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A Challenge to the Reader The Twelve Byzantine Riddles of Pal. gr. 356

Abstract: This paper deals with the collection of twelve Byzantine riddles contained in Pal. gr. 356 (f. 168), a manuscript written between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century. All the riddles have been translated and endowed with a full commentary, with particular regard to the similar riddles present in other manuscripts; when possible (in most cases), a solution has been provided.

One of the reasons that have so far held back the scholars who had a fairly good level of competence in the difficult field of ancient riddles (and Byzantine riddles in particular) from attempting to publish a comprehensive edition of these numerous little poems is the apparently inescapable need to endow every single conundrum not only with a translation, but also with a solution. I am not able to tell to what extent this presumed necessity is really inescapable – maybe it is just a sort of psychological obligation that could be overcome with relative ease, but what the small bibliography on this subject does witness to is the fact that most of the former editors of Byzantine riddles have often refrained from proposing a solution to a riddle that did not happen to have one. Apart from their latest editor, who chose to add at the end of the ancient texts and their modern translations a commentary with a discussion of the main issues regarding almost every riddle, most scholars have limited themselves to editing the texts they had read in the manuscripts without translating or discussing them¹.

But in my opinion, the editor who behaves in this way falls short of the readers' expectations and in some way betrays them, because, due to their peculiar nature, riddles definitely need an explanation. Moreover, a similar behavior looks like a demonstration of a sort of escapism on the part of the editor, because he hides himself behind the Greek text without giving it that peculiar kind of attention a riddle necessarily demands: not only a translation, but also (something which is most important) a solution, no matter how tentative and approximate this solution might be.

¹ The edition of the Serbian scholar Č. MILOVANOVIĆ, *BYZANTINA AINIGMATA*. Vizantijske zagonetke. Beograd 1986 opens with a short introduction and closes with a long commentary (both in Serbian). The 214 riddles, all endowed with a Serbian translation, are divided into three groups: 144 poetic riddles with solutions (placed in alphabetical order according to the first letter of the Serbian solution); 41 prose riddles with solutions (taken from the “Question-and-answer” books published by N.F. KRASNOSEL' TŠEV, *Addenda k izdaniju A. Vasileva “Anecdota Graeco-byzantina” [Letopis istoriko-philolog. obćestva pri Novorossijskomy unversitete 7]*, Odessa 1899, and C. F. HEINRICI, *Griechisch-byzantinische Gesprächsbücher und Verwandtes aus Sammelhandschriften [Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Abhandlungen der philologischen-historischen Klasse 28, nr. 8]*, Leipzig 1911); 29 poetic and prose riddles without solutions (placed in alphabetical order according to the first letter of the Greek text). For her edition, Milovanović did not inspect any manuscript but relied on the texts published by the former editors, mostly without translations and commentaries. Among these editions, the most important are J.-F. BOISSONADE, *Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regiis*. Paris 1831, III 429–455 (the *editor princeps* of the so-called ‘collections’ ascribed to Michael Psellos, Basil Megalomytes and Theodor Aulikalamos, who wrote some footnotes and tried to solve the riddles that did not have a solution), S. LAMBROS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αινίγματα*. *ΔΙΕΕ* 2 (1885) 152–166, and *Αινίγματα*. *ΝΕ* 17 (1923) 202–217 (the Greek scholar who published the riddles of Athous Dionysiou 347 = Lambros 3881, *Diktyon* 20315), M. TREU, *Eustathii Macrembolitae quae feruntur aenigmata*. Breslau 1893 (to whom we owe the excellent edition of the ‘collection’ of the riddles attributed to Eustathius Macrembolites), N. A. VEIS, *Βυζαντινὰ αινίγματα*. *Epeteris tou philologikou syllogou Parnassou* 6 (1902) 103–110, A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae*. St. Peterburg 1913; T. EUANGELIDES, *Αινίγματα πατριάρχου Ἀλεξανδρείας Γερασίμου τοῦ Σπαρταλιώτου*. *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 31 (1932) 295–298, and S. EUSTRATIADIS, *Τρύφωνος Εὐαγγελίδου: Αινίγματα πατριάρχου Ἀλεξανδρείας Γερασίμου τοῦ Σπαρταλιώτου*. *Romanos ho Melodos* 1 (1933) 154–160, published the two ‘collections’ attributed to Gerasimos, Patriarch of Alexandria.

In order to fight the unpleasant feeling I have just mentioned (this psychological obligation – a feeling which is nonetheless quite strong, I cannot deny it), I am going to publish here a group of mostly unedited Byzantine riddles, whose solutions I have only partially been able to find².

THE MANUSCRIPT

The riddles are preserved by the Palatinus graecus 356 (*Diktyon* 32476), a codex now safe and quiet on the shelves of the Palatine Library of Heidelberg after a very eventful life, because this precious little book, after its arrival in Western Europe, shared the same vicissitudes as the most famous Palatine manuscript, Palatinus graecus 23 (*Diktyon* 32453), the book of the Greek Anthology, that (as is well known) was first brought from Germany to the Vatican library during the Thirty Years' War as a present from Maximilian the First, Emperor of Bavaria, to Pope Gregory XV, was then brought to Paris after the treaty of Tolentino was signed between Napoleon and Pope Pius VI, and was eventually brought back to Heidelberg³.

Written by a hand dated between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century and not very different from the hand that wrote the Marcianus graecus 512 (*Diktyon* 69983), a manuscript with another interesting collection of Byzantine riddles, the Pal. gr. 356 belonged to Arsenios Apostolios, Bishop of Monemvasia, son of Michael Apostolios⁴. Its 196 paper pages contain a fairly large number of works, among which the more significant are four declamations of Libanius, one oration of Aelius Aristides, a collection of letters (Julian the emperor, Synesius, Theophylaktos Simocatta, Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil of Caesarea, Michael Psellos), some dogmatic, rhetorical, and poetical works⁵. Some of these items, such as a section of George Choiroboskos' Poetic tropes, can be found in the Marc. gr. 512 as well, but there is no reason to postulate a tight relationship between the two manuscripts.

The riddle section is placed in the last part of the Pal. gr. 356 and starts at f. 168r, after an iambic composition by Theodore Prodromos, In Abrahamum Patriarcham, SS. Trinitatem convivio excipientem⁶. Stevenson introduces the collection with the following words: *Aenigmata XII, senariis iambicis. Inc. Τίς ἐστὶν ἄλλος τῶν κακῶν σπορευς βλάβης; f. 168. Horum aenigmatum nonnulla in aliis codicibus nomine BASILII MEGALAMITAE inscribuntur*⁷.

² In doing this, I also hope that some colleagues who are smarter than me might succeed in finding the solutions I have not been able to find. This hope has already been fulfilled by one of the anonymous readers (whom I warmly thank for his brilliance) who has found the correct solution of the ninth riddle, suggested a highly probable solution for the eleventh riddle and has indicated a parallel passage useful for reinforcing the validity of the tentative solution I had given to the seventh riddle.

³ On the manuscript of the Greek Anthology, see A. CAMERON, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes*. Oxford 1993; for a description of its wanderings, see in particular 178–201. It is now possible to see the manuscript on the website of the Heidelberg University Library (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpgraec356>).

⁴ The collection of the Marc. gr. 512, first recognized by S. ZANANDREA, *Enigmistica bizantina: considerazioni preliminari. Miscellanea marciana 2–4* (1987–1989) 141–157, and described by E. MIONI, *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum Codices Graeci Manuscripti*, vol. 2, Codices 300–625. Roma 1985, 369–374, has recently been edited by me (S. BETA, *An enigmatic Literature. Interpreting an unedited Collection of Byzantine Riddles in a Manuscript of Cardinal Bessarion [Marcianus Graecus 512]*. *DOP* 68 [2014] 211–240).

⁵ For a detailed description of the manuscript, see H. STEVENSON, *Codices Manuscripti Palatini Graeci Bibliothecae Vaticanae*, Roma 1885, 203–207. In the aforementioned website of the Heidelberg University Library (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpgraec356>), the manuscript is dated to the thirteenth century. G. DE GREGORIO, *Teodoro Prodromo e la spada di Alesio Contostefano* (Carm. Hist. LII Hörandner). *Nea Rhome* 7 (2010) 200, n. 8, dates it between the thirteenth and fourteenth century, stating that its handwriting is “influenzata dalla «Fettaugen-Mode»”.

⁶ Also, the riddle section of Marc. gr. 512 was preceded by a group of Prodromos' works, among which there was the poem on Abraham; but the poem immediately preceding the riddles was a different Prodromos' composition (the Carmen in Manulem Anemam).

⁷ The meter of the riddles is the standard Byzantine dodecasyllable, as it is customary in this kind of poetry; riddles in political verses are much rarer.

Let us accept this description for the moment and let us take a closer look at the text of the riddles, written, like the poetic texts that precede it, in two columns. After the first eleven lines of f. 168r, we read in the left hand column the title of the collection: Αινίγματα πάνυ ὠραῖα (“Very beautiful riddles”). Then, in the right hand column, we find the first line of the first riddle, whose beginning is connected to the end of the title by a horizontal stroke; since a similar stroke is repeated in the following two lines (that is between the end of the second line and the beginning of the third, and between the end of the fourth line and the beginning of the fifth), the copyist was probably led to behave in this way in order to help the users of the manuscript to read the text in the correct way.

Unlike other similar Greek and Latin manuscripts, where some of the answers to the riddles are written, by the copyist himself and also by later readers, either at the beginning of each poem or in the margins of the page, the Pal. gr. 356 does not present any solution – and this is why its riddles are a real challenge to the reader⁸.

Here is the text and the tentative translation of the twelve riddles, followed by the commentary⁹.

THE RIDDLES

Riddle 1 (3)

- 1 Στοὰ ξύλων ἄμοιρός εἰμι καὶ λίθων,
 ὕλης τε λοιπῆς γηίνης πάσης ἅμα·
 οὐδεὶς καταστρέφει με καὶ παρατρέχω·
 οὐδὲν ἐγείρει καὶ συνίσταμαι αὖθις.

“I am a cloister made without wood and stones,
 without any other kind of earthly material;
 nobody can overturn me, but I can overtake;
 nothing wakes me up, but I stand up again”.

