

Life and Society in Eleventh Century Constantinople

By N. OIKONOMIDES (Athens)

The poet *Christophoros Mitylenaios* was a man with many curiosities. Born and raised in Constantinople, he spent most of his life in this city. He was a prolific writer and very successful at that. Using the metrical forms that the Byzantines had inherited from antiquity as well as those that they developed, he wrote thousands of poems, mainly epigrams, to all the saints, and composed several metrical calendars of the whole year. Some have been translated into slavic, others have been introduced into the standard liturgical manuscripts and all met with remarkable success and are preserved in many codices¹).

He also wrote epigrams of varying length and metrical styles concerning persons and events of his times. Most of them are preserved in a unique, fifteenth century manuscript of Grottaferrata, which has been partly destroyed by mice. But thanks to some independent copies of individual poems, we now have intelligible (often complete) texts of two thirds of them. Their importance for the historian has already attracted some attention²). We shall examine them once again from a different point of view, using the critical edition of Kurtz (to be quoted by the letter K followed by the number of each poem)³).

¹) Enrica Follieri, *I calendari in metro innografico di Cristoforo Mitileneo*. I–II, Bruxelles 1980. In the introduction to this monumental publication, one will find a synthesis of what is known about the author and detailed bibliographical references. More recent publications: eadem, *Un Bollandista „ante litteram“: Cristoforo Mitileneo*, in: *Studi Bizantini e Neogreci*. Galatina 1983, p. 279–284. — C. Crimi, *Graeca et bizantina*. Catania 1983; idem, *Identificazione di un frammento di anacreonteo*, *Studi di filologia bizantina* III (Catania 1985), p. 15–21; idem, *Recuperi cristoforei*, *Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata* 39 (1985), p. 233–242.

²) Enrica Follieri, *Le poesie di Cristoforo Mitileneo come fonte storica*, *Zbornik Radova Viz. Inst.* 8/2 (1964) (*Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky* II), p. 133–148.

³) E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios*. Leipzig 1903. We now have an italian translation with commentary of this collection: *Cristoforo di Mitilene, Canzoniere*. By A. Anastasi, C. Crimi, R. Gentile. Catania 1983. — The present paper is a by-product of a seminar on Christophoros Mitylenaios, conducted at the University of Athens in 1988, in collaboration with my colleagues A. Kominis and P. Vokotopoulos.

It has long been remarked that in the Grottaferrata manuscript the poems are arranged in chronological order. Some of them, referring to historical events, can be dated with precision: K 8 to 1034, K 18, 19, 24 to 1034–1041, K 22 to ca. 1039, K 49 to December 1041, K 52 to April 1042, K 54, 55 to 1042/43, K 61 to March/April 1043, K 65 to 1043, K 70 to ca. 1045, K 95 to ca. 1047/48, K 143 to after 1068. *Christophoros* lost an adult brother, ca. 1040 (K 44), then his mother while his father was still alive, ca. 1042 (K 57–60), then a sister, ca. 1045–47 (K 75–79). We may thus conclude that he must have been born within the first fifteen years of the eleventh century.

He grew up in the parish of Saint Protasios, in the region of Strategion, close to the administrative centre of the Byzantine capital (K 36, 114). He may have frequented the neighbouring school of Saint Theodore of Sphorakiou (see *infra*). He started writing poetry quite early (one of his metrical calendars was ready in the forties of the century: K 83). To make a living, he entered the public service as an imperial scribe (*hypographeus*: K 114), and was probably attached to the financial service called *sakelle*⁴). He held office as a judge (with mainly fiscal responsibilities) twice in the Pontus (in the province of Paphlagonia and in that of the Armeniakoi). In Paphlagonia, he already occupied a distinguished social position as his honorific title was that of patrician; later he was promoted to *anthypatos* (i.e. honorific proconsul); one may assume that he did not climb any further in the hierarchy, as these two titles, patrician and *anthypatos*, are the highest ones mentioned in the manuscripts preserving his works. This was a successful — not an outstanding — career for an 11th century civil servant⁵).

The Grottaferrata manuscript is obviously an anthology of poems. Their chronological arrangement suggests that they were copied from a register in which *Christophoros* kept duplicates of (all?) his poetical works. The criteria

⁴) This is a hypothesis based upon the fact that *Christophoros* wrote a poem for the image of Christ Pantokrator depicted on the dome of the palace room called the Oatos, which served for storing the archives of the neighbouring *sakelle*, and presumably was not accessible to the general public. In the twelfth century, the Oatos contained also the archives of another financial service, of the *genikon*: see F. Dölger, *Beiträge zur Geschichte byzantinischer Finanzverwaltung*. Leipzig 1927, p. 26, note 1.

