

Dreams, Memory and Imagination in Byzantium

Edited by

Bronwen Neil
Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides



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Desire, Dreams, and Visions in the Letters of Emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos and Theodoros of Kyzikos

Mark Masterson

This chapter discusses homoerotics visible in letters that passed between Emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos and Theodoros of Kyzikos.¹ Scholars have shied away from analysing these letters on this basis.² The reason for their reluctance to discuss desire has been associated with a prevailing idea, which I wish to challenge, that the language of same-sex desire in Byzantine epistolography is best regarded as an indicator of the correspondent's level of education and/or a strong metaphor for friendship. Scholars also explain homoerotic warmth as a generic feature of Byzantine epistolography and, since its appearance is driven by generic expectations, they judge this warmth as not particularly referential, beyond asserting that the letter is a letter. While there is something to these positions, I do not think that we should evacuate the surface meanings of desire from the language in these letters. The homoerotic language is not solely performative, that is, meant only to demonstrate a level of education or the genre, nor is it solely metaphorical, that is, meant to indicate the strength of a friendship. Konstantinos and Theodoros speak of their desire for one another too much and in too many ways for it to be dismissed as only performative and/or metaphorical. Same-sex desire appears in both dreams and waking visions in the third and fourth letters in the collection, the first from Konstantinos, and the other an answer from Theodoros. These letters not only speak often of desire, they manipulate its phenomenology. These letters also contain language that calls male-male same-sex sexual activity to mind, including, in Konstantinos' letter (discussed below), a metaphor of rose

1 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012 (B1–18), 83–108; Darrouzès 1960, 317–332. (All translations in this essay are my own. I thank Derek Krueger for his advice, Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides and Bronwen Neil for their patience, and Christabel Marshall for her help.)

2 While it has been the case that the homoeroticism has not been given much play in the scholarship on these letters, their remarkable nature has had a way of pushing hard on reluctance. For example, Demosthenous 2004, 175, while being opposed to seeing same-sex desire in the context of Byzantine men's friendships, wonders whether desire is present in these letters. He refers to and echoes a similar comment by Angelidi 2002, 228 n. 28.

and thorns whose bodily correlate is anal eroticism.³ While we cannot know what sexual acts, if any, occurred between these two men, these letters suggest a level of comfort with same-sex desire in Byzantine circles that we should bear in mind when we form opinions about elite male culture in the medieval empire.

Before proceeding, a word about this corpus of letters is in order. The eighteen letters that survive from the correspondence between Konstantinos and Theodoros are precious. The letters, in sequence, answer one another. It is not common to have a conversation documented like this. Based on internal evidence (mention of a Russian incursion⁴ and general anxiety around rulership, which suggests that Romanos I Lekapenos, who was lead emperor through much of Konstantinos' youth, was still around or Konstantinos was but freshly in charge⁵), scholars have generally thought the letters date from the 940s.⁶

1 Byzantine Epistolography and Same-Sex Desire

Byzantine epistolography⁷ often features homoerotic language.⁸ A frequent approach in the scholarship has been to drain the language of much significance, denying that expressions of same-sex desire in the letters could refer to actual desire between men. Non-articulated appeals to assumed heterosexuality and more overt ones to religious morality and law have seemingly sufficed to tamp down most thought about possible referentiality of this language to actual desire. Messis has the following to say, and these words are representative of

3 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87.

4 Konstantinos, *Letter 5* (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 90–91).

5 In *Letter 4*, Theodoros has a dream, discussed below, that may allegorise anxiety about palace politics (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89).

6 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, *4.

7 For remarks on the epistolographic genre, Byzantine expectations of letters, and the contexts of their writing and first readings, see Mullett 1997, 11–43.

8 Over the years, scholars have noted the erotic/friendly language in Byzantine epistolography (e.g., Karlsson 1962, 21–23, 58–78; Grünbart 2005, 113–122; Mullett 1999; Patlagean 1985, 603–605; Schneider 2008; Tomadakis 1993, 116–118). The general trend has been to interpret the language of same-sex desire as a performative and semantically inert convention of the genre, e.g., Messis 2006, 823; 2008, 33–34 and Demosthenous 2004, 173–175. That said, there has been some tentative resistance to this position on the erotic language in the letters. Mullett 1999, 20–21, e.g., believes it is worth thinking carefully in terms of referentiality to actual desire (cf. Schneider 2008, 95). Odorico 1995 also challenges this general approach to same-sex desire in Byzantine epistolography with an audacious reading of Theodoros Daphnopates' seventeenth letter.

the predominant trend in approaching representations of same-sex desire in Byzantine epistolography:

La correspondance de l'empereur Constantin VII Porphyrogénète avec le métropolite de Cyzique Théodore est pleine non plus d'allusions, mais des expressions ouvertement érotiques. Ce fait a incité nombre de savants modernes à parler soit des vrais rapports érotiques entre les personnes qui correspondent, soit d'une sorte de littérature homoérotique. Mais la réalité semble être tout autre. Ces textes 'officiels', préparés pour une circulation publique dans une société dont le conformisme chrétien ne permet pas l'expression de sentiments érotiques hétérosexuels, beaucoup plus homosexuels, constituent le plus souvent de purs jeux littéraires, un champs où chacun montre son éducation et sa finesse d'esprit. Dans ces textes, le vocabulaire érotique appartient à la catégorie du vocabulaire concernant l'*eros* 'celeste', un *eros* complètement déssexualisé, et s'assimile seulement en apparence au vocabulaire de *paidika*, selon l'expression de Synèse de Cyrène. Ce vocabulaire est utilisé pour, rhétoriquement, marquer l'intensité du rapport amical.⁹

