

MARIA TOMADAKI^a

An Unpublished Byzantine Lament for a Learned Man*

with one figure

ABSTRACT: The article includes the *editio princeps*, an English translation and a commentary of an unpublished Byzantine lament in elegiac distichs. The poem is preserved in a philosophical manuscript that belonged to the cardinal Bessarion (cod. Marc. gr. Z 197) and is dedicated to a learned man called Trikanas Kantzas, who is not known from other sources. It is distinguished by its secular style, its adaptation of Homeric language and its emotional expression of feelings of grief.

KEYWORDS: Lament; Trikanas Kantzas; Editio Princeps; Elegiac Distichs; Late Byzantine Poetry

INTRODUCTION

The first folio of the codex Marc. gr. Z 197 (*Diktyon* 69668)—a philosophical manuscript containing Neoplatonic commentaries on Platonic dialogues¹—kindles the interest of the reader with a well written and quite long lament in elegiac distichs dedicated to a person named Trikanas Kantzas (**fig. 1**). The poem is remarkable for its archaizing style, its lyrical expression of grief, its variety of images, and for its obscure addressee and date. As indicated in its title, it is an ethopoetic lament, which expresses in verses the deep sorrow of a child for the loss of Trikanas. This unspecified child (girl or boy) could be either a student of Trikanas or one of his children. The present paper offers an *editio princeps* of the lament, an English translation and a commentary.

The poem begins with the child's invitation to the natural elements (e.g. trees, rivers, groves) to mourn the death of a wise man (vv. 1–2). The child strongly wishes to become a Thracian bird, so as to fly away and be relieved from the pain (vv. 3–4). It urges its eyes to lament and praises the deceased through the usage of several rhetorical questions (vv. 5–14). Then it invites a circle of youths to lament for Trikanas' death by tearing at their cheeks and breasts and by shedding streams of tears, following the example of a personified stone (vv. 15–19). Moreover, it asks the sun to provide an explanation for Trikanas' death, since the sun is able to see everything (vv. 20–21). After some encomiastic words about Trikanas' character and appearance, the child also invites the basic elements of nature (water, fire, wind, and land) to honor the deceased with grief (vv. 22–26). A commemoration of his virtues follows (e.g. wisdom and rhetorical abilities), as well as a statement on the inevitability of death (vv. 27–35). In the final part of the lament the child asks the clouds to grant him/her tears and asks all kinds of animals to mourn this time for himself/herself, as he/she deeply wishes to die too (vv. 36–45). Finally, the mourning person asks the stars and the flowers to reveal on earth or in heaven Trikanas' phantom (*eidolon*) as a consolation for the

^a Maria Tomadaki: Niedersächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Friedländer Weg 11, 37085, Göttingen, Germany; maria.tomadaki@adwgoe.de

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¹ The manuscript is dated to the late Byzantine period and contains Neoplatonic commentaries on the Platonic dialogues by Olympiodorus and Damascius, see E. MIONI, *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum, Codices graeci manuscripti*, volume 1, *thesaurus antiquus codices* 1–299. Roma 1981, 309.

mourner's pain. The poem ends with the repetition of the first verse, which functions as a refrain that gives a ring-form composition to the poem.

The lament is a witness of the Byzantine reception of the ancient laments, since it contains several elements of the latter. To begin with, its language abounds in Homeric vocabulary that serves the metrical pattern of the elegiac distich². Moreover, the motifs and the ideas expressed in the poem imitate those of the ancient laments. The invocation to natural elements to participate in the ritual of grief, the reference to the Muses and to Aphrodite, as well as the images of an exaggerated expression of grief (e.g. breast beating) are indicative examples³. By contrast, the Church Fathers criticized the uncontrolled lamentation, favouring a moderate expression of grief on the grounds that the latter corresponds to the Christian way of life that offers the only true consolation for the death of our beloved ones⁴. The classicizing style of the poem and the absence of Christian elements indicate that the poem belongs to the so-called "learned Byzantine poetry"⁵. Earlier Byzantine poets such as John Geometres, Christopher Mitylinaios, and Theodore Prodromos also composed laments (entitled monodies) in order to mourn family members and friends or to fulfil the wish of a commissioner⁶. This indicates that the anonymous poet continues an established tradition of composing mourning texts, but this lament differs from the aforementioned examples due to its distinguished classicizing character. It is not, though, clear if it was recited during the burial, as happened with the ancient laments, or if it was composed as a kind of a literary exercise. Margaret Alexiou's significant study offers us a firm basis for examining the Greek laments and their ritual, but, in my opinion, more work is needed in order to understand the relation of the Byzantine mourning texts to the ancient ones, since the Byzantine laments often imitate the latter⁷. Other Byzantine laments, which could contribute to such a study remain unpublished. The present article aims to bring in light an unknown text and illuminate some aspects of its content and its manuscript context.

With regard to the genre of the poem, it has several of the typical characteristics of laments, as these were established and analyzed by Margaret Alexiou⁸. Specifically, the whole poem is constructed with invocations to various natural elements (e.g. trees, rivers, groves, sun, water, fire, whirlwinds and land) to weep and express their grief for the loss of Trikanas. Another structural

² All the quotations and allusions are recorded in the *apparatus fontium et locorum parallelorum*. Only a few similarities to Byzantine texts and authors can be noticed (e.g. Digenis Acrites, Mitylinaios, Metochites), which are mentioned in the *apparatus fontium et locorum parallelorum* and in the commentary. The Homeric language is dominant in the ancient funerary poetry, see R. HUNTER, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry, A Selection* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). Cambridge 2022, 5.

³ Similar motifs occur in Bion's *Lament for Adonis*, ed. N. HOPKINSON, Theocritus, Moschus, Bion (*Loeb Classical Library* 28). Cambridge 2015, 506–517.

⁴ For some examples of church fathers' disapproval of uncontrolled grief see ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. London 1974, 28–29.

⁵ The only element that relates the poem to the vernacular Byzantine laments for a deceased (e.g. Digenis Acrites, Christ) or the destruction of a city is the usage of many rhetorical questions.