2 γηίνους Pal (= Pal. gr. 356)

The relative notoriety of this riddle is witnessed by a curious fact that tells us something interesting about the history of the manuscript. In the right margin, just after the end of the first line of the little poem, we read the following Latin note: “*est Basilii Megalomita Cod. Reg. 968*”. The author of this remark had clearly noticed that the same riddle was written in another manuscript, a book belonging to the “collection of the king”. The king in question was the king of France: the Cod. Reg. 968 cannot be anything but the actual Parisinus graecus 968 (*Diktyon* 50557), one of the two manuscripts used by Jean-François Boissonade for his 1831 edition of the riddles of Michael Psellos, Basil Megalomytes and Theodore Aulikalamos. It is therefore highly probable that the remark was written while our manuscript was in Paris, that is, between 1797 and 1815: while he was reading the Pal. gr. 356,

⁸ In the older manuscripts the solutions are written at the beginning of each riddle, as if they were its title (see, for example, the riddles of Par. Suppl. gr. 690, mentioned *infra*, p. 14); this custom can be also seen in the many manuscripts that preserve the Latin collection of Symphosius / Symposius. In the more recent manuscripts the solutions are written (usually by a different hand) in the right or the left margins or, less frequently, on the top and at the bottom of the page.

⁹ The number of each riddle does not correspond to its position in the manuscript. The reason why I have decided not to follow the order of the manuscript is quite simple – and I trust that the reader will understand the rationale that lies behind my decision. I have preferred to start my discussion with the riddles that have already been edited; I have then dealt with the riddles that have (or appear to have) a solution and those whose solution I have not been able to find; I have finally left to the end a poem that, although it looks like a riddle, is actually something else. But, in order to let the reader know the real position of each riddle in the manuscript, I have indicated it in brackets.

a librarian who was familiar with the works written in the Pal. gr. 968 spotted the close similarity between the two poems and wrote the note we can still read¹⁰.

Although there is no indication of authorship whatsoever in our manuscript, this riddle is not anonymous. It belongs to the poetical collection of Christopher Mitylenaios, as is witnessed by the more complete manuscript that preserves it, the Cryptoferratensis Z a 29 (*Diktyon* 17975), the main basis of Marc De Groote's recent edition¹¹.

As can be seen from the text printed by De Groote (n. 35), which I quote below, Christopher's riddle is very close to ours:

Στοὰ ξύλων ἄμοιρος εἰμι καὶ λίθων
 ὕλης τε λοιπῆς γῆϊνης πάσης ἅμα·
 οὐδεις καταστρέφει με καὶ παρατρέχω·
 οὐδεις ἐγείρει καὶ συνίσταμαι πάλιν.

But since De Groote's text is the result of the editing of the slightly different versions present in the manuscripts he used for his edition, it might be useful to review both the manuscripts themselves and the text they present.

The manuscript of Grottaferrata is not the oldest book where we find our riddle. Written in the thirteenth century, it is at least one century younger than the Parisinus Suppl. gr. 690 (*Diktyon* 53425), a manuscript whose date has been discussed but which is now considered to be a product of the twelfth century¹². This very interesting parchment manuscript contains many other riddles, scattered through its 258 pages; the two small Christophorean sections (both anonymous: its author is never mentioned) comprehend four and two riddles, all endowed with a solution, written (as seemed to be common, at least in most of the Latin riddle collections) right before the text, as if it were its title¹³. The complete title of our riddle (that is, its solution) appears to be αἶνιγμα εἰς τὴν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἴριον ἦτοι τὸ τόξον ("A riddle on the rainbow in the sky, or the bow"), which was probably the same solution written in the Cryptoferratensis (whose text is mutilated at the beginning by the teeth of mice: we read only ριν ἦτοι τὸ τόξον).

The riddle is present in three other manuscripts. In the aforementioned Par. gr. 968, a book written in the fourteenth century, its solution (written in the left margin by a different hand) is simply οὐρανός ("sky"); edited by Boissonade in the third volume of his *Anecdota*, it is the n. 41 of the collection attributed to Basil Megalomytes. The riddle had already been published by the same Boissonade in the second volume of the *Anecdota*, but in a different version¹⁴; he had found it in another

¹⁰ If the peculiarities of the stroke and of the ink do not deceive us, the author of this note might be the same one who drew the long horizontal strokes that connect the first six lines of the first riddle.

¹¹ Christophori Mitylenaii Versuum variorum Collectio Cryptensis, ed. M. De Groote. Turnhout 2012. Christopher's collection was first edited by A. ROCCHI, *Versi di Cristoforo Patrizio editi da un codice della monumentale Badia di Grottaferrata*. Roma 1887; his edition was soon followed by E. KURTZ, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios*. Leipzig 1903; both editions have been superseded by De Groote's.

¹² G. ROCHEFORT, Une anthologie grecque du X^e siècle: Le Parisinus Suppl. gr. 690. *Scriptorium* 4 (1950) 2–17, dated the manuscript between 1075 and 1085; following the advice of other paleographers (Irigoien and Follieri), M. D. LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Text and Contexts*, I (*WBS* 24/1). Wien 2003, 329, challenged this dating and wrote that the manuscript was written in the twelfth century (a date accepted by De Groote).

¹³ The riddles of the first section (ff. 144v and 145r) are 21, 47, 56 and 71 De Groote; the riddles of the second section (ff. 183rv) are 111 and 35 De Groote. In his edition, de Groote uses the Par. Suppl. gr. 690 for this second section only. It is not certain whether the poem on the sponge (137 De Groote), the last item of another Christophorean section preserved by the Par. Suppl. gr. 690 (ff. 69r–70r), is a riddle or not. In her edition, where it bears the n. 69, Milovanović considers it a riddle.

¹⁴ J.-F. BOISSONADE, *Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regiis*. Paris 1830, II 476, n. 24, in a section of Σύμμικτα.

manuscript known for its riddles, the Parisinus graecus 1630 (*Diktyon* 51252), a more recent book (fifteenth century) where the riddle has the solution εἰς τὴν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἴριν¹⁵. The third manuscript is the Marcianus graecus 524 (*Diktyon* 69995), a book older than the former ones, because it seems to have been written at the beginning of the thirteenth century; here the solution is the most complete one, because it mentions (as the Par. Suppl. gr. 690) both the rainbow and the bow (αἶνιγμα εἰς τὴν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἴριν ἢ τὸ τόξον)¹⁶.

Riddle 2 (1)

- 1 Τίς ἐστὶν ἄλλος τῶν κακῶν σπορεὺς βλάβης;
 Τίς ἐξανάπτοι φροντίδων τρικυμίας;
 Φυτοσπόρος τίς τῶν κακῶν τῶν ἐν βίῳ;
 Ἐγὼ τὰ πάντα συλλαβῶν περιφέρω.
- 5 Ζητεῖς δέ {με} μαθεῖν καὶ τίνα κλησιν φέρω;
 Μήτηρ μὲν ἐμοὶ συλλαβῶν δυὰς μία.
 Καὶ πρῶτον ἂν μου δεύτερον γράμμα ζύσης,
 θάνατον ἄλλον χεῖρονα τοῦ θανάτου
 εὐρήσεις με τάχιστα συνηρμοσμένον.
- 10 Εἰ δεύτερον δὲ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον μου πάλιν,
 ζῶον βροτοῖς χρήσιμον εὐρης τετράπουον.

7 ἐν ... ζύσης Pal || 11 εὐρήσεις με Pal

“What is the other thing that sows disgraces that might cause damage?
 Who might kindle a strong wave of troubles?
 Who is the begetter of the disgraces that torment our life?
 I embrace all these things and bring them with me.
 Are you trying to know who I am and which name I bear?
 My mother is a single couple of syllables.
 And if you start by erasing my second letter,
 you will soon find out that I am a combination of letters
 that make me another death worse than death itself.
 But if you go on by erasing the first letter as well,
 you will find out that I am a four-footed animal useful to mortal men”.

With the exception of the first two lines, the riddle has a lot in common with another riddle published by Boissonade in 1831. In the collection assembled by the French scholar under the title *Αἰνίγματα συντεθέντα παρὰ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγαλομίτου* (“Riddles collected by Basil Megalomytes”) through the fusion of the two Basilian ‘collections’ he had found in Par. gr. 968 and 1630, this riddle occupies the first place. A quick look at this version will suffice to show that the main difference is the presence of a couple of extra lines in the Palatine version:

¹⁵ Both versions were published by Cougny in his *Appendix* (E. COUGNY, *Epigrammatum Anthologia Palatina cum Planudeis et Appendice nova epigrammatum veterum ex libris et marmoribus ductorum*. Parisiis 1890, III, nn. 46 and 75); Par. gr. 968 and 1630 were the manuscripts used by Boissonade for the text of the collection attributed to Basil Magalomytes. Milovanović (as note 1) prints the riddle Boissonade had taken from Par. gr. 968 (n. 13).

¹⁶ The more significant textual difference between the manuscripts lies at l.3: in Marc. gr. 524 and Par. gr. 968 we have *περιστρέφει*, in the other four (Par. Suppl. gr. 690, Crypt Z α 29, Pal. gr. 356 and Par. gr. 1630) *καταστρέφει*.

Φυτοσπόρος τις τῶν κακῶν τῶν ἐν βίῳ
 ἐγὼ τὰ πάντα συλλαβῶν περιφέρω.
 Ζητεῖς δὲ μαθεῖν καὶ τίνα κλῆσιν φέρω;
 μήτηρ ἐμὴ μὲν συλλαβῶν δυὰς μία·
 διπλῆ δὲ φωτίζει με τριάς γραμμάτων.
 Καὶ πρῶτον ἐν μου, δεύτερον, γράμμα ξέσας,
 πανευφυῶς εὐρησ με χεῖρα θανάτου·
 καὶ δεύτερον δὲ καὶ τὸ πρῶτόν μου πάλιν,
 ζῶον βροτοῖς χρήσιμον εὐρησ τετράπουν.

There are other significant differences, such as the presence of an extra line in the Parisian version (l. 5: διπλῆ δὲ φωτίζει με τριάς γραμμάτων) and the wordier structure of ll. 8–9 in the Palatine version (θάνατον ἄλλον χεῖρονα τοῦ θανάτου / εὐρήσεις με τάχιστα συνηρμοσμένον instead of the more simple πανευφυῶς εὐρησ με χεῖρα θανάτου). What does not change, though, are the multiple solutions of the riddle (φθόνος / φόνος / ὄνος), a common feature of these Byzantine conundrums.

The play between φθόνος (‘murder’) and φόνος (‘envy’) has a tradition that is much older than this peculiar poetic genre, whose popularity began around the eleventh century: in the epigram Εἰς φθόνον, composed four centuries before, George Pisides wrote that ‘murder’ (φόνος) is what we obtain when we erase the second letter of ‘envy’ (φθόνος); in one of her gnomic epigrams, composed in the ninth century, the nun Kassia wrote that ‘murder’ is the consequence of ‘envy’ (ἐκ φθόνου φόνος)¹⁷.