Messis offers several arguments against perceiving same-sex desire in these letters, all of which deserve question. First he speaks of the circulation of the letters precluding the presentation of same-sex desire as, presumably, actual desire would have been shameful to depict. But he asserts this is the case rather than shows it. Second, since Byzantine circles did not countenance the depiction of heterosexual desire, *a fortiori* representation of same-sex desire was even less likely. As we will see below, ample depiction of same-sex desire in these letters makes his idea of a taboo on representation precarious. Seemingly aware of this, Messis insists either that the language is purely performative, demonstrating education and/or a cultivated temperament, or that it is a sexy metaphor for heavenly incorporeal love. It is not controversial to me that this language is performative at least some of the time. In the matter of heavenly love, there is support here and there for this when God is referred to.¹⁰ But a

9 Messis 2006, 823.

10 E.g., in *Letter 4*, Theodoros writes the following: "May it happen that we be filled with your true intercourse and conversation, O God and Lord who converts everything to a better state." Ἡμᾶς δὲ εἴη τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐμφορηθῆναι συνουσίας καὶ ὁμιλίας σου, ὦ Θεέ καὶ Κύριε, ὁ πάντα μετασκευάζων ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον. (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89).

detailed reading of the letters of Konstantinos and Theodoros shows that the predominant register of their language of desire is corporeal and not celestial.¹¹

A softened version of this approach to desire in the letters perhaps is understandable, if ultimately not persuasive, if we think in terms of the long history of the genre that stretches back into late antiquity and earlier than that. Many of the letters from the fourth-century fathers, for example, feature warm language that uses tropes of desire.¹² Still, I think we need to push back on the notion that, say, Basil the Great or Synesios is an optimal guide for understanding tenth-century epistolography. Indeed, viewing later Byzantine writers as unreflectively continuing with earlier modes is a desiccated approach to a practice that shows variation in later times. The letters of Nikolaos Mystikos, for example, do not have nearly the array of erotic language that the letters of Theodoros and Konstantinos have.¹³ But besides that, we should consider the letters within their later context. The empire of the 900s was different from that of the 300s or 400s. And the situation around same-sex desire was different also. The strength of negative reactions to desire between men was not as strong as it had been.¹⁴

2 Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos and Theodoros of Kyzikos

Proclaimed emperor while still a boy in 913, Konstantinos was emperor until his death in 959. That said, Romanos I Lekapenos consigned Konstantinos to

11 Elsewhere, and again in the context of discussing the letters of Konstantinos and Theodoros, Messis insists on his sure knowledge of Byzantine authorial intentions, of anticipated medieval receptions of these letters, and on what constitutes proper interpretive practice now: "Voir dans ces lettres l'expression d'un réel amour ou, pire encore, les prémisses d'une littérature homoérotique, signifie que nous ne savons pas lire les textes à la manière que les Byzantins les écrivaient et les lisaient." (Messis 2008, 34; cf. Demosthenous 2004, 173–175 for similar sentiments). I believe that these letters possess greater semantic richness than this.

12 Though no friend to same-sex desire, Basil the Great nonetheless uses warm language in his letters. See, e.g., Messis 2006, 823; Tomadakis 1993, 117.

13 Nikolaos Mystikos, *Letters* (Jenkins and Westerink 1973).

14 Space will not permit a discussion of this important issue. Suffice it to say that Byzantium in the 900s does not display much concern with same-sex sexual activity. Laiou (1992, 78) remarks that same-sex sexual behavior in Byzantium, which was forbidden in civil law, seemingly was not worth attention unless it caused a scandal: "Il est possible que, en dépit de tout son zèle normatif pour prohiber les actes homosexuels, la société byzantine les ait en fait tolérés tant qu'ils ne faisaient pas scandale." For more on this relative lack of concern, see Messis 2006, 779 n. 170, 781; Mullett 1988, 11 n. 41; Pitsakis 2008, 9; Smythe 1999. Also see Masterson forthcoming-a and forthcoming-b.

the sidelines in 920, taking over as lead emperor until 944. This meant that Konstantinos, denied political power, seemingly had time to develop his intellectual interests. Once he was sole emperor and probably before that, he superintended important intellectual projects. He guided the writing of the immense encyclopaedia, the *Souda*. He commissioned Histories,¹⁵ the *De Ceremoniis* (the invaluable guide to imperial ceremonial), the *Excerpta de Sententiis* (a massive project of excerpting earlier literature), and much else besides.¹⁶ Konstantinos was a leading figure in an intensely intellectual milieu that lasted for decades.

Another thing to note about this milieu is that Konstantinos Kephala (probably around 900, though perhaps a little earlier) compiled the *Greek Anthology*.¹⁷ This collection of epigrams, many of which are sexual in nature (especially in books 5 and 12), is quoted often in the *Souda* and was surely well known in these circles. The *Greek Anthology* arguably is present in the letters of Konstantinos and Theodoros. Intertextuality with the *Greek Anthology*, as with intertextuality with scripture, is one of the ways Konstantinos and Theodoros communicate with each other. These quotations are not just inert displays of education, on the one hand, and piety on the other. These recollections and quotations of earlier written productions recall passages and/or scenarios in the source texts. A homoerotic interpretation of these letters and their context explores this semantic richness.