⁶ See, for instance, John Geometres, *On Theodore Dekapolites* (poem 229, in iambs), ed. M. TOMADAKI, Iohannes Geometra, *Carmina iambica* (CCSG 100). Turnhout 2023, 115–116; Christopher Mitylinaios, Poem 57 (*On his mother*, in elegiacs), ed. M. DE GROOTE, *Christophori Mitylenaii Versuum variorum Collectio Cryptensis* (CCSG 74). Turnhout 2012, 51–52 and Theodore Prodromos, Poem 54 (*On Manuel Anemas*, in iambs), ed. W. HÖRANDNER, Theodoros Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte* (WBS 11). Wien 1974, 450–455. For more examples of Byzantine monodies and other funerary poems dedicated to a deceased, see A. RHOBY, *Labelling Poetry in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period*. *Byz* 85 (2015) 276–277 and P. AGAPITOS, *Ancient Models and Novel Mixtures: The Concept of Genre in Byzantine Funerary Literature from Photios to Eustathios of Thessaloniki*, in: *Modern Greek Literature, Critical Essays*, ed. G. Nagy – A. Stavrakopoulou. New York – London 2003, 12–13.

⁷ See M. ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament*.

⁸ ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament*. For an analysis of the features of Byzantine monodies in particular, see M. D. LAUXTER-MANN, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres, Texts and Contexts. Volume Two* (WBS 24/2). Wien 2019, 89–100.

element of laments it contains is the use of several rhetorical questions, which express the sentiments of the mourning person and at the same time commemorate the virtues of the deceased. A third motif typical of laments, particularly of those performed during the funeral, is the address to relatives or companions of the deceased. In this case the narrative voice addresses a circle of young men (*kouroi*, v. 15), inviting them to participate in the ritual of lamentation. Those youths were probably present at the funeral and could have been the students of Trikanas or young admirers and disciples belonging to the same intellectual circle.

To the best of my knowledge, the name Trikanas Kantzas does not occur in any other source. The poet depicts the deceased as a learned and wise man, a dancer of the Muses, who was especially interested in science, rhetoric, geometry and possibly astronomy⁹. The fact that the poem is rich in references to natural elements might indicate Trikanas' engagement with the natural sciences. However, there is no clear evidence either about his exact profession or about the cause of his death. As there is no indication that he was a monk or a priest, we cannot identify him with the well-known Iakobos Trikanas (14th c., *PLP* 29309), an Athonite monk who was a supporter of Hesychasm. Trikanas Kantzas seems instead to have acquired a secular training and a circle of disciples, who are invited to mourn for his loss (vv. 15–17). Another well-attested Trikanas from the fourteenth century is Kalos Trikanas (*PLP* 29310), who held the title of *sakelliou* in Constantinople and is the addressee of letters from Thomas Magistros and from the administrative official Michael Gabras¹⁰. The meaning of these epistles is very obscure, but they imply that Kalos Trikanas was a learned man, who offered his advice to Gabras on some of his writings and was also an organizer of the so-called rhetorical *theatra*. Although the profile of Kalos Trikanas seems to be close to that of Trikanas Kantzas, we do not possess enough evidence to support the idea that they were the same person. Two other obscure historical figures having the name Demetrios Trikanas and originating from Thessaloniki are recorded in *PLP* (29306, 29307). The surname (or sobriquet) Kantzas is attested only once in *PLP* (10991), for a certain Manuel Kantzas (13th–14th c.), whose origin remains unknown.

Neither the poet nor the scribe of the poem are known, despite my efforts to identify them. Yet, what do we know is that Marc. gr. Z 197 (*Diktyon* 69668) is a direct apograph of Marc. gr. Z 196 (*Diktyon* 69667), an important witness of the so-called 'philosophical collection', a group of Neoplatonic writings, which were copied in a characteristic script during the second half of the ninth century¹¹. Both codex Marc. gr. Z 197 (*Diktyon* 69668) and his apograph belonged to Cardinal Bessarion. There are different opinions about the date of Marc. gr. Z 197 (*Diktyon* 69668). Westerink, and recently Carlini, dated the manuscript to the fifteenth century and considered it a copy commissioned by Bessarion¹². Based on the date of the manuscript's watermarks (1318–1334), Mioni instead dated it to the fourteenth century, arguing that Bessarion possessed this Neoplatonic manu-

⁹ See the verses 11, 18, 28 and 37–39.

¹⁰ See the epistles 355, 374, 381 and 423 of Michael Gabras in G. FATOUROS, *Die Briefe des Michael Gabras* (ca. 1290–nach 1350) (*Wiener Byzantinistische Studien* 10), Wien 1973, 557–558, 587, 603–604, 656. On the office *sakellarios* (treasurer of the palace or of the Great Church in Constantinople), see *ODB* 3, 1828–1820 ('Sakellarios', 'Sakellion').

¹¹ On the manuscripts, which comprise the "philosophical collection" and some hypotheses concerning their origin, see indicatively G. CAVALLI, *Qualche riflessione sulla "collezione filosofica"*, in: *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. C. D'Ancona. Leiden 2007, 155–165 and F. RONCONI, *La « collection philosophique »: un fantôme historique*. *Scriptorium* 67 (2013) 119–140; cf. also D. BIANCONI – F. RONCONI, *La « collection philosophique » face à l'histoire*. *Péripiétés et tradition* (*Miscellanea* 22). Spoleto 2020.

¹² See L. G. WESTERINK, *Ficino's Marginal Notes on Olympiodorus in Riccardi Greek MS 37*. *Traditio* 24 (1968) 352 and A. CARLINI, *Due percorsi tradizionali a confronto dal IX al XV secolo: Par. gr. 1807 – Marc. gr. Z. 196 (coll. 743) e 246 (coll. 756)*, in: *La « collection philosophique » face à l'histoire*. *Péripiétés et tradition*, ed. D. Bianconi – F. Ronconi. Spoleto 2020, 13–14. Modern editors of Neoplatonic texts often date the manuscript to the 15th century, see indicatively G. VAN RIEL, *Damascius, Commentaire sur le Philèbe de Platon*. Paris 2008, cxvii.

script during his studies with the philosopher Plethon Gemistos in Mystras¹³. The classicizing style of the poem fits well with the revival of classical learning initiated by Plethon Gemistos in Mystras during the first decades of the fifteenth century, but we cannot argue that the poem was produced in this intellectual circle, because its script bears paleographical elements that point to an earlier date. In particular, the poem is written in two columns, in a minuscule archaizing script, which contains some elements of the so-called *Fettaugenmode* (e.g. enlarged rounded φ, ω, ε) combined with very small letters and characteristic tall majuscule gammas and etas¹⁴. Its script differs from the writing style of the main text and it seems to have been added to the manuscript by another fourteenth-century hand¹⁵. A recent autopsy of the manuscript also revealed that the folio, on which the poem is written seems to be made of oriental paper and actually to derive from another manuscript¹⁶.

