceramic shards, and would not have survived due to their perishable nature.

Extant funerary graffiti from the churches of St George (Hephaisteion) and Panagia Lykodemou in Athens offer an insight into a further middle Byzantine inscriptive practice: incised in columns and walls of these buildings, they contain simple phrases consisting only of names, professions and times of death. As they do not indicate any actual places of burial, these texts do not represent genuine funerary inscriptions but

42 Among the most outstanding examples of eleventh-century verse epitaphs are: a lengthy poem by an anonymous spatharios for his young son, Stratigoules, and another one for the spatharios himself from the arcosolium in St Christina in Carpignano, Italy: RHOBY I, nos. 186 and 187, 267–272; the epigram for Paula found in the arcosolium of the narthex of Yilanli Kilislesi, Cappadocia: ibid. no. 203, 295–296 and WEISSBROD, ‘Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes…’ 228; the verses for the monk Symeon in the narthex of the Chapel of St Symeon in Kesisler Vadisi, Cappadocia: RHOBY I, no. 210, 299–302; four dodekasyllaboi for the donors of the parecclesion of St Nicolas of the Vatopedi monastery on Mt Athos (PAZARAS, Ἀνάψαλμα σαρκοφάγοι, no. 18, 28; RHOBY, Inscriptional Poetry 201; IDEM III, no. GR29); commemorative verses for the monk Theodosios in the monastery of Hosios Loukas, Phokis, Greece: N. OIKONOMIDES, The first century of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas. DOP 46 (1992) 245–255; RHOBY III, no. GR112.
44 See, for example, PAZARAS, Ἀνάψαλμα σαρκοφάγοι no. 17, 28, no. 44, 38, no. 61, 47, no. 90, 56.
47 For a grave marker on a ceramic shard from Southern Italy containing the inscription ΚΟΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΑΦΙΟΝ, cf. SAFRAN, Public Textual Cultures 125, & note 39.
only obituaries. It has nonetheless been suggested that they may be associated with the unidentified remains found in the tombs in the temple or the bone-pits excavated in the vicinity. The example of two ninth-century inscriptions, one on a slab marking a tomb, the other inscribed into a column of the Parthenon, but both recording the death of the same person, Leo, the protospatharios and strategos of the theme Hellas, suggests that some people mentioned in the graffiti could indeed have been buried close to the temples, which bore their obituary. Remarkably, some of the inscriptions in the Hephaisteion make note of ordinary people such as dyers and shell gatherers, and thus indicate that the eleventh-century epigraphic habit penetrated deeper into the lower strata of society than is generally assumed. Moreover, it also transpires that the setting of the church and the medium of graffiti could be employed in celebration of festive occasions as, for example, the announcement of childbirths, although our evidence of this practice is too meagre to allow any speculation about its range and frequency.

**BROADENING OF MEDIA/CONTRACTION OF GENERIC RANGE**

The proliferation of inscriptions set in the context of churches and monasteries can arguably be singled out as the most predominant trait of the overall epigraphic habit in the eleventh century. Undoubtedly this came about as the consequence of the architectural transformation of the sacred space that had taken place over the previous two centuries, during which redecorated and newly-erected religious buildings were increasingly furnished with elaborate iconographic programmes, and equally abundant accompanying inscriptive material. The most lavish eleventh-century foundations of Hosios Loukas, Nea Mone, Daphni, and St John the Theologian on Patmos serve as outstanding examples, as well as being vast repositories, of Christian didactic epigraphy. They include a wide range of standard devotional texts, from simple captions to elaborate liturgical formulae, but without following any tradition precisely to the letter. Such flexibility within the set practices always leaves scope for regional deviations and peculiarities among which we can find, for instance, the feature, unique to eleventh-century churches in Southern Italy, of the isopseph (99), which translates as ‘Amen’.

It has already been pointed out that some eleventh-century inscriptions appear on and around tombs, or, indeed, as obituaries carved or painted in the interior of churches and funerary chapels. These buildings originally also housed a large number of religious accoutrements such as liturgical vessels, books, processional crosses, icons, silks, reliquaries, etc. Although only a small proportion of these items survives, and even fewer can be found in their original context, their range can be gauged from documentary evidence, principally from monastic typika that include the inventories of gifts bequeathed to some churches and monasteries. The typology of eleventh-century religious art is also fairly well attested due to the survival of some exquisite pieces in modern art collections, predominantly Western, where they arrived either as a result of their


49 Kalcellis, Parthenon 79–80. A more extensive study on Byzantine graffiti in the Hephaisteion by Anne McCabe will be published in the forthcoming Festschrift dedicated to the Director of the Agora Excavations at Athens, John Camp.