We don't know much about our other correspondent, Theodoros of Kyzikos. He was a churchman whose star ascended so long as Konstantinos was emperor. Later, he seems to have run afoul of the new regime that came to power after the death of Konstantinos' son, Romanos II, in 963. He was exiled that year, and we hear nothing more of him after 965.¹⁸ Like Konstantinos, he clearly had attained a high degree of education.

3 Dreams and Visions in the *Souda*

As noted above, dreams and waking visions enliven the two letters to be discussed below, and they provide phenomenologically varied ways for

15 There was the *Basileiai*, written by Ioseph Genesios, and the anonymous *Vita Basilii* and *Theophanes Continuatus*, both perhaps written by Theodoros Daphnopates (Treadgold 2013, 178).

16 See Treadgold's discussion (2013, 156–167) of the hub of intellectual activity that was Konstantinos' court. See also Lemerle 1986, 309–353.

17 Lemerle 1986, 310; Cameron 1986, 292.

18 See Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, *3–16, for a sketch of Theodoros' life.

Konstantinos and Theodoros to present their desire for one another. It is of interest that Konstantinos' own encyclopaedia, the *Souda*, worked to define both dreams and waking visions. A look at the *Souda*'s entries on the "dream" ("Ονειρον) and "waking vision" ("Υπαρ) underscores the significance of their appearance in the letters. The prevailing distinction between visions that should be kept in mind is whether one is asleep and dreaming, or one is awake and experiencing a waking vision. First, then, the "dream" (δνειρον).

The *Souda* defines the "dream" (δνειρον) in relation to the "vision-in-sleep" (ένυπνιον).¹⁹ The entry itself is confused, that is, a quotation from Homer at the end of the entry contradicts the definition being developed. Nevertheless, it is safe enough to say that the difference between dreams and visions-in-sleep is that dreams have a pronounced connection to reality and predict what will be:

"Ονειρον ένυπνίου διαφέρει: ἕτερον γάρ ἐστι καί οὐ ταυτό. ἀλλὰ καί τὸ δνειρον καί ένυπνιον καλῶς εἴποι τις ἄν: ὅταν δὲ τεχνικῶς λέγῃ τις, κυρίως ἕκαστον χρῆ καλεῖν, καί τὸ μὲν ἀσήμαντον καί οὐδενὸς προαγορευτικόν, ἀλλ' ἐν μόνῳ τῷ ὕπνῳ τὴν δύνανται ἔχον, γινόμενον δὲ ἐξ ἐπιθυμίας ἀλόγου ἢ ὑπερβάλλοντος φόβου ἢ πλησμονῆς ἢ ἐνδείας, ένυπνιον χρῆ καλεῖν, τὸ δὲ μετὰ τὸν ὕπνον ἐνέργεια ὄν καί ἀποβησόμενόν ἐστιν ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν δνειρον. πολλάκις δὲ καταχρηστέον τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, ὡς καί "Ομηρος: 'θεῖός μοι ένυπνιον ἦλθεν δνειρος.'²⁰

A dream differs from a vision-in-sleep. It is something else and not the same. But someone can say not objectionably that a dream is a vision-in-sleep. But whenever someone speaks with skilful precision, it is necessary to use each word in its proper sense, and the one meaningless and not foretelling anything, having its power during sleep alone, and coming into being because of an irrational desire or an overarching fear or satiety or poverty: this one it is necessary to call a vision-in-sleep. With respect to a good or bad dream there is effectivity in reality or soon to eventuate. Often [sc. both of the] nouns must be used, just as Homer [says]: "a divine dream came to me as a vision-in-sleep."

The dream addresses reality and has predictive power ('effectivity in reality or soon to eventuate'), whereas the vision-in-sleep comes from something irrational in the mind or from the way the body is feeling, and therefore has, according to the *Souda*, no address to reality. It is debatable of course whether

19 Greek features three nouns that mean 'dreams', δναρ, δνειρον, and δνειρος, with no appreciable difference in meaning between them.

20 *Souda*, Omicron 345 ("Ονειρον); Homer, *Iliad* 2.56; *Odyssey* 14.495.

a dream driven by, say, the reality of one's own indigestion is not somehow connected to reality. But rather than question too exactly, it is best to accept the distinction and allow mental or somatic solipsism to define the vision-in-sleep. The quotation from Homer is interesting here. As the vision-in-sleep (ἐνύπνιον) plays in the mind while one is asleep, a dream (ὄνειρος) can appear within this envelope, as it were.

The other type of vision is one we have while we are awake: the “waking vision” (ὑπαρ). Here is the *Souda*'s entry for the waking vision:

“Υπαρ: ἀλήθεια, οὐκ ἐν ὄνειρῳ. τὸ μεθ’ ἡμέραν ὄναρ. οἶον φανερώς, ἀληθῶς ὑπάρχον. “ἔμοι διηγοῦ σὺ τοῦμόν ὄναρ: ἐγὼ δ’ ἔοικα [σοι] τὸ σὸν ὑπαρ ἀφηγεῖσθαι.” Ὑπαρ λέγει τὸ μεθ’ ἡμέραν ὄναρ: ὡς ἐναργῶς ὑπάρχον, ἀληθές. κατὰ ἀποκοπὴν τῆς τελευταίας συλλαβῆς τῆς χον.²¹