The elegiac distich is also indicative of the poem's genre. Although other meters were common for laments in Byzantium (e.g. the anacreontics and dodecasyllables), the elegiac distich was the most common one for the ancient monodies, epitaphs and funerary inscriptions¹⁷. The lament contains some metrical errors, but it generally gives the impression that the poet was well acquainted with metrics. Some errors such as additional syllables or the omission of a metrical syllable could have been caused not by the poet himself but by a later scribe of the poem¹⁸. The poet respected the prosodic rules; only in five cases does he deviate from the common prosodic patterns, namely in vv. 6, 7, 21, 33, 37. In most cases he shortens a long vowel (or a diphthong) in the last syllable of a word when the subsequent word begins with a vowel. It is likely that he considered those examples as another kind of epic correption: Μουσάων ὀλωλότος (v. 7), πημονῶν οἶμαι (v. 21), λόγων εἶδεα (v. 37). A usual epic correption can be found in v. 3 (ἐγὼ ὄρνις) and an internal one in v. 50 (βαῖᾱ). With regard to the caesurae of the 27 hexameters, the masculine caesura, the so-called penhemimeres, has predominance (3a, 8 verses), but the other common hexametric caesurae can also be found: feminine caesura (3b, 5 verses), bucolic diairesis (5 verses), hephthemimeres (4a, 7 verses), medial caesura (3c, 6 verses) and a caesura after the second foot (1 verse).¹⁹ In most cases the bucolic diairesis coexists with the medial caesura²⁰. One may wonder why so many hephthemimeres occur, as this caesura was not common in ancient elegies, but this can be explained by the late date of the poem.

In the pentameters we can notice the following tendencies: the ancient rule of having pure dactyls in the second hemistich is often violated, as there are spondees in several cases²¹. Additionally, there is a pause at the end of the first hemistich in most pentameters, which is in line with the an-

¹³ See MIONI, *Bibliothecae* 309 and E. MIONI, Vita del cardinale Bessarione. *Miscellanea Marciana* 6 (1991) 51–52.

¹⁴ The script also contains a characteristic abbreviated form of *kai*. On the *Fettaugenmode*, see H. HUNGER, Die sogenannte Fettaugen-Mode in griechischen Handschriften des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts. *BF* 4 (1972) 105–113. It should be noted that the poem's script differs from the script of the fifteenth-century humanists, such as Bessarion, Michael Apostoles, Ianos Laskaris, Ioannis Rhosos, Andronikos Kallistos. On several examples of the humanists' writing style, see P. ELEUTERI – P. CANART, *Scrittura greca nell'Umanesimo italiano*. Milano 1991.

¹⁵ A similar script, but not identical, can be found in the fourteenth-century manuscript Monac. gr. 280 (*Diktyon* 44727), which is of unknown origin, as well as in the manuscripts copied by the fourteenth-century astronomer and physician, Georgios Chrysokokkes, who lived in Constantinople and in Trabzon. For the description of Monac. gr. 280, see M. MOLIN PRADEL – K. HAJDU, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München*. 5, *Codices graeci Monacenses* 266–347 (*Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Monacensis* 2/5). Wiesbaden 2019, 127–129. On Georgios Chrysokokkes, see *ODB* 3, 453; *PLP* 31142 and *RGK* 3, 126.

¹⁶ The colour of the poem's paper is darker than the paper used in the main text and it does not have any watermark. Autopsy of the manuscript in August 2022.

¹⁷ See LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 93, and ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament* 104–105.

¹⁸ See the vv. 21, 31, 46 in the *apparatus criticus*.

¹⁹ According to LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* 360, the medial caesura was first attested in Late Antiquity and is present in the compositions of many Byzantine poets.

²⁰ See vv. 3, 13, 43, 46.

²¹ See vv. 2, 6, 10, 12, 14, 18, 20, 24, 32, 34, 42, 44, 49.

cient metrics²². The avoidance of hiatus between the two hemistichs is generally observed, but hiatus does occur in other positions²³. Another element, which witnesses the Byzantine origin of the poem and creates a certain rhythm, is the paroxytone ending of several of its verses. The poet formed elegiac couplets of emotional and commemorative character by using a poetic language, which is full of Homeric expressions and several rhetorical devices, such as the personification of natural elements, hyperbaton, rhetorical questions, similes, antitheseis, and repetitions²⁴.

In the present edition, the punctuation of the manuscript was partly retained. Question marks were added, and full stops replaced the colons of the manuscript (:), which in most cases indicate a strong pause. As far as the accentuation is concerned, the scribe was careful with accents and he followed closely the traditional rules of the accentuation of the enclitics. He also added the iota subscript where this was needed. Only a few orthographical irregularities and the omission of a letter (φῆτραι instead of φρήτραι) can be observed, but all of the inconsistencies are recorded in the *apparatus criticus*.

²² See vv. 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 28, 30, 34, 36, 38, 40, 47.

²³ There is only one case of hiatus between the two hemistichs, namely in v. 10. Other cases of hiatus can be found in vv. 3, 13, 24, 29, 34, 43, 45 and 46.

²⁴ Only a few Byzantine verbal forms occur: ἔσβεσε (v. 8), λέγε (v. 20), ἔτρεχεν (v. 40).

EDITION AND TRANSLATION

Θρηῖνος Τρικανᾶ τῷ Καντζᾶ τεθνηκότι,
ὥς ὑπὸ παιδὸς συντεθεὶς αὐτῷ γόος.