50 On funerary graffiti from the Hephaisteion and Panagia Lykodemou, and on eleventh-century inscriptions commemorating a dyer and a shell-gatherer, see: McCabe, Byzantine funerary graffiti 128.


original function as diplomatic gifts or, as was more often the case, of the looting of 1204. Irrespective of their value and quality, the majority of these objects tend to be conservative in character, and therefore also to use stock inscriptive material. Commonly employed are simple invocations, dedicatory formulae or patrons’ names, but also religious texts such as sigla and eucharistic prayers that reflect a liturgical function. Moreover, some pieces feature elaboration, specially commissioned verses, usually naming their patrons and donors who originally commissioned and bequeathed the objects to the religious foundations of their choice. Liturgical vessels can display donors’ portraits, although these appear very rarely. Some carry inscriptive evidence of prolonged use and patronage by more than one donor. Overall, these objects and their texts represent reliable witnesses of continuity though also, on occasion, of changes in religious habits whose purposes they served.

The monumental epigraphy of this period is especially prolific in donor inscriptions, although the surviving evidence of their distribution tends to be predominantly concentrated in the Greek mainland and islands, Cappadocia and Southern Italy. The term ‘donor inscription’ is normally used in its generic meaning, to


55 As, for example, in: GUILLOU, Recueil des inscriptions, no. 51, 53–54 (a staurotheké with biblical text and invocation μνήμητης); nos. 82–86, 86–88 (sigla on reliquaries); nos. 88–89, 89–90 (two chalices with eucharistic formulae); no. 89, 90–91 (liturgical lamp with the invocation ἄφνησι τοῦ σώματός σου); J. COTSONIS, Byzantine figural procession crosses. Washington, D.C. 1994, nos. 2 (with the Deesis, monastic figures and a dedicatory inscription), 12 (figure and name of St George), 16 (nomina sacra, sacred text and invocation κείμενον ἐρωτήματα); the plaque of St Hermolaos with a votive text (S. BOYD, Ex-voto therapy: a note on a copper plaque with St Hermolaos, in: I. SEVCENKO – I. HUTTER [eds.], AETOS. Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1998, 15–27); H. R. HAENLÖSER, II Tesoro di San Marco. Florence 1971, no. 51, 58, 67, 64–65, 67, 72 (two chalices and one paten with the eucharistic text); no. 78, 75–76 (lamp with an invocation on behalf of the patron, archbishop Zacharias).

56 RHOBY II, nos. Ixk4–7, 50–57 (three painted icons with four verse ‘signatures’ of the painter/commissioner John Tobabi); no. 1xk13, 68–69 (bronze plaque with the engraved image of the Virgin and the Child and deictic verses); no. Ixk55, 133–135 (marble icon of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Child with a fragmentary epigraphic epigram); no. Ixk62–65, 144–144 (Virgin Hodegetria with four verse inscriptions); nos. Me5, 156–157; Me33, 200–201; Me99, 285 (reliquary of the myron or aima of St Demetrios with eucharistic verses and two references to the commissioner); no. Me10, 169–70 (taphorophorion or panagiarion, cf. I. DREP, Zograf 35 (2011) 56) with deictic verses); no. Me12, 172 (reliquary of St Christopher, verses ‘spoken’ by the commissioner Michael); nos. Me27, 92; Me29, 193–195; Me34, 201–203; Me51, 221–222; Me69, 238–239; Me89, 266–268; Me92, 274–275; Me97, 281–283; Me102, 287–290; Me106, 295–296 (all reliquaries of the True Cross inscribed with verse inscriptions); the eleventh century also produced a substantial number of ivories featuring religious scenes, labelled with sigla, and inscribed with verses e.g. nos. El26–30, 337–342 (tripych with the Deesis and a choice of holy figures) and ivory icons representing St John and Paul and St Andrew and St Peter respectively (no. El31 and 32, 342–346) both connected with the eleventh-century imperial workshop.