A waking vision is truth and not [a vision] in a dream; a dream during the day. [A waking vision] is existent obviously and truly. ‘You tell me my dream and I seem to relate [to you] your waking vision’ [writes Emperor Julian.]²² A waking vision designates a dream during the day as evidently existent, a true thing; [also] according to the removal of the final syllable, the χον.²³

The waking vision (ὑπαρ) is distinct from the dream (ὄνειρον), and especially from the vision-in-sleep (ἐνύπνιον). It has a closer relationship to reality, as it is ἀλήθεια or truth. The entry strengthens the point about truth through asserting that the word for waking vision, ὑπαρ, is an abbreviation of ὑπάρχον, which means “a thing existing.” The waking vision also happens during the day while one is awake. As a daytime envisioning, it has, on this basis, an attachment to things that are real: consciousness establishes credibility. Still though, a tension is present in this word, and, as above with the dream, it is best not to try to resolve it. It is a tension between, on the one hand, the reality of envisioning things while awake, that is, the fact of consciousness, and, on the other hand, an oblique connection the waking vision has to things that are real, which tends to be more occult and even supernatural. With his characteristically odd acuity, Emperor Julian highlights this tension: magically and from a distance he tells Ekdikios, the letter recipient, what the truth is.

21 *Souda*, Upsilon 155 (“Υπαρ”).

22 Emperor Julian, *Ep.* 108 (Bidez 2004, 186).

23 To whit, ὑπάρχον (“a thing existing”) has become ὑπαρ.

A brief excerpt from *Theophanes Continuatus*, an anonymous history in four books further substantiates these assertions about the waking vision. Written most probably in the 950s at the direction of Konstantinos,²⁴ this history narrates happenings in the 9th century. The account of the reign of Michael III (842–867) includes a dream that Bardas, Michael's uncle, had. A leading political figure because of the power vacuum created by Michael's youth, Bardas had a dream in which he was cut to pieces. The dream also told him that Michael was doomed. The dream prefigured Bardas' brutal assassination in 866 by dismemberment at the hands of the soon to be emperor, Basileios I.²⁵ After concluding his narration of Bardas' dream, the author remarks as follows: "and thus the dream [of Bardas] came to pass, and on account of this it is [in my estimation] a waking vision (ὑπάρ) and not a dream."²⁶ The vision that came to Bardas in a dream, on account of its perfect predicative power, qualifies as a waking vision. With these distinctions between the dream and waking vision in mind, I will now focus on desire, dreams, and waking-visions in two letters by Konstantinos and Theodoros.

4 Konstantinos' *Letter 3*

Konstantinos voices desire for Theodoros often in *Letter 3*.²⁷ He extends discussion of it by presenting it in both a dream and a waking vision. There is much to say about this letter. First, Konstantinos affects rusticity with the evident aim of lowering Theodoros' expectations for the letter. The letter then gains homoerotic warmth as it proceeds. He speaks of Theodoros' gift of summer fruit and wine, likening them to a kiss from his lips. He expands on the emotion, feeling filled up and gladdened: "and as though, according to what has been written, gladdened."²⁸ "Gladdened" is meant to be read intertextually, as Konstantinos signals this by saying "according to what has been written." As Tziatzi-Papagianni suggests,²⁹ a probable intertext is a portion of Psalm 103, a psalm which enumerates many of the benefits that God brings to the world:

24 Treadgold 2013, 165.

25 Calofonos 2014, 108–110, discusses this grim assassination and the dream associated with it.

26 *Theophanes Continuatus* 4.40/204 (Featherstone and Signes-Codoñer 2015, 290): καὶ ὁ μὲν ὄνειρος οὕτω δὴ ἐτελεύτα· ὁ δὲ ὕπαρ ἄλλ' οὐκ ὄναρ ἐστίν.

27 *Letter 3*, Konstantinos to Theodoros (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87–88), is printed and translated in its entirety in the Appendix.

28 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87: καὶ οἶσινε κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον εὐφρανθέντες.

29 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87.

... ἐξανατέλλων χόρτον τοῖς κτήνεσιν καὶ χλόην τῇ δουλείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῦ ἐξαγαγεῖν ἄρτον ἐκ τῆς γῆς· καὶ οἶνος εὐφραίνει καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ ἱλαρῦναι πρόσωπον ἐν ἐλαίῳ, καὶ ἄρτος καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου στηρίζει. χορτασθήσεται τὰ ξύλα τοῦ πεδίου, αἱ κέδροι τοῦ Λιβάνου, ἃς ἐφύτευσεν ...³⁰

... raising up grass for the cattle and the shoots for the slavery of men to bring forth bread from the earth. Wine gladdens the heart of a man to make the face shine with oil, and bread makes the heart of man strong. The trees of the plain will be made to grow lushly, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted.