⁵) The combination of titles patrician and judge of Paphlagonia is attested in the titles of codd. Marcianus Nannianus 182 and Parisinus gr. 396: J. Darrouzès, in *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 16 (1958), p. 67. More detailed information is provided in the manuscript of Grottaferrata and several others that mention him both as *anthypatos* and as patrician. — In cod. Mosquensis 353 (Arhimandrit Vladimir, *Sistematičeskoe opisanie rukopisej moskovskoj sinodal'noj biblioteki*. Moscow 1894, p. 514) *Christophoros* is mentioned as patrician and *hypatos*, which is a plausible combination; one may wonder though whether this is not the result of a scribal error for *anthypatos*.

of the selection are not known to us, but one may assume that they must have mostly been aesthetic and philological (success in applying the classical rules of grammar, syntax and metric) rather than related to the interest that a specific poem might present at a given moment. The only message that the anthologist wanted to convey when putting together the model of the Grottaferrata manuscript, was to show off this remarkable know-how in versification.

Most of *Christophoros'* poems were written in response to concrete situations with a view to publication. The genre was very much in fashion during the eleventh century; famous Byzantine scholars, such as *Michael Psellos* and *John Mauropous* wrote epigrams on the same or similar subjects as *Christophoros* but their compositions are considerably more limited in range. With biting irony or with generous praise, always in an impeccable and metrically correct Greek, *Christophoros* addresses specific circumstances of his time and provides us with a series of snapshots that enliven eleventh century Constantinopolitan society and allow us to work out his attitudes towards it.

Everyday life. — In *Christophoros'* poetry there is a keen interest in real life, its sorrows but also its pleasures. On the one hand, he writes poems in order to mourn dead relatives and friends (44, 57–60⁶), 75–77, 119) or the “femme fatale” of his times, the mistress of the emperor, *Maria Skleraina* who was granted the special new title of *sebaste* (respectable, august) and whose demise would have “deprived the world of all Grace” (K 70). Many epigrams were written to be engraved on tombs, one of which (inside a church?) was decorated with portraits of the owner, represented as a layman and as a monk (K 16, 104, 107, 119). *Christophoros* also tries to comfort the sick, questioning the competence of the doctors, that he does not hold in high esteem (K 22, 85, 119, 142). But on the other hand his poems concerning pleasant things are by far more numerous. He writes about fruit or sweets or perfumes, or wine, or utensils or even luxurious decorated textiles (K 28, 42, 43, 45, 87, 88, 94, 99, 105, 110, 115, 117). He glorifies the relaxing pleasures of the bath (K 53). He sings the praises of the opposite sex: a certain *Eudocia*, “the most beautiful of all women”, in whom he might have been personally interested (K 66, 67); or a young lady (a relative of his?) who was about to be engaged (K 81); he alludes to unfaithful wives (K 31, 84). Having nothing else to do, he enjoys the singing sparrows (K 48) or he watches the spiders and the ants at work and expresses admiration for their achievements (K 122, 125); or he is inventing riddles, so necessary to fill the long winter evenings, and puts them to verse. Or else he indulges in some domestic gambling: one poem concerns the game of *tablion* (something like to-days backgammon) with its dice⁷), a symbol of

⁶) For these poems cf. Crimi, *Graeca et bizantina*, p. 45–50 (Motivi epigrammatici nei carmi sul eco).

⁷) Cf. Ph. Koukoules, *Byzantinon Bios kai Politismos*. I/1, Athens 1948, p. 200–204.

the instability of life (K 73). He is pleased with his house, but he complains about the mice that eat up his food reserves as well as his books (K 103) and about the owl that keeps him awake at night (K 131). He seems to feel uncomfortable in a boat because he is afraid of the sea (K 109), yet he goes fishing (K 127). He comments on works of art (K 15, 16, 28, 50, 51, 93, 95, 98, 101, 106, 133, 143⁸) and has contacts with painters (K 112). He draws constant pleasure from going to shows given by professional actors or mimes (K 138).

He spends part of his life in the muddy (K 132) streets and on the paved ones, where religious processions take place, such as the one that went on 6 October from Saint Sophia to the forum of Constantine and to the church of Saint Thomas of Amantiou⁹): once, this procession turned into a riot, and many participants got burnt by the candles while others were beaten up by the mace-brandishing police of the *pantheotai* (K 1).

