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Off the Page and Beyond Middle-Byzantine Constantinople: An Epigram by Theodore Prodromos on a Fresco of the Deposition in Latin-Ruled Naxos (Early Fourteenth Century)*

with 11 figures

ABSTRACT: In this article I examine an epigram by Theodore Prodromos, which was recently found inscribed on an early fourteenth-century fresco of the Deposition in the private church of Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos. The epigram is composed in iambic dodecasyllables and has been identified with the first poem in his well-known collection of epigrams on the Old and New Testaments, the Tetrasticha, where it is entitled *Eis tēn apokathēlōsin* (On the Deposition) (Tetr. 262a). I discuss the intimate relationship between the imagery of the epigram and Byzantine scenes of the Deposition, something that most probably shows that Prodromos was familiar with the contemporary iconography of the scene. The analysis of its reproduction on the fourteenth-century fresco at Potamia—a composition largely based on the middle-Byzantine iconographic tradition for this scene—shows that Tetr. 262a was in this case most probably treated as a purely prose inscription, closely associated with its protagonist Nicodemus and his actions in the event. Its focus on a secondary character, who is depicted performing a practical task in the scenes of Deposition, probably explains its unparalleled appearance in this small church on Naxos. Finally, I discuss the possible routes that could have brought the Tetr. 262a to the island and I conclude that this epigram is likely to have reached Naxos together with the specific variant of the scene from a model book, which was largely based on middle Byzantine imagery and texts.

KEYWORDS: Theodore Prodromos; Epigram; Tetrasticha; Monumental Painting; Deposition; Nicodemus; Secondary Characters; Transmission of Epigrams; Naxos

The epigrams that have been preserved in Byzantine painted programmes are today known to us thanks to the extraordinary corpus compiled by Andreas Rhoby¹. Of the numerous metrical inscriptions collected to date, however, only a small number can be attributed to known Byzantine authors². And the majority of them, especially those that accompany narrative scenes, were used in

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¹ On epigrams on monumental painting see A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* (VB 15). Wien 2009; IDEM, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst. Nebst Addenda zu Band I “Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken”* (VB 23). Wien 2010, 36, 391–413; IDEM, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein nebst Addenda zu den Bänden 1 und 2* (VB 35). Wien 2014, 103, Teil II, 773–811; IDEM, *Ausgewählte Byzantinische Epigramme in illuminierten Handschriften* (VB 42). Wien 2018, 529–531.

² On epigrams that have been preserved on monumental painting and where the corresponding author has been identified see primarily RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* 53–55. For a discussion of these epigrams in the context of the corresponding painted decoration see V. KEPETZI, *Autour d’une inscription métrique et de la représentation des apôtres Pierre et Paul dans une église en Élide*, in: *Ritual and Art. Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. P. Armstrong. London 2006, 160–181; M. PATEDAKIS, *Agnōsto epigramma ston naisko tīs Koimīsīs ston Agio Iōannī Mylopotamou*, in: *Paideia kai politismos stīn Krītī, Vyzantio – Venetokratia. Afierōma ston Theochaī Deterakī*, ed. I. Vassis –

churches that date to a much later period than the poems themselves, and in regions well beyond the latter's place of origin, i.e. Constantinople³. In this article, I focus on an epigram by the famous twelfth-century author Theodore Prodromos found inscribed on an early fourteenth-century wall painting in a privately-founded church on the island of Naxos. This inscription was unknown to the wider academic community until recently⁴. Its identification offers a new example of Prodromos's tetrasticha found *in situ*, thus strengthening the hypothesis that these epigrams were (re)used as inscriptions at least from the thirteenth/fourteenth century onwards. Moreover, this epigram enables us to reflect on some significant issues arising from the introduction of these metrical texts to the painted decoration of churches, namely, the way they were perceived by painters, patrons, and other viewers, and how this specific type of text travelled through time and space.

THE CHURCH OF AGIOS GEORGIOS AT KATO POTAMIA

Agios Georgios, a medium-sized, barrel-vaulted, single-nave church, is located on the top of a low hill, outside the present-day village of Kato Potamia (**Fig. 1**)⁵. Of the original decoration, the frescoes of the barrel vault in the sanctuary and those on the north side of the barrel vault and the north wall of the nave are the best preserved. Scenes from the Infancy, Ministry and Passion of Christ adorned the nave vault. The Presentation in the Temple (**Fig. 2**), the Baptism of Christ, and the Entry into Jerusalem were depicted on the south side. Today only fragments of these scenes are visible. A large Crucifixion, now in a poor state of preservation, occupies the tympanum of the west wall. The narrative continues with the Descent from the Cross, the Women at the Tomb, and the Incredulity of Thomas on the north side of the vault (**Fig. 3, 4, 5**). The scenes of the Lamentation and the Descent into Hell appear out of sequence on the vault of the bema⁶. Several standing saints decorated the lower zone of the church. Today only St. Mamas on the west wall, and St. Nicholas on the north can be identified.

The iconography of the scenes is plain both in terms of the figures and the narrative details, and it generally corresponds to that of middle Byzantine schemes⁷. The insertion of specific motifs shows that the painter or painters were also to some extent familiar with the contemporary icono-

St. Kaklamanis – M. Loukaki. Iraklion 2008, 57–69; N.P. ŠEVČENKO, The metrical Inscriptions in the murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, in: *Asinou across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa*, Cyprus, ed. A. Weyl Carr – A. Nicolaïdès (*DOS* 43). Washington, D.C. 2012, 69–90; M. PATEDAKIS, *Mia epigrafi me ĩgemonikī diastasi. Epigramma tou Theodōrou Prodromou sto Vivlos geneseōs (evang. Matthaiou 1.1) apo tīn Panagia ston Merōna*, in: Margaritai. *Meletes stī Mnīmī toy Manolī Borboudaki*, ed. M.S. Patedakis – K.D. Giapitsoglou. Sitia 2016, 328–359; and A. RHOBY, On the Inscriptional Versions of the Epigrams of Christophoros Mitylenaios, in: *Poetry and its Contexts in Eleventh-century Byzantium*, ed. F. Bernard – K. Demoen. London 2016, 147–154. On epigrams that have been preserved on stone artefacts, icons, small art objects, and manuscripts, and that are attributed to known authors see A. PAUL, *Dichtung auf Objekten. Inschriftlich erhaltene griechische Epigramme vom 9. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert: Suche nach bekannten Autorennamen*, in: *Byzantinische Sprachkunst. Studien zur byzantinischen Literatur gewidmet Wolfram Hörandner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Hinterberger – E. Schiffer (*Byzantisches Archiv* 20). Berlin – New York 2007, 234–265; RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten* 36–38; IDEM, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein* 94–97; IDEM, *Ausgewählte Byzantinische Epigramme in illuminierten Handschriften* 71–73.

³ RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* 52, 53–55.

⁴ T. KONSTANTELOU, *Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs stīn ypaithro tīs Naxou (telī 13ou-arches 14ou aiōna): koinōnikos chōros kai eikastikī dīmiourgia*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Athens 2019, 283–287.

⁵ The dimensions of the church are: 6.42x3.77m. The architecture and the wall paintings are unpublished. For some brief references see N. ZIAS, *Byzantina, mesaionika kai neōtera mnīmeia nīsōn tou Aigaiou*. *AD* 28 (1973) 554; G.S. MASTOROPOULOS, *Naxos. To allo kallos*. Athens 2006, 112. For a recent analysis of the frescoes see KONSTANTELOU, *Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs* 278–293.

⁶ The rendering and the colours of these frescoes are a little different from the paintings in the nave and must be attributed to a second painter or to a somewhat later date.

⁷ KONSTANTELOU, *Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs* 278–293.

graphy of Palaiologan art and that of the Levant⁸. The depicted saints were popular in other churches of the island during the late Medieval period. The inscriptions found in the painted decoration are also of the standard kind, i.e. captions identifying the scenes, the holy figures, and the buildings, as well as narrative passages written on the scenes⁹. Of these, only the inscription that accompanies the composition of the Deposition, which will be examined below, is metrical.



(left) Figure 1: Church of Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos, view from southwest (Photo: author)

(right) Figure 2: The Presentation in the Temple, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)



Figure 3: The Deposition, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)

⁸ KONSTANTELLOU, Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs 278–293. The scenes of the Deposition and the Women at the Tomb analyzed in this paper are representative of this approach to the iconography of the scenes.

⁹ KONSTANTELLOU, Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs 278–280. See also below, pp. 101–102.



Figure 4: The Women at the Tomb, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)



Figure 5: The Incredulity of Thomas, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)

From the dedicatory inscription over the entrance to the church, which probably mentioned the names of the donors and the date of the erection and/or painted decoration of the church, only the following letters are preserved: +ΔΕC ΜΘΤ [...] ΜΟ.ΤΩΝ..ΨΩΝ [...] (+DES ΜΤΗΤ [...] ΜΟ.ΤΩΝ..ΨΩΝ [...]). A small section from a second, supplicatory inscription is also preserved next to an unidentified female saint on the eastern arch of the north wall. The inscription reads: ΔΕΗCIC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ [...] (ΔΕΪCΙC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ [...]).