The word the letter tells us to read intertextually is “gladdened” (εὐφρανθέντες), and it finds its correlate in “gladdens” (εὐφραίνει) in the psalm. A reader’s recollection of this psalm leads to further reflections, for there are additional commonalities between these two texts. They have pleasant elements in common and there are also accompanying items that qualify pleasure: things in the psalm and the letter come with a catch. We find heart and wine in both the psalm (οἶνος εὐφραίνει καρδίαν) and the letter (καρδίαν; οἶνον). There are also good things to eat: summer fruit in the letter and sustaining bread in the psalm. All these good things don’t come free though. They have accompanying drawbacks. In the psalm it is the slavery of men (τῇ δουλείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων) which accompanies the things to be enjoyed. In the letter, the wine and summer fruit are accompanied by “constriction and distress.”³¹ The admission of a downside then leads Konstantinos to reflect further on other instances in which something good is accompanied by something unwanted. Konstantinos provides an explanatory metaphor: that of the rose and thorn: “just as, I suppose, the thorn thrives, somehow, near the rose.”³²

Konstantinos’ mention of the rose and thorn adds sexual content to his letter, placed as it is between a discussion of desire and an introduction of the terms *eromenos* (ἐρώμενος) and *erastes* (ἐραστής).³³ Within this learned discourse, drawn from the pederastic poetry found in the *Greek Anthology*, the anus of the boy was the rosebud and the thorn was the hair that would arrive to mark the end of a boy’s desirability.³⁴ For example, in the anonymous fortieth epigram from Book 12, a young man past the age of boyish desirability wishes

30 Ps. 103: 14–16.

31 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87: θλίβον καὶ τρύχον.

32 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87: ὥσπερ, ὡς οἶμαι, τῷ ῥόδῳ πως ἀναφύεται καὶ ἡ ἀκανθα.

33 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87–88.

34 Richlin 1992, 35–36.

to be worshipped as a statue might be. But he wants to be a particular kind a statue: one whose extremities are made of marble but the rest, made of wood (probably) and covered with a cloak, is not:

“Μὴ ‘κδύσης, ἄνθρωπε, τὸ χλαϊνίον, ἀλλὰ θεώρει
οὕτως ἀκρολίθου κάμὲ τρόπον ξοάνου.”
γυμνὴν Ἀντιφίλου ζητῶν χάριν, ὥς ἐπ’ ἀκάνθαις
εὐρήσεις ῥοδέαν φυομένην κάλυκα.³⁵

“Don’t take off, man, my little cloak, but look at me as if I were a god’s statue with marble extremities.” Seeking the naked grace of Antiphrilos, you will discover his blooming rosebud, as it were, amid thorns!

Antiphrilos, whose words comprise the first two lines, does not want his cloak removed, for it will reveal that he has sprouted hairs on his posterior. A work such as this epigram would occur to an educated Byzantine reader (and Theodoros was certainly one of those) not only because of the compilation and circulation of pederastic poetry at this time, but also, as noted above, because of the mention of beloved boy and lover, who appear soon in the paragraph.

Next Konstantinos writes of “the law of *eros* and of *philia* that’s unbastardised, true, sweet, and lovable/erotic.”³⁶ One could be forgiven for imagining that Konstantinos was going to expand on the notion of maturity bringing an end to desirability, given what he was just talking about. But it turns out that the primary aspect of this law about which he wishes to speak is the pain of being apart, for this is what causes “constriction and distress in [his] heart.” In any case, he no sooner mentions the law than the thorns reappear, but they are not as wounding as absence. And as the thorns cannot compete with absence, neither can a new metaphor, that of the two-edged sword (ῥομφαία δίστομος): “What is more wounding than thorns, or a two-edged sword, unless it be the loss of one’s *eromenos* ...”³⁷ The two-edged sword appears in both the Septuagint³⁸ and in the New Testament³⁹ and takes us into scripture and away from pederastic literature. What is the valence of this image? Thorns and roses speak of pederasty, albeit interrupted. What does the two-edged sword say?

35 *Greek Anthology* 12.40.

36 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87: νόμος ... ἔρωτος καὶ φιλίας ἀνοθεύτου καὶ ἀληθοῦς καὶ γλυκείας καὶ ἐρασμίας.

37 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87: Τί γὰρ ἀκάνθης ἢ ῥομφαίας διστόμου πληκτικώτερον, εἰ μὴ στέρησις ἐρωμένου....

38 In the Septuagint, ῥομφαία δίστομος appears at Ps. 149:6 and Eccles. 21:3.

39 In the New Testament, ῥομφαία δίστομος appears in Apoc. 1:16 and 2:12.

In the Septuagint, the two-edged sword appears in the Psalms and in Ecclesiasticus. In the bloodthirsty Psalm 149, the two-edged sword is a weapon of righteous aggression that holy men wield after they have praised God and taken carnal enjoyment in their bedchambers:

... καυχῶνται ὅσοι ἐν δόξῃ καὶ ἀγαλλιάσονται ἐπὶ τῶν κοιτῶν αὐτῶν· αἱ ὑψώσεις τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ λάρυγγι αὐτῶν, καὶ ῥομφαίαι δίστομοι ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν τοῦ ποιῆσαι ἐκδίκησιν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ἔλεγμους ἐν τοῖς λαοῖς, τοῦ δῆσαι τοὺς βασιλεῖς αὐτῶν ἐν πέδαις καὶ τοὺς ἐνδόξους αὐτῶν ἐν χειροπέδαις σιδηραῖς, τοῦ ποιῆσαι ἐν αὐτοῖς κρίμα ἔγγραπτον· δόξα αὕτη ἐστὶν πᾶσι τοῖς ὁσίοις αὐτοῦ.⁴⁰

... the holy men will speak loud in glory and they will rejoice in their bedchambers. The exaltations of God will be in their throats and the two-edged swords will be in their hands to bring vengeance to the nations, to refute the peoples, to bind their kings in fetters and their nobles in iron chains, to bring to them the judgement that has been written. This glory will be for all His holy men.