He also follows the ceremonial processions of the emperor (K 24) and seems to have participated to public festivities with pagan origins, such as the *broumalia* (K 115), which included masked parades¹⁰). And he describes another similar parade that used to take place on the 25 of October, on the feast of the two notaries who achieved sainthood, *Markianos* and *Martyrios*¹¹): it was organized by the students of the school of notaries, together with their teachers¹²). The poem describing it (K 136) is poorly preserved, yet it shows a masquerade, in which the students paraded, some on horseback others on foot, wearing borrowed luxurious garments and crowns of onions and garlics; they behaved indecently, like actors (“those deceivers of the scene”, 1. 81) and ate all kinds of fruit and sweets, drawing the applause and the criticisms of the spectators. Such lively street scenes were certainly frequent: a parade of women — may-be of organized female workers — is also described by *Michael Psellos*¹³).

Christophoros' passion seems to have been the hippodrome. He was obviously a fan of the Green faction. He wrote an epigram (K 8) ridiculing a Blue

⁸) On this poem, cf. Crimi, *Recuperi cristoforei*, p. 241–242.

⁹) R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin I/3. Les églises et les monastères*. Paris 1969, p. 250.

¹⁰) D. Antonijević, *Vizantijske brumalije i savremene maskirane povorke balkanskih naroda*, *Balkanica* 10 (1979), p. 99–129 (with English summary).

¹¹) This parade went on for more than a century, until patriarch *Loukas Chrysoberges* (1156–1169) forbade it. See the commentary of *Balsamon* to canon 62 of the Council in Trullo.

¹²) K 136. A detailed study on the notarioi and their studies is to be found in Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, *Le notariat byzantin du IXe au XVe siècle* (still unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1986, University of Montreal).

¹³) See Angeliki Laiou, *The Festival of „Agathe“*. Comments on the Life of Constantinopolitan Women, in: *Byzantium. Tribute to Andreas Stratos*. I, Athens 1986, P. 111–122.

charioteer who lost control at a turn and broke his chariot¹⁴). Such partisan poetry related to the hippodrome was not uncommon: we have many epigrams of all periods down to the tenth century extolling the exploits of individual charioteers and in the twelfth century *Theodore Prodromos* wrote a poem explaining to caesar *Nikephoros Bryennios* how red and green were far superior colours to blue and white¹⁵) — an obvious reference to the factions (*demoi*), where the Greens and Reds were associated in their opposition to the Blues and Whites.

Mitylenaios also wrote later an epigram (K 50) expressing admiration for one bronze horse of the hippodrome, probably one of those now decorating the façade of the church of San Marco in Venice¹⁶). On another occasion, he went to the hippodrome while some other regular supporters were out of town, and wrote for them a long poem (125 poorly preserved verses: K 90) about the whole event¹⁷): a vivid description of the preparations and of the actual race, with the chants, the shouting and whistling, the manoeuvres of the contestants and the final triumph of the Green charioteer. Another piece of partisan literature: this poet was quite a fan¹⁸).

The circle of the intellectuals. — Because of his strong classical education, *Christophoros* was interested in his colleagues, the scholars. Three of his earliest poems (9, 10, 11) are related to literary contests that took place in Constantinople between the best students of competing schools under the supervision of the emperor himself. On the occasion of such a contest *Christophoros* took a very strong stand in favour of the school of Saint Theodore of Sphora-

¹⁴) The accident occurred close to the place where the two organs of the *demoi* were placed together in the eleventh century (cf. also K 90, l. 54) — while in the tenth they used to be placed in two opposite parts of the arena (Koukoules, *Byzantinon Bios*, III, p. 23). Judging from the title, one may assume that this happened during a *chryson hippodromion*, i. e. the races traditionally held in the week following Easter Sunday (*ibidem*, p. 30).

¹⁵) Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 133, p. 1007 ff.

¹⁶) See C. Crimi, *Graeca et bizantina*, p. 35–40 (Sul cavallo bronzeo descritto da *Cristoforo di Mitilene*).

¹⁷) He is not the only one known for such an exploit. In 1168, another public official, the grand *logothete Michael Hagiotheodorites*, wrote a similar poem for the sake of friends who lived in the province: K. Horna, *Eine unedierte Rede des Konstantinos Manasses*, *Wiener Studien* 28 (1906), p. 195–197.

¹⁸) See Koukoules, *Byzantinon Bios*, III, p. 7–80; L. Bréhier, *La civilisation byzantine*. Paris 1950, p. 93–103; R. Guillard, *Etudes de topographie de Constantinople byzantine*. Berlin, Amsterdam 1969; R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*. Paris 1964, p. 183–194. Interesting — and new — details provided by the poem of *Mitylenaios*: the running surface of the hippodrome had, at its beginning at least, five (if not six) lanes and gates (1.15) but later narrowed because of a wall (1.38); the selection of the lanes was done according to a complicated system in which random drawing by lots (1.17) was combined with deliberate selection (1.13).

kiou, generously praising its personnel and its students. On the other hand, he violently denounced the (rival?) school of (the Virgin of) Chalkoprateia, in which, says-he, the *schede*, i. e. the rhetorical exercises that the students were supposed to prepare by themselves, were sold to them by their own professor¹⁹).