These losses prevent us from reconstructing the context in which this fresco decoration was created with any certainty. A recent analysis of the painted decoration has dated the frescoes to the first decades of the fourteenth century, and attributed them to a local painting workshop, which was active in the countryside of the island during the last quarter of the thirteenth century and the first quarter of the fourteenth century¹⁰. The small size of the church indicates that it was probably built as a family chapel. Despite its modest external appearance and the simple plan, the prominent location and the relatively good quality of the frescoes suggest the patrons were individuals of some social status¹¹.

¹⁰ KONSTANTELOU, Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs 292–293.

¹¹ It is worth noting that some of the patrons of the churches who chose to employ the painters of this workshop were probably among the local archons of the island. On the patron of Agios Konstantinos in Vourvouria (1310) who is given the honorific epithet *kȳr* in the dedicatory inscription, see A. KOSTARELLI, *Ī mnīmeiakī zōgraphikī to 14o aiōna stī Naxo: ta akriivōs chronologīmena mnīmeia*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ioannina 2013, 61–64 and KONSTANTELOU, Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs 272–273.

THE SCENE OF THE DEPOSITION AND THE TETR. 262A OF THEODORE PRODRAMOS

The scene, inscribed in the upper left corner Η ΑΠΟΚΑΘΗΛΩΣΙΣ (The Deposition), is well preserved (**Fig. 3**)¹². The event depicted is unfolding in front of the city wall and two buildings in Jerusalem. At the centre of the composition, Christ is portrayed with his eyes closed, his head falling onto his shoulder, and with his left hand still nailed to the cross. He is wearing a white loincloth. A short inscription is written on the horizontal beam at the top of the cross. It reads: Ι(ΗCOY)C X(PICTO)C Ο ΒΑCΙ(ΛΕΥC) ΘΗ(C) ΔΟΞ(HC) (Jesus Christ, the King of Glory)¹³. The burial shroud decorated with small red fleurs-de-lys is depicted behind Christ's body.

On the left-hand side¹⁴ of the composition, Joseph of Arimathea, standing with one foot on a narrow ledge below the suppedaneum of the cross and the other suspended in the air, grasps the body of the dead Christ. He is clad in a brown chiton and a red himation. Behind him the Virgin raises her veiled hands and presses her son's hand against her cheek. She is wearing the traditional blue robe and reddish brown maphorion. John stands next to her and inclines his head towards his veiled raised hand¹⁵. He is dressed in a blue chiton and a reddish brown himation. These two figures are accompanied by their names. The figure of the Virgin is labelled Μ(ΗΤΗ)Ρ Θ(ΕΟ)Υ (Mother of God) and St. John ΙΩ(ΑΝΝΗC).

On the right, Nicodemus is represented standing on a ladder and extracting the nail from Jesus' hand with pliers. He is depicted as a rather ugly figure and is wearing a brown garment with short sleeves, as seen on the left shoulder, over a short red tunic. His depiction matches the way in which the man who frees the hands and feet of Christ is generally depicted in the scenes of the Deposition, i.e. wearing a short tunic, the usual attire of a workman, with bare arms and legs, and sometimes as a tiny, rather ugly figure¹⁶. However, this representation does not agree with the identity

¹² Matthew 27:57–59; Mark 15: 43–46; Luke 23:50–53 and John 19:38–40. The Descent from the Cross appears in Byzantine art soon after Iconoclasm. The earliest image occurs in the manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris gr. 510, 867–886) (L. BRUBAKER, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*. Cambridge 1999, 296–297). For the literary texts that formed the iconography of the scene and discussion on the variants and their meanings see G. MILLET, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*. Paris 1916, 467–488; M. BOSKOVITS – G. JÁSZAI, *Kreuzabnahme*. *LCI* 2 (1970) 590–595; G. SCHILLER, *The Deposition*, in: EADEM, *Iconography of Christian Art*, transl. J. Seligman. London 1971–1972, 2, 164–168; K. WEITZMANN, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection: Ivories and steatites*. Washington D.C. 1972, 66–68; E. PARKER, *The Descent from the Cross: its Relation to the Extra-Liturgical Depositio Drama*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New York University 1975; L. HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo*. *Les fresques de Saint Georges et la peinture du XIIe siècle*. Brussels 1975, 152; L. REAU, *La Descente de Croix*, in: *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, II/2 (1977) 513–518; H. MAGUIRE, *The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art*. *DOP* 31 (1977) 162–163 and passim; Y. NAGATSUKA, *Descente de la Croix, son développement iconographique des origines jusqu'à la fin du XIVe siècle*. Tokyo 1979; D. MOURIKI, *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, transl. R. Burgi. Athens 1985, 132–133; M. EMMANOUIL, *Oi toichographies tou Agiou Dimitriou sto Makrychōri kai tīs Koimīseōs tīs Theotokou ston Oxylioth tīs Euboias (Etaireia Euboikōn Spoudōn, Parartīma tou Kī' tomou)*. Athens 1991, 69–71, 119–120; V. FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina. Eikonografikī kai technotropikī analysī tōn toichographiōn*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Athens 2000, 192–199; I. SINKEVIĆ, *The Church of St. Pan-teleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage*. Wiesbaden 2000, 53–54.

¹³ The inscription comes from Psalm 23(24):7–10. It is mostly inscribed on the cross in the Man of Sorrows and the Crucifixion, especially during the Late Byzantine Period. More rarely it appears in the scene of the Deposition. On this see HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo* 152; EMMANOUIL, *Eubolia* 120, with examples and earlier bibliography.

¹⁴ Left and right are used here from the viewer's perspective.

¹⁵ Following the iconography of the scene of the Crucifixion, John is usually placed at the right side of the composition and not behind the Virgin. This pairing appears rather rarely in the middle Byzantine examples of the scene (NAGATSUKA, *Descente de la Croix* 19, 20, 41, XVI [V B 401]). The introduction of the ladder in the iconography of the scene in the second half of the eleventh century and the lack of available scape likely explain this arrangement.

¹⁶ There are some exceptions to this rule. For example, in some tenth- and eleventh-century images of the Deposition Nicodemus wears a long tunic, such as the one worn by Joseph of Arimathea (WEITZMANN, *Catalogue* 67; MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 133).

ascribed to Nicodemus by the evangelist John—the only evangelist to mention Nicodemus in his description of this event—i.e. a wealthy Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council (John, 3:1). Moreover, John simply says that Nicodemus was present and brought an enormous quantity of myrrh and aloë to anoint the body of Christ (John 19:39) and, most importantly, he does not associate him with the process of removing the nails from the body of Christ.

This, and the fact that this lowly figure is not identified by name, inevitably leads to some reservations about identifying the man who removes the nails with Nicodemus in all cases¹⁷. In the church of Agios Georgios, however, this figure can safely be identified with Nicodemus thanks to the epigram that is at the heart of this paper. In fact, Potamia is not an exception, since the name Nicodemus accompanies the nail-removing figure in other Deposition scenes that date to approximately the same period¹⁸. In the church of Omorpe Ekklesia (1289) on the island of Aegina (also under Latin rule in this period), the initial letter N of Nicodemus is inscribed above the head of the nimbed “workman” who removes the nails from the feet of Christ (**Fig. 6**)¹⁹. In the church of Agios Nikolaos at Elenes in Venetian Crete (c.1300) all the figures are accompanied by their names, including Nicodemus (O NIKOΔIMOC), who is once again dressed as a workman and, in this case, has a halo (**Fig. 7**)²⁰. Despite the number of examples presented here being somewhat restricted, I believe that at least some of the workshop painters, the church's patrons and congregants would have recognized Nicodemus in this intriguing figure²¹.

Returning to the scene at Potamia, most of its elements derive from the iconographic tradition of the middle Byzantine period. In depicting the body of Christ, the painter at Potamia follows an iconographic variant, known from as early as the ninth century, in which Christ has one hand freed from the cross, while the other is still nailed to it²². Although this pose continues to appear in late Byzantine examples of the scene²³, the more common variant shows the upper part of Christ's dead body forming a diagonal, having been removed from the cross, and being embraced by the Virgin, whose gestures, facial expression and posture now emphatically depict her suffering at the death of

¹⁷ The workman could be identified with one of the Jews who extracted the nails from the hands of Christ and lay his body upon the earth according to the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (J. MONTAGUE RHODES, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford 1983, 91). In his monograph Yasushi Nagatsuka accepts without reservation the identification of the nail-removing figure with Nicodemus and sees behind this “humble” way of depicting him an attempt to emphasize the leading role of Joseph in the scene (NAGATSKA, *Descente de la Croix* 5, 14–16). According to Doula Mouriki, the fact that Nicodemus is engaged in manual labour explains his depiction by the painters as a workman (MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 133).

¹⁸ I must admit that my survey has not been extensive and there may be other cases. In the examples I was able to locate, this insistence on naming was extended to other supplementary figures in other narrative scenes as well. This approach, which appears in some painted decorations of the middle Byzantine period and becomes more systematic in the late Byzantine period, requires a future separate study.

¹⁹ FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina* 192–199.