58 For a ninth/tenth century cross with eleventh- and thirteenth-century donor inscriptions: COTSONIS, Byzantine figural procession crosses 29, 32, pl. 12 a–b.

59 The large number of reliquaries of the True Cross produced around the year 1100 naming emperors as patrons and commissioners indicates continuous imperial patronage of this cult: J. KÖDER, Zu den Versinschriften der Limburger Staurothek. Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte 37 (1985) especially n. 52. On the other hand, the inscriptions on the reliquaries of St Demetrios (Moscow, Vatopedi, Halberstadt), testify that in the eleventh century the cult included a further, hitherto unattested aspect of the worship of this saint: the holy oil or myron which had begun to flow in his cathedral in Thessaloniki: I. KALAVREZOU, Reliquary of St Demetrios, in: H. EVANS – W. WIXOM (eds.), The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–126. New York 1997, 77–78; F. A. BAUER, Eine Stadt und ihr Patron. Thessaloniki und der Heilige Demetrios. Regensburg 2013, and M. WHITE, The ‘grave covering’ of St Demetrios between Byzantium and the Rus, forthcoming.

60 For the list of donor inscriptions from Asia Minor and the Mani, see above, note 9. Additional eleventh-century material includes: St Sophia, Constantinople: donor portraits with imperial titles of Zoe and Constantine IX Monomachos (C. MANG, The
Mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul. Washington, D.C. 1962, 27–28, pl. 14, see, plate no. 2); Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessaloniki: two donor inscriptions: one commemorating the consecration of the church by the protospatharios and katepano Christopher, his wife Maria and their children; another, a prayer on behalf of Christopher and Maria, probably added after the decoration of the church was completed (J. M. SPIESER, Inventaires en vue d’un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance. I. Les inscriptions de Thessalonique. TM 5 [1973] 63–64; RHIO III, no. GR126, see, plate no. 3); Hosios Loukas, Phokis: verses commemorating monk Gregory, a donor, and portraits and names of a further four abbots and katekores in fresco painting (OKONOMIDES, The First Century 245–252; RHIO III, no. GR110–111); Katholikon of the Vatopedi Monastery, Mt Athos: verses commemorating monk Sophronius for his patronage of mosaic decoration (RHIO I, no. M1, 381–385); St Theodoroi, Athens: verses dedicated to Nikolaos Kalomalos, who rebuilds the church (V. LAURENT, Nicolas Kalomalos et l’église des saints Théodore à Athènes. Hell 7 [1934] 72–82; RHIO III, no. GR15, see, plate no. 4); The Virgin of the Angel (Madonnina) in Chandax, Crete: invocation on behalf of Eumathios, the protospatharios and strategos of Crete (Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, see, plate no. 5); Cappadocia: Göreme, St Barbara founded of the domestikos Basil (JERPHANION, Les églises rupestres II, no. 182, 309); Karabà Kilise: deesis inscriptions with donor portraits (ibid. I i, 458, nos. 42–44); Chapel 27: donor invocations Κύριε βοήθει (ibid. I ii, nos. 64–65, 281); Karaba Kilise: donor inscription of protospatharios Michael Skepides, Catherine and Niphon; further invocations for Michael, Catherine, Eudokia, Nyphon, Basil and Irene—all with donor portraits (ibid. II, nos. 186–187, 190–194, 333–339); St Nicholas (St Demetrios), Bari: katepan Basil Mesardonites erects a church/chapel dedicated to St Demetrios (GUILLOU, Recueil des inscriptions, no. 143, 154–159; RHIO III, no. IT2); St Nicholas, Naples: presbyter Peter builds and decorates the church (GUILLOU, Recueil des inscriptions, no. 123, 136–137); St Eustratios, Locres, Calabria: donors Michael and John build a church dedicated to the Theotokos, St Eustratios and his fellow martyrs, and St Catherine (ibid., no. 131, 143–144); St Severina, Rossano, Calabria: a cathedral built during the bishopric of Ambrose (ibid., 139, 150–151); St George, Trani: Romanos Kladon (richter Klostonev, cf. PmbZ no. 26865; C. MANGO, BZ 91 [1998] 131), a strategos of Kibyrreotes builds the church (ibid., nos. 181, 189–192), Sts Peter and Paul, Palermo: dux Robert (Guissard) and his wife Sikelgaita build the church, care of the paravthalasites of Palermo, Nikolaos, the son of Leo (ibid., no. 195, 210–211); Vaste, Salento: Michael the African founds a church (A. JACOB, Vaste en Terre d’Otrante et ses inscriptions. Aevum 71/2 [1997] 243–253); St Jason and Sospatros, Corfu: donor inscription of the priest Stephen (P. L. BOKOTOPOULOS, ΠΕΡΙ της χρονολογίας του ἐν Κερκύρα ναού τῶν Ἁγίων Ἰακώβου καὶ Σώσπατρος. DChAE IV 5 [1966–69] 149–174; RHIO III, nos. GR67–68); Varnakova Monastery, Katholikon, Phocis: foundation of the monastery by the monk Arsenios (CIG IV, no. 8730, 337; new edition by O. DELOUIS – D. ROUSSET, REB 70 [2012] 237–244); Hagia Trias, Koutzoventes, Cyprus (RHIO I, nos. 222, 223, 319–322).