In these schools as well as in the one for notaries (K 136, 1. 195, 209) only two faculty members are mentioned: the *maistor* or *didaskalos*, who did the actual teaching of literature and rhetoric and was credited with the success of the students; and the *proximos* (assessor) or *paidagogos* (educator) a man of culture who was compared to the column that held the institution together, and who obviously was in charge of discipline and of general education. This division of tasks, that appears for the first time in Byzantium in this poem, seems to have been common in mediaeval Western Europe as well²⁰); this is quite remarkable, as one would hardly have thought that the educational systems in East and West might have such close similarities in organization despite their fundamentally different origins and objectives.

It might be worth noting here that the Sphorakiou quarter, where the “good” school of St. Theodore lay, was quite close to *Mitylenaios*’ home, while the Chalkoprateia were considerably further away. It is not impossible that his attitude on this issue might have been inspired by a certain neighbourhood solidarity or even by the fact that he himself might have been an alumnus of the school of Saint Theodore. Be that as it may, it is clear that these literary competitions generated considerable interest and partisan participation in the community of Constantinopolitan literati.

With age, *Christophoros*’ school memories and animosities faded away and were replaced by new career related animosities. He now accuses some of his colleagues of committing grammatical or stylistic mistakes (K 23), or for their penchant for wine (K 37), or for their incompetence which added to the dismal level of the studies (K 40). But the exchange of writings between scholars continued (K 64, 78, 79, 84), as did the exchange of compliments and praise (K 27, 97, 100) and of invective: in one poem, *Christophoros* brags about the devastating effectiveness of his verbal attacks, which inflict wounds like javelins (K 36).

¹⁹) On these contests and on the *schede* see P. Lemerle, *Cing études sur le XIe siècle byzantin*. Paris 1977, p. 227 ff.; and H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*. II, München 1978, p. 25 ff. (with bibliography). More recent studies: R. Anastasi, *A proposito del carme 70L di Giovanni Mauropode*, in: *Studi in onore di F. M. Pontani*. Padova 1984, p. 243–246; and *idem*, *Ancora su Anna Comnena e la schedografia*, *Studi di filologia bizantina* III, p. 77–95.

²⁰) It is well attested in Western Europe. See P. Riché, *Les écoles et l’enseignement dans l’Occident chrétien de la fin du Ve au milieu du XIe s.* Paris 1979, p. 195 ff.

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The circle of the clerics. — *Christophoros* lived in the time of Patriarch *Michael Keroullarios*, one of the chief protagonists of the Schism (1054), the strong personality known for his unsuccessful attempts to dominate Emperor *Isaac I*. At such times, one would expect that Byzantine society, generally perceived in our times as being dominated by ecclesiastics, would be going through a period of religious fervour. Nothing of the kind. The Great Schism is hardly mentioned by the historians of the period; and eleventh century intellectuals were mainly interested in classical culture and the revival of philosophy, while the man of the street enjoyed the new well-being that came with peace and with the opening of new markets. Religion remained an important part of life and the church enjoyed social power and spiritual prestige — but it did not by any means dominate all aspects of peoples' lives.

Church activities are constantly present in *Christophoros*' poems; but it is their social rather than spiritual functions that seem to dominate. The poet was not a particularly devout person. Like many of his contemporaries, starting with *Michael Psellos*, his references to the divine are neither forthcoming nor frequent. He often refers to saints' icons and to saints' feasts, and celebrates the building of new churches (K 12, 95). He also speaks of cantors and their conductor (K 129), of Lent regulations and of distributions of food (K 102, 128), of exchanges of visits on festive occasions (K 124), festive decorations of churches (K 32), and processions (K 1). Although a layman, he shows a considerable interest in churchmen. He praises high positioned ecclesiastics mainly for their culture (K 27, 43, 61), without insisting at all on their theological achievements or personal virtue. And he complains of the low intellectual level of the newly hired secular clergy of a big church (undoubtedly Hagia Sophia: K 63)²¹), clerics who came from the lower strata of society, from the merchants and craftsmen of the capital. He criticizes the monks of the monastery *tou Manouel* for their unbecoming headpieces (K 120)²²), and the ones of the

²¹) Judging from its place in the collection, the epigram should date from the reign of *Constantine Monomachos*. But its state of preservation does not allow us to say with certainty to which church this clergy was attached. Yet, as we know that this emperor had made important donations to Hagia Sophia, one of which intended to assure that mass would be sung in it every day — leading to the massive hiring of new personnel — it is very probable that the new clergy of the Great church was the object of *Christophoros*' criticism. *Constantine*'s donation had probably been recorded in a chrysobull — the one that is represented in the famous Hagia Sophia gallery mosaic: cf. N. Oikonomides, *The Mosaic Panel of Constantine IX and Zoe in Saint Sophia*, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 36 (1978), p. 222–225. The numerous clergy of Saint Sophia still created problems at the end of the eleventh century: P. Gautier, *L'édit d'Alexis Ier Comnène sur la réforme du clergé*, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 31 (1973), p. 165–201.