This weapon of the righteous men appears with nearly opposite valence in the Ecclesiasticus. Here, the two-edged sword is not a weapon wielded by the holy ones—it is among the metaphors for soul-destroying sin:

Τέκνον, ἡμαρτες; μὴ προσθῇς μηκέτι καὶ περὶ τῶν προτέρων σου δεήθητι. ὥς ἀπὸ προσώπου ὄφεως φεύγε ἀπὸ ἀμαρτίας· ἐὰν γὰρ προσέλθῃς, δήξεταί σε· ὁδόντες λέοντος οἱ ὁδόντες αὐτῆς ἀναιροῦντες ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων. ὥς ῥομφαία δίστομος πᾶσα ἀνομία, τῇ πληγῇ αὐτῆς οὐκ ἔστιν ἴασις.⁴¹

Have you sinned child? Do so no longer and ask for pardon for your previous [sins]. As from the face of a serpent, flee from sin. For if you will approach, it will bite you: its teeth are those of a lion carrying off souls of people, just as the two-edged sword is all lawlessness, there is no cure for its blow.

These two occurrences from the Septuagint show that the two-edged sword has a double valence. On the one hand it is a weapon of the carnal fathers who fight with divine sanction and, on the other, it is “all lawlessness” (πᾶσα ἀνομία)

⁴⁰ Ps. 149:5–9.

⁴¹ Eccles. 21.1–3.

that will destroy a soul, similar to a savage beast or a malady for which there is no cure.

The life of the two-edged sword in scripture does not end there. It also occurs in the Apocalypse of John I and II. As is well known, this section of the New Testament claims to be a quotation of a letter that John has written to the seven churches in Asia.⁴² In this letter, he relates what an angel sent by Christ told him about last things. Hearing a voice telling him to write,⁴³ John turns around to see the source of that voice:

Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ· καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς, καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν· ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν, ὡς χιῶν, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χεὶρὶ αὐτοῦ ἄστέρους ἑπτὰ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὁξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.⁴⁴

I turned to look to the voice which was speaking with me. Having turned I saw seven gold candle-stands and in the midst of candle-stands one like the son of man, clothed to his feet and wearing a gold sash across his breast. His head and hair are white as wool is white, as snow is white, and his eyes are as the fire's flame. His feet are like brass, as though in the furnace of the glowing [flame], and his voice is like the voice of many waters. He is holding in his right hand seven stars, and from his mouth a sharp two-edged sword is jutting out. The appearance of him shines as the sun does in its power.

Here the two-edged sword juts out from the mouth. It is a difficult image, but surely gestures in the direction of language that is aggressive. The words out of the mouth of the "one like the son of man" will be violent and punishing. The partly metaphorical nature of the sword discernible in Ecclesiasticus ("all lawlessness"/*πάντα ἀνομία*) has been realized here, as the sword is as metaphorical as can be at this point in the text.

In the next section of the Apocalypse the two-edged sword appears again. There are further directions for John:

⁴² Apoc. 1:4.

⁴³ Apoc. 1:10–11.

⁴⁴ Apoc. 1:12–16.

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν· Οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐκ ἡρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι· οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως. μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ, καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.⁴⁵

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum [John, I want you to] write the following: "The one holding the sharp two-edged sword says the following: 'I know where you live, where the throne of Satan is, and you honor my name. You did not deny faith in me during the days faithful Antipas was a martyr, who was killed among you, in the place where Satan lives. But I do have some things against you. You have those who honor the teachings of Balaam, who taught Balak to pitch a snare in the face of the sons of Israel, to eat the sacrifices to the idols, and to fornicate. In the same moment you also have those honoring the teaching of the Nicolaitians. Repent therefore. If you don't, I will come for you swiftly, and I will make war on you with the sword of my mouth.'"

Here, the two-edged sword appears first as an actual weapon in the hand but at the end of the passage it is issuing from his mouth again.⁴⁶ We see a movement toward physicality and then back toward metaphor that characterised the two-edged sword in the first section of the Apocalypse. It is an instrument of physical and verbal chastisement. The sword here means to sharpen the resolve to repent of consuming sacrificial meats and fornicating (φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι), the latter of which is particularly interesting when compared with the desire-filled context of Konstantinos' letter.

When Konstantinos mentions the two-edged sword in his letter, he wields an image that, when in the Septuagint, is both an actual weapon of the carnal fathers and a metaphor for the damage that sin can do to the soul. In the New Testament, the two-edged sword is not only a physical weapon but also a metaphor for the punishing word of Christ that condemns fornication. This image from authoritative scripture brings moral and phenomenological complexity

45 Apoc. 2:12–16.

46 The adjective 'two-edged' (δίστομος) is missing in the later verse but may be presumed.

to this scene of desire in a medieval letter: carnality, chastisement of fornication, and lawlessness on one hand, and, on the other, a dichotomy between physicality and metaphoricity.