For the prevalent forms in middle Byzantine donor inscriptions, see: RHIOY, The structure of inscriptional dedicatory epigraphy, passim and 328–332; SUBOTIC – TOT, Historical Inscriptions, passim and 105–106.


62 This type of inscriptive evidence survives in meagre quantity, and it rarely deviates beyond the formulaic declarations.
of the basic tenets of Byzantine imperial ideology. In the case of the eleventh-century material, we can rely
only partly on what still exists in any epigraphic context: much of our information on imperial patronage
comes from other narrative sources, and it reveals little by way of indicating any public display of text.63

As to other eleventh-century samples that belong to the domain of secular epigraphy—here defined as
non-liturgical epigraphy or any epigraphy set outside the context of religious buildings—they too survive
very sparsely. Extant are inscriptions recording, for example, the building of secular structures such as city
gates, citadels, towers and walls, and inscriptions marking boundaries and constructions of bridges.64 In spite
of its scarcity, such epigraphic material is particularly useful because it can be contextualised more easily: it
could go a long way towards elucidating diplomatic relations,65 military history,66 and trends in the cultural
and intellectual life of contemporary Byzantium.67 Rather uncommonly, several eleventh-century inscriptions
also show an interest in classical literature by making use of themes from Homer and Aesopic fables.68

Eleventh-century epigraphy employs an impressively wide range of media such as stone, fresco, mosaic,
textiles, precious metals, and techniques like cutting, carving, painting, incising, enamelling, and engraving.
It also displays diverse levels of formality, although it has to be added that study in this area remains rather
tentative: an understood division between formal and informal epigraphy does not make the question of tax-
onomy any easier nor does it help attempts to distinguish the individual typology of epigraphic evidence.
Some clarity, however, can be achieved.

As a rule, eleventh-century verse inscriptions feature more frequently on objects of minor arts than in
monumental epigraphy, and they tend to be less informative. Prose inscriptions are more conservative, and
are displayed predominantly on buildings and tombs. They show a greater uniformity of inscriptive formu-
lae, and offer more detailed factual information. We have already seen that some inscriptional categories also
overlap, and that matching expressions such as κύριε μνήμητι/ θανάτω can be found in commemorative and
dedicatory epigraphy as well as featuring on objects that signify authority and ownership, such as seals.69

Textual sources indicate that the Constantinopolitan production was more substantial: e.g., in St Sophia, in Constantinople, a
donor inscription commemorated repair works by Romanos III Argyros: G. MERCATI, Sulle iscrizioni di Santa Sofia, in: Collect-
tanea Byzantina. Bari 1970, II 293; a further imperial inscription from Nicaea marked the rebuilding of the Church of the Dormition
after the earthquake in the 11th-c: RHODY I, no. M17, 18, 405–406. For further evidence of imperial patronage, see: PAUL,
Historical figures; F. BERNARD, The Anonymous of Sola and the School of Nosiai. JÖB 61 (2011) 81–88; W. HÖRANDNER, Epi-
grams on Icons and Sacred Objects. The Collection of Cod. Marc. gr. 524 once again, in: M. SALVADORE (ed.), La poesia tar-
12th-c material SPINGOU, Words and artworks.