²²) Cf. Crimi, *Recuperi cristoforei*, p. 233–238. On the monastery, see Janin, *Eglises*, p. 320–322.

monastery tou Proedrou for indulging in tasty food (K 135)²³). Playing with the name of the monk *Mourzoul*, he accuses him of simplemindedness (K 4)²⁴. He intervenes in favour of an old lady who wanted to become a nun in a monastery of the Virgin (K 144). He praises monasticism as an expedient way of saving one's soul, especially for people who embrace it shortly before their death (K 16, 49), but nowhere does he utter a word of himself, or of any member of his family, ever taking the habit. The major problems of his times concerning dogma or church hierarchy are well beyond his preoccupations.

He opposes the extremes to which blind faith can lead in a very long poem (in 135 twelve-syllable verses) against the monk *Andreas* "who buys as real relics the bones of plain people and who finds acceptable the existence of too many limbs belonging to one and the same saint" (K 114)²⁵. The title tells already the essential part of the story.

The cult of relics has always been a major manifestation of Byzantine piety²⁶). Constantinople was admired by all Christians because of the number and quality of these "records of the sufferings of the saints", some of which had arrived there in relatively recent times, as precious spolia of victorious campaigns against the Arabs. No one ever questioned the authenticity of some of them, especially after the defeat of Iconoclasm, a movement that had opposed not only icons but also relics²⁷). *Christophoros* himself wrote an epigram to praise a relic of *Saint Panteleimon*, known for its miraculous healings (K 89). But the case of the monk *Andreas* was quite different.

Yet one has to stress that nowhere was this monk accused of being an impostor or of trying to take advantage of the fake relics that he acquired. On the contrary. He only spent and never received money for them (cf. 1. 62, 63, 69, 70). He acted always in "faith", in good faith, and never had doubts about the relics that he bought (1. 17–18). *Christophoros* ridiculed this faith in two

²³) On the monastery see Janin, *Eglises*, p. 58–59 and V. Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*. V/2, Paris 1965, nos 1141 and 1185.

²⁴) D. Goutas, professor of Arabic at the University of Crete, kindly informed me that the Arabic word *mourzoul* means the simple-minded person.

²⁵) Attention to this poem has been drawn recently by A. Každan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century*. University of California Press 1985, p. 95–96.

²⁶) Bréhier, *Civilisation*, p. 258; H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*. München 1959, p. 275; A. Frolov, *La relique de la vraie croix*. Paris 1961. A general survey of the cult of relics in the middle ages with a good bibliography is provided by Th. Head, *Relics, Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 10 (1988), p. 296–299.

²⁷) See the nuances introduced in this discussion by J. Wortley, *Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V and the Relics, Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982), p. 253–279.

instances (1. 17 ff., 87 ff.), in the second of which he took astonishing liberties with the well known passage of the gospel about faith moving mountains (Matth. 17, 20).

Yet the attitude of *Andreas* was not necessarily the result solely of simple-mindedness. At the suggestion that, if he was not interested in authenticity, he could as well collect bones from any cemetery, he would have answered that obtaining them for free would deprive him of the Lord's compensation (1. 66: *misthos*; cf. Matth. 5, 12 et al.). In other words, *Andreas* could also be seen as a man with a coherent theory, based (a) on unlimited and unquestioning faith and (b) on personal sacrifice (here: financial sacrifice). One cannot help thinking of the rebirth of mysticism in the early 11th century and of the paramount importance that was then granted to blind faith as well as to the ideal of personal sacrifice. It is thus possible that, although marginal, *Andreas* might represent a poorly known trend in eleventh century monasticism²⁸), which was seen by many as a laughing stock.