- Δένδρεα καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἄλσεα, λείβετε θρηῖνον
ἀνδρὸς μητιόεντος νῦν οἰχομένου·
αἰ αἰ, εἴθε γενοίμην Θρηκία νῦν ἐγὼ ὄρνις,
ὄφρ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γᾶν εἶχον ἄγειν· ἄ, πάθον·
5 τέγγετε δάκρυσιν, ὀφθαλμῶν κύκλα, τέγγετε γαῖαν,
οὓς ἔρωσ αἰθερίης τιτρώσκει σοφίης
τοῦ χοροποιοῦ τῶν Μουσάων ὀλωλότος ἄφαρ.
τίς γ' ἐμὸν ἔσβεσε φῶς; τίς φρένας εἶλεν ἐμάς;
κεῖνος ἐμῇ κραδίῃ, κεῖνος νόος ἔμπεδος ἦν μοι,
10 οὗ κεφαλὴν ποθέω, οὗ βέβλημαι ἄχει.
οἴμους ἀστερόεντας ἀνιχνεύει τίς Ὀλύμπου
ἢ φύσιος τίς ὁδοὺς ἀτρεκέως οἶδεν;
οὐκέτι ὄντος, ὃς αἰθέρα ἀγλαὸν ἀμφιπόλεψε,
καίπερ ἔχων δέμας ἐν μητέρι γῇ πάντων;
15 δρύπτετε, κοῦροι, στήθεα λαχνήεντα, παρειάς,
οἱ Μούσαις ὕμνους ἦδετε μυστιπόλοις,
δακρυχέοντες ἀπὸ βλεφάρων ἀπαλῶν ὥς κρῆναι·
ὃς γὰρ ἔφαινε ἐπιστήμης ὄργια, ποῦ;
αἰνῶ τὴν λίθον, ἣ πηγὰς ἀφίησι δακρύων·
20 ἠέλιος, πάνθ' ὀρᾷς πῶς ταυτί; λέγε.
πημονῶν οἶμαι πληθὸς ἔδρασεν ἐκεῖ κακεῖνα.
ἦθεα κεδνά, χαρίεσσα φυή, μέγεθος,
εἶδος ἀγαυόν, ἐπὼν ἀγορή, τίς κεύθει ταῦτα;
ἄγριος Ἄδου οἶκος, δεινός τε πικρός.
25 ὕδωρ, τοίνυν, πῦρ ἀΐδηλον, ἄελλαι, γαῖα,
πένθει λυγρῷ τιμᾶτε τὸν οἰχόμενον.
σὴν ἀγανοφροσύνην μέμνημαι, μήδεα πυκνά,
πειθοῦς ἔκγονα τέκν' ἀγκύλα ῥητορίης
ποῖ δὴ ὄχετο; ἀρπάξασα κακὴ θυέλλη

4 ἀπείρονα γᾶν] cf. ἀπείρονα γαῖαν locus communis in Hom. 5 ὀφθαλμῶν κύκλα] Const. Manas., *Brev. Chron.* 4040 (p. 220 Lampsidis); Const. Manas., *Arist. et Cal. fragm.* 168, 3 (p. 206 Mazal) 7 χοροποιοῦ τῶν Μουσάων] Liban., *Or.* 60, 13, 7 (p. 321 Foerster) 8 cf. *Dig. Acr. Grott.* 9N, 4113 (p. 345 Trapp) φρένας εἶλεν] Hom., *Il.* 16.805; cf. 9, 377; 18, 311 9 νόος ἔμπεδος] Hom., *Il.* 11.813 10 κεφαλὴν ποθέω] Hom., *Od.* 1.343 12 ἀτρεκέως οἶδεν] Herod., *Hist.* 4, 16; 4, 25; Theod. Metoch., *Carm. XIII ad Leon. Bard.* 232 (p. 466 Featherstone) 13 αἰθέρα ἀμφιπόλεψε] cf. Io. Gaz., *Tab. Univ. Descrip.* 1, 135 (p. 14 Lauritzen) 15 στήθεα λαχνήεντα] Hom., *Il.* 18.415; Opp., *Cyneg.* 3, 31; Nonn., *Dionys.* 28, 210; 36, 324; 46, 196 17 βλεφάρων ἀπαλῶν] cf. Eur., *Elect.* 1336 19 πηγὰς ἀφίησι δακρύων] cf. Greg. Naz., *Or.* 14, 95 (PG 35, 872A) 20 πάνθ' ὀρᾷς] cf. Eur., *Phoen.* 745; Eur., *Elect.* 659 21 πημονῶν] Soph., *Oed. Tyr.* 1230 22 ἦθεα κεδνά] Hes., *Theog.* 66; *Op. et Dies* 699; Greg. Naz. *Carm.* II, 2, 3, 167 (PG 37, 1492A); II, 2, 4, 67 (PG 37, 1510) 23 εἶδος ἀγαυόν] Orph., *Lithic.* 304 25 πῦρ ἀΐδηλον] Hom., *Il.* 2.455 26 πένθει λυγρῷ] Hom., *Il.* 22.242; 2.70; Aesch., *Choeph.* 17; cf. Eur., *Iphig. Aul.* 1618b 27 ἀγανοφροσύνην] Hom., *Il.* 24.772; *Od.* 11.203 | μήδεα πυκνά] Hom., *Il.* 3.202 29 κακὴ θυέλλη] Hom., *Il.* 6.345; Hom., *Od.* 10.54

4 ἄ cod. 20 ἠέλιος cod. 29 ἀρπάξασσα cod.

Lament for the deceased Trikanas Kantzas,
a wailing as if it was composed for him by his child.

- Trees and rivers and groves, shed streams of tears²⁵
for the wise man has now died.
Alas, would that I were now a Thracian bird,
that I may travel to the ends of the earth; oh, woe is me!
- 5 Circles of eyes, dampen the earth with tears,
[eyes] which are hurt by the eros for heavenly wisdom
of the Muses' dancer, who has suddenly died.
Who quenched my light? Who seized my mind?
He was for me my heart, an unshakable spirit,
- 10 whose dear head I desire and for whom I am wounded with distress.
Who traces Olympus' starry paths
or knows precisely the ways of nature?
The one who traversed the bright sky is no more,
even though he had a living body on the mother earth?
- 15 Youths, tear <your> shaggy chests and <your> cheeks,
– you, who were singing hymns along with the mystic Muses –
weeping like fountains from <your> tender eyelids;
where is the one who brought to light the mysteries of scientific knowledge?
I praise the stone, which sheds streams of tears.
- 20 Sun, you who watch over everything, tell <me> how this <happened>?
I think the great number of miseries caused those there.
Noble manners, graceful stature, size,
lordly shape, the gathering of speeches, who covers <all> these?
The wild house of Hades, the terrible and bitter one.
- 25 So, water, consuming fire, whirlwinds, land,
honor the deceased with bitter grief.
I remember your gentleness, numerous counsels,
the offspring of persuasion, the complications of rhetoric,
whither are they gone? An evil storm-wind seized <them>

²⁵ On this interpretation, see *LBG*, s.v. θρήνος.