The success of such a wordplay led the poets who were active in the following centuries either to write other riddles with the same solutions or to add new solutions following the same pattern; since riddles tend to have an open tradition, it is difficult to say if the first two lines we read in the Palatine version were added at a later date to a shorter, original version, or if it was the author of the Parisian version who decided to cross out the first two lines and therefore shorten a version that seemed too long to him.

In fact, other versions of the same riddle might be even more different. This is the case for the riddle which the Baroccianus graecus 76 (*Diktyon* 47363) attributes to Euthymios Tornikes, first edited by Papadopoulou-Kerameus:

Ἐγὼ κακῶν κάκιστος ἀρχῆθεν μένω·
 δασὺν φέρω τράχηλον, ὡς καὶ τὴν κάραν.
 Εἰ γοῦν σὺ τὸν τράχηλον ἐκτέμης μόνον,
 κακοῦ πατρὸς χεῖριστον εὐρήσεις γόνον·
 εἰ δὲ ψιλώσεις τὴν δασυνθεῖσαν κάραν,
 πολλοῖς βροτοῖς κύοντα τοὺς πόνους ἴδης.
 Οὐκοῦν πατήρ, παῖς, ἔγγονος, κακὰ τρία,
 φθορὰν παρεισφόρησαν εἰς πᾶσαν χθόνα¹⁸.

¹⁷ George Pisides, Epig. 28 Sternbach (= 111 Tartaglia); Kassia A 40–42 Krumbacher. On these wordplays, cf. BETA, *Enigmatic Literature* 227. On the peculiar concept of ‘envy’ in Byzantine literature, cf. M. HINTERBERGER, *Phthonos: Missgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur (Serta graeca 29)*. Wiesbaden 2013.

¹⁸ PΑΡΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ-ΚΕΡΑΜΕΟΥ, *Noctes* 206, n. 4: “Here I stand from the beginning, the worst of all evils: / I have a hairy neck, and so is also my head. / If you cut my neck only, / you will find out that I am the worst son of an evil father; / but if you strip bare my hairy head, / you might see that I bear in my womb tribulations for all mortal men. / The father, the son and the offspring are the three evils / that use to cause destruction all over the world”.

The author took his start from the Pisidian couple (φθόνος / φόνος), but he then changed the third solution, because if we eliminate the aspiration (δασύτης) of the first letter (the φ) by making it ψιλός (a π), we obtain the word πόνος ('tribulation')¹⁹.

Riddle 3 (12)

- 1 Ἐν γράμμασιν ἕξ συλλαβὰς τρεῖς σοι {φέ} φέρω.
 Ψυχῶν μεσίτης εἰμὶ πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην.
 Ἄν ἀφέλης μου τὴν κεφαλὴν εὐστόχως,
 μάθης με βροτῶν ἐσχάτην κατοικίαν.
- 5 Εἰ δ' αὖ κεφαλὴν ἀφέλης τὴν δευτέραν,
 τόπον ποθητὸν ναυτίλοις μάθης φίλον.
 Εἰ δ' αὖ κεφαλὴν ἀφέλης καὶ τὴν τρίτην,
 εὕρης με τοῦ ἔαρος σύμβολον νόει.
 Εἰ δ' αὖ τέταρτον ἀφέλης τῶν γραμμάτων,
- 10 ὕπαρξιν εὕρησεις με τοῦ θεοῦ μόνον.
- “I bring you three syllables in six letters.
 I am a go-between of souls as far as the lord is concerned.
 If you take away my head with accuracy,
 you might learn that I am the last house of mortal men.
 But if you take away also my second head,
 you might learn that I am a beloved and desirable place for sailors.
 But if you take away also my third head,
 you might find out – think! – that I am the token of spring.
 But if you take away also the fourth of my letters,
 you might find out that I am simply the essence of God”.

Like the one we have just discussed, the last riddle of the Palatine collection is also a variation on another fairly popular riddle – and, exactly like the ‘envy’ riddle, its most significant difference from the other versions we happen to know lies in the first couple of lines.

One of the commonest versions of the riddle, the poem first edited by Boissonade among the ‘collection’ attributed to Michael Psellos, has many progressive solutions, because from the first one we pass to the second one by eliminating the first letter, and so on:

Τρισύλλαβον πέφυκα. Σὺ δέ με σκόπει·
 ζῶν με γεννᾷ· ζῶν οὔκουν τυγχάνω.
 Ἄν μου τὸ πρῶτον ἀφέλης τῶν γραμμάτων,
 εὕρης με κατάπαυσιν ἀνθρώπων γένους·

¹⁹ Another version (made known to me by Albrecht Berger, who found it at the bottom of p. 16 of the second edition of Caspar Ludwig Momartz’s *Bosporomachia*, an allegoric poetical composition in modern Greek, published in Venice by Dimitrios Theodosiou in 1792) shows all the four solutions – but the last two have been quite inappropriately inserted by the unknown poet in the text itself. The text of this “riddle in iambic” (Αἶνιγμα, στίχοις ἰαμβικοῖς) whose title is “About envy, murder, labour and ass” (Τοῦ φθόνου, φόνου, πόνου καὶ ὄνου), is the following: Ἐγὼ κακὸν κάκιστον ἀρχῆθεν πέλω, / δασὺν φέρω τράχηλον ὡς καὶ τὴν κάραν. / Ἄν γοῦν σὺ τὸν τράχηλον ἐξέλης μόνον, / κακοῦ πατρὸς κάκιστον εὕρησεις γόνον. / Εἰ δὲ ψιλώσης τὴν δασυνθεῖσαν κάραν, / πολλοὺς βροτούς φθειρόντα εὕρησεις πόνον. / Εἰ δ' ἐξέλης αὖ τὴν ψιλωθεῖσαν κάραν, / ζῶν φέριστον λοιπὸν εὕρησεις ὄνον.

τὸ δεύτερον δὲ γράμμα συναφανίσας,
 γῆς πρὸς θάλατταν ὄξυ κατίδης τέλος·
 κἂν τὸ τρίτον γράμμα δὲ πάλιν ὑφέλης,
 εὐωδίαν ἔχον με πολλὴν κατίδης·
 εἰ γράμμα μου τέταρτον πάλιν ἐκβάλοις,
 ὄντως ὄν εὐρήσεις με, κἂν δίχα τόνου²⁰.

Here in Psellos' version the first solution is κηρίον (the 'honeycomb' has been begotten by an animal, but is not an animal), followed by ἡρίον (the 'tomb' is the repose of the human beings), ῥίον (the 'promontory' is the sharp end of the land near the seaside), ἴον (the 'violet' has a strong and good scent) and ὄν (the neuter participle of the verb 'to be' is in effect the real being).

In the same volume of his *Anecdota*, Boissonade also published the version he found in the two 'collections' of Basil Megalomytes:

Πτηνόν με γεννᾷ, καὶ βροτὸν μαῖαν φέρω,
 οὗ πρέσβις οὐράνιος ἄπιλος πέλω.
 Ἄν δ' ἀποτάμης τὴν κατ' ἀρχάς μου κάραν,
 δάκρυα κινῶ καὶ μόνης ἐκ τῆς θέας·
 εἰ δ' ἀφέλης μου καὶ κάραν τὴν δευτέραν,
 ποθητόν εἰμι ναυτίλοις ἐν ταῖς ζάλαις·
 εἰ δ' αὖ κεφαλὴν ἀφέλης μου καὶ τρίτην,
 ἔαρ τὸ τερψίθυμον εἰς μέσον φέρω.
 Εἰ δ' ἀποκόψεις καὶ τετάρτην μου κάραν,
 ὕπαρξιν ἐκ ῥήματος καὶ μόνην ἔχω·
 εἰ δ' αὖ σὺν αὐταῖς καὶ πέμπτην διατέμης,
 γραμμαὶ συνιστῶσί με τρεῖς. Σοφέ, νόει²¹.

The differences between this riddle and Psellos' lie not only in the text of the clues ("I have been begotten by a bird but my midwife is human"; "I make people cry simply by showing myself"; "Sailors long for me during the storms"; "I bring inside me the spring that gives joy to the soul"; "I owe my own single life to a verb"), but also in their number, because the author had added a sixth definition: the clue "if you cut also a fifth letter together with the other four, I am made by three strokes" is a hint at the capital letter N.

It would be too long (and also out of place here) to discuss all the other versions of this extremely beloved riddle. It is more significant to look at the beginning of the Palatine riddle instead, because

²⁰ Psellos 47 Westerink (13 Boissonade = 40 Cougny = 128 Milovanović): "I have three syllables. Look at me: / an animal begets me; and yet, I am not an animal. / If you take away the first of my letters, / you might find out that I am the resting place of the human race; / having wiped out my second letter, / you might see that I am a sharp end of land in front of the sea; / if you subtract my third letter as well, / you might see that I am something very sweet-smelling; / if you should throw away my fourth letter as well, / you will discover that I am what really is, even though I do not have an accent". Psellos' 'collection' has recently been edited by L. G. WESTERINK, *Michael Psellus. Poemata*. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1992, xxvi and 298–302; on its structure, see A. CAMERON, *Michael Psellus and the Date of the Palatine Anthology*. *GRBS* 11 (1970) 339–350. A shorter version of this riddle can be read in the 'collection' of Eustathios Makrembolites 4.3 (TREU).

²¹ Basil 6 Boissonade: "(“I have been begotten by a bird but my midwife is a human being; / I am his unfledged ambassadress, high in the sky. / If you cut my head at its beginning, / I make people cry simply by showing myself; / if you cut my second head as well, / sailors long for me during the storms; / if you cut my third head as well, / I bring inside me the spring that gives joy to the soul. / If you cut my fourth head as well, / I owe my own single life to a verb; / but if you cut also a fifth letter together with the other four, / I am made by three strokes. If you are clever, solve this riddle, then!”). The riddle was published by Cougny as well (n. 50).

the clue “I am a go-between of souls regarding the lord” does not seem to correspond to the honeycomb. Since the second solution cannot be anything else than the customary ἡρίον, the first solution must be either θηρίον or νηρίον, the only two Greek words ending with -ηρίον that have a sound meaning. If the ‘lord’ (δεσπότης) is ‘the Lord’ (that is, God) and if this ‘go-between’ is something that, by causing the death of men and women, makes their souls go to heaven (and therefore meet God), both solutions might be possible. But, even if ‘oleander’ (νήριον) is well known for being a very poisonous plant, I think that ‘wild animal’ / ‘beast’ (θηρίον) might be a more appropriate (because less remote) answer²².