Politics and society. — One tends to think that a monarchy would not accept the expression of political opinions, especially those in opposition to the official one. Yet, *Christophoros* seems to have felt free to express his views: he praised the ruler (K 18, 19, 24, 54) but sometimes he also went against the stream. In his poem for the death of *Romanos III* (1034), he clearly showed his disapproval of the way in which many Byzantines (including the empress *Zoe* and the City's high society) hastened to forget the deceased emperor in order to support his successor, *Michael IV* (K 8). Things are even more striking in the quite flattering epigram (K 65) that *Christophoros* wrote for the rebel *Maniakes* shortly after his death on the battlefield — an epigram in which this pretender to the throne is described as the last Byzantine of valour, and this while *Constantine IX Monomachos*, against whom *Maniakes* had rebelled, was still reigning unchallenged in Constantinople. Uttering a politically dissenting opinion in eleventh century Byzantium was not unthinkable after all.

The people surrounding *Christophoros* who are mentioned in his poems mostly belong to his own social rank and status: mainly middle level civil servants, but also educators, scholars, ecclesiastics and monks. Rarely does he speak of persons who had really made it to the top position of their field, such as the governor of Constantinople (*eparchos*) *John* (K 30) or the supervisor of the port (*parathalassites*) and judge *Melias* (K 15, 16) who had previously been the director of a prison (*domestikos ton teicheon*). Even rarer are references to the military, whose virtual absence from *Christophoros*' entourage reflects a more general attitude.

Only one soldier is mentioned, *John* (K 38), not for any achievement but because, being greedy, he snatched away the belongings of his fellow soldiers.

²⁸) Sincere veneration of relics, even inauthentic ones, if done in ignorance, seems to have been accepted by some in Mediaeval Western Europe: Head, *Relics*, p. 298.

Christophoros was writing in a period of generalized peace and he intended to glorify it (K 28). This was the mainstream attitude of eleventh century Constantinopolitans, who lived with the “illusion of a lasting peace” and chose to demobilize the empire, and to use foreign mercenaries for the defensive tasks in the periphery²⁹). Already at that time, the inhabitants of the capital had started considering themselves as somehow different from the rest of the empire, were interested in having a good time and tended to ignore the problems of the provinces³⁰). Another eleventh century scholar and public servant, *John Mauropous*, also insisted on the ideas of the lasting peace and of the special status for Constantinople and its inhabitants³¹). They were all members of the upper middle class of functionaries, proud of their urban origins, habits and mentality.

And this mentality still separated them from the other major component of the capital’s population, the members of the guilds. *Christophoros* speaks several times of the merchants and craftsmen of Constantinople. He wrote an epigram for an iron-merchant who was in contact with the emperor himself (K 62); he mentions the butchers (K 64), the bakers and the greengrocers, the tavern-keepers and the cooks, the shoemakers and the sievemakers, the seamen and the fishermen, the construction workers (K 63). But while he speaks with admiration for the weaving and the cooking of women, who work at home (K 28, 42), whenever he refers to the guilds’ people, he does it with a touch of revulsion at their lack of manners and of education. This was the haughty attitude of the traditional Byzantine public servant towards those who did not share his background and whose professions were considered as vile since the Roman times. For the members of the guilds, social acceptance would come only later, towards the end of *Christophoros*’ life, when the emperors opened the senate to them.

Another concept which is virtually absent from *Christophoros*’ poetry is that of “high birth”. Only once does he use a term alluding to the noble ancestry (*eupatrides*: K 27, 1.20) of a person whose other, concrete, qualities are profusely described in the same poem: good education, talent as a writer, high connections, commanding general respect, etc. This is another predictable attitude for an eleventh century constantinopolitan bureaucrat. This social group could not claim long and glorious lineages (as did the provincial aristocracy). Instead it stressed the system that had existed for a long time and which controlled social ascent through the acquisition of imperial titles: this is beautifully illustrated in poem K 55³²).

²⁹) Lemerle, *Cing études*, p. 263–271.

³⁰) Héléne Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*. Paris 1975, p. 64–66.

³¹) *Ibidem*, p. 54–55.

³²) See also Crimi, *Graeca et bizantina*, p. 41–43 (Una consonanza tra Giovanni Geometra e Cristoforo di Mitilene).

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It is addressed to the emperor *Constantine Monomachos* on behalf of *John Hypsinous* an otherwise unknown *protospatharios* (this was his middleranking honorific title). It is said, with plenty of puns and jokes and references to antiquity, that the emperor had profusely distributed not only gold but also honours; but *Hypsinous* had not himself received a promotion, and was asking for one. The poem recalls the wide distribution of salaries and titles that this emperor made at the beginning of his reign, after opening the senate to the public servants³³). *Michael Psellos* in particular, insists on the dual nature of these distributions (titles-money) and points out that such promotions were given mainly to those who demanded with insistence or to those who made a good joke to the emperor³⁴). *Christophoros*' poem thus may well have been one of these demands, intended to provoke the emperors generosity by appealing also to his sense of humour.