- 30 ἄλγεά τε στοναχὰς καὶ σκοτόεντα γόον
τοῖς ἀρετὴν τε καὶ ἥβην σὴν ποθέουσι λιποῦσα.
ὦ σοφίης ἐρατεινῆς, φύσιος κλεινῆς
καὶ μελιφώνου γλώσσης· ὦ θανάτοιο δυσηχοῦς
φείδεαι οὐδενός· οὐ κάλλεος, οὐ στιλπνοῦ,
35 οὐχ ὥρης ῥοδοπέπλου καὶ σθένεος κρατεροῖο.
ὦ νεφέλαι, δότε μοι δάκρυα, οὐ γὰρ ἔχω.
ποῦ λόγων εἶδεα πολλά, ἀμύμονος Ἑρμοῦ ἔργα
καὶ χρυσῶν ἐπέων ἄσματοι μοι κλεινά;
τίς δὲ γεωμετρίας λόγος ἐν μερόπεσσι θανόντος,
40 οὗ κλέος ἔτρεχεν εἰς οὐρανὸν εὐρὺ<v> μέγα;
οὔρεα καὶ πτηνῶν ἀγέλαι, νεπόδων νέφος ὕγρον
καὶ φρήτραι χερσαίων, ἐμὲ πενθεῖτε·
ποῦ γὰρ μοι ἐρικυδέα Μουσῶν δῶρα ἀγητὰ
καὶ Κυθερείης ἄγαλμα καλὸν δίας
45 ὄχρετο; τὰγαθὰ φρουῖδα· ἐγὼ δὲ κακῶς φθινύθω αἶ.
τείρεα παμφανόωντα καὶ ἄνθεα ποικιλόεντα,
φαίνετέ μοι κατὰ γῆν ἢ ἐκατ' αἰθέρα νῦν
εἰδῶλον βροτέης μορφῆς, ἀχέων θαλπωρὴν,
ὅς γὰρ ἔην μέγας Ἑλλάνων ἐν σοφίῃ,
50 ἀγλυόεντα τὰ τῇδε λιπὼν ἐνὶ γῇ βαιῶ κεῖται.
δένδρεα καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἄλσεα, λείβετε θρῆνον.

30 ἄλγεά τε στοναχὰς] Hom., *Il.* 2.39; Hom., *Od.* 14.39 32 σοφίης ἐρατεινῆς] Chr. Myt., *Carm.* 10, 21 (p. 11 De Groote)
35 σθένεος κρατεροῖο] cf. Bacch., *Dith.* 4, 40; Opp., *Hal.* 4, 542 40 cf. Hom., *Od.* 8.73; 19.107 41 πτηνῶν ἀγέλαι] Soph., *Aj.* 168; cf. Eur., *Ion* 106 43 ἐρικυδέα...δῶρα] Hom., *Il.* 3.65; *Il.* 20.265 46 τείρεα παμφανόωντα] Greg. Naz. *Carm.* II, 1, 61, 17 (PG 37, 1395A); cf. Hom. *Il.* 18.485

34 οὐ στιλπνοῦ cod. 39 γαιομετρίας cod. 40 εὐρὺ cod. μέγα p. corr. cod. recte: μέγαν a. corr. 42 φρήτραι scripsi: φῆτραι cod. 46 παμφανόοντα cod.

- 30 and left behind griefs and groans and dark mourning
to those who desire your virtue and your youthful bloom.
Oh, delightful wisdom, renowned nature
and honey-voiced tongue; Oh, dissonant death,
you don't spare any; neither the beauty, nor the brightness,
35 nor the bloom of youth with the roseate veil and the powerful strength.
Oh clouds, grant me the tears, I do not yet have.
Where are the many forms of speech, the deeds of blameless Hermes
and the well-known songs of the golden verses?
Which word of geometry <is still > in mortals, since he died,
40 the one whose great glory was coursing through the broad heaven?
Mountains and flocking birds, the fluid cloud of fish
and the tribes of the land-animals, mourn for me.
Where <are> the glorious admirable gifts of the Muses
and the beautiful sculpture of the divine Cythereia?
45 Is it gone? The goods have vanished; Ah, I shall badly perish.
Radiant stars and multicoloured flowers,
show me now on earth or on heaven
the phantom of the mortal figure, the consolation of pains,
the one who was great among Hellenes in wisdom,
50 abandoning the gloomy <earthly life>, he lies in this small portion of land.
Trees and rivers and groves, shed streams of tears.