Riddle 4 (7)

- 1 Ἐγὼ βλέπω τὰ πρόσθεν ἐν θεοπτία.
 Εἰ γοῦν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφέλης τῶν γραμμάτων,
 εὔρης με πρᾶγμα συστατικὸν τῶν ὄλων.
 Συναφελῶν δὲ δεῦτερον τῶν γραμμάτων,
 5 μάθης με διπλὴν ἐκτελοῦν σημασίαν.
 Γνοίης δὲ πάλιν ἀναγνοῦς ἀντιστρόφους
 ὅπερ συνεστῶς ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων.

“I see through the eyes of God what has happened in the past.
 If you take away the first of my letters,
 you might find out that I am a component of the entire world.
 Having subtracted the second of my letters,
 you might discover that I have a double meaning.
 By reading my contrariwise, you might learn
 what is the thing that is composed by the four (elements)”.

In the ‘collection’ of Psellos, the riddle of the honeycomb (13 Boissonade = 47 Westerink) was preceded by a conundrum whose four answers were exactly the same four solutions as for our riddle, although the text of the clues is completely different:

Εἷς τοῦ χοροῦ πέφυκα τῶν θεοπρόπων.
 Δισυλλαβῶν δὲ γραμμάτων τετρακτί
 τὴν πῆξιν ἔσχον· ἂν δὲ τὴν κάραν τέμης,
 νηφάλιον θήσεις με τοῖς βροτοῖς πόμα,
 καὶ σωματικῶν ῥυπτικὸν μολυσμάτων.
 Διχῆ δὲ διελὼν με καὶ τεμῶν μέσον,
 μέρος μὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτίκα νόει.
 Ἀντιστρόφως δὲ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν δράσας,
 ἐναντίον θήσεις με τοῖς ἀσωμάτοις²³.

²² Some of the other versions of the riddle with the first clue as ‘honeycomb’ are discussed in BETA, *Enigmatic Literature* 225. The versions of the riddle with the first clue as ‘beast’ can be found in the following manuscripts: Ambrosianus E 34 sup. [*Diktyon* 42686], f. 85r, Bononiensis 2911 [*Diktyon* 9746], f. 71r, Ierosolimitani 303 and 797; f. 83v; Meteorensis Metamorphoseos 399 (*Diktyon* 41809), f. 113r; Vindobonensis Phil. gr. 321 (*Diktyon* 71435), f. 263v; Vaticanus Barberinianus Gr. 41 (*Diktyon* 64589), f. 108r (copied by Leone Allacci). Contrary to what I had guessed in my edition (BETA, *Enigmatic Literature* 224), the first clue of Marc. gr. 512 (Δάκνω σε καὶ τρέμω σε καὶ τί τυγχάνω; / Τριῶν δὲ κύκλος συλλαβῶν με δεικνύει), also present in Vindobonensis Phil. gr. 124 (*Diktyon* 71238), f. 6v, might hint more at a ‘beast’ than at a ‘honeycomb’.

²³ Psellos 46 Westerink (12 Boissonade = 39 Cougny = 118 Milovanović): “I am one of the group of the prophets. / My structure was made of a bunch of four letters / in two syllables; but if you cut my head, / you will turn me into the teetotal drink of the

If one reads this version, the first solution is not difficult to find, since there are three prophets (the classical word θεόπροπος is used in the Bible for indicating Moses) whose Greek name is made of four letters (Ἄμωσ ‘Amos’, Ἰωήλ ‘Joel’ and Ὡσηέ ‘Hosea’), but only the name of the first one can be divided into two syllables. If deprived of the first letter (the ‘head’), the name Ἄμωσ becomes the unusual word μῶσ, the term that, according to Philo of Alexandria, in the language of the ancient Egyptians meant ‘water’ (“the component part of the entire world”, according to the Palatine version, but also “the teetotal drink of the human beings that cleans up the filthiness of the body”, as Psellos’ version says)²⁴. The second half of the name of the prophet is ὦσ: in the text of our manuscript it is a word that has two meanings (the conjunction and the noun that is an equivalent of οὖς ‘ear’); in the text of the many manuscripts that have preserved Psellos’ ‘collection’, it is simply a part of the body (ὦσ = οὖσ). Finally, the palindrome reading of Ἄμωσ gives σῶμα (‘body’): “the opposite of what is not bodily” for Psellos, “what is composed of the four elements” for the unknown poet of the Palatine manuscript²⁵.

Riddle 5 (8)

- 1 Ζῶον τετράπουν χρηματίζω τῇ φύσει.
Πλὴν συλλαβὴ τις πρὸς δὲ καὶ λέξις μία
τῶν γραμμάτων τέσσαρσι συντεθειμένη
κλῆσιν παριστᾶ τὴν ἐμὴν σαφεστάτην.
- 5 Εἰ γοῦν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφέλης τῶν γραμμάτων,
ψιλὸν δὲ πάλιν ἀντὶ τούτου μοι λάβης,
μέρος μελῶν με τῶν ἀναγκαίων μάθης.
Εἰ δ’ αὖ διώξεις τὸ ψιλὸν πορρωτάτω,
θήσεις δὲ δασύ, γῆν με γνωριεῖς, φίλε.
- 10 Τοῦ προστεθέντος δ’ αὖθις ἀφελουμένου
καὶ τινος ἐμβληθέντος ἀμεταβόλου,
ψυχῆς μέρος με κυριότατον μάθης.
Ἄφεις δὲ τοῦτο καὶ λαβῶν θαυμασίως
τὸ τῶν ὄλων ἔκκριτον ἀμεταβόλων
- 15 χύσιν με μάθης ὑδάτων πεφυκέναι.
Τούτου δὲ πάλιν μακρὰν ἀπερριμμένου,
αἰσθήσεως εἰδός με γνώσεις αὐτίκα.
Ἀρχῆς δὲ τούτου πάλιν ἐξαιρουμένης,
ζῶον τετράπουν εἰμὶ καθάπερ πάλαι.

3 συντεθειμένε Pal || **9** φίλος Pal || **16** ἀπερριμμένου Pal

“I am called a four-footed animal, because of my nature.
I have just one syllable, and moreover one single word,
composed by four letters,
represents my name in the clearest way.

human beings / that cleans up the filthiness of the body. / But after having divided me and cut me in the middle, / you should soon know that I am a part of the body. / Having read me contrariwise, / you will make of me the opposite of what is not bodily”.

²⁴ Philo, The life of Moses 605 B.

²⁵ On palindromes in Greek literature, see C. LUZ, Technopaignia. Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung. Leiden – Boston 2010, 179–211.

If you take away the first of my letters
 and if you pick up a voiceless consonant instead,
 you might learn that I am a necessary part of the body.
 If you drive far away the voiceless consonant
 and put an aspirated one, you will know, my friend, that I am earth.
 After having taken away the letter that had been added
 and after having inserted a liquid consonant,
 you might learn that I am the most important part of the soul.
 After having taken away this letter and picked up like a magician
 the most eminent of the liquid consonants,
 you might learn that I have become a flood of water.
 After having thrown far away this letter as well,
 you will learn at once that I am a form of sense-perception.
 But if the first letter is then taken away,
 I am a four-footed animal exactly as I was before”.

One of the main features that mark the compositional technique of the author of our riddles, namely the inclination toward the modification of the standard structure of a given poem by inserting one (or even more) new clues, is shown in the most evident way in this conundrum, by far the longest one of our collection.

The oldest example of a riddle with multiple solutions known to us is the following epigram from the fourteenth book of the *Palatine Anthology*:

Εἰμι χαμαίζηλον ζῶων μέλος· ἦν δ’ ἀφέλης μου
 γράμμα μόνον, κεφαλῆς γίνομαι ἄλλο μέρος·
 ἦν δ’ ἕτερον, ζῶον πάλιν ἔσσομαι· ἦν δὲ καὶ ἄλλο,
 οὐ μόνον εὐρήσεις, ἀλλὰ διηκόσια²⁶.

Its four solutions, that go from the first (πούς) to the last (ς) through a series of progressive eliminations of the first letter of each resultant word (οῦς and ὕς), have inspired many similar riddles, that differ from one another just because of the first solution, since the Greek words composed of four letters that end with -ους are many²⁷.

Our unknown poet has chosen to insert all these possible solutions in just one riddle. Therefore, we start with the ‘ox’ (βοῦς) and, through the change of the first letter (the voiced β turns into the

²⁶ Greek Anthology 14.105: “I am the part of an animal which affects the ground; but if you take a single letter / away from me, I become a part of the head; / but if you take away another letter, I shall again be an animal; but if you take another letter away, / you will not find me one, but two hundred”. On this epigram, see the remarks of N. HOPKINSON, *Greek Poetry of the Imperial Period: An Anthology*. Cambridge – New York 1994, 105; he does not say why he has chosen to date it before the Byzantine era, but if he considered it to be a creation of a poet lived during the Roman Empire because of its meter (classical elegiac couplet instead of Byzantine dodecasyllable), I cannot but agree with his tentative date. See also C. LUZ, *What Has It Got in Its Pockets? Or, What Makes a Riddle a Riddle?* In: *The Muse at Play. Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*, ed. J. Kwapisz – D. Petrain – M. Szymański. Berlin – Boston 2013, 83–99.

²⁷ The epigram that, in the same Palatine book, follows AP 14.105 is very similar: Τέσσαρα γράμματ’ ἔχων ἀνύω τρίβον· ἦν δὲ τὸ πρῶτον / γράμμ’ ἀφέλης, αἰώ· καὶ τὸ μετ’ αὐτὸ πάλιν, / βορβόρω εὐρήσεις ἐμὲ φίλτατον· ἦν δὲ τὸ λοιπὸν / αἶρης, εὐρήσεις κἀπίρρημα τόπου (“I have four letters and I walk marching along: but if you take away the first letter, / I hear; and if you take away the one after it, / you will find me very fond of mud; but if you take away the last letter / instead, you will find an adverb of place”). The first three solutions of AP 14.106 (πούς, οῦς, ὕς) are the same, but the last one is different, because it comes out of the elimination of the last letter of the first solution: if we take away the last letter of πούς we obtain the adverb of place ποῦ (‘where’).

voiceless π), we find the same ‘foot’ (πούς) as in the epigram from the *Palatine Anthology*²⁸; if we substitute the voiceless consonant with an aspirated one, we find the ‘soil’ (χοῦς); if we again change the first letter and add in sequence two liquid consonants, we have first the ‘mind’ (νοῦς) and then the ‘stream’ (ροῦς)²⁹; with the last couple of solutions we come back to the standard answers ‘ear’ (οὔς) and ‘pig’ (ῥῆς).