Criticism of society. — According to *Christophoros*, greediness, at various levels, seems to be the main social illness. In the prevailing scale of values of eleventh century Constantinopolitans, striving for economic well being was considered paramount, independently from the means that were used to achieve it. As it has already been remarked on the basis of other sources, “wealth was a basis for social stratification”³⁵). But this principle did not necessarily meet with general approval — and definitely not with that of *Mitylenaios*.

The judge of Hellas, *Basil Xeros*, is accused of having dried up this previously wealthy province³⁶). This is a pun on the family name of the judge, which means “dry”, and also underscores the sufferings, all too common in the eleventh century, to which the inhabitants of the provinces were subjected by the fiscal administrators.

Members of high society, such as a dignitary of the Church (*sunkellos*), probably related to the family of *Argyropoulos*³⁷), and a certain *Lykoleon*³⁸) removed the icon of Saint Cyrus from the church of the middle-class Strategion, where it belonged, and took it to a house in the Kynegion, close to the

³³) Lemerle, *Cing Etudes*, p. 287 ff.

³⁴) Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*. Ed. E. Renauld. I, Paris 1926, p. 132.

³⁵) A. Každan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium*. Washington D.C. 1982, p. 159.

³⁶) A. Bon, *Le Péloponnèse byzantin jusqu'en 1204*. Paris 1951, p. 194–195, mentions several judges of Hellas and Peloponnesos named *Basil* and known from their seals: one was a *protospatharios* (no. 39), another, with the family name *Xeros*, was *vestarches* (no. 42).

³⁷) Otherwise unidentifiable but belonging to one of the foremost families of Constantinople: J. F. Vannier, *Familles byzantines. Les Argyroi*. Paris 1975, p. 50–51.

³⁸) A vestes, known to have been the founder of a church and a donor to pious foundations: *Neos Hellenomnemon* 14 (1917), p. 5–10, 13.

palace and the monastery of Mangana, a rising part of the city in these early years of *Constantine Monomachos*; *Christophoros*, who also lived in the Strategion, wrote one (poorly preserved) poem (K 68) in an effort to bring back the icon for the spiritual as well as the material well being of the quarter; interestingly enough, he seems to have been acting as a representative of his neighbourhood.

When there was a fire at the buildings of the cemetery of Saint Luke, in the western part of the City, grave-diggers and undertakers found the opportunity to plunder the corpses with impunity (presumably those awaiting burial) in order to sell their garments (K 82). This expression of unholy greediness, provides the opportunity for several puns related to spiritual punishment and to the fire of hell that would be visited upon the perpetrators. It also says something about the society and its non-respect of traditional taboos.

Already in these poems, one can discern the distinction between the grabbing of the powerful, done openly from a position of strength, and the anarchic plundering characteristic of the lower strata of society. In both cases, material goods are at stake. *Christophoros*' sympathies are clear. He is very much against the rich man who "gapes for money as a cat gapes for suet" and buries his gold to hide it (K 134). On the contrary, he shows compassion for a certain *Leon* who lived in abject poverty: paraphrasing a well known passage of *Gregory of Nazianzus*³⁹), he describes him as being "without a dime, without a stick, without shoes, without a second dress" and concludes that, although involuntarily, *Leon* lives the life of an apostle (K 29). This is a sarcastic comment on the standard church attitude comforting the poor with the promise of heaven, while reassuring the rich that salvation was very much within their grasp⁴⁰). And although one cannot be certain that this poem was written for a real person and not for a fictitious one⁴¹), the general attitude of questioning some social inequality is obviously present.

This critical attitude is much more pronounced and seems to have attained an articulate level in one of *Christophoros*' earliest poems (K 13), from the mid-thirties of the century. It bears the title "*Eis ten tou biou anisoteta*" which literally means "to the inequality of life". One should remember though that

³⁹) Migne, PG 36, p. 649 and 37, 1180, commented upon by *Maximus the Confessor*, Migne, PG 91, p. 1368 ff.

⁴⁰) The essential texts on this issue are put together by Dom H. Leclercq, art. „richesse“ in: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*. 14/2, Paris 1948, p. 2414–2419.

⁴¹) The title „*eis ton ptochon Leonta*“ brings to mind the well-known story of the *Ptocholeon*, on which see H. G. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur*. München 1975, p. 148–150. The tale of *Ptocholeon*, as is preserved to-day in many versions and in manuscripts dating from the 15th century and later, provides no clues for identifying the *Leo* of the epigram with the one of the tale. But it is not impossible that *Christophoros* might have had an earlier version of the tale in mind.

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two key words of this title have double meanings: *anisotes* can be translated as inequality or as inequity; and *bios* can be translated as life or as fortune. The poem, that is summarized here, shows clearly that both meanings were in the author's mind⁴²).