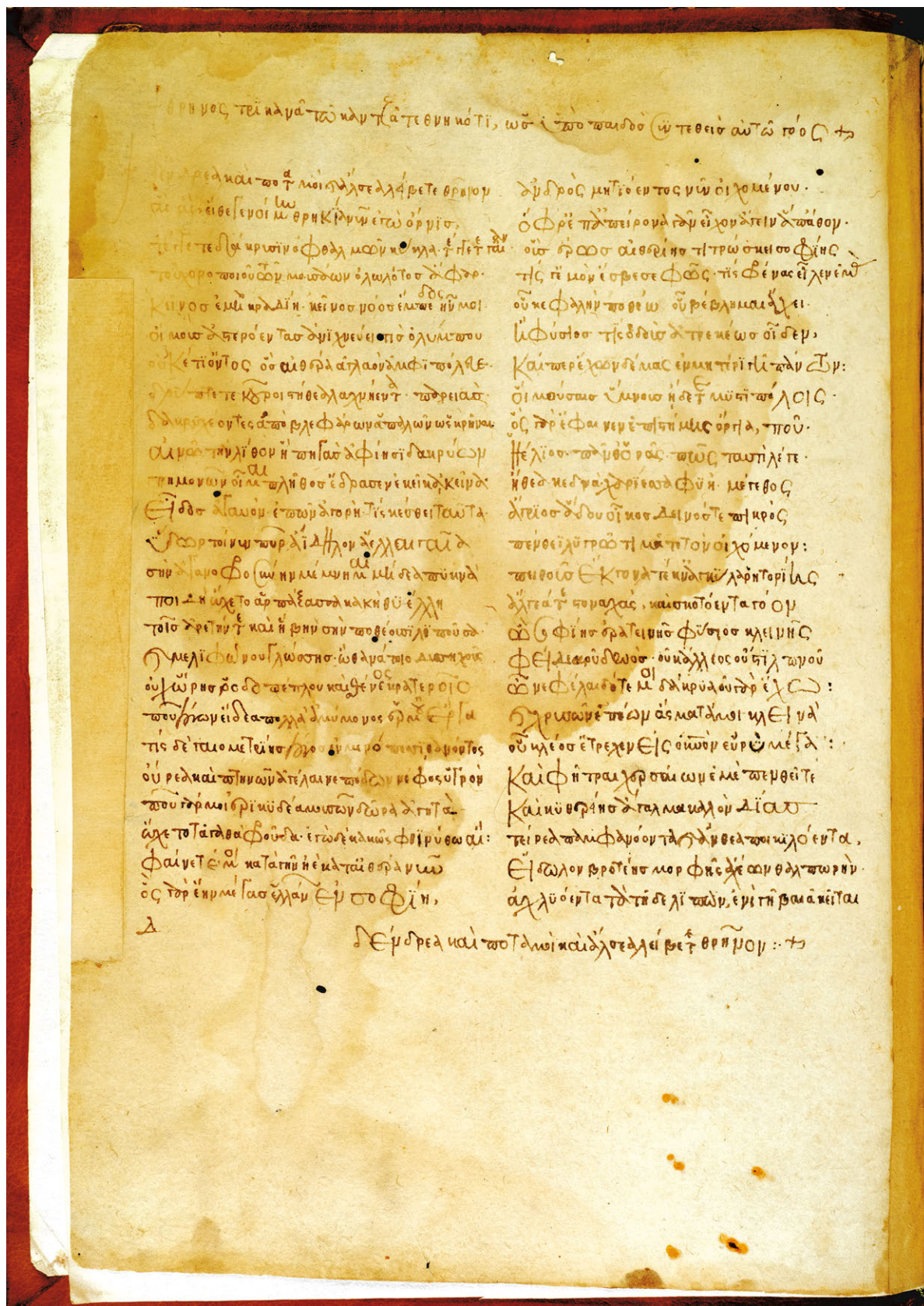


Figure 1: Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z 197, f. Iv
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 Divieto di riproduzione)

COMMENTARY

Tit: The title consists of two verses in *dodecasyllables*. *Goos* is another term for lament and it often occurs in Homer. According to Alexiou, it is “a shrill cry”, “a spontaneous weeping of the kinswomen”, always performed by women²⁶.

1: The compassion of nature is a *topos* of laments from antiquity to modern times. A well-known passage comes from *Prometheus Bound* 88–99:

ΠΡΟΜΗΘΕΥΣ ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί,
ποταμῶν τε πηγὰι ποντίων τε κυμάτων
ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα παμμῆτορ τε γῆ,
καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ,
ἴδεσθέ μ', οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός.

O you bright sky of heaven, you swift-winged breezes,
you river-waters, and infinite laughter of the waves of ocean,
O universal mother Earth, and you, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call!
See what I, a god, endure from the gods²⁷.

A noteworthy example from the Byzantine period is the *Lament for the death of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos*, which is preserved in the famous illustrated manuscript of Skylitzes' *Chronicle*, cod. Matritensis Vitr. 26-2 (*Diktyon* 40403) and is attributed to Symeon Metaphrastes²⁸.

Βουνοὶ καὶ ὄρη, κλαύσατε σὺν ἡμῖν τὸν δεσπότην

...

Ἥλιε τὰς ἀκτῖνάς σου κρῦψον ἐκ τῆς ἡμέρας,
ἐν ᾗ τὸ φέγγος ἔκρυσσε τῆς οἰκουμένης τάφος.

...

ναὶ ἄψυχα συνθρηγεῖτε.
Πάλαι μὲν ὕδωρ ἔβλυσαν πέτραι θεοῦ δυνάμει,
νῦν δὲ ῥεύσουσι δάκρυα, νικώμεναι τῷ πάθει²⁹.

Hills and mountains, cry with us for the emperor

...

Sun, thy glowing rays withhold beginning with the hour
in which the tomb withheld from us the universe's splendor.

...

Inanimate things, mourn with me!

In olden days, springs gushed from stones by God's transcendent power;
Now stones shall shed abundant tears succumbing to their sorrow.

Another later lament in epic style, which contains an invocation to nature, can be found in the manuscript El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, Σ.ΙΙ.7, f. 255v (15th c.; *Diktyon* 15358). According to Miller, it is dedicated to Elvira, the sister of the duke of Lefkada, Leonardo III Tocco († 1503).

²⁶ On *Goos*, see ALEXIOU, The Ritual Lament 102–103. Cf. E. PAPADOGIANNAKI, “Oxytonon goon”: *Goos* and its Performance in Classical Athens, *Classica et Mediaevalia* 62 (2011) 15–32.

²⁷ Tr. H. WEIR SMYTH, Aeschylus: Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound. Cambridge MA 1926, 225.

²⁸ On the edition and the English translation of the poem, see I. ŠEVČENKO, Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Scylitzes. *DOP* 23 (1970) 210–214. The text is also available at DBBE: <https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/types/30509> (accessed 15.07.2023).

²⁹ A similar invocation to the natural elements (sun, moon, stones, etc.) can be found in the Lament for the death of Leo the Wise from the same manuscript, see ŠEVČENKO, Poems 201–203.

Τείρεα παμφανόων καὶ ἡελίου ἀκάμαντον
 φῶς, Ἐκάτας θ' ἱερὸν φέγγος ἀπ' οὐρανόθεν,
 οὔρεα βουνοὶ τε σκιόεντες καὶ νάπαι ἱρῶν
 σμήνεα νυμφάων ἡδέ τε Νηϊάδων,
 ἔθνεα Μουσάων Χαρίτων τε θεαίνων, κλῦτε,
 ἔλθετε, θρηγνόν τ' οἰμωγὴν τοῦ θανάτου
 στησάμεν' Αἰβιέρας ἔνεκεν πάϊδος βασιλῆος³⁰.

Stars, all shining and inexhaustible light of sun,
 holy light of Hecate from heaven,
 mountains, shadowy hills and valleys of holy places
 swarms of nymphs and of the Naiads,
 hear tribes of the Muses, the Graces and goddesses,
 come to set up a lamentation and a wailing
 for the death of Aiviera, the daughter of a king³¹.

3–4 The child wishes to become a Thracian mourning bird so as to fly away from sufferings. One could wonder why the poet especially refers to a Thracian bird. A possible explanation could be that he is referring to the ancient myth of Tereus, Procne and Philomela, which was often used in Byzantine texts, especially in relation to mourning and death. Tereus, king of Thrace, was married to Procne, but he raped her sister Philomela and cut her tongue in order to hide his crime. When Procne became aware of his terrible actions, she killed their son (called Itys) and she served him as a meal to her husband. While Tereus pursued the two sisters for killing them, the gods turned them into birds: Tereus became a hoopoe, Philomela a swallow and Procne a nightingale, which mourns with its sorrowful song the death of Itys. Aristophanes refers to the same myth in his *Frogs* (680–685), when he compares Cleophon to the Thracian swallow and the mourning song of a nightingale. Perhaps these verses offer an indication that the narrative voice of the poem is a feminine one. According to Alexiou, the speaking voice in most of the Greek laments is feminine³². However, since the word παῖς can signify either a boy or a girl, we cannot exclude the possibility that the speaking voice of the lament could also be a boy, for instance, a student or a son of Trikanas.