Riddle 6 (5)

- 1 Μέρος μὲν εἶμι τῶν βροτοῖς πεφυκότων,
ἔτι δὲ καὶ φύλαγμα τῶν ἐν ταῖς μάχαις.
Καὶ γὰρ με δισήμαντον εὔρης, εἰ θέλεις·
λέξιν δὲ δισύλλαβον ἐμπεριφέρω,
- 5 γράμμασι πέντε τὴν ὅλην πληρουμένοις.
Τούτων δ’ ἀριθμὸς ἐστὶ μέχρι χιλίων
πλὴν προστεθέντων τριάκοντα καὶ μόνων.
Καιρὸν δὲ δηλῶ καὶ πάλιν εὐμορφίαν
ἀρχὴν ὅταν τις καὶ τέλος τῶν γραμμάτων
- 10 ὑπεξέλη μου καὶ τὸ λειφθὲν κατίδης·
διπλῆς γὰρ εἶμι καὶ πάλιν σημασίας.

3 δυσήμαντον Pal

“I am one of the parts of the human body,
but I also act as a protection during battles.
If you want, you can find out that I have a double meaning³⁰:
I bring inside me a word made of two syllables,
formed on the whole by five letters.
Their number reaches the sum of one thousand,
but only if you have added the number thirty to this total sum.
If you take away the beginning and the end of the letters
that compose my name and if you look at what is left,
I indicate time and then beauty:
in fact, I still have another double meaning”.

The five texts I have translated and commented so far were similar to other riddles already known to us from other sources. By contrast, the texts I am going to deal with in the next part of this article are all unedited (save the second poem of our manuscript, a strange text I will discuss at the end); therefore I am starting to move on less steady ground.

But, as far as this riddle is concerned, I am quite sure of its solution, thanks to another different kind of clue we have not met so far – a clue whose goal is precisely to let those who try to solve a riddle know if the solution (or the solutions) they have found is (or are) correct. Such a clue is the

²⁸ A riddle with the solution βοῦς (οὔς / ῥῆς / ς) is 83 Milovanović, first edited by LAMBROS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αἰνίγματα* 157, n. 5.

²⁹ Two riddles with the solution νοῦς are 138 and 139 Milovanović: the first one belongs to the ‘collection’ of Basil Megalomytes (33 Boissonade = 71 Cougny); the second one was first edited by LAMBROS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αἰνίγματα* 157, n. 4. One riddle with the solution ροῦς is 82 Milovanović (for its first edition, see again LAMBROS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αἰνίγματα* 157, n. 6). For the use of the adjective ἀμετάβολος (‘invariable’) in the sense of ‘liquid’, see Dionysius Thrax, *Ars grammatica* 632.7.

³⁰ The adjective δισήμαντος is only attested in a passage of Eustathios of Thessalonica, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* III 517,8 (VAN DER VALK).

numeric periphrasis we read at ll. 6 and 7 (“Their number is one thousand, / but only if you have added thirty”): these two lines are a reference to the principles of isopsephy, because they mean that the sum of the letters that form the first word must be 970 (that is, one thousand minus thirty)³¹.

The first solution of the riddle is then a word of five letters that has two different meanings, because it indicates not only something used as a protection during a battle, but also a part of the human body. Such a word is θώραξ, ‘cuirass’ and ‘thorax’; the confirmation is indeed given by the isopsephic play, because if one adds up 9 (the numeric correspondent of θ), 800 (ω), 100 (ρ), 1 (α) and 60 (ξ), the result is precisely the number 970.

And, of course, if one takes away the first and the last letters of θώραξ (namely θ and ξ), the solution is ὥρα, another word with a double meaning, because it is not only an indication of time (‘hour’), but also means ‘beauty’.

Riddle 7 (4)

- 1 Ἐμψυχόν εἰμι γεννηθὲν ἀλλ’ ἀσπόρως.
Μέσον περιφέρει με τετράς γραμμάτων
Ἄιδης δὲ καὶ κόσμος με τετραμερόθεν·
κἀγὼ γεννήσας καὶ γεννηθεὶς ἀσπόρως,
5 πόνους τὸ γεννώμενον προσέφερε μοι.

“I was born endowed with life, but without having been sown.
A group of four letters encloses me up in the middle;
underworld encloses me, and also heaven does from its four parts;
although I have given birth and I have been given birth without having been sown,
what has been given forth has brought upon me troubles”.

The solution of the riddle seems quite clear: what has been generated without having been sown cannot be but Adam, the first man, whose name is made of four letters; he was able to generate in turn, but this ‘generation’ made his life troublesome.

Since our text is a riddle, I reckon that the last line of the poem is an enigmatic reference to Eve, who was created out of a rib of Adam. This quite unusual form of generation is alluded to in the commonest riddle on the first man, which is also the first item of Milovanović’s edition, a poem copied in many manuscripts, where Adam speaks in first person:

Ὁ πατήρ μου ἐγέννησέ με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου
καὶ ἐγὼ ἐγέννησα τὴν μητέρα τοῦ πατρός μου³².

Here, the father mentioned in both lines is God, who generated Adam out of the womb of the Mother Earth; in his turn, Adam generated Eve, who was going to generate (through a long line of descendants) the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, father of Adam.

The ‘troublesome’ nature of Eve, together with her miraculous birth, is alluded to in another riddle belonging to the ‘collection’ of Psellos:

³¹ On the many uses of isopsephy in Greek literature, see LUZ, *Technopaignia* 247–325.

³² This riddle (1 Milovanović: “My father begot me out of the womb of my mother; / as for me, I begot the mother of my father”) was first edited by A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Παλαιὰ καὶ νεότερα αἰνίγματα. Laographia* 1 (1909) 575; other more or less similar versions were then edited by S. KYRIAKIDES, *Ἄσματα καὶ αἰνίγματα. Laographia* 8 (1921) 122, n. 4; LAMBROS, *Βυζαντικὰ αἰνίγματα* 210, n. 38, 213, n. 83, 215, n. 39; N. KYTION, *Βυζαντινὰ αἰνίγματα. Kypriaka Chronika* 3 (1925) 133, n. 10.

Ἀνὴρ με γεννᾷ καὶ πατὴρ ὑπὲρ φύσιν·
ζωὴν καλεῖ με, καὶ θάνατον προσφέρω³³.

The allusions to the peculiarity of Eve’s generation present in these two poems make the interpretation of the last line of the riddle of the Pal. Gr. 356 less probable as a reference to another ‘trouble’ generated by Adam (namely, the birth of his son Cain).

As for the third line of the riddle, the reason for the seemingly obscure mention of Hades and of the four parts of the universe can be explained through a couple of passages of the *Sibylline Oracles*³⁴. In the first book of the Oracles, we learn that Hades (Ἅιδης) appears to have taken its name from having ‘enwrapped’ and ‘hidden’ Adam (Ἀδάμ) after his death; the verb used in the oracle (ἀμφικαλύπτω) is somehow recalled by the verb we read in the riddle (περιφέρω)³⁵. In the second book of the Oracles, we learn that Adam’s name fills the four parts of the world, because the first letters of the Greek names that indicate the four parts of the world (ἀντολία, δύσις, ἄρκτος and μεσημβρία), that is East, West, North and South, spell out the four letters of the name of the first man³⁶.

Riddle 8 (6)

- 1 Ἐνυγρόν ἐστιν ἢ προσοῦσα μοι φύσις,
καὶ βρῶσις εἰμι τοῖς βροτοῖς ποθητέα.
Εἰ γοῦν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφέλης τῶν γραμμᾶτων,
ἂν ἀφέλης δὲ καὶ τελευταῖον πάλιν,
5 γνώσεις πνοὴν με καὶ μίαν τῶν δουλίδων.

“The nature I have is something aquatic,
and I am a food mortal men do like a lot.
If you take away the first of my letters,
but then you take away also the last one,
you will learn that I am a breeze and one of the handmaiden”.

The clues given by the poet in this short riddle are quite straightforward, and do not seem to be ambiguous. But I must admit that it has not been easy to find the three solutions – and, by the way, I am not completely sure that those I have found are the correct ones.

The first clue tells us that the first solution must be a fish. As in the other cases we have seen (and also in some others that we are going to see), the author has taken the start from another famous

³³ Psellos 51 Westerink (17 Boissonade = 44 Cougny = 15 Milovanović): “A man generates me, a father against nature; / he calls me ‘life’, but I bring death”.

³⁴ As already signaled in n. 2, I owe this indication to an anonymous reader who, with his extremely useful remarks, made a significant contribution to the completeness of this article.

³⁵ Oracula Sibyllina 1.81–2 (GEFFCKEN): Ἄιδην δ’ αὐτ’ ἐκάλεσαν, ἐπεὶ πρῶτος μόλεν Ἀδάμ / γευσάμενος θανάτου, γαίη δὲ μιν ἀμφεκάλυψεν). Among the meanings of περιφέρω quoted in LSJ, ‘to enclose’ (‘to surround’, ‘to enwrap’) is missing, but the peculiar meaning I use in my translation can be easily deduced from the noun ἡ περιφέρεια (‘circumference’).

³⁶ Oracula Sibyllina 3.24–6 (GEFFCKEN): αὐτὸς δὲ θεὸς ἐσθ’ ὁ πλάσας τετραγράμματος Ἄδάμ / τὸν πρῶτον πλασθέντα καὶ οὐνομα πληρώσαντα / ἀντολίην τε δύσιν τε μεσημβρίην τε καὶ ἄρκτον). But the author of our riddle might have taken this well-known etymology (witnessed by Augustine as well: see his commentary to John’s Gospel, 9.14.2) from a Christian epigram of the first book of the *Palatine Anthology* as well (1.108: Οὐ σοφίης ἀπάνευθεν Ἀδάμ τὸ πρὶν ἐκαλεῖτο, / τέσσαρα γράμματ’ ἔχων εἰς τέσσαρα κλίματα κόσμου: / Ἄλφα γὰρ ἀντολίας ἔλαχεν, δύσεως δὲ τὸ Δέλτα, / Ἄλφα πάλιν δ’ ἄρκτοιο, μεσημβρίας δὲ τὸ λοιπόν): “Not without wisdom was Adam called this way, / because the four letters of his name correspond to the four quarters of the universe: / he received Alpha from Antolie (the sunrise, i.e. East), Delta from Dysis (the sunset, i.e. West), / a second Alpha from Arktos (the bear, i.e. North) and the last letter from Mesembrie (midday, i.e. South)”.

riddle, the αἴνιγμα that has as its first solution the ‘shrimp’ (καρίς), and whose first line is “I live in the sea and I am food for mortals” (Θάλασσαν οἰκῶ καὶ βροτοῖς πέλω βρῶμα)³⁷.