²⁰ On the frescoes of the church see I. SPATHARAKIS – T. VAN ESSENBERG, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, III, Amari Province. Leiden 2012, 48–59.

²¹ It is rather difficult to establish when the tradition of Nicodemus removing the nails from the hands and feet of Christ crystallized and to understand how widespread this narrative was. Apart from the scenes mentioned in the text and the text of the epigram which will be examined in this article, this association of Nicodemus with the removal of the nails is to be found in two homilies of the middle Byzantine period. On these see below, pp. 97–98. We can probably assume that the references made in the vespers and the compline of Holy Friday, namely that Joseph together with Nicodemus took down the body of Christ from the cross, played a role in the second figure in the scenes becoming identified with Nicodemus (The Lenten Triodion 615, 618 [Transl. MOTHER MARY – ARCHIMANDRITE K. WARE, *The Lenten Triodion*. South Canaan PA 2002]). Moreover, we should add that in the eighteenth century Dionysios of Fournā identifies this figure with Nicodemus (Dionysios of Fournā, *Hermeneia* 109 [ed. A. PAPADOPOULOU-KERAMEUS, *Dionysiou tou ek Phournā hermeneia tīs zōgraphikīs technīs*. St. Petersburg 1909]).

²² WEITZMANN, *Catalogue* 66–68; BRUBAKER, *Vision and Meaning* 296–297. See also HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo* 154–155; Mouriki, *Nea Moni* 132–133.

²³ NAGATSKA, *Descente de la Croix*; FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina* 192–199.

her son²⁴. In this type, Joseph is frequently depicted putting his arms around Christ from behind, while Nicodemus is shown standing on the ground and removing the nails from his feet.



Figure 6: The Deposition, 1289, Omorpe Ekklesia, Aigina (Photo: author)



Figure 7: The Deposition, c. 1300, Agios Nikolaos at Elenes, Crete (Photo: Ioannis Spatharakis)

The upright poses and reserved gestures of grief of the Virgin and St. John at Potamia, as well as Joseph's awkward position, all conform with the middle Byzantine depictions of the scene. Other figures and motifs that are usually included in Deposition scenes contemporary with Potamia, such as the lamenting women, the weeping angels, and the cosmic symbols of the sun and the moon, are absent in this case²⁵. It seems that the emphasis at Potamia is on the main action, the removal of the dead body of Christ, and not so much on the grief resulting from the Passion, a theme that had been increasingly highlighted through the highly emotive participation of the Virgin and other figures from the mid-twelfth century onwards²⁶. Here the expression of sorrow is restrained. What links the scene from Potamia with later representations of the same scene is the depiction of the city wall of Jerusalem²⁷ and its buildings, features that appear more systematically from the thirteenth century on²⁸. What is rather rare is the inclusion of the burial shroud behind the body of Christ, and more specifically the way in which it is depicted²⁹ and decorated with the red

²⁴ A variant also known from the middle Byzantine period. On this see MILLET, *Recherches* 474; NAGATSUKA, *Descente de la Croix* 58–62 and *passim*; MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 132; FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina* 98, with bibliography and examples.

²⁵ On their introduction into the scene see above all, HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo* 154–155; EMMANOUIL, *Euboia* 70, 119–120; FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina* 196.

²⁶ HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo* 154–155; MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 132; FOSKOLOU, *Ī Omorfī ekklēsia stīn Aigina* 197–198.

²⁷ The city wall of Jerusalem is actually illustrated in the background of the scene from the end of the twelfth century, as can be seen in the *Descent from the Cross* in the church of St. George at Kurbinovo (1191). On this see HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo* 152.

²⁸ K. DIAMANTI, *Oi toichographies tou Agiou Dimitriou (1286) stis Krokees tīs Lakōnias kai to ergastīrio tou anōnymou zōgrafou. Symbolī stī meletī tīs prōimīs palaiologeias zōgraphikīs stī Lakōnia*. Tripoli 2012, 94, 96–97, with examples from the thirteenth century; I. SPATHARAKIS, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, 1, Rethymnon Province. London 1999, 130, 189–190, 245, 299–300; IDEM – VAN ESSENBERG, *Crete* 250.

²⁹ Such cloths appear only occasionally in Byzantine scenes of the Deposition. For instance, in the mid-tenth-century ivory panel from Dresden a crumpled cloth is lying on the ground, and more specifically below the cross and the feet of Joseph of Arimathea (A. GOLDSCHMIDT – K. WEITZMANN, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 1934, 47, Nr. 40). A close match to the scene at Potamia is found in the twelfth-century Deposition from the Enkleistra of St. Neophytus in Cyprus (ca. 1200), in which the linen cloth is held by Joseph of Arimathea who is trying to lay the dead body of Christ down (C. MANGO – E.G. HAWKINS, *The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and Its Wall Paintings*. *DOP* 20

fleurs-de-lys³⁰. This is the only example of the scene preserved in the monumental decoration of Naxos³¹.

The metrical inscription is written in the top right-hand corner of the scene, occupying the space between the vertical and the right arm of the cross (**Fig. 3, 8**), and continuing below, covering part of the upper zone of the structure depicted in the background on that side. It ends above the head of Nicodemus. The inscription is made up of nine lines. It is presented here as it appears in the scene³².

- 1.1 ΤΟΛμΗΡΕ ΝΙΚΟΔιμΕ•ΡΥΨΟΝ
- 1.2 ΤΗΝ σΦΥΡΑΝ•μ'Η σΥΝτΡΙΒ'Η
- 1.3 Τῖ δεσπΟτιΚ(όν) ὍCTε(ον) Ἡ λαΒίς ἄρ
- 1.4 κει Και τ(ῶν) ΕΙΛΩΝ ΕΛΚΕ
- 1.5 τω
- 1.6 Ευ των χειρ(ῶν)
- 1.7 [μ]ετελΘΕ ΛΟΙΠΟΝ
- 1.8 [τ]ουσ πό
- 1.9 δασ

As mentioned above, the inscription can be identified with the epigram entitled *Eis tēn apokathēlōsin* by the well-known twelfth-century poet Theodore Prodromos³³. This epigram belongs to a collection of iambic and hexametric four-line poems that Prodromos composed based on selected passages from the Old and New Testaments, known as the *Tetrasticha*.³⁴ This epigram is based on a passage in the Gospel of John, the only gospel to mention Nicodemus, and more specifically on the verses that narrate his participation in the Deposition (John 19:38–40)³⁵. This is the first Tetras-

[1966] 151). According to Elizabeth Parker the presence of such cloths highlights the liturgical significance of the scene (PARKER, Deposition 78–82). The unnatural way in which the cloth is represented at Potamia, i.e. behind Joseph of Arimathea and almost suspended by the hands of Christ, recalls the cloths of honour that are depicted behind the enthroned Virgin and Child in the West from the late twelfth onwards. On the latter see K.T. BROWN, *Mary of Mercy in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Art. Devotional Image and Civic Emblem*, London and New York 2017, 102–103, with bibliography. Moreover, its luminous white colour brings to mind the phrase from the *Doxastikon* from the *Aposticha* which is sung on Holy Friday and on the Feast of the Myrrh Bearers “Joseph with Nicodemus took Thee down from the Tree, who deckest Thyself with light as with a garment” (The Lenten Triodion 615 (MOTHER MARY – ARCHIMANDRITE K. WARE)).

³⁰ On the presence of the fleur-de-lys motif in Byzantine art and its connotations from as early as the twelfth century onwards see HADERMANN-MISGUICH, Kurbinovo 316–318; EADEM, Tissues de pouvoir et de prestige sous les Macédoniens et les Comnènes. À propos des coussins-de-pieds et leurs représentations. *DChAE* (1993–1994) 127–128; R. OUSTERHOUT, The Byzantine Heart. *Zograf* 17 (1989) 38–39. On its use on coins, and architecture see IDEM, Byzantium between East and West and the Origins of Heraldry, in: *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies*, ed. C. Hourihane. Princeton, N.J. 2009, 164–165, with earlier bibliography. The same motif appears sporadically in the fourteenth-century painted programmes of Naxos (KOSTARELLI, *Ī mnīmeiakī zōgraphikī to 14o aiōna stī Naxo* 111, with examples).

³¹ This is probably due to the significant losses from painted surfaces in a large number of decorative programmes on the island.

³² The diplomatic transcription reproduces the writing marks, the punctuation, and the mixture of majuscule and minuscule letters of the inscribed text. On these features see below pp. 99–100. Translation below, on p. 97.

³³ On the poetic work of Theodore Prodromos see primarily W. HÖRANDNER, *Theodoros Prodromos, historische Gedichte (WBS 11)*. Vienna 1974; N. ZAGKLAS, *Theodoros Prodromos: Miscellaneous Poems. An Edition and Literary Study (Oxford Studies in Byzantium)*. Oxford 2023.

³⁴ On the *Tetrasticha* and their popularity see Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* (ed. G. PAPAGIANNIS, Theodoros Prodromos, *Jambische und hexametrische Tetrasticha auf die Haupteerzählungen des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, 1–2 [*Meletemata* 7]. Wiesbaden 1997); L. TASEVA, *Tetrasticha des Theodoros Prodromos in einer unbekannten serbischen Übersetzung des 14. Jahrhunderts*. *BSI* 69 (2021) 59–79.