8 τίς γ' ἐμὸν ἔσβεσε φῶς: The lamenting person expressing sadness for the loss of Trikanas by comparing him to the light of eyes. Similar phraseology occurs in the poem *Digenis Akrites*, the moment when Digenis laments the death of his mother.

Τίς μοι τὴν ρίζαν ἔκοψεν τοῦδε τοῦ βίου ἄρτι;
 Τίς φῶς ἐμὸν κατέσβεσεν, ἤδη οὐ θέλω βλέπειν;
 Ἦ σπλάγχνων τίς ἐχώρισεν τῶν μητρικῶν ἀθρόως³³;

Who just cut the root of this <worldly> life?
 Who quenched my light, can I already not see?
 Or who suddenly separated (me) from the maternal inwards³⁴?

11–14 With the use of the metaphor 'οἶμους ἀστερόεντας...Ὀλύμπου', Olympus is indirectly identified with the sky, which is in line with the Homeric tradition³⁵. Trikanas was examining the

³⁰ Published by E. MILLER, *Catalogue des manuscrits grecs de la bibliothèque de l'Escurial*. Paris 1848, 84.

³¹ Translation is mine.

³² See ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament* 108. Cf. HUNTER, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry* 7–8.

³³ *Digenis Akrites*, version Z, Book 9, lines 4112–4114, ed. E. TRAPP, *Digenes Akrites*. Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen (*WBS* 8). Wien 1971, 345.

³⁴ Translation is mine.

starry paths of the Olympus sky, although he was a mortal on earth. This might be an allusion to Trikanas' engagement with astronomy. The poet makes another link between the sky and the earth in v. 47.

19 A parallel image of the stones shedding tears can be found in the aforementioned lament for the death of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, vv. 34–35:

Πάλαι μὲν ὕδωρ ἔβλυσαν πέτραι θεοῦ δυνάμει,
νῦν δὲ ρεύσουσι δάκρυα, νικώμεναι τῷ πάθει³⁶.

In olden days, springs gushed from stones by God's transcendent power;
Now stones shall shed abundant tears succumbing to their sorrow.

The personification of the stones as mourning women recalls the ancient myth of Niobe and her representation as a weeping stone. The motif of the weeping stone is also attested in other Byzantine texts and still survives in the Modern Greek saying δάκρυσαν και οι πέτρες “even the stones cried”, which is especially used for expressing deep sorrow for the sudden loss of a young person³⁷.

20 The line recalls the Homeric verse Ἡέλιος, ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούεις “sun, you who see and hear everything” (*Il.* 3.277). The same verse occurs in the commentary of Olympiodorus on Plato's *Phaedo*, a treatise that is included in the manuscript Marc. gr. Z 197³⁸.

33–35 Death spares nothing, neither the deceased's beauty, nor his wealth, youth nor strength. The motif of the inevitability of death is also expressed in the *Odyssey* in the words of Achilles addressed to Agamemnon, when he meets in Hades his sorrowful spirit: μοῖρ' ὀλοή, τὴν οὐ τις ἀλεύεται ὃς κε γένηται “deadly fate, that none avoids of those born” (*Od.* 24.29).

35 ὥρης ῥοδοπέπλου: The adjective ῥοδοπέπλος appears in TLG only once, in Quintus' *Posthomerica* in a similar expression Γηθείω ῥοδοπέπλος ἄν' οὐρανὸν Ἠριγένεια “Now Dawn with her robes of rose can rejoice up in heaven” (*Posthom.* 3.608)³⁹. The image of the rosy dawn recalls the well-known Homeric verse ῥοδοδάκτυλος ἠὼς “the rosy-fingered day” (*Od.* 2.1). The word ὥρα possibly refers to Trikanas' youth, implying that he died while he was still young⁴⁰.

36 A personification of the clouds is implied, as they could grant rainy tears to the mourning woman. In antiquity the *nephelai* were considered Oceanid nymphs of clouds, minor goddesses, who nourished the earth with rain⁴¹. The Oceanids in *Prometheus Bound* 399–402 lament Prometheus' fate and shed flowing tears:

στένω σε τᾶς οὐλομένας τύχας, Προμηθεῦ,
δακρυσίστακτα δ' ἅπ' ὅσων
ῥαδινὰν λειβομένα ῥέος παρειὰν
νοτίοις ἔτεγξα παγαῖς.

³⁵ See *Il.* 5.750 and 8.394: “Μέγα οὐρανὸς οὐλυμπὸς τε”. The epithet ἀστερόεις is common in Homer and is connected to οὐρανὸς in *Il.* 4.44.

³⁶ Edition and translation by ŠEVČENKO, Poems 211.

³⁷ The same motif can, for instance, be found in the mourning words of Michael Psellos for the death of the patriarch Michael Keroullarios: Εἶδον ἐγὼ τηνικαῦτα τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ ἰδὼν ἐδάκρυσεν μὲν, πῶς γὰρ οὐ; Τὸ γὰρ θέαμα καὶ λίθους εἰς πηγὰς δακρύων ἐρρήγνυεν “Then I saw the man and by seeing <him> I cried, how couldn't I? The spectacle bursts into streams of tears.” For the edition of the Greek text, see I. POLEMIS, Michael Psellus Orationes funebres, vol. 1 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana). Berlin – Boston 2014, 63.

³⁸ See Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo* 4.9, ed. L.G. WESTERINK, The Greek Commentaries on Plato's *Phaedo*. Volume I Olympiodorus. Oxford – New York 1976, 85.

³⁹ Translation by N. HOPKINSON, Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica* (Loeb Classical Library 19). Cambridge 2018, 177.

⁴⁰ Cf. the word ἥβην in v. 31.

⁴¹ See W.H. ROSCHER, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, III. Leipzig 1897–1909, 177–179.

I mourn your unfortunate fate,
Prometheus. Shedding from my eyes a coursing flood of tears
I wet my tender cheeks with their moist streams⁴².

37–40 In this passage, the interests of Trikanas are specified. The reference to λόγοι, as well as to the god Hermes, who was associated in Byzantium with rhetoric, support the idea that Trikanas was skilled in rhetoric. One may also compare the references to Trikanas' persuasive rhetorical speech (v. 26) and to his sweet-voiced tongue (v. 33), which allude to the honey metaphor as a means of praising eloquence. The phrase χρυσᾷ ἔπη also refers to Trikanas' eloquence, but it might also recall the *Golden Verses*, a poem of moral and philosophical exhortations in hexameters, which is ascribed to Pythagoras. The poem was popular among the Neoplatonists (e.g. Iamblichus), who used it for their moral teachings, and as its manuscript tradition attests, its popularity was retained in the intellectual circles of the late Byzantium⁴³. Pythagoreanism is known for its contribution to philosophy and to geometry, which is clearly mentioned in v. 39 as another field of Trikanas' expertise.