But καρίς cannot be the answer to our riddle, because if we take away the first and the last letters we have a meaningless word (αρι). Since the names of the fishes (and the shellfishes, and the crustaceans) are too many, it is better to start from the second clue: a wind and a she-slave. In one of the smartest riddles of the Marc. Gr. 512, the πνοή indicated in the text turned out to be a specific wind: Νότος, the south wind³⁸. But since no peculiar wind of the Greek compass rose is suitable for the solution of the riddle in our case, we should rather think of a synonym of wind, or a peculiar kind of πνοή.

One possible answer might then be the word αὔρα (‘breeze’). There is no slave whose name is Αὔρα – but there is Ἄβρα, connected, both as a proper and as a common name, with slaves. In the Life of Cicero, Plutarch mentions a character, the servant girl of Pompeia, whose name was Ἄβρα (‘Habra’)³⁹. As for the common name, in two passages of Menander we find the term ἄβρα with the meaning of ‘personal slave’ – a meaning present in a passage of another Plutarchean biography, the Life of Julius Caesar⁴⁰. For a Byzantine ear, there was no difference between the pronunciation of the two words; therefore, this word is, in my opinion, a possible solution⁴¹.

And what about the fish? Well, if we add the letter λ before and the letter ξ after αβρα, we have λάβραξ, the name of a fish (‘sea bass’), and also a proper name, because Labrax was the pimp in Plautus’ Rudens (a comedy modeled after an original by Diphilus)⁴².

Riddle 9 (10)

- 1 Δισυλλάβως εἴληφα γράμματα τρία·
ὑπαρξιν ἔσχον δευτέραν μετὰ πρώτην,
ζῳοῖς ἅπασι τὴν ζωὴν δὲ παρέχω.
Εἰ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκτέμεις, τεραστίως
5 εὔρης με πάλιν ὑγιῶς ἡρμοσμένον.
Εἰ δ’ οὖν συνοχὴν ἐκτέμης μου δευτέραν,
εἰς θάμβον ἴδης προσφυῶς ὑπεκτρέχον.

2 δευτέ{υ}ραν μετὰ πρῶτον Pal

“I have received three letters divided in two syllables;
I have had a second life after the first,
but I grant life to every living creature.

³⁷ On this riddle, present in Basil’s ‘collection’ (11 Boissonade = 54 Cougny = 110 Milovanović), and its many variants, see BETA, Enigmatic Literature 216–218.

³⁸ See BETA, Enigmatic Literature 224.

³⁹ Plutarch, Cic. 28.3.

⁴⁰ Menander 63.3 and 411.3 Kassel-Austin and Plutarch, Caes. 10.3. This second meaning is present in the Bible as well (Ge. 24.61, Ex. 2.5, etc.).

⁴¹ Another riddle whose two solutions ask for an explanation founded on the identical pronunciation of different letters (or of a different group of letters) is the conundrum discussed by K. VON HOLZINGER, Die Aristophaneshandschriften der Wiener Hofbibliothek, I. Die Busbeckeschen Aristophaneshandschriften (*Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*. 167, 4. Abhandlung). Wien 1911, 108–109. In the riddle, the last item of a small collection of eight texts present in the f. 59v of the Vindobonensis Theol. gr. 95 (*Diktyon* 71762) (description: H. HUNGER – O. KRESTEN, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Teil 3/1: Codices Theologici 1–100*. Wien 1976, I 172), the first solution (ἔλαιον = ‘oil’), by losing its first letter, turns into the second, homophonic one (λέων = ‘lion’).

⁴² On the presence of fish dishes on Byzantine tables, see F. TINNEFELD, Zur kulinarischen Qualität byzantinischer Speisefische, in: *Studies of the Mediterranean World (Past and Present XI)*. Tokyo 1988, 155–176.

If you cut my head, miraculously
 you might find that I am again soundly fit.
 But if you cut my second letter,
 you might see that I naturally run toward the amazement”.

In this riddle, too, we have to look for three different solutions. But, if the first solution has three letters and the second two, the number of the letters of the third depends upon the meaning of the word συνοχή.

The first solution is something that has lived twice and, at the same time, gives life to every living animal. Since a Christian answer to this question is clearly possible (a fairly good number of Byzantine riddles asks for solutions connected with the Bible, as we have already seen with the poems on Adam and Amos), the longer solution might be a word that hints at Jesus, who did live a second (human) life after his first (divine) life, and who is, of course, the source of living for all the creatures of the world.

Following the clever suggestion of the referee I have already mentioned, I am inclined to see this solution as the expression ὁ ὢν (“he who is”), three letters that appear in the halo of Jesus on some icons⁴³. If we ‘cut the head’ of this expression, then we have something that looks like a miracle (a τέρας): the meaning of the word does not change because we have again (πάλιν) the same word, whole and sound, that is ὢν (with crasis)⁴⁴.

As for the third solution, if we assume that συνοχή means something like ‘letter’, then after the elimination of the second letter of ὢν we have ὦ, an exclamation that indicates many different kinds of reaction including ‘surprise’ (θάμβος)⁴⁵.

The solution proposed by the referee is even more convincing if we think that the emergence of this iconographic feature may have something to do with the efflorescence of hesychasm as it dates to the fourteenth century, that is to the period in which our manuscript was probably written⁴⁶. The interplay between the riddle and contemporary art (and perhaps contemporary theology as well) is therefore remarkable indeed.

Riddle 10 (9)

1 Εἰς ὕψος ὀρῶ καὶ πολλὰ σκοπεῖν θέλω.
 Ἐξὰς γραμμᾶτων δισυλλάβως με φέρει.
 Καὶ πρῶτα τρία διελὼν γράμματά μου,
 ποιὰν φωνὴν εὗρης με παίδων νηπίων.

⁴³ Εἰμὶ δ’ ἔγωγε ὁ ὢν (“I am he who is”) is also the incipit of a Byzantine riddle first published by LAMBROS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αἰνίγματα* 165 = 98 Milovanović; its solution (Μονογενής “Only Begotten”) was first guessed by A. I. SPYRIDAKIS, *Βυζαντιακὰ αἰνίγματα*. *Epeteris Parnassou* 8 (1904) 187–188. A fairly different version of the riddle (with the solution φασεφόρος ὁ ἦλιος) can be found in another manuscript (Vat. gr. 889 [*Diktyon* 67520], f. 137v).

⁴⁴ In Basil’s ‘collection’ (31 Boissonade = 68 Cougny = 130 Milovanović) there is a riddle where the elimination of a letter does not change the meaning of the solution (ll. 1–2: Ἐχω τρία γράμματα, καὶ τι τυγχάνω. / Ἐνὸς στεροῦμαι: ταὐτὸ τυγχάνω πάλιν): if we ‘cut the head’ of the three letter word σῦς (‘pig’), we obtain ὕς (again, ‘pig’). Note the use of the adverb πάλιν, as in our riddle.

⁴⁵ But, since the meaning ‘letter’ is nowhere attested for συνοχή, we should rather look for another explanation. If we suppose that συνοχή means ‘a union of letters’ (a meaning that, although never attested elsewhere, is not unbelievable), then the ‘surprise’ (ὦ) would be the result of the elimination of the ‘second’ (δευτέρα) ‘union’ (συνοχή) of letters (ὄν, as opposed to the ‘first union’ ὄν).

⁴⁶ See A. STREZOVA, *Hesychasm and Art: The Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in the 14th and 15th Centuries*. Canberra 2014, 74–75.

“I look high over me and want to see many things.
A bunch of six letters divided in two syllables brings me.
After having taken away my first three letters,
you might find out that I am the voice of infant children”.

Here the solutions are two: a disyllabic word composed of six letters (“I look high over me and want to see many things”); a smaller word composed of three letters (that is, one half of the first one), corresponding to “the voice of infant children”.

I have not been able to find the solutions of the riddle. But, in order to help my Byzantine colleagues in finding its two solutions, I copy in the footnote the clever remarks made by the reviewer in his report⁴⁷.

Riddle 11 (11)

- 1 Τετράδα μὲν γίνωσκε συλλαβῶν φέρω·
ὀκτάδι γραμμάτων με προσφυῶς νόει.
Καὶ κέρδος ἄγω τοῖς βροτοῖς πλὴν δυσκόλου.
Τῶν γραμμάτων δὲ τὰ τρία κόπτων, φίλε,
5 τὰ πρῶτα βλέψον ἐστερημένον βίου.
Καρατομῶν δε πάλιν εἰ θέλεις, ξένε,
εὐωδίαν εἴληφας ὀσφραίνοντά με.

“Guess me: I bring a bunch of four syllables.
Try to know who I am, composed of a group of eight letters.
And I bring a gain to all mortals, except to those who are unpleasant.
By cutting the first three letters, my friend,
look at something that is deprived of life.
But if you want, my guest, to cut my head again,
you have caught me, something that has a pleasant smell”.

Here the solutions are again three: one word made of eight letters and four syllables (something that “brings a gain to all mortals, except to those who are unpleasant”); one word made of five letters (something “that is deprived of life”); one word made of four letters (something “that has a pleasant smell”).

Two of the three clues seem to bear a certain resemblance to a couple of clues in the ‘honeycomb’ riddle (that is, the model of the third riddle of our manuscript). The third clue of our riddle (l. 7: εὐωδίαν εἴληφας ὀσφραίνοντά με) is very similar to l. 8 of Psellos’ version of the ‘honeycomb’ riddle (εὐωδίαν ἔχον με πολλὴν κατίδης), namely the ‘violet’ (ἴον); the second clue of our riddle (l. 5: τὰ πρῶτα βλέψον ἐστερημένον βίου) is reminiscent of the different versions of the analogous clue of the ‘honeycomb’ riddle indicating ἡρίον, that is ‘death’ (βροτῶν ἐσχάτη κατοικία; κατάπαυσις ἀνθρώπων γένους; δάκρυα κινῶ καὶ μόνης ἐκ τῆς θέας).