³⁵ Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* 2, 275 (262a) (PAPAGIANNIS); I. VASSIS, *Initia Carminum Byzantinorum*. Berlin – New York 2005, 769.

tichon (262a) composed in iambic dodecasyllables³⁶. The text, as published by Papagiannis, is as follows:

Εἰς τὴν ἀποκαθήλωσιν

On the Deposition

Τολμηρὲ Νικόδημε, ῥῖψον τὴν σφύραν,
μὴ συντριβῇ τι δεσποτικὸν ὀστέον·
ἢ λαβίς ἀρκεῖ καὶ τὸν ἥλον ἐλκέτω·
εὖ τῶν χειρῶν· μέτελθε λοιπὸν τοὺς πόδας.

Brave Nicodemus, drop the hammer,
Lest it break a bone of the Lord.
The pliers suffice, let them extract the nail;
Well done with the hands; now continue with
the feet.

In Tetr. 262a the narrator probably calls Nicodemus brave because he followed the example of Joseph of Arimathea and dared like Joseph³⁷ to contribute to Christ's burial despite the hostility of the Romans and his fellow Jews³⁸. He encourages him (or indeed commands him, since he uses the verb in the imperative) to throw away the hammer so as not to break any of Christ's bones,³⁹ and to use only the pliers to extract the nails. Since Nicodemus has now released the Lord's hands from the cross, the narrator incites him to go on to free the feet. The second verse also give a specific meaning to these actions, that is, the need to protect the body of Christ, while this "command" could also reflect Prodromos's emotional response to the violence perpetrated against the body of the Lord.

Even though the involvement of Nicodemus in the act of removing the body of Christ from the Cross is absent from St. John's account of that episode—as mentioned above—Prodromos chose to elaborate this specific theme in the first tetrastichon he composed for the Gospel passage that mentions Nicodemus's presence at the event. We could argue that, in doing so, Prodromos must already have been familiar with this narrative and/or had come across texts which included this specific episode. For instance, in the homily on the Lamentation of the Virgin written either by the tenth-century author Symeon Metaphrastes or the famous twelfth-century teacher of the Patriarchal School in Constantinople Nikephoros Basilakes there is a clear reference to Nicodemus pulling the nails from the hands and feet of Christ⁴⁰. In the sermon on the Crucifixion by Michael Psellos, it is

³⁶ The hexametric epigram reads as follows: Δάκτυλά τοι, Νικόδημε, προήλυθε δάκτυλα Θωμᾶ· Θωμᾶς γὰρ μετόπισθε καὶ εἰς τύπον ἔβλεπεν ἥλων, αὐτὰρ σὺ πρότερός τε καὶ αὐτοὺς ἔδρακες ἥλους, ἐν δ' ἱερὴν ἐδίφησας ὕγρην ἔτι πλευρὰν ἄνακτος. ("Your fingers Nicodemus anteceded the fingers of Thomas; for Thomas came afterwards and looked at the nail marks, while you were there before him, pulled out the nails themselves, and touched the still dripping holy side of the King"). Theodoros Prodromos, Tetrasticha 2, 276 (262b) (PAPAGIANNIS).

³⁷ The quality of boldness is attributed to Joseph of Arimathea. See for instance, Mark 15: 43: "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus".

³⁸ I thank Christos Karakolis for his help in clarifying the meaning of the word *tolmēros* (τολμηρός). On the perception of the narrative character of Nicodemus see C. KARAKOLIS, *The Unfinished Story of Nicodemus: A Reader-Centered Approach in Expressions of the Johannine Kerygma in John 2:23–5:18; Historische, literarische und theologische Vorlesungen vom Colloquium Ioanneum 2017 in Jerusalem*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Jörg Frey (*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 423). Tübingen 2019, 13–27, with earlier bibliography.

³⁹ A phrase closely connected to the references (in Exodus 12: 46; Numbers 9:12) to the prohibition on breaking any bones of the lamb in the Passover sacrifice, which is echoed in Psalms 33: 21. The fulfillment of prophecy is alluded to earlier in the Gospel of John (John 19:36). Respect for the body of Christ might also explain why Nicodemus is rarely depicted holding a hammer in scenes of the Deposition.

⁴⁰ "ὅτι μόνος Νικόδημος τοὺς ἥλους τῶν χειρῶν καὶ τῶν ποδῶν σου διίστησι καί, ὅλον ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου σε καθελὼν, ἐμαῖς ἀγκάλαις ἐποδῶνως ἐντίθησιν, αἷς σε καὶ πρῶην ὄντα βρέφος χαρμοσύνως ἐβάστασα." ("Nicodemus alone removed the nails from your hands and feet and, after lowering you unbroken from the wooden cross, sorrowfully placed you in my embrace, which once joyfully held you as an infant") PG 114, 216; Nikephoros Basilakes, *Progimnasmi e monodie* 177, 335 (ed. A. PIGNANI, *Niceforo Basilace. Progimnasmi e monodie [Byzantina et neo-hellenica neapolitana]* 10]. Naples 1983; Nikephoros Basilakes, *Progimnasmatata* 219 (ed. and transl. N. BENEKER – G.A. GIBSON, *The Rhetorical Exercises of*

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who take down the Lord's body from the Cross and gently pull the nails out from his hands and feet⁴¹.

On the other hand, students of Byzantine iconography will easily recognize the ekphrastic elements of the epigram and more specifically the intimate relationship between the imagery of the poem and Byzantine images of the Deposition. In these images, Nicodemus is often identified with the figure depicted either standing on a ladder and removing a nail from Christ's hand or kneeling and removing the nail from a foot, as mentioned above. Moreover, it is in art that Nicodemus is occasionally shown holding a hammer, like the one mentioned in the epigram, though this is a rare occurrence⁴². The most well-known example is probably the central panel of an ivory triptych from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Constantinople, second half of the tenth century) (Fig. 9).⁴³

With these examples in mind, it is not unreasonable to also assume that Prodrornos was familiar with the contemporary iconography of the scene and that, in composing Tetr 262a, he combined the two ways of depicting Nicodemus. Besides, in the words of Marc Lauxtermann, "the epigrams form a literary response to the visual forms of imagination with which Prodrornos and his audience were familiar".⁴⁴ Since the narrator of Tetr. 262a commands Nicodemus to move from the hands to the feet, the epigram would be a perfect match for the variant in which Nicodemus is still standing on the ladder, trying to remove the nail from Christ's hand using a hammer. In this iconographic setting, the epigram would operate as indicator of his identity, a short piece of ekphrasis (as it describes the position of Nicodemus and narrates what comes next in the story) and an exegesis (as it alludes to the theological significance of the use of the instruments, and of the sequence of his movements). The series of imperatives ῥῖψον τὴν σφύραν ("drop the hammer"), τὸν ἥλον ἐλκέτω ("let [the pliers] extract the nails"), and μέτελθε ("continue") might infuse the static representation of the figures with a sense of movement and help to dramatize the event. The use of the epigram, almost two hundred years after its composition, in the representation of the Deposition at Potamia is an indication of this connection. Here, as noted above, Nicodemus is depicted trying to extract the nail from Jesus's left hand, which is still attached to the cross. This visual and performative dimension is apparent in other epigrams as well and probably reveals the initial function of this collection⁴⁵. But this intriguing subject is beyond the scope of the present study.

Nikephoros Basilakes. *Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium* [Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 43]. Cambridge, MA – London 2016).

⁴¹ "ἡρέμα γοῦν τοὺς ἥλους ὑπεξαγαγόντες τῶν τε χειρῶν ὁμοῦ καὶ ποδῶν, εἶτα δὴ καὶ διαγκαλισάμενοι εὐφυῶς καὶ γενναίως μετεωρίσαντες καθαρῶς τε ἀμφοῖς τὸ ἄχραντον ἐκεῖνο σῶμα σεπτῶς ἄγαν ἐλίξαντές τε καὶ περιστείλαντες, ἐν μνημείῳ κατέθεσαν". ("so they pulled out gently the nails from His hands and feet and then they embraced that undefiled body skillfully, held it bravely up in the air, swathed and wrapped it with clean garments with utmost reverence, and placed it in a tomb"). Michael Psellos, *Orationes Hagiographicae* 178 (ed. E.A. FISHER, Michaelis Pselli *Orationes Hagiographicae*. Leipzig 1994).

⁴² The hammer is rarely seen in Byzantine images of the Deposition (WEITZMANN, Catalogue 67). For examples from both the Byzantine and the Western artistic tradition, see NAGATSUKA, *Descente de Croix* 5 n. 3 and *passim*.

⁴³ On this see, WEITZMANN, Catalogue 66–69 and more specifically 67. In this case, as in some tenth- and eleventh-century images of the Deposition, Nicodemus (?) wears a long tunic, such as the one worn by Joseph of Arimathea (WEITZMANN, Catalogue 67; MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 133).