Comparison of the two-edged sword to the thorn (ἄκανθα) is revealing and appropriate, for Konstantinos presents them both as less vexatious than being apart from Theodoros is. The thorn encapsulates a limitation on desire according to the general protocols around pederasty: a hairy man is not to be desired. The threat posed by the two-edged sword to desire is more nebulous. It is certainly reasonable to imagine that the two-edged sword embodies strictures against carnal expression of desire, though it is not a simple image, on account of its life as carnal, lawless, and upholder of God's law. But Konstantinos worries less about desire improper (thorn) or illicit (sword) than he does about being apart. He does not worry about prohibition, whether it is based on age—for hair on his beloved (ἐρώμενος) will not bother him—or on religion. Rather, absence is the worst thing. Indeed, he expands on this norm-breaking position when he says the following: "I am mad but [I am mad] temperately, for friendship [as far as I am concerned] knows how to innovate in all things."⁴⁷ In their friendship, paradoxes abound. Madness is not madness. There is a law of *eros* and *philia*, according to which rulebooks are thrown out amid innovation and renegotiation. Established law is innovation and the rule is that there is no rule.

Now having broken free of constraints, Konstantinos becomes more direct and speaks of his desire as perceptible in dreams and in a waking-vision, both of which of course, as noted above in the discussion of their respective entries in the *Souda*, had a particular address to reality and truth. In the letter he remarks that dreams (ὄνειροι) often harass him as he sleeps and he rejoices when he thinks his "dearest one" has been put in his hands, that there is an opportunity for intercourse/conversation—a double-entendre: προσομιλεῖν—and kissing (καταφιλεῖν). Then he awakens and the visions that he had while asleep yield to the kind one has while awake. The illusion of presence that unconsciousness made available is no longer present for him. And he expresses dissatisfaction with being in the domain of the waking vision (ὕπαρ). A reader might expect that things will be chaster going forward. This expectation is not met when all the same things are written into the register of the waking vision; all these feelings turn out to be truth (ἀλήθεια) and a thing existing (ὑπάρχον), as it were. The waking vision, initially the chilly waters of reality, becomes an increasingly warm bath as kissing, friendly biting (δακεῖν ... φιλικῶς), and satisfying desire

47 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 88: μαίνομαι γάρ, ἀλλὰ σωφρόνως· οἶδε γάρ φιλία πάντα καινοτομεῖν.

(ἵνα τῆς ἐφέσεως ἀπολαύσωμεν) become “truth and not [a vision] in a dream” (ἀλήθεια, οὐκ ἐν ὀνείρῳ), as the *Souda* would put it.⁴⁸

In sum, a reader of this letter, who considers the presentation of Konstantinos’ desire for Theodoros in it, finds Konstantinos outlining a place for desire outside of usual strictures recoverable from both earlier Greek literature and scripture. The letter concludes with a phenomenologically varied depiction of this desire, showing up both in dreams and in a waking vision. While a modern reader of this letter might be tempted to think Konstantinos’ talk of dreams and visions is illusory, the *Souda* discourages such a view. Dreams and waking visions have a connection to truth and there is the fact that Konstantinos has spent much time considering his desire from a number of angles.

5 Theodoros’ Letter 4

We are fortunate to have Theodoros’ response to Konstantinos’ letter (see Appendix: Letter 4). In his answer, Theodoros prefers the flames of desire and, more egalitarian, he does not talk of lovers (ἐρασταί) and beloveds (ἐρώμενοι), nor does he speak of thorns and roses. He thereby avoids the asymmetries of pederasty which were a prominent theme in Konstantinos’ letter. Theodoros focuses on Konstantinos’ sweet mouth and depicts the emperor as a spring, honeyed and golden, that does not quench a fire but makes it flame higher and hotter. Also depicting his thoughts about the emperor as happening in both an unconscious dream and in conscious visions, Theodoros articulates his desire via the dream/waking vision dichotomy. He thinks of Konstantinos during the day. Konstantinos also appears to Theodoros in a dream in which a running or horse-back riding Konstantinos is being pursued. His dream is not as erotic as Konstantinos’. The running, perhaps a race, with overtones of political allegory, does not seem sexy. But the admiring lead-in, which features Theodoros’ delight in Konstantinos’ smile, perhaps is. There also might be a double-entendre with “stood” when he says, “during the night you, a dream, stood at my right.”⁴⁹

The verb in question *παρέστηκας* is intransitive in this form and can refer to an erection, as resort to the *Greek Anthology* shows. In Epigram 232 from Book 12, in a poem by Skythinos, an impatient narrator addresses his erect penis:

Ὅρθὸν νῦν ἔστηκας, ἀνώνυμον, οὐδὲ μαραίνῃ,
ἐντέτασαι δ’ ὥς ἄν μήποτε παυσόμενον·

48 *Souda*, Upsilon 155: “Υπαρ.

49 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89: καὶ νύκτωρ δεξιός μοι παρέστηκας ὄνειρος.

ἀλλ' ὅτε μοι Νεμεσηνὸς ὄλον παρέκλινεν ἑαυτὸν
 πάντα διδοῦς, ἃ θέλω, νεκρὸν ἀπεκρέμασο.
 τείνεο καὶ ῥήσσου καὶ δάκρυε· πάντα ματαίως·
 οὐχ ἔξεις ἔλεον χειρὸς ἀφ' ἡμετέρης.⁵⁰

Now you have stood straight up, nameless one, nor do you fail: you strain as though you would never cease. But when Nemesenos stretched out his entire self next to me on the bed, offering everything I might have wanted, a dead thing you hung there. Strain, burst, and cry! It's all in vain. You will not receive mercy from my hand.

Addressing his erect penis, the narrator berates it for being hard now (ὀρθὸν νῦν ἔστηκας) when it only had dysfunction to offer a willing boy at some previous moment. He will now let his penis suffer in an unrelieved erect state by refusing it masturbation.