“Lord, if men are made of the same dust and share the same nature, how is it that they differ in their *bios*? Of course, things do not stay put, they do change, but how and when? In the most convoluted and disorderly times, it happens that out of a thousand or of ten thousand rich men, one goes down; and out of thirty thousand miserable paupers, three succeed and join the upper lot. The quest of justice burns me, Lord, and I speak to you; please hear my moans with your usual forbearance. What can one say? that you created the one with your own hands while the other has a different creator? aren't we all made by your fingers? Yet some enjoy not only what is necessary but much more, including the superfluous; while the others strive for one-bite morsels or even for sheer crumbs. Is this equity? how long are you going to keep our world standing? Unleash a quake or another deluge but without a second ark or a new Noah: all should disappear, not leaving any remains. Now if, as you promised (Gen. 8, 21), you do not want to inundate the earth again, just hit Atlas with your hand and with him destroy all the world, mix the earth to the firmament. This would make for general equality.”

The raw materials of *Christophoros'* reasoning are predictable. In the Bible (Prov. 22,2) it is said that both rich and poor are made by God and *St. Gregory of Nazianzus* explained that this was done in absolute equality. The ecclesiastical and patristic traditions, though, accepted the disparities and tried to discourage rapacity and encourage charity among the rich; and to discourage contest and to encourage endurance among the poor⁴³). *Christophoros'* extremist conclusion, is undoubtedly inspired by the funeral service, yet it is something quite new. Not only does it show an obvious sensibility to the social

⁴²) Attention to this poem has already been drawn by Každan-Epstein, *Change*, p. 210.

⁴³) After the major studies on poverty in the Middle Ages done or inspired by M. Mollat, the bibliography on the subject has increased considerably. See M. Mollat, *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pauvreté*. Paris 1974; idem, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*. Yale Univ. Press 1986 (translation from the French edition, published in 1978); P. Brown — O. Capitani — F. Cardini, e. a., *Povertà e carità dalla Roma tardo-antica al 700 Italiano*. Abano Terme 1983, esp. p. 36–64 (O. Capitani, *Tendenze della Storiografia sulla Povertà nel Medioevo*, oggi: important bibliographical presentation). A complete survey of the relationship between rich and poor, from the Bible and the church fathers all the way down to the twentieth century, assorted with rich bibliographies, is to be found in the article „pauvreté chrétienne“ (by several authors) in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. 12, Paris 1984, p. 613–697. For Byzantium (only the early period) see Evelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles*. Paris 1977.

problems but also an attitude of revolt — not of revolution, obviously, as the whole poem is addressed to God himself. His complaints for the limited vertical mobility of society, echo similar remarks contained in tenth century imperial novellae, issued in order to curb the excesses of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the peasants; the emperor *Basil II* (996) estimated that the prosperity of one family might well last for a whole century⁴⁴). One tends to think that Byzantine society before and after the year 1000 might well have been going through a period of stability (if not stagnation), right at the moment when new social groups, “those who recently started thriving” (including the merchants and craftsmen of Constantinople) were preparing to rise in society and to enter the senatorial aristocracy.

Be that as it may, it is obvious that this poem was only a youthful cry of protest of no consequence. In spite of the fact that the objections towards the rich had not disappeared (K 134), *Christophoros*, who in the meantime had also made a good career, turned towards philanthropy and lauded the advantages of the hospitals that not only cured diseases but also — and above all — cured the effects of poverty (K 130). Moreover, his rebellion was conceived within the framework of pure orthodoxy; it did not deviate towards heresy⁴⁵) nor did it contest any fundamentals of Byzantine society. These limitations meant that, although the economic and social aspects of social inequity were perceived and expressed, and an ideological framework was being sought, no realistic solution was proposed.

In spite of all these shortcomings, *Christophoros*' attitude was, for the 11th c., something new. The only Byzantine parallel that one can quote comes from a 14th century literatus, *Alexios Makrembolites*. He also addressed the problem of social inequity but without asking for any intervention on the part of God; in his times, he could see His punishment coming in the form of the Ottoman Turks⁴⁶).

⁴⁴) I. and P. Zepos, *Jus Graecoromanum*. I, Athens 1931, p. 264.

⁴⁵) The only phrase of the poem that might be interpreted as taking some distance from the right faith, is the question whether the poor might have been created by someone else than God; this brings to mind the dualistic heresies, that viewed this world as the work of Satan. But this still seems far fetched.

⁴⁶) I. Ševčenko, *Alexios Makrembolites and his „Dialogue between the Rich and the Poor“*, *Zbornik Radova* 6 (1960), p. 187–229.