⁴⁴ M. LAUXTERMANN, Book review of Gr. Papagiannis, Theodoros Prodrornos. *Jambische und hexametrische Tetrasticha auf die Haupteinzählungen des Alten und des Neuen Testaments*, Wiesbaden 1997. *JÖB* 49 (1999) 368; IDEM, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*. Texts and Contexts, Vienna 2003, I, 78–79. See also, W. HÖRANDNER, *Forme et fonction*. Remarques sur la poésie dans la société byzantine (*Séminaires byzantins* 4). Paris 2017, 74–75.

⁴⁵ The iconic character of the collection and its initial purpose has recently been analyzed by Manolis Patedakis in his lecture, entitled "Some Aspects of Theodore Prodrornos' Poetry in the Tetrasticha on Chapters from the Old and New Testament", in the *Speaking From the Margins* lecture series, organized by the Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams (Ghent University), delivered on 17th May 2022. For discussion of the initial purpose of this collection see HÖRANDNER, *Forme et fonction* 64–65, 71. PATEDAKIS, *Mia epigrafi me igemoniki diastasi* 344–352.



(left) Figure 8: Tetr. 262a by Theodore Prodromos in the scene of the Deposition, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)



(right) Figure 9: The Deposition, second half of the 10th century, Constantinople (Photo: Courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, D.C)

TETR. 262A AS AN INSCRIPTION IN THE CHURCH AT POTAMIA

Let me now make some observations on the way in which the epigram has been reproduced at Potamia (**Fig. 3, 8**) As is the case for most of the metrical inscriptions, the title has been omitted. The verses are written out continuously, without spaces between the words⁴⁶. The beginning of a line does not correspond to the beginning of a verse. Only two small dots, used to mark the beginning or the end of verses as a guide to the reader, appear here⁴⁷. The first one after the word Nikodēme (Νικόδημε) denotes the caesura, while the other after the word sphyran (σφύραν) marks the end of the verse. The text is written using both capitals and lower-case letters, as is usual in this period⁴⁸. The letters are small and narrow and the painter positions some letters above others⁴⁹. There are only two discrepancies between the modern edition of the text and the inscription⁵⁰. The word

⁴⁶ The continuous writing appears in both metrical and prose inscriptions.

⁴⁷ On the use of these *sigla* see indicatively, PATEDAKIS, Agnōsto epigramma 61; I. DRIPČ – A. RHOBY, Byzantine Verses as Inscriptions: the Interaction of Text, Object, and Beholder, in: A Companion to Byzantine Poetry, ed. W. Hörandner – A. Rhoby – N. Zagklas. Leiden-Boston 2019, 445; A. RHOBY, Interpunktionszeichen in byzantinischen Versinschriften, in: Griechisch-byzantinische Handschriftenforschung Traditionen, Entwicklungen, neue Wege, ed. Ch. Brockmann – D. Deckers – D. Harlfinger – S. Valente. Berlin – Boston 2020, 293–302.

⁴⁸ On the more systematic use of minuscule script in Byzantine painted inscriptions from the thirteenth century onwards see FL. KARAGIANNI, Paratīrseis stī chrīstī tis mikrogrammatīs grafīs stis vyzantines epigraphes (10os–14os ai.), in: Praktika tou ST' Diethnous Symposiou Ellīnikīs Palaiographias, Drama, 21–27 Septemvriou 2003, ed. V. Atsalos – N. Tsironi, I. Athens 2008, 686; and A. RHOBY, Inscriptions and Manuscripts in Byzantium: A Fruitful Symbiosis?, in: Scrittura epigrafica e scrittura libraria: fra Oriente e Occidente, ed. M. Maniaci – P. Orsini. Cassino 2015, 30–35.

⁴⁹ This deposition also follows an epigraphic tradition known in mural painting from as early as the twelfth century onwards. On this see KARAGIANNI, Paratīrseis 685.

⁵⁰ i.e. rypson (ρύπον) instead of ripson (ρίπον) and eilōn (εἰλὼν) instead of ēlon (ἤλον).

xeirōn (χειρῶν) is used in the inscription rather than the Ionic cherōn (χερῶν), which Prodromos used for the sake of the metre⁵¹.

As mentioned above, the content of the epigram is well suited to the iconography of the scene. The hammer is the only element that is missing. Nicodemus is shown prising out the nail using pliers. But which of the functions of this epigram mentioned above could the patron, the painter, and the small congregation of this church have understood? Did they recognize the poetic nature of this inscription? And how did they ultimately receive Prodromos' epigram in this church?

Before attempting to answer these questions, I shall first make some observations on the visual rendering of the epigram at Potamia. An examination of the inscription shows that giving the epigram an autonomous space in the most suitable available area, i.e. between the vertical and the right arm of the cross, and an elegant appearance, was not among the painter's priorities;⁵² nor did he employ refined script or a visual strategy in order to differentiate it from the other types of inscriptions in the church. Instead, the painter started inscribing the text at some distance from the upper border of the scene and continued writing the words without spaces and using somewhat awkward lettering, as mentioned above, for the first four lines. Afterwards he breaks the word *helketō* (ἐλκέτω) in the fourth line and writes the last syllable (– *tō* [τω]) in the small space between the cross arm and the building depicted on that side of the scene (l. 5), even though he had enough space to finish the verse on the fourth line. He places the next phrase *eu tōn xeirōn* (εὐ τῶν χειρῶν) next to Christ's nailed hand (l. 6), writes the following line immediately below it and completes the inscription by breaking the last words of the epigram, *[t]ous po/ das* ([τ]οὺς πό/δας) (l. 8, 9), in order to fit it into the restricted space between Nicodemus' raised hands above his head⁵³.

Behind this arrangement we can probably see an attempt to fit the whole text into the side of the scene in which Nicodemus is depicted, to link specific words (or those the artist recognized) with the iconography of the action and to complete the inscription just above the head of the protagonist, Nicodemus. In order to achieve this, however, the painter was compelled to divide the epigram into several lines, to break up words, and write not only on the blue background of the composition but also on unusual surfaces such as buildings (l. 5 and l. 6) and between the raised hands of one of the figures (l. 8 and 9). This development of the text, combined with the thin form of the letters and tightly packed script, eventually led to a "cramped" layout and a somewhat awkward visual result⁵⁴. In view of these observations, it can be argued that, while our painter seems to understand the con-

⁵¹ The variant *cheirōn* (χειρῶν) appears in the sylloge of Laura B43 (twelfth–thirteenth c.) as well. On this see LAUXTER-MANN, Book review of Gr. Papagiannis 369.

⁵² On the importance given to the visual dimension of verse inscriptions see G. AGOSTI, *La mise en page come elemento significativo nell'epigrafia greca tardoantica*, in: *Scrittura epigrafica e scrittura libraria: tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. M. Maniacci – P. Orsini. Cassino 2015, 45–86; I. DRPIĆ, *Chrysepes Stichourgia: The Byzantine Epigram as Aesthetic Object*, in: *Sign and Design. Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*, ed. B.M. Bemos-Rezak – J.A. Hamburger. Washington D.C., 2016, 51–69; IDEM, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium*. Cambridge 2016; A. RHOBY, *Text as Art? Byzantine Inscriptions and Their Display*, in: *Writing Matters. Presenting and Perceiving Monumental Inscriptions in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. I. Berti – K. Bolle – F. Opdenhoff – F. Stroth (*Materielle Textkulturen* 14). Berlin – Boston 2017, 265–283; RHOBY – DRPIĆ, *Byzantine Verses as Inscriptions* 443–458; and I. DRPIĆ, *Inscriptions*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature*, ed. S. Papaioannou. Oxford 2021, 383–389. However, both Rhoby and Drpić maintain that an elegant visual appearance is not a constant feature of the inscribed epigrams, since a significant number are written using careless lettering.

⁵³ On this intentional relationship between the inscribed words and the iconography in specific Byzantine artworks see B. HOSTETLER, *The Iconography of Text: The Placement of an Inscription on a Middle Byzantine. Reliquary Eastern Christian Art* 8 (2011) 49–55; IDEM, *The Visual Structure of Epigrams and the Experience of Byzantine Space: A Case Study on Reliquary Enkolpia of St. Demetrios*, in: *Spatialities of Byzantine Culture from the Human Body to the Universe*, ed. M. Veikou – I. Nilsson. Leiden 2022, 631–655.

⁵⁴ We should probably always bear in mind the impact that difficult working conditions, e.g., painting from ladders or scaffolding, might have had on the rendering of inscriptions.

tent (or some words) of the inscription, he probably did not recognize its poetic nature, nor its Prodromic authorship. Instead, he seems to have approached it as an anonymous prose text, which—since it refers to one of the figures in the scene—needed to be completed just above or close to that figure. And this epigraphic approach has nothing new or special about it; in fact, it recalls the arrangement of other categories of inscriptions, such as the simple labels that name gospel figures or the biblical quotations that represent their spoken words⁵⁵.



