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# Byzantine Book Epigrams:

## the case of *ὥσπερ ξένοι…*

Greek manuscripts are generally being studied as witnesses of Ancient, Early Christian or Byzantine texts. By contrast, the (snippets of) texts found in the margins of these manuscripts have received very little scholarly attention. So-called book epigrams are a good example of such little-explored marginalia. Recently, however, a wealth of material has become publicly – and freely – available through the Ghent University *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams*, which has sparked off further research into this subject.

In this paper we will focus on one particularly popular type of epigram, namely the *ὥσπερ ξένοι*-case:

Ὥσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσιν ἰδεῖν πατρίδα·

οὕτως καὶ οἱ γράφοντες βιβλίου τέλος.

This text can be considered to be the most standard, and thus most often attested, version of the epigram (http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/occ/346). However, due to the numerous occurrences of this formula throughout more than one hundred Byzantine manuscripts, its diversity in length, meter and lexical choice is striking. This presents manifold challenges to the scholar. We will discuss two of these challenges, more specifically the editorial issues and the metrical irregularities.

As with many book epigrams, its edition is highly complicated by the variety in which it has come down to us. This specific epigram, however, challenges the concepts of authorship and originality to such an extent that it complicates the (re)construction of an authoritative text even further. Producers of book epigrams often combined a traditional, formulaic attitude with their own original input, which makes every single occurrence of this type of epigram a more or less original text.

Secondly, our case study exhibits certain metrical deviations, most notably in the last verse of the epigram. The high frequency of metrical irregularities in the *ὥσπερ ξένοι*-case suggests that it was not felt to be problematic to deviate from the dodecasyllabic pattern. We will argue that this is a consequence of the 'commatic' style of Byzantine meter, which is also typical of Byzantine rhetoric.

By addressing these two main issues, we will shed light on the indistinct poetic status of book epigrams in general.