Boundary stones: ASDRACHA, supplement, 310–316; bridge built by the monk Nikodemos over the River Eutos (see above,
note 28); a tower built by the bishop, synkellos and rhaiktor Leo of Athens (Byzantine Museum, Athens, no. BXM 861); gate of a
praetorium in Chersonessos: B. LATYSHEV, Eştrudy po Vizantijskoj epigrafike, 3. Nadpis’ vremeni Isaka Kommina, najdennaja v’
Xersonija. VV 2 (1895) 184–188; Southern Italy: a fortified residence of the Byzantine governor in the port of Bari built by
the ruler Basil Mesardontes (GUILLOU, Recueil des inscriptions, no. 143, 154–159; RHODY III, no. IT2).

As is the case, for example, with inscriptions on Byzantine imperial gifts such as crowns and silks: HILSDALE, The Social Life of
the Byzantine Gift; MUTHESIUS, Byzantine silk weaving 34–37.

On the role of the topoteretes of the Byzantine fleet Constantine in quenching the rebellion of George Maniakes in 1042, see: A.
JACOB, Le topotèrète de la flotte Constantin et la révolte de George Maniakès en 1042 dans une inscription inédite de terre

The astrolabe from Brescia testifies to an interest in astrology and Arabic culture in general in the eleventh century. It bears two
inscriptions: in verse, describing the object itself, and in prose, with the patron’s name, title and a dating formula: RHODY II, no.
Mef2, 223–224; GUILLOU, Recueil des inscriptions, no. 13, 14–15.

For a building inscription from Amasya written in a Homeric style, see: MANGO, A Homeric Inscription; for the inscription fea-
turing Aesopic fables in verse from a monastery in Eski Gümiş (M. GOUGH, Anatolian Studies 15 [1965] 162–164, cf. LAUX-
TERMANN, Byzantine Poetry 176: RHODY II edited other ‘Aesopian’ epigrams from Eski Gümiş: nos. Add19–21, 402–406); on
Aesopic verses from the Mani and the Pontos, see: N. B. DRANDAKES, Ἀναδιπλοῦτος παράστασις Βυζαντίνου μύθου. EEBS 39–40

For inscriptions on seals that use this kind of epigraphic formula, see the PBW catalogue of inscriptions on seals: M. JEFFREYS [et
al.], Prosopography of the Byzantine World: http://db.pbw.kcl.ac.uk/jsp/browseseals.jsp (consulted in February 2014).
Although the epigraphic production of this period has uncovered a few surprises, for example, in the cases of the obituaries of ordinary people and inscribed boundary stones, the overall trends can be unmistakably identified, whereby the formulaic character of inscripational texts dominates the epigraphic habit, and the range of inscripational media becomes wider than the generic range of their epigraphic formulae. These developments can be clearly recognized from the eleventh century as they continue uninterrupted into the Komnenian and Palaiologan times.

THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST

The eleventh century seems to have been a time when the epigraphic presence of artists and craftsmen became more prominent, as they increasingly left their names, and written records of their activities in public texts. One of the most outstanding attestations of this practice can be found on the bronze door of the Church of St Paolo Fuori le Mura in Rome, which was exported from Byzantium in 1070. It preserves the memory of a craftsman, the metalworker (χαρτής) Staurakios, who expresses himself bilingually, in Greek and Syriac, and leaves his exhortation for a perpetual prayer inscribed on his artwork (οἱ ἁγιασμένοι ἡμῶν ἐξέσοδε καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοί). The same door carries the signature of the second bronze worker, Theodore, who invokes the protection of Sts Peter and Paul as remuneration for his work on the decoration (γράφειν) of the door. Another example of artists’ self-representation can be found in the strikingly colourful crypt of the Church of the Madonna delle Grazie (Sts Marina and Christina) in Carpignano Salentino, whose painter (ζωγράφος) Eustathios signed his work using the customary formula ‘by the hand of’ (διὰ χειρός). A somewhat different pattern can be seen in the case of the family of metalworkers from Pugliano, who were probably of Greek extraction, and acted in their capacity as patrons, rather than being exclusively artists. They left a votive dedication composed in Latin (but written in the Greek alphabet!) on a sarcophagus in the Chapel of St Antonio of the Church of Santa Maria.