(left) Figure 10: Inscription (Mark 16:6) in the scene of the Women at the Tomb, Naxos, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)



(right) Figure 11: The words of the prophetess Anna inscribed on her scroll, early 14th century, Agios Georgios at Kato Potamia, Naxos (Photo: author)

The scene of the Deposition is the only one in the church that is accompanied by a metrical inscription. The other well-preserved scenes have more commonplace inscriptions, namely captions and biblical texts, and names for the depictions of the holy figures and structures. The inscriptions in the scene of the Holy Women at the Tomb are worth commenting on, since their arrangement reveals the same logic as we have just seen in the Deposition (**Fig. 4, 10**). The angel's words from Mark 16:6, an ordinary prose text, are written almost exactly in the centre of the upper zone of the scene⁵⁶. The lettering is of the same form as before but larger in size. The text begins next to the angel's raised wing, is written continuously, and is divided into three lines, though it could have been completed in one or two. Thanks to this arrangement, the inscription is completed directly above the angel who utters the corresponding words. The label ΑΓΓΕ(ΛΟC) Κ(ΥΠΙΟ)Υ (The Angel of the Lord) is written below and next to the angel and the word Ο ΤΑΦΟC (The grave) next to

⁵⁵ On this last category see N.P. ŠEVČENKO, *Written Voices: The Spoken Word in Middle Byzantine Monumental Painting*, in: *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. S. Boynton – D.J. Reilly. Leiden 2015, 153–165.

⁵⁶ ΙΔΕ Ο ΤΟΠΙΟC ΟΠΟΥ ΕΘΗΚΑΝ ΑΥΤΟΝ / ΗΓΕΡΘΗ ΟΥΚ ΕCΤΙ / ΩΔΕ (“See the place where they laid him/ He has risen! He is not/ here.”) (Mark 16:6). The sequence of the phrases has been altered here. The phrase appears in the scene as early as the eleventh century (A. TSAKALOS, *Le Monastère rupestre de Karanlik Kilise. Monachisme, art et patronage en Cappadoce Byzantine. Thèse de doctorat de IIIe cycle*, Paris 1 2006, 319; R. OUSTERHOUT, *Women at tombs: narrative, theatricality, and the contemplative mode*, in: *Wonderful Things. Byzantium Through its Art*, ed. L. James – A. Eastmond. London 2013, 242, fig.16.7).

the empty building⁵⁷. The label M(HTH)P Θ(EO)Y (Mother of God), inscribed in the nimbus of the Myrrh-bearer next to the angel, indicates the presence of the Virgin Mary at the scene⁵⁸.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that in this same church an elegant visual appearance is given to a commonplace inscription, i.e. the words of the prophetess Anna inscribed on her scroll in the Presentation in the Temple (**Fig. 2, 11**)⁵⁹. A familiar method from manuscript-painting is employed here. A decorated initial in red is followed by the rest of the text, painted in well-defined letters in black. It seems that in this case, visual attention was paid not to a specific category of inscriptions (e.g. epigrams), but to texts written on a specific medium (scrolls).

The communicative function of the inscriptions and the congregation's response to them is difficult to assess since we lack the appropriate evidence. It is probably safe to argue that the rendering of the inscriptions, and more specifically that of the epigram, combined with the location of the scenes on the barrel vault and the dim light inside the church, would have surely adversely affected their legibility, even for those who were able to read. We can assume that the priest of the church was familiar with these texts and recited them aloud on special occasions and when the liturgy was celebrated in that church⁶⁰. We might even suppose that the presence of a lengthy inscription would have attracted the attention and guided the gaze of the viewers to the related figures, such as Nicodemus, stimulating reflection upon their character, piety and role in the life and Passion of Christ.

Even though the sample is small, based on the above discussion, I would argue that we are not dealing here with a sophisticated programme featuring extensive use of inscriptions and paying careful attention to their visual appearance. Nor can it be suggested with any confidence that we are dealing with a thoughtful and deliberate selection of texts and images that work in tandem in order to reflect the patron's religious concerns, intellectual background or literary preferences. Even though a part of the original decoration has been lost, from what survives it appears that one narrative composition was accompanied by a twelfth-century epigram, two scenes were accompanied by prose texts of some length and well-known to artists already from the eleventh century, while the rest of the frescoes have only one- or two-word captions. Words and texts of different categories coexisted. However, the appearance of a twelfth-century poem of Constantinopolitan origin in a "provincial" fourteenth-century painted programme must, of course, be explained. And this brings us to the final issue I would like to tackle.

⁵⁷ The representation of the two Maries follows the narration of Matthew (28:1–7) and not of Mark (16:5), which refers to the three Maries that are usually depicted in the scene from the thirteenth century onwards (D. MOURIKI, *Oi toichographies tou Sōfira konta sto Alepochōri tis Megaridos*. Athens 1978, 26). The watchmen are missing in this case. However, the tomb is represented as a building and the representation of the censer held by the Virgin corresponds to the Late Byzantine examples of the scene (MOURIKI, *Oi toichographies tou Sōfira* 27, with examples and bibliography). It is also interesting to note that the glass vessel held by the first myrrhophore on the left with the light on dark, spiral decoration on the body corresponds to a contemporary category of vessels (thirteenth–fourteenth c.) that come from the Arab world. I owe this information to Dr Tassos Antonaras.

⁵⁸ On the presence of the Virgin Mary in the episodes of the Women at the Tomb and the Chairette from as far back as the Early Byzantine period see N. ZARRAS, *La tradition de la présence de la Vierge dans les scènes du « Lithos » et du « Chairette » et son influence sur l'iconographie tardobyzantine*. *Zograf* 28 (2000/1) 113–120; IDEM, *O eikonografikos kyklos tōn Eōthinōn Euangeliōn stīn Palaiologeia mnīmeiakī zōgraphikī tōn Valkaniōn*. Thessaloniki 2011, 121–123, 129–132. Her regular appearances in the aforementioned scenes during the late Byzantine era has been connected with the growing cult of the Virgin in the same period.

⁵⁹ TOYTO TO | ΒΡΕΦΟΣ | ΟΥΡΑΝ(ΟΝ) Κ(ΑΙ) Γ(Η)Ν ΕΤΕΡΕΩCΕΝ ("This child has made firm the sky and the earth"). This phrase is inscribed on the unrolled scroll of the prophetess Anna from the eleventh century onwards (MOURIKI, *Nea Moni* 121).

⁶⁰ On the oral presentation of the epigrams see RHOBY, *Text as Art?* 265–283, with earlier bibliography. On the infrequent use of the small rural chapels, a conclusion based on the content of a Naxian dedicatory inscription see S. GERSTEL – A.M. TALBOT, *The culture of lay piety in Byzantium 1064–1453*, in: *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. M. Angold. London 2006, V, 80–81.

THE TRANSMISSION SCENARIOS

The fact that a twelfth-century epigram was used in an early fourteenth-century fresco on Naxos invites us to think about the possible routes that could have brought the Tetr. 262a to the island⁶¹. It is now known that, besides the large collection of Tetrasticha, a series of independent, shorter collections of epigrams, detached from the main corpus soon after the emergence of the initial collection, has survived⁶². Both contained epigrams that could either be read as literary texts or used as verse inscriptions⁶³. This second function was also reflected in their titles⁶⁴. The Tetrasticha were also incorporated into cycles of epigrams, which contained verses by other poets too⁶⁵.

Tetr. 262a *Eis tēn apokathēlōsin* appears in three abridged versions of the Tetrasticha⁶⁶ and in the Lavra B43 collection, which dates to the twelfth or thirteenth century⁶⁷. Obviously, the anthologists of these collections recognized the inscriptional potential of this particular epigram, or had seen it used as a verse inscription. However, despite this evidence of its “popularity”, the epigram does not appear as an inscription in any of the Byzantine scenes of the Deposition that have been published up to now. Moreover, and in contrast to Tetr. 187a (*Eis tēn Christou gennēsēn* – On the Birth of Nativity of Christ) and Tetr. 230a (*Eis ton entaphiasmon* – On the Entombment), this epigram was not included in the anonymous post-Byzantine book the *Art of Painting* nor in the famous *Painter’s Manual* of Dionysios of Fournā (1729–1733)⁶⁸. Instead of using Tetr. 262a for the Deposition the *Art of Painting* proposes the last two verses of Tetr. 230a, which is dedicated to the Entombment, the episode that usually follows the Deposition⁶⁹. I would argue that an epigram dedicated to Nicodemus, that is to a secondary figure performing a practical task in one of their scenes, would not have excited the attention of post-Byzantine painters, nor would such a reference have

⁶¹ On the artist’s sources and the ways the epigrams circulated, see C. BOURAS, *Allīgorikī parastasi tou Viou-Kairou se mia metabyzantinī toichographia sti Chio*. *AD* 21 (1966) 32; KEPETZI, *Autour d’une inscription métrique* 168; PATEDAKIS, *Mia epigrafi me īgemonikī diastasi* 341, n. 21; RHOBY, *Christophoros Mitylenaios* 147–155 and especially 148, 149.

⁶² On these see Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* 2, 193 (PAPAGIANNIS); LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 78–81.

⁶³ LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 81.

⁶⁴ Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* 2, 193 (PAPAGIANNIS); LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 78–81; PATEDAKIS, *Mia epigrafi me īgemonikī diastasi* 342.