42–45 In Homer the ἐρικυδέα δῶρα “glorious gifts” are of the Gods (*Il.* 3.65; *Il.* 20.265). However in the poem, these are the gifts of the Muses and refer to the learning and culture of Trikanas.

45 After v. 45 there is possibly a lacuna in the poem, because v. 46 is also a hexameter and the elegiac distich is not complete.

46–48 The first two verses form a chiasmus: the shiny stars can reveal the phantom (εἶδωλον) of Trikanas in the sky or the colourful flowers can make it appear on earth. Indirectly, the child wishes to die, because in this case she/he could see the *eidolon*, namely the spirit image of Trikanas in heaven, whereas the appearance of the *eidolon* on earth would signify that the child will remain alive. Odysseus, however, met the *eidolon* of Hercules in Hades while he was alive (*Od.* 11.602). The *eidolon* is the only consolation for the child's pain, in contrast to prayers to God, as the Christian teachings advise.

49–50 These verses bear a resemblance to the tomb epigram which Nikephoros Gregoras—a polymath known for his specialized knowledge in *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy)—dedicated to his teacher, the renowned Byzantine scholar Theodore Metochites⁴⁴. Since Metochites died in 1332 in Constantinople, we assume that this is the date of the epigram below, which was meant to be inscribed on the tomb of Metochites.

Τοῦ Γρηγοῤᾤ ἐπίγραμμα
ἐπὶ τῷ τάφῳ τοῦ μεγάλου λογοθέτου τοῦ Μετοχίτη
Ὅς πάρος ἐν σοφίῃ μέγα κῦδος ἔην γε θνητῶν,
βαῖδς ὠδὶ λάας τοῦγε κέκευθε νέκυν.
Δῆμος σεπτῶν Μουσάων ὀλολύξατε πᾶσαι·
ᾤλετο κεῖνος ἀνὴρ· ᾤλετο σοφίῃ πᾶσα⁴⁵.

Epigram of Gregoras
(inscribed) on the tomb of Metochites, the great logothetes

⁴² Translation by WEIR SMYTH, Aeschylus 253.

⁴³ For the relation of the Neoplatonists to the poem, see J.C. THOM, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary*. Leiden 1995, 13. For its manuscript tradition and its significant transmission during the Palaeologan period, see the *Pinakes* database: <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>

⁴⁴ On Gregoras, see *ODB* II 874–875, and on Metochites, see *ODB* II 1357–1358.

⁴⁵ On the edition of the poem, see S.G. MERCATI, *Sulle poesie di Niceforo Gregora*, in: *Collectanea Byzantina* I, ed. IDEM. Roma 1971, 150–151.

The one who soon became a great glory among mortals with his wisdom,
 a small stone covered here his corpse.
 Choir of all the revered Muses, cry out loud;
 this man perished; all of wisdom perished⁴⁶.

In both poems there is an antithesis between the small tomb and the greatness of the deceased man, as well as an emphasis on his wisdom and erudition. The adjective βαιὸς is a common epithet for tombs and it is usually part of an antithetical sentence. An indicative example is the beginning of an anonymous epigram from the *Palatine Anthology* dedicated to Homer's tomb: Εἰ καὶ βαιὸς ὁ τύμβος, ὁδοιπόρε, μὴ με παρέλθῃς, / ἀλλὰ κατασπείσας, ἴσα θεοῖσι σέβου ("Wayfarer, though the tomb be small, pass not by, but pour on me a libation, and venerate me as thou dost the gods")⁴⁷. The characterization of Trikanas as "great among Hellenes in wisdom" (μέγας Ἑλλάνων ἐν σοφίῃ) indicates that he was an intellectual trained in classics⁴⁸.

EPILOGUE

The poem dedicated to Trikanas Kantzas is rich in metaphors and lyrical expressions of grief. The whole universe is invited to participate in the lamentation, even the phantom of the deceased is called in order to console the child. Although the poem was composed in the Byzantine period, it is of a secular style and full of Homeric vocabulary. It presents Trikanas as the leader of the Muses, a well-educated man who explored nature and the heavens. Trikanas seems to have been acquainted with rhetoric, geometry, philosophy and the natural sciences, and perhaps this is the reason why the poem includes so many invocations to natural elements. The so-called Palaeologan revival in the decades around 1300 was characterized by a renewed interest in classical models, rhetoric, astronomy, philosophy and natural sciences. These fields were particularly cultivated in Constantinople in the intellectual circle of Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) and in Mystras under the direction of Plethon Gemistos (c. 1360–1452). The manuscript's provenance and the education of Trikanas facilitate the hypothesis that he belonged to an intellectual circle, but unfortunately, lack of further evidence prevents us from identifying his historical identity. Trikanas could have been a teacher, most likely from the 14th century, and the youths, who lamented him, could have been his students. It is peculiar that no information is preserved in any other text for this wise and learned man, who still remains an obscure figure. The poem is significant, for it provides evidence not only of the existence of Trikanas, but also of an intellectual circle which was active in the Palaeologan period and had a particular interest in subjects related to ancient philosophy, the natural sciences and ancient poetry.

⁴⁶ Translation is mine.

⁴⁷ See *AG* VII.2b, vv. 1–2. On the text and translation, see W. R. PATON, *The Greek Anthology, Volume II: Book 7: Sepulchral Epigrams. Book 8: The Epigrams of St. Gregory the Theologian* (*Loeb Classical Library* 68). Cambridge MA 1917, 4–5.

⁴⁸ Byzantine intellectuals started calling themselves Hellenes in the twelfth century due to the revival of the interest in ancient texts during that time and also to distinguish themselves from the Westerners, see R. MACRIDES – P. MAGDALINO, *The Fourth Kingdom and the Rhetoric of Hellenism*, in: *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. P. Magdalino. London – Ohio 1992, 139–156. A similar characterization is attributed to Plethon Gemistos by Bessarion in an elegiac tomb epigram he composed in honour of him. On the epigram, see DBBE: <https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/types/5175> (accessed: 15.07.2023). Cf. also the tomb epigram dedicated to Bessarion by Andronikos Kallistos: <https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/types/5168> (accessed: 15.07.2023).

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FIGURES

Figure 1: Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z 197, f. Iv (© Biblioteca Marciana; su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Divieto di riproduzione).