⁴⁷ “Looking εἰς ὕψος seems to me to have a biblical tinge; Isa. 40.26 ἀναβλέψατε εἰς ὕψος τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν καὶ ἴδετε may be particular relevant, but if it is, then I do not know what we should learn from this. At any rate, βλέπειν εἰς ὕψος makes one think about looking up, i.e. about ouranoskopia of some sort – so perhaps we should think of a sort of seer? (But, again, μάντις does not seem to fit here.) On the other hand, φωνὴ παιδῶν νηπίων is highly ambiguous. It can e.g. denote any hypocoristic form used by children, such as βρῦ (cf. sch. in Ar. Nub. 1381 βρῦν οἶνον κατὰ τὴν νηπίων παιδῶν φωνήν)”. I have myself checked the names of all the prophets of the Bible, but no one corresponds to the clues given in the riddle.

‘Death’ might be the correct solution for “something that is deprived of life”, because the corresponding Greek word (ἡρίον) has five letters; if we consider the ‘head’ (κάρα) indicated by the principle of l. 6 (καρατομῶν) as (more loosely) the beginning of the word, instead of its first letter (more precisely), then ‘violet’ (ἴον) might be the correct solution for “something that has a pleasant smell”.

As for the first word, the anonymous referee (to whom I am indebted for these suggestions as well) suggests ποτήριον: a cup (especially when filled with good wine) is in fact a gain for everyone – except for those who do not like to amuse themselves because of their bad temper (being δύσκολοι). And since we know that banquets were an excellent venue for asking riddles, both in classical and Byzantine times, I do not share the referee’s doubts regarding this solution, which I find convincing indeed.

Riddle 12 (2)

- 1 Ἔστι γένος τι τῶν ἀνακτόρων μέσον
 θῆλυ πρὸς ἄρρεν, ἄρρεν εἰ θῆλυ βλέπει.
 Ἄμφω δὲ κοῦδέν ἐστιν, ὧν δ’ ἔχει δύο,
 τοῦ μὲν μετέσχεν οὐδαμῶς, τό δ’ ἐρρήη.
 5 Κρατεῖ δὲ πᾶσι καὶ κρατεῖται τοῖς ὅλοις,
 καὶ πάντα τολμᾷ, πάντα δὲ φρίσσει τρέμων.
 Στέργει γέλωτας, ἀλλ’ ἐρᾷ τῶν δακρύων.
 Ἄδοξόν ἐστὶ, κομπόδοξον ὃν φύσει,
 τυραννικὸν, λατρῶδες, ἄστοργον φίλων,
 10 σεμνὸν, ταπεινὸν, ἄφρον, ἄγλωττον, λάλον,
 δοῦλον, βίαιον, θυμικὸν, δειλὸν, λάγνον,
 ἐκ τῶν ἄκρων κραθὲν δὲ τῶν ἐναντίων
 ἄκρον πέφυκεν ἐκ κακῶν κακὸν μέγα.

“There exists a clan in the middle of the palaces,
 female if compared with male, male if it has a female look.
 They are both things and they are nothing: of the two things that they have,
 it never had a share in the first one, but the second one has gone away.
 It rules over everybody and it is ruled by everybody;
 it boldly endures everything but it shudders at everything because it is fearful.
 It is fond of laughter, but it loves tears.
 It is ignoble, because it is braggart by nature;
 it is despotic and servile, it does not feel any affection for its friends;
 it is haughty, miserable, ignorant, lacking in eloquence, loquacious,
 slavish, violent, irascible, coward, lecherous;
 and from the mix of extreme contraries
 does an extreme and immense evil of evils result”.

I have chosen to end this article with this text because, although its structure is very enigmatic, it is not a proper riddle. The long poem (thirteen lines) in fact shows a continuous recourse to a feature typical of riddles, namely the use of antithesis: male against female (θῆλυ / ἄρρεν, ἄρρεν / θῆλυ), ruling and being ruled (κρατεῖν / κρατεῖσθαι), laughing and crying (γέλως / δάκρυα), despotic and servile (τυραννικὸν / λατρῶδες), haughty and miserable (σεμνὸν / ταπεινὸν), silent and loquacious (ἄγλωττον / λάλον), and so on.

Some of the antithetical remarks made by our unknown poet (male vs. female, silence vs. chatter) closely resemble those underlined by Eubulus in a much older riddle, apparently uttered by the pro-

tagonist in the Σφιγγοκαρίων (*Sphingocarion*), a fourth century Middle comedy centered on a witty slave (Carion is the name of the protagonist in Aristophanes' *Wealth*) who, like Oedipus' Sphinx, was particularly skilled at asking (and solving) riddles.

The comic riddle, quoted by Athenaeus in the tenth chapter of the *Deipnosophists*, inside a long section dedicated to the habit of asking riddles during the symposia, is the following:

Ἦστι λαλῶν ἄγλωσσος, ὁμώνυμος ἄρρени θήλυσ,
οἰκείων ἀνέμων ταμίας, δασύς, ἄλλοτε λεῖος,
ἀξύνετα ξυνετοῖσι λέγων, νόμον ἐκ νόμου ἔλκων·
ἔν δ' ἔστιν καὶ πολλὰ καὶ ἂν τρώση τις ἄτρωτος.
τί ἔστι τοῦτο; τί ἀπορεῖς;⁴⁸

Another character in the play attempts to give an answer: in his opinion, the thing hinted at in the riddle is the politician Callistratus. But the answer is completely wrong. After having blamed the interlocutor for talking nonsense (σὺ δὲ ληρεῖς ἔχων), the first character (the slave Carion) says that the correct answer is the rump (πρωκτός):

οὔτος γὰρ αὐτός ἐστιν ἄγλωττος λάλος,
ἔν ὄνομα πολλοῖς, τρωτὸς ἄτρωτος, δασὺς
λεῖος. τί βούλει; πνευμάτων πολλῶν φύλαξ ...⁴⁹.

I defer my remarks on the significance of this bawdy solution (and also on the equally significant wrong answer given by the unknown interlocutor) to the explanation of the last poem of our collection. What I want to underline here is the fact that, however subtle it might appear, such a connection between a comic riddle and a Byzantine poem is not isolated, because there is another similar example where this connection is much more patent. In the same section of the *Deipnosophists*, we read an interesting quotation from another Middle comedy, Antiphanes' *Sappho*:

(Sappho) Ἦστι φύσις θήλεια βρέφη σῶζουσ' ὑπὸ κόλποις
αὐτῆς, ὄντα δ' ἄφωνα βοῆν ἴστησι γεγωνόν
καὶ διὰ πόντιον οἶδμα καὶ ἠπείρου διὰ πάσης
οἷς ἐθέλει θνητῶν, τοῖς δ' οὐδὲ παροῦσιν ἀκούειν
ἔξεστιν· κωφὴν δ' ἀκοῆς αἴσθησιν ἔχουσιν.
(B.) Ἦ μὲν φύσις γὰρ ἦν λέγεις ἐστὶν πόλις,
βρέφη δ' ἐν αὐτῇ διατρέφει τοὺς ῥήτορας.
Οὔτοι κεκραγότες δὲ τὰ διαπόντια
τάκ τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ τὰπὸ Θράκης λήμματα
ἔλκουσι δεῦρο, νεμομένων δὲ πλησίον
αὐτῶν κάθηται λοιδορουμένων τ' αἰεὶ
ὁ δῆμος οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἀκούων οὔθ' ὀρῶν.

⁴⁸ Eubulus, fr. 106.1–5 Kassel-Austin (from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 10.449ef): “It has no tongue, yet it talks; its name is the same for male or female; / it is steward of its own winds, hairy, but sometimes hairless; / it says things unintelligible to them that understand, / drawing out one melody after another; / one thing it is, yet many, and if someone wound it, it is unwounded. / What is this? Why aren't you able to give me an answer?” On this fragment, see also the commentary of R. L. HUNTER, *Eubulus, The fragments*. Cambridge 1983, 200–207.

⁴⁹ Eubulus, fr. 106.7–9 Kassel-Austin: “Because it speaks although it has no tongue, / it has one single name although it belongs to many, it is wounded although it stay unwounded, it is hairy / although it is hairless. What else do you want? Guardian of many winds...”

(Sappho) (...). Πῶς γὰρ γένοιτ' ἄν, ὦ πάτερ,
 ῥήτωρ ἄφωνος (...)
 Θήλεια μὲν νῦν ἐστὶ φύσις ἐπιστολή,
 βρέφη δ' ἐν αὐτῇ περιφέρει τὰ γράμματα·
 ἄφωνα δ' ὄντα <ταῦτα> τοῖς πόρρω λαλεῖ
 οἷς βούλεθ'· ἕτερος δ' ἂν τύχη τις πλησίον
 ἐστὼς ἀναγιγνώσκοντος οὐκ ἀκούσεται⁵⁰.

The riddle is constructed in the same way (it is still a dialogue, but between two women): first we have the question asked by Sappho herself (“There is a feminine being which keeps its babes / beneath its bosom; they, though voiceless, / raise a cry sonorous over the waves of the sea / and across all the dry land, reaching what mortals they desire, / and they may hear even when they are not there; / but their sense of hearing is dull”); then we have a tentative answer given by an old character, another woman (“That being of which you speak is the state; / the babes she nourishes within her are the politicians. / These, by their bawling, draw hither receipts / across the sea from Asia and from Thrace. / The people, meanwhile, sit near them / while they feed and brawl continually, neither hearing nor seeing anything”); finally, after Sappho’s rebuke (“How could, father, a politician / be voiceless?”), we have the correct answer (“The feminine being is an epistle: / the babes within her are the letters it carries round; / they, though voiceless, talk to whom they desire / when far away; yet if another happens to be standing near / when it is read, he will not hear”).

A very similar version of this riddle is also present in the aforementioned Byzantine ‘collection’ of Basil Megalomytes. The only slight differences lie in the solution and in the meter: in the margin of most of the manuscripts that preserve Basil’s ‘collection’ we read the solution βίβλος (‘book’) instead of ἐπιστολή (‘epistle’); the iambic trimeters have been changed into political verses:

Ἔστι τις φύσις θήλεια, φωνήεσσα καὶ λάλος,
 καὶ βρέφη περικόλπια σώζει καὶ περικρύπτει.
 Ἄγλωσσα δὲ καὶ λαλιᾶς ἀδίδακτα τὰ βρέφη·
 ἀλλ’ ὅμως ἔντρανον αὐτοῖς καὶ γεγωνὸν τὸ φθέγμα·
 κὰν τοῖς ποντίοις ὕδασιν οἷς θέλουσι λαλοῦσι,
 καὶ τοὺς ἐν νήσοις φθάνουσι καὶ τοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἠπείροις.
 Πολλοῖς δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῶν ἀκούειν καὶ παροῦσι·
 τῆς δ’ ἀκοῆς τὴν αἴσθησιν κωφὴν ἔχει τὰ βρέφη⁵¹.