The inscripational record of artists and their activities for this period is particularly strong in Italy though it is by no means exclusive to this region. A further three pieces of evidence coming from the Greek mainland and Mt Sinai supply additional layers to the question of artistic presence in eleventh-century epigraphy. The first concerns a group of middle Byzantine donor inscriptions from the Mani that preserve the names of stonemasons who executed the majority of inscriptions commissioned by the patrons from the local monastic, ecclesiastical and secular communities. In some cases, the stonemasons go so far as to inscribe themselves among the donors, and thus leave little doubt about the significant position that they themselves had in their society. The Mani inscriptions testify to the existence of at least three marble workshops. Craftsmen from each of these disclose their names, professions and even places of origin. Νηήκής μάρτιος ἅπα ὕνορας Μοίλης, for example, leaves his signature in five different instances, while Γεώργιος μάστορας even places his name before those of the patrons who must have commissioned his services, and would have customarily been afforded the more prominent place in the display.
A further two pieces of epigraphic evidence shed a somewhat different light on the question of artistic self-expression. One dates back to the very end of the eleventh century (or possibly the beginning of the twelfth), and connects the name of John Tohabi with a total of six icons whose elaborate inscriptions make use of both the Greek and the Georgian language, and indicate Tohabi’s direct involvement in the process of the production and display of the images and texts. The icons are inscribed with five deictic and highly self-referential epigrams, four of which are in Greek. They also feature two donor portraits, most probably of Tohabi himself, who is seen depicted in the act of adoration before the Virgin and, in the second instance, in front of the Gate of Paradise. The epigrams are painted on the reverse of the wooden panels, and describe the scenes on the anterior so accurately as to leave no doubt that they were purpose-made and intended to accompany precisely the images to which they refer. Moreover, the poems disclose explicit personal detail about John Tohabi: he is mentioned as a presbyter and monk (πρόθυρον μοναχής εὐελώσας Ἰωάννης, οἰκτρός πρεσβύτης, μοναχός, διότι τοῦ ἐν μονοτρόποις), the painter and/or the author of inscriptions (the terms used could denote the acts of both painting and writing/inscribing: ἐγράφε, ... γράφας ... ἐρύθη ὁμορεί, σπηλιογράφησας, αἰνοτορίσμη) and as a donor (τὰς ἱεράς ... ταύτας εἰκόνας, ἀς καὶ δώμα δέδοκε). In spite of the vagueness of insessional formulae, we are very likely witnessing an exceptionally creative individual, who may have united in himself the roles of the patron, the author, as well as possibly also acting as the artist. Challengingly, the vocabulary employed in the poems does not allow us to ascertain the exact level of Tohabi’s artistic and/or authorial involvement in the execution of the icons and the accompanying inscriptive material. The same vagueness of expression can be found in the case of Stephen, who uses the verbs τισορεό and somewhat more emphatic μορφεί, to denote his own role in the making of the two eleventh-century icons, of Elijah and Moses, for the St Catherine’s Monastery on Mt Sinai. He, like Tohabi, leaves inscriptions in two languages, although, in this case, Stephen’s invocation in Greek is repeated almost verbatim in Arabic.

Overall, however, at least considering eleventh-century evidence, we still know more about artists who executed manuscript illumination than about those who worked in other crafts. Hortatory formulae and terms of humility that the painters and metalworkers use in their inscribed signatures to a great extent coincide with those found in the contemporary manuscript material. It seems therefore likely that the epigraphic custom of signing one’s work, which had dwindled since early Byzantium, when mosaicists customarily requested prayers on behalf of themselves, fellow-workmen and their own families, was gradually reintroduced into the middle Byzantine inscriptive habit from contemporary scribal practices. That the connection between these two artistic media may have been even more immediate is suggested by several graffiti from the Chapel of Niketas Stylites in Kızıl Çukur in Cappadocia. This site preserves an extraordinary number of informal incised and painted epigraphs, some of which display such precision and skill as to seem to have been exe-

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78 N. Thierry, Haut Moyen Age en Cappadoce. Les églises de la région de Çavuşin, II. Paris 1994, 278–279, nos. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, pl. 146a–c.
trons of themselves as the makers of highly accomplished and widely recognized artwork. The trend of signing one’s work continues into the later period. Late Byzantium in particular generated far more frequent instances of artists’ inscriptions, and it has attracted scholarly attention much more than is currently the case with the evidence dating to the eleventh century. 79