⁶⁵ LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 78–79. Lora Taseva has recently studied the insertion of fourteen tetrasticha translated into Serbian before the readings of translation D of the Triodion Synaxaria in about ten South Slavonic manuscripts that date from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Tetr. 268a, which is dedicated to Nicodemus, appears in the entry for the Sunday of the Holy Myrrh Bearers in five of them ranging in date from the late fourteenth to the fifteenth century. This can be accounted for by the fact that Nicodemus is commemorated on this day together with Joseph of Arimathea. Since no similar combination has been found in a Byzantine codex, it is not possible to examine how the Triodion may have contributed to the dissemination of the tetrasticha. It is also important to note that the epigram in question is referring to Nicodemus’s identity as the “nocturnal” disciple and not to his actions in the Deposition. On this see TASEVA, *Tetrasticha des Theodoros Prodromos* 59–79.

⁶⁶ These appear in manuscripts that date from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century: Paris. gr. 1277 (p4) (thirteenth c.), Ven. Marc. gr. 498 (M) (second half of fourteenth c.), and Vatic. gr. 1277 (v2) (1313–1316). On these see Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* 1, 145–146 (PAPAGIANNIS).

⁶⁷ LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 300.

⁶⁸ On these see Dionysius of Fournā, *Hermeneia* 233, 277 (PAPADOPOULOU-KERAMEUS). There is no acknowledgement of Theodore Prodromos’s authorship of these epigrams. The Tetr. 187a and Tetr. 230a have been identified by Marc Lauxtermann (LAUXTERMANN, *Book review of Gr. Papagiannis* 370; IDEM, *Byzantine Poetry* 80).

⁶⁹ Dionysius of Fournā, *Hermeneia* 233 (PAPADOPOULOU-KERAMEUS). On the Tetr. 230a see Theodoros Prodromos, *Tetrasticha* 2, 241 (PAPAGIANNIS). The epigram reads as follows: *Τί δακρύεις θάπτουσα Χριστόν, Παρθένε, πάλαι λαβοῦσα τῆς χαρᾶς τὰς ἐγγύας; οἰμωζέτω θάνατος, Αἰδὴς κλαίετω· σὺ δὲ τριταῖον τὸν σὸν υἱὸν ἐκδέχου*. (“Why do you shed tears Virgin Mary while you are burying Christ, when you have already received the guarantee of joy? Let Death wail aloud, let Hades cry, while you wait for your son to return on the third day.”) The last two verses are transmitted here anonymously and without the original title of the epigram. Even though the content of the epigram does conform with the iconography of the scene, it is interesting that the verses refer to the grief of the Virgin Mary and offer her consolation by announcing the defeat of Death and her son’s impending resurrection.

been considered appropriate to the emotional intensity given from the twelfth century onwards to the grief and sorrow of the Virgin and other saintly figures in the scene, as noted above. This could account for the almost invariable absence of this epigram from the Byzantine scenes of the Deposition. However, we now know that it was eventually used as an inscription on a fourteenth-century scene at Potamia on Naxos.

Taking all the above into consideration, the following possibilities emerge. The first scenario involves the patron or the painter of this small church being familiar with, and/or having at their disposal a manuscript, such as those mentioned above, which contained the Tetr. 262a or a collection of epigrams, including Tetr. 262a⁷⁰. This could have been the source from which they took this specific epigram. Up to now there has been no evidence for the existence of any manuscripts on the island in this period, whereas the activity of learned patrons can only be indirectly detected in the patronage of certain monuments⁷¹. We should not, of course, exclude the possibility that these individuals might even have been able to recite the epigram from memory⁷². Needless to say, by attributing the appearance of this epigram on a wall painting in Naxos to the wishes of a patron and his familiarity with Prodhomos's work, we might perhaps account for its unique appearance in art. Yet, it would still probably be hard to explain why this learned individual selected only the scene of the Deposition, the figure and the actions of Nicodemus, for poetic amplification, and not Joseph of Arimathea or the Virgin, especially in a period when viewers would be looking for features in the scene that could create a connection with the grief caused by the death of Christ. A disjunction in this connection, between a hypothetical learned patron and his familiarity with Prodhomos's poetic oeuvre, arises when we consider the careless rendering of the epigram, and indeed the small size and simple plan of the church and the choice of a local painter. Finally, if we do accept the above hypothesis, we are then witnessing an amazing coincidence, i.e. the presence in a fourteenth-century fresco of both a twelfth-century text and an image that is mainly based on the middle Byzantine tradition, each coming from separate sources but ultimately so well matched.

I believe that this last factor, namely, the close relationship between the content of the epigram and the iconography of the composition, should lead us to the assumption that the text could have travelled with the iconography to the church, and to ponder the possible pathways by which they could have arrived on the island of Naxos. Could we assume that the painter of this small church reproduced both image and text from memory⁷³? The faithful reproduction of the text and the small number of errors (two) tends rather to suggest that the artist had the text in front of him. Was our painter then perhaps copying a drawing of the scene, included in a set of sketches or a model book,

⁷⁰ There is only a smattering of evidence for the use of codices containing literary material by Byzantine painters. On this see RHOBY, *Inscriptions and Manuscripts* 28–29. For the possible use of manuscripts containing epigrams by the painters on Crete, see PATEDAKIS, *Mia epigraphē me īgemonikī diastasi* 341, n. 21.

⁷¹ Recent research based on the presence of specific surnames in dedicatory inscriptions and other epigraphic and visual elements has detected the presence of opponents of Michael VIII Palaiologos on the island. On this theory and related arguments see E. KOUNTOURA-GALAKE, *Decoding Byzantine Churches on Naxos in the Early Palaiologan Period: Motivations and Inevitable Necessities*, *Pour une poétique de Byzance. Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros*, ed. S. Efthymiadis et al. (*Dossiers byzantins* 16). Paris 2015, 141–161; EADEM, *Women Living on Palaiologan Naxos: the Epigraphic Evidence*, *Women and Monasticism in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: Decoding a Cultural Map*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake – E. Mitsiou (*Section of Byzantine Research, International Symposium* 23). Athens 2019, 163–185; N. ZARRAS, *Identity and Patronage in Byzantium: Epigraphic Evidence and Donor Portraits of Naxos*, *Inscriptions in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History and History of Art*, ed. Chr. Stavrakos. Wiesbaden 2016, 53–78.

⁷² On the role of memory and the existence of an oral tradition concerning verse inscriptions see BOURAS, *Allīgorikī parastasi tou Viou-Kairou* 32; W. HÖRANDNER, *Customs and Beliefs as Reflected in Occasional Poetry: Some Considerations*. *BF* 12 (1987) 238; ZAGKLAS, *Theodore Prodhomos* 131, 139.

⁷³ On the role of the memory in the transmission of visual motifs see primarily R. CORMACK, *Painter's Guides, Model-Books, Pattern-Books and Craftsmen: or Memory and the Artist*, in: *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, ed. M. Bacci. Pisa 2007, 11–29.

which was accompanied by the corresponding inscription? Was he following the written instructions of a painter's guide, which included the description of this specific variant of the scene and proposed the Tetr. 262a as the ideal inscription for it? These attractive ideas cannot be definitively accepted or rejected, since our knowledge of the use of painters' manuals in Byzantium, and more importantly of the form they took, is inadequate⁷⁴.

The use of a model book or a painter's guide could explain the "simple" rendering of the epigram and why this is the only scene to be accompanied by a metrical inscription in this church, even allowing for the significant losses in the painted surfaces of the church. The use of such a source could explain the coexistence of metrical and prose texts with shorter captions and labels. Such a solution would correspond well to the content of the post-Byzantine, anonymous Art of Painting, which is basically a compilation of inscriptions of all kinds⁷⁵. A significant collection of inscriptions, including a series of epigrams, is also found in the recently published Hermeneia of the Painters (Panteleimoniensis 259, last decade of the sixteenth century), which is probably a copy of a late Byzantine painter's manual⁷⁶. Inscriptions of all kinds and lengths are also found in the famous Painter's Manual of Dionysios of Fournas⁷⁷. Two tetrasticha have been transmitted anonymously and without their titles in the Art of Painting and in the manual of Dionysios of Phourna, as mentioned above.

Even though we lack firm evidence concerning the existence of a model book from this early period, I would propose that in this case this was the source of our epigram. I would also suggest that the model book that our painter used in this church was based to a significant extent on older models, since the iconography of the scene and the epigram are both more consistent with the "simplicity" of the early twelfth-century versions of the scene⁷⁸. The relationship with the middle Byzantine artistic tradition is revealed by the rest of the iconography of the church and of the other painted churches by the same workshop⁷⁹. Moreover, it is possible that the painter and cleric Michael, who belonged to the same workshop, found the epigram that is inscribed on the scroll of St.