Postulating a more or less tight connection between a Byzantine conundrum and a much older comic riddle is therefore a possibility that cannot be ruled out.

But there is also another significant feature that witnesses beyond any doubt that the author of our poem was well acquainted with the world of Greek riddles. The first line seems to play on a very similar incipit to a quite famous Byzantine riddle, a poem some manuscripts even attribute to the emperor Julian:

Ἔστι τι δένδρον τῶν ἀνακτόρων μέσον,
 οὗ ῥίζα καὶ ζῆ καὶ λαλεῖ καρποῖς ἅμα.

⁵⁰ Antiphanes, fr. 194 Kassel-Austin (from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 10.450e–451b).

⁵¹ Basil Megalomytes (39 Boissonade = 26 Milovanović): “There is a feminine being, speaking and talkative, / which keeps and hides its babes beneath its bosom. / The babes are tongueless, / since nobody has taught them to speak; / but their voice is high and sonorous; / they speak to the mortals they desire / over the waves of the sea, / and over the islands, and over the lands. / Even when they are present, it is not possible to hear them; / but the sense of hearing of the babes is dull”.

᾽Ωρα δὲ μιᾶ καὶ φυτεύεται ξένως,
καὶ πάλιν πίπτει καὶ τρυγᾶται ριζόθεν⁵².

The solution is different: as is stated by its title, the answer is the κοντοπαίκτης, the ‘acrobat’ who balances a wooden pole on his head. But, since the riddle was very popular, the extreme similarity of the two initial lines cannot be the result of sheer chance.

Furthermore, apart from the considerations I have just elaborated, the long poem we read in the Pal. gr. 356 is not a riddle. According to the other manuscript that has handed it down to us (the Laurentianus 32.19 [*Diktyon* 16283], a book written in the fifteenth century), it is a poem ‘against the eunuchs’ (κατ’ εὐνούχων), composed by Theodore Prodromus; even if its author is probably not Prodromus (Vassis attributes it tentatively to Niketas David Paphlagon), it is more a moralistic meditation on the contradictory features of the eunuchs (both physical and political) than a proper riddle asking for an answer⁵³.

But, precisely because of the contradictions they displayed (already underlined by Eubulus in his comic riddle, where he played on the supposed effeminacy of the politician Callistratus), these features might also be used in proper riddles whose solution was probably the eunuch, as in an anonymous riddle found by Spyridon Lambros in a Mount Athos manuscript (Hagiou Panteleemonos 829 = Lambros 6336 [*Diktyon* 22968], f. 93r):

Ζῶον μὲν εἶμι, καὶ ζῶ δὲ κατὰ μόνας.
Ἄνῆρ μὲν οὐκ ἀνῆρ δέ,
οὐκοῦν τέρας τι τῶν μυθοπεπλασμένων,
ἀμφίβολον τῇ φύσει, κιβδηλίας.
Βούλει μαθεῖν τὴν κλῆσιν, μαθὼν τὴν φύσιν;
Ἐν ἰσολέκτοις συλλαβαῖς εἰς τὰ δύο,
ὀκτῶ μόρια γραμμάτων πάντα φέρω,
ψηφός ὀκτῶ δεκάκις ἑκατὸν δὲ εἰς δύο,
ἔτι δεκάκις πέντε σὺν ὀκτῶ πᾶσιν,
ἔχει τὸ πᾶν. Γνωθί με καὶ πρόφαινέ με⁵⁴.

⁵² Basil Megalomytes (8 Boissonade = 51 Cougny = 41 Milovanović): “There is a tree in the middle of the palaces, / whose root is both alive and talkative, exactly like its fruits. / In a single hour it also grows in a strange way, / and then falls down, and gets a harvest at its roots”. Cougny 22 (“Ἔστι τι δένδρον τῶν ἀνακτόρων μέσον, / οὗ ρίζα καὶ ζῆ, καὶ λαλεῖ καρποῖς ἅμα, / μιᾶ δ’ ἐν ᾽ώρα καὶ φυτεύεται ξένως, / καὶ καρπὸν αὖξει, καὶ τρυγᾶται ριζόθεν”) is a very similar version, first edited by Saumaise in 1689 in his *Exercitationes Plininae in Caii Julii Solini polyhistora* with the attribution to the emperor Julian. On the complicated story of this riddle, see L. STERNBACH, *Analecta Byzantina. Ceské Museum Filologické* 6 (1900) 291–293 (who discusses its attribution to Eustathius Kanikles); see also ZANANDREA, *Enigmistica bizantina* 149–150.

⁵³ The text of the poem was first published by Emmanuel Miller in his edition of the poetical compositions of Manuel Philes (Manuelis Philae Carmina. Parisiis 1855, I 450). According to Miller, the author of this (n. cclv: Τοῦ αὐτοῦ κατ’ εὐνούχων) and of the former poem (n. ccliv: Εἰς κλίνην. Τοῦ αὐτοῦ) is the same author of n. ccliii, the short poem “On a greedy man” attributed to Theodore Prodromos, Τοῦ Προδρόμου εἰς λαίμαργον; since this poem is elsewhere attributed to Niketas David Paphlagon, Vassis put forward the hypothesis that the poem ‘against the eunuchs’ was written by him (I. VASSIS, *Initia Carminum Byzantinorum*. Berlin – New York 2005, 258), although he endows it with the asterisk usually reserved for the *carmina dubia vel spuria*. But the indication of the authorship written in red ink in the left margin of the Laurentianus (f. 294v), though not completely easy to read, appears to indicate quite clearly that the copyist meant that the poem had indeed been composed by Prodromos (Τοῦ Προδρόμου... κατ’ εὐνούχων). The text printed by Miller (endowed with a long and detailed note on the rare adjective κομπόδοξος) is almost identical to our text; the only difference can be found at l. 9 (the Laurentianus has ἄστοργον φύλον where the Palatinus has ἄστοργον φίλων).

⁵⁴ Milovanović 90 (see LAMBROS, *Αἰνίγματα* 214): “I am a living animal, but I live on my own. / I am a man and I am not a man, / I am one of those wonder creatures created by myths, / ambiguous by nature, deceiver. / Now that you have learnt my nature, do you want to know my name? / I bring all together eight parts of letters / in syllables antithetically composed one against

We are not sure if the solution of the riddle is the ‘eunuch’, but the antithesis of l. 2 (ἄνῆρ μὲν οὐκ ἄνῆρ δέ) appeared in a similar form (ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, ἄνθρωπος δ’ ὅμως) in an older riddle, likewise quoted by Athenaeus but also hinted at by Plato in the Republic, a list of four antithetical statements where the first one in fact alludes to an eunuch⁵⁵.

CONCLUSIONS

These frequent references to older riddles are one of the most evident features of Greek ‘enigmatic’ literature – and our unknown author was very well aware of this. In his short collection, he introduced not only items composed by other authors, such as poem 1 (a riddle whose paternity goes back to Christopher Mitylenaios) and poem 12 (an enigmatic text written either by Theodore Prodromos or by Niketas David Paphlagon), but also riddles he had probably found in other ‘collections’, such as poem 4 (from Michael Psellos), poem 2 (from Basil Megalomytes), and poem 3 (from Psellos and Basil). In these last cases, he added some more or less significant changes in the original text, by modifying the structure of the clues, or by replacing the traditional clues with new ones, or by adding a new clue – or even more clues, as in the case of poem 5, where the original source (a four lines riddle first witnessed in the Palatine Anthology, with four solutions) has become a nineteen lines riddle with seven different solutions.

But (if he was indeed the author of the riddles that are witnessed by this manuscript only, as I am inclined to think) he was also able to create new riddles: sometimes (as in poem 7) he took his start from a fairly ordinary solution (Adam) and created an entirely new text, but elsewhere (as in poems 6 and 8) the fruit of his inspiration has given birth to a couple of smart conundrums, good for testing the perspicacity of a group of friends during a banquet or for teaching the peculiarities of Greek vocabulary to a class of students (as symposia and schools were probably the most common venues for these riddles).

And in at least one case (I mean poem 10), he has even succeeded in composing a riddle that is still capable of challenging the wits of classical scholars after so many centuries. Thanks to the writer of the manuscript (and also to its later readers) who refused to write their solutions in the margins of the pages, the unknown poet of the riddles of the Pal. gr. 356 has assured himself a presence ἐς αἰεὶ in the bibliography of Byzantine literature.

two. / The number eight ten times one hundred, multiplied for two, / and five ten times plus eight / is the complete sum. Come on, guess who I am, and reveal me”. The solution εὐνοῦχος suggested (but with a question mark) by Milovanović seems to correspond to the first clues of the riddle (the eunuch’s life was marked by loneliness; of the three syllables that compose his name, one is made of two letters and two are made of three letters), but the sum of the numeric values of the nine letters (1795) does not appear to correspond to the sum resulting from the complicated calculation of the numbers at ll. 8 and 9.

⁵⁵ The most complete version of this riddle (ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, ἄνθρωπος δ’ ὅμως, / ὄρνιθα κ’ οὐκ ὄρνιθα, ὄρνιθα δ’ ὅμως, / ἐπὶ ξύλου τε κ’ οὐ ξύλου καθημένην, / λίθῳ βαλὼν τε κ’ οὐ λίθῳ διώλεσεν) is given by the scholiast to Plato’s Republic 479c (235 CHASE GREENE); it says that “a man who is not a man, but who is a man yet, / hits with a stone that is not a stone (but misses it) / a bird that is not a bird, but that is a bird yet, / perched on a wood that is not a wood”. Its complete solution is written by the scholiast himself (νυκτερίδα ὁ εὐνοῦχος νάρθηκος κισήρει: “the eunuch [hits] a bat [perched] on a reed with a pumice-stone”). The riddle is quoted (in a shorter version) by Athenaeus Deipnosophists 10.452c, who ascribes it to a certain Panarces (see M. L. WEST, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*. Oxford ²1992, II 93–94); in the scholium to Plato’s Republic, the riddle is ascribed to Clearchus of Soli, who was Athenaeus’ major source for his section on riddles (fr. 95 Wehrli). On this famous conundrum, see also [Tryphon], *On tropes* 4 (III 194.12 ff. SPENGLER), Syrianus, *Commentary to Hermogenes* (VII 949.19 WALZ), [George Choïroboskos], *On tropes* 20 (III 253.18–25 SPENGLER), Photios, s.v. νυκτερίδος αἴτιος (III, p. 32 THEODORIDIS) and the Suda, s.v. αἴτιος (II, p. 173 ADLER).