THE VISUAL QUALITIES OF ELEVENTH-CENTURY INSCRIPTIONS

The formulaic nature of textual evidence makes much of the inscriptional material associated with the eleventh century notoriously difficult to date with precision. This aspect of the middle Byzantine epigraphic habit serves as an apt pretext for discussing a further noteworthy development, dated to the end of the tenth century, of a noticeable change in the palaeography of Greek inscriptions, whereby monumental texts start to be executed in a markedly elaborate and decorative manner. Although the script largely remains majuscule, it makes abundant use of ligatures, abbreviations, writing marks, and some minuscule letters, even at the expense of the general legibility and visibility. 80

Although the exact reasons for this modification are still not clear, the gradual evolution that had taken place over roughly a century, being completed in the course of eleventh century, allows us to roughly date otherwise undated Byzantine inscriptions on the grounds of their script to the time either before or after this period. The epigraphic material considered in this essay concurs with this observation, as well as indicating that a more precise dating on the basis of a palaeographical analysis cannot be fully productive unless the regional character of Byzantine epigraphic material is taken into consideration, and the features of language, orthography, dating systems, and inscriptional formulae are also explored in some detail. Such methodology is best tested against the backdrop of evidence that is homogeneous in chronology and provenance, as can be demonstrated, for example, by a study of public writing found on the site of the medieval Acropolis in Athens. On the basis of the uniformity of style in many of the extant middle Byzantine inscriptions from this site, the existence of professional stonemasons and painters can be surmised, who were presumably based in the neighbourhood, and could offer their services to pilgrims and locally based customers. 81 The evidence of donor inscriptions from the Mani confirms that such workshops continued to exist in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that the consistency in the palaeography and contents of local monumental writing can be attributed to them. 82

The claim about the local traits of Byzantine epigraphy notwithstanding, it also seems to have been the case that some trends in the palaeography of middle Byzantine inscriptions were carried from the centre to the periphery, or the other way around, but either way further afield: Nicole Thierry, for example, identifies a ‘schematic’ style in the Church of St Michael Ihla in Cappadocia, which she then associates with the styles of painting and writing found in eleventh-century ecclesiastical material across the empire. 83 This approach, however, must come with a caveat: many churches dating back to the middle Byzantine period were subject


81 KALDELLIS, Parthenon 79. Some eleventh-century material in particular shows a high degree of uniformity, such as, for example: ORLANDOS – BRANOUSES, Τα χαρακτήρα, nos. 55–60.

82 KALOPISSI-VERTI, Epigraphic evidence in Middle-Byzantine Churches of the Mani, passim.

to continuous repair work, and this could cause epigraphic testimonies that carry eleventh-century dates to be unreliable by virtue of displaying palaeographic characteristics of later centuries.\(^8^4\)

Naturally, the more closely associated the material is with the major centres of production, the more confidently it can be contextualised, just as has been possible in the case of the three eleventh-century Greek inscriptions from Otranto and Bari in Italy. These epigraphy have been connected with Constantinopolitan workshops on the basis of their style and quality of execution.\(^8^5\) Most recently, a Homeric inscription from Amaseia has been re-dated to the tenth/eleventh century because it provides "an excellent example on stone of what Herbert Hunger, speaking of middle Byzantine manuscripts, called *epigraphische Auszeichnungs-majuskel*.\(^8^6\) This script features fairly regularly in middle and late Byzantine manuscript material, where it exemplifies the epigraphic style used for inscribing prose and verse peritext such as titles, colophons and book epigrams. It has been frequently linked with the production of Constantinopolitan, and even more directly, imperial, scriptoria and workshops, but it can also be traced, beyond writing on soft materials, across other artistic media, that is, in stone, mosaic, and fresco painting. This indicates that in the eleventh century as well as later there existed a clear idea of the specific visual appearance and signification of formal inscriptive writing. The existence of such scripts also suggests that they could be employed to send strong messages of officialdom and authority even without any elaborate verbalization of their formal or institutional provenance.\(^8^7\)