⁷⁴ The discussion concerning the existence, form, date and function of model books and painter's guides is still ongoing. On this subject see V. GRECU, *Byzantinische Handbücher der Kirchenmalerei*. *Byz* 9 (1934) 675–701; M. CHATZIDAKIS, *Ek tōn Elpiou tou Rōmaiou*. *EEBS* 14 (1938) 393–414; E. KITZINGER, *The Mosaics of Monreale*. Palermo 1960, 43–63; A.J. ROSS, *A Late Twelfth-Century Artist's Pattern Sheet*. *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 25 (1962) 119–128; D.C. WINFIELD, *Middle and Later Byzantine Wall Painting Methods. A Comparative Study*. *DOP* 22 (1968) 93–96; K. SNIPES, *A preliminary Study of the Yale Menologium Pattern Sheets*. *The Yale University Library Gazette* 42 (1968) 140–153; H. BUCHTHAL, *The "Musterbuch" of Wolfenbüttel and its Position in the Art of the Thirteenth Century*. Vienna 1979; R.W. SCHELLER, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900–ca. 1470)*. Amsterdam 1995; M. VASSILAKI, *Apo tous eikonographikous odigous sta schedia ergasias tōn metavizantinōn zōgrafōn*. *To technologiko ypovathro tīs vyzantinīs eikonographias*. Athens 1995; I. HUTTER, *The Magdalen College 'Musterbuch': A Painter's Guide from Cyprus*, in: *Medieval Cyprus. Studies in Art Architecture and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, ed. N. Patterson Ševčenko – Chr. Moss. Princeton N.J. 1999, 117–146; N.P. ŠEVČENKO, *The Heavenly Ladder Images in Patmos MS. 122: A 12th-century Painter's Guide?* *Nea Rhome: rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 6 (2009) 393–405; G. KAKAVAS, *Dionysios of Fournas: Artistic Creation and Literary Description*. Leiden 2008; G.R. PARPULOV – I.V. DOLGIKH – P. COWE, *A Byzantine Text on the Technique of Icon Painting*. *DOP* 64 (2010) 201–215; C. VAPHEIADES, *Encheiridia zōgraphikīs sto Byzantio. Ī martyria tou kōdikos I. M. Panteimonos 250*. *Ekdosi, kritiko ypomnima, scholiasmos*. Athens 2017; IDEM, *Byzantine painting treatises: the case of Codex Panteleimoniensis 259*. *Journal of Mediae aetatis sodalicium* 16 (2018) 132–144.

⁷⁵ The initial date of this collection remains unknown. The manuscript Hieros. Patr. 214, that contains this guide dates to 1674. On this see Dionysios of Fournas, *Hermeneia* 274–288 (PAPADOPOULOU-KERAMEUS); LAUXTERMAN, *Book review of Gr. Papagiannis* 370.

⁷⁶ VAPHEIADES, *Encheiridia zōgraphikīs sto Byzantio* 224–229; IDEM, *Byzantine painting treatises* 132–144, and especially 138–141.

⁷⁷ *Επίγραμμα* or *στίχοι* are the words used by Dionysios of Fournas to indicate an inscription, not necessarily metrical. On this see Dionysios of Fournas, *Hermeneia* 228–233 (PAPADOPOULOU-KERAMEUS).

⁷⁸ KONSTANTELOU, *Ena "ergastirio" zōgraphikīs* 317–319.

⁷⁹ KONSTANTELOU, *Ena "ergastirio" zōgraphikīs* 317–319.

John the Baptist in the church of the Panagia at Archatos on Naxos (1285) in just such a source⁸⁰. Last, but not least, a manual might also be the source of the well-known epigram—if it was not reproduced from memory, since it is a well-known and widely used text—that accompanies the scene of the Melismos at the church of Agios Georgios at Lathrenos (ca.1285) and appears in two other churches on the island of Naxos [Agios Ioannes at Kerami (c. 1260–1270 or ca.1275)] and Agios Ioannis Theologos at Kaminos of Philoti (1314)⁸¹.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given the significant number of verse inscriptions that have been found in the painted decoration of Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches in recent years, the discovery of another one in a small private church with frescoes dating to the early fourteenth century should probably not come as a great surprise or indeed excite the sort of enthusiasm that characterizes this article. However, the fact that the epigram examined in this paper constitutes an epigraphic reproduction of a poem composed in Constantinople in the twelfth century by the famous author Theodore Prodromos prompted me to consider significant aspects of its “epigraphic life” in a different historical moment and space. The examination of the content of Tetr. 262a, entitled *Eis tēn apokathēlōsin*, demonstrated that it actually constitutes a description of and elaboration on the significance of the actions of the figure (Nicodemus) who releases the nails from the hands and feet of Christ in the Deposition. Yet despite this strong and straightforward visual content, this epigram has never been selected to be inscribed on any other image of the Deposition known to date. Its rarity is probably explained by its focus on a secondary figure who is not strictly connected with the main message of the scene from the twelfth century onwards, that is the grief aroused by the Passion of Christ.

In its unique reproduction in the Naxian church, Tetr. 262 is rendered as a common prose inscription. Signs that could highlight its poetic nature, such as reserving a special place for it, an elegant visual appearance, and the use of *sigla*, are absent. The script is rather carelessly executed, while the text has been broken into several parts in order to ensure a close connection with the iconography of the scene and most importantly with its protagonist, Nicodemus. Based on the above, I have argued that our painter was copying the scene along with the inscription from a drawing included in a set of sketches or a model book, or he was following the written instructions of a painter's guide, which proposed the Tetr. 262a as the ideal inscription for this specific variant of the scene, which emphasizes the main action of the event, the removal of the dead body of Christ from the Cross. Both, text and imagery, reveal the strong presence of the middle Byzantine tradition in the representation of this event.

In addition, the epigram we have examined can be added to the group of Tetrasticha which have been preserved *in situ*. It is of great interest that the Tetr. 230a, entitled *Eis ton entaphiasmon*, which has been included in the post-Byzantine book *Art of Painting* as mentioned above, was found inscribed according to Hans Rott below the scene of the Resurrection in the church of agios Stephanos on the island of Nis in Lake Eğirdir, Turkey⁸². However, given that these frescoes have

⁸⁰ KONSTANTELOU, Saint John the Baptist Rigodioktes. A Holy Healer of Fevers in the Church of the Panagia at Archatos, Naxos (1285). *DChAE* 41 (2020) 183. The epigram was read with the help of Manolis Patedakis. But since the epigram remains unpublished and its literary sources have not been established, any hypothesis concerning those sources and the context in which it was created would be problematic.

⁸¹ KONSTANTELOU, Ena “ergastīrio” zōgraphikīs 64–66, with the other examples from the painted programmes of Naxos and elsewhere. On this epigram see primarily RHOBY, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken 172–173.

⁸² The scene was visible until the beginning of the twentieth century. On this see H. ROTT, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler aus Pisidien, Pamphylien, Kappadokien und Lykien*. Leipzig 1908, 89; LAUXTERMAN, Book review of Gr. Papagiannis, 370; IDEM, *Byzantine Poetry* 81; RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* 310–311.

since been destroyed, it is now impossible to clarify their date (thirteenth century?) and comment further on the source of this specific epigram (another model book?). Manolis Patedakis has recently identified Tetr. 186a, entitled 14th (On the Book of the Genealogy), in the church of the Panagia at Merona in Crete (1380–1400)⁸³. Its examination showed that it was probably a book epigram, while it appears that it was probably intentionally selected by the patron of the church, the *archon* Matthaios Kallergis, in order to emphasize his ancient and noble origins in the local society. It is rather hard to establish at this point the source of Tetr. 229a, entitled *Eis tēn staurōsin* (On the Crucifixion), which is inscribed on an icon of the Crucifixion in Moscow (fifteenth century)⁸⁴, while the errors and variants that have been detected in another epigram by Prodromos, but not one from the same collection, included in the eighteenth-century depiction of Bios in the church of Panagia Krina on Chios, demonstrate that the painter probably inscribed the epigram from memory⁸⁵.

The different contexts and artistic media in which these Tetrasticha have been found may explain the variations in their reception and transmission. Despite these differences, the above examples, just like the inclusion of these or other Tetrasticha in collections of approximately the same period, confirm the strongly inscriptional character of these poems, and their use as inscriptions from at least the thirteenth or fourteenth century. No doubt the publication of other examples and their systematic exploration will reveal more about the various ways in which this group of inscriptions were received, rendered and circulated in the Byzantine world and beyond.

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⁸⁴ A. FROLOW, *Quelques inscriptions sur des œuvres d'art du moyen âge*, 3. *Inscription sur une icône byzantine*. *CahArch 6* (1952) 167; H. MAGUIRE, *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response*. Toronto 1996, 23–24; LAUXTERMANN, *Book review of Gr. Papagiannis*, 369; W. HÖRANDNER, *Randbemerkungen zum Thema Epigramme und Kunstwerke, Πολύπλευρους νοῦς*. *Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, ed. C. Scholz – G. Makris (*Byzantisches Archiv 19*). München – Leipzig 2000, 80–82; LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry 81*; RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten* 124–126.

⁸⁵ BOURAS, *Allīgorikī parastasī tou Viou-kairou* 26–34; HÖRANDNER, *Customs and Beliefs* 238; ZAGKLAS, *Theodore Prodromos* 137–139.

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