The noticeable emphasis on visual appearance in many eleventh-century inscriptions does not seem to have been restricted only to epigraphic material in Greek. The example of the rising number of pseudo-Kufic inscriptions offers a case in point. The middle Byzantine period was marked by a lively interest in Eastern culture and art. Islamic artisans worked for Byzantine patrons, including the emperor, and the Constantinopolitan court developed a taste for Arabic-style art through the trade of luxury objects and diplomatic gifts from the east. This eventually prompted Byzantine imitations of these objects. The well-known glass bowl, now in San Marco in Venice, decorated with the images of Greek deities and arabesque ornament in the form of a Kufesque inscription, represents an extraordinary example of a larger body of material that naturally, the more closely associated the material is with the major centres of production, the more confidently it can be contextualised, just as has been possible in the case of the three eleventh-century Greek inscriptions from Otranto and Bari in Italy. These epigraphy have been connected with Constantinopolitan workshops on the basis of their style and quality of execution.\(^8^5\) Most recently, a Homeric inscription from Amaseia has been re-dated to the tenth/eleventh century because it provides "an excellent example on stone of what Herbert Hunger, speaking of middle Byzantine manuscripts, called *epigraphische Auszeichnungs-majuskel*.\(^8^6\) This script features fairly regularly in middle and late Byzantine manuscript material, where it exemplifies the epigraphic style used for inscribing prose and verse peritext such as titles, colophons and book epigrams. It has been frequently linked with the production of Constantinopolitan, and even more directly, imperial, scriptoria and workshops, but it can also be traced, beyond writing on soft materials, across other artistic media, that is, in stone, mosaic, and fresco painting. This indicates that in the eleventh century as well as later there existed a clear idea of the specific visual appearance and signification of formal inscriptive writing. The existence of such scripts also suggests that they could be employed to send strong messages of officialdom and authority even without any elaborate verbalization of their formal or institutional provenance.\(^8^7\)

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Athenian churches such as the Holy Apostoles of Solakis, Hagioi Theodori, Hagioi Asomatoi, Panagia Lykodemou and Kapnikarea can also be viewed in this context. While the decorative motifs on their walls in imitation of the old Arabic script may have been influenced by the abundant islamicizing decorations of Hosios Loukas in Phocis, which preserves the earliest example of arabesque cloisonné brickwork in Greece, there is little doubt that these monuments follow the general trend of cultural hybridity in middle Byzantine art. The verbal meaning of the Athenian pseudo-epigraphs—if any at all was intended—remains obscure, but the presence of such inscriptive material most certainly adds a semantic note of cosmopolitan, exotic, and apotropaic nature, and it thus enhances symbolic value that inscribed texts commonly encompass and convey.89

Although preliminary, the present study aims to demonstrate that, in addition to their literal sense, inscriptions could also communicate alternative and equally potent meaning. The eleventh-century material considered here shows that inscriptions can define space and symbolize ideology, authority, and status; that they can confirm religious tenets, show changes in religious practices, assume apotropaic significance and be used to decorative ends.

Equally significantly, the epigraphic evidence considered here prompts us to think about the Byzantine culture of writing as a complex phenomenon in terms of both the readership/audiences that it addresses, and the ideas that it communicates. Eleventh-century inscriptions remind us that, in the manner of epigraphic heteroglossia, the same or similar inscriptive material can vary in its stylistic and linguistic registers. This in turn provides a more complete and longer-lasting public statement about the intellectual background and social status of the commissioner. The inclusion of religious imagery further enhances the message of piety and spiritual integrity by way of reaching the widest spectrum of possible recipients.

These notions arguably cannot be considered as independent from the idea of epigraphy; rather, as their appraisal expands the operative range of any inscribed text that they accompany, they should be viewed as an integral part of any inscriptive practice within which they feature. Therefore, when we lament the declining epigraphic habit in Byzantium and the poor state of the discipline of Byzantine epigraphy in modern times, we should also bear in mind that, in order to manage these deficiencies, it is no longer sufficient to simply generate more studies that are concerned with reading inscriptions as mere texts. Although it goes without saying that being sufficiently well equipped to understand the literal sense of any inscribed writing is a mandatory starting point, this material, whenever possible, should also be examined with a good understanding of its original context and function, and with full appreciation of the material aspect of writing, and of the verbal, visual and symbolic meaning that it carries.

Fig. 1: Antioch: obituary of Bardas

Fig. 2: St Sophia, Constantinople: donor portraits of Zoe and Constantine IX Monomachos
Fig. 3: Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessaloniki: donor inscription

Fig. 4: St Theodori, Athens: Pseudo-Kufic decoration and verses dedicated to Nikolaos Kalomalos
Fig. 5: Invocation of behalf of Eumathios, the protostrator and strategos of Crete

Fig. 6: Apros: restauration of a city gate by Constantine X and Eudocia