Still, Theodoros' letter dismisses much of the content of the dream, as it merely contains things that appear "in a vision" and not the truth.⁵¹ Although he is gladdened in the dream, it is ultimately unfulfilling.⁵² He prefers to picture his desired one during the day via a waking vision. He wishes for "true intercourse and conversation,"⁵³ both of which are double-entendres. He is also grateful for the words in Konstantinos' letters, calling them "beautiful" (ὡραίους), a word often associated with sexually desirable persons. And these beautiful words come on like an insistent lover. In speaking of how these words affect him, Theodoros corrects Konstantinos' friendly biting (δάκειν ... φιλικῶς) to say, instead, that they bite him in a desirous or erotic way (δάκνειν ἐρωτικῶς), and also that they are "turning over his soul." This turning over is worth attention. In this increasingly erotic milieu, that is, biting has just been made desirous/erotic (ἐρωτικῶς), "turning over" (στρέφειν) turns out to have a relevant sexual life.

It will be useful to quote the final words of the letter here:

... πολλαπλασίαν ἐδεξάμην τὴν ἀμοιβήν, τοὺς ὡραίους σου λόγους καὶ γλυκεροὺς, οἵπερ ἐν τῷ δάκνειν ἐρωτικῶς καὶ στρέφειν μου τὴν ψυχὴν πλεόν

50 *Greek Anthology* 12.232.

51 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89: κατὰ τὴν φαντασίαν.

52 I should note here that εὐφροσύνης and εὐφραίνειν ('gladness' and 'to be glad'; the latter appearing twice) are well regarded as echoes of εὐφρανθέντες in Konstantinos' letter (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89 and 90).

53 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89: ἀληθοῦς ... συνουσίας καὶ ὁμιλίας.

εὐωδιάζουσιν ἥπερ ὁ ἐπαινεθεὶς ἀνθοσμίας οἶδεν εὐφραίνειν καρδίαν ἀνθρώπων
ἦ καὶ τὸ νέκταρ αὐτό, ᾧπερ οἱ μάκαρες ἐμεθύσκοντο.⁵⁴

I have received recompense many times over for yesterday's fruits, these fruits that have nothing brilliant about them other than the fact that they were chosen [for you by me], [recompense that is these] beautiful and sweet words of yours, words that, through desirous/erotic biting and turning over my soul, are fragrant. [And they are] more fragrant than [even] how the praised scent of flowers knows how to gladden the heart of men or even nectar itself, on which the blessed ones used to get drunk.

A reader of the letter has quite a carnal vision in their mind: the emperor biting Theodoros on, what?, the neck and then turning him over to ... oh wait, it's the soul. The arrival of the soul is deflating and decorporealising, but it does not evacuate the immediately preceding words of semantic content. The reader has been on a journey that the soul (ψυχή) cannot erase. Indeed, "turning over" (στρέφειν) has an eye-opening semantic range in the *Greek Anthology*. Corporeal, this verb refers to anal penetration on four occasions.

Four epigrams, two from Book 5 and two from Book 12, show that this verb can be construed as designating a man turning someone, male or female, over or around in order to penetrate them anally. At 5.54.5–6, Dioscorides suggests that if one's wife (or concubine) is pregnant, anal sex provides a good substitute enjoyment: "[H]aving turned your bed-partner over (στρέψας), enjoy her buttocks that are like the rose, practising boyish Kypris"⁵⁵ (note too the presence of the rose). In another poem, also from Book 5, Markos Argentarios addressing devotees of male love, assures them that if they don't have a boy at hand and only a girl or a woman, there is a solution, anal intercourse: "... having turned over Menophila of the beautiful hips, suppose in your mind that you possess male Menophilos himself in his recesses."⁵⁶ There is an epigram by Kallimakhos in Book 12, which is one of the few poems in this book of the anthology not concerned with the love of boys. After telling the young men that they should not spend time with a female runaway slave,⁵⁷ Kallimakhos concludes the poem by implying that she is (probably) being anally penetrated: "For I know that she, worthy to be stoned, is in some kind of way being

54 Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 89–90.

55 ... στρέψας ῥοδοειδὲι τέρπεο πυγῇ / τὴν ἄλλοχον, νομίσας ἀρσενόπαιδα Κύπριν.

56 5.116.5–6: ... στρέψας Μηνόφιλαν εὐίσχιον ἐν φρεσὶν ἔλπου / αὐτὸν ἔχειν κόλποις ἀρσενά Μηνόφιλον.

57 12.73.3: τὴν δρῆστιν μὴ ὑποδέχεσθε, νέοι.

turned over around here and badly loved.”⁵⁸ In poem 93, also from Book 12, Rhianos makes a list of dazzling boys who can command a man’s attention. Theodoros or Philokles are truly beautiful to gaze upon.⁵⁹ The next boy mentioned, Leptines, is our point of interest. His gorgeous body is the object of a compound verb built on *strephein*, *epistrephein*. This verb both refers both to turning things over (it is close in meaning to the uncompounded verb, στρέφειν) and to perception:

ἦν δ' ἐπὶ Λεπτίνεω στρέψης δέμας, οὐκέτι γυῖα
κινήσεις, ἀλύτῳ δ' ὡς ἀδάμαντι μένεις
ἴχνια κολληθεῖς ...⁶⁰

If you turn over/gaze upon the body of Leptines, no longer will you move your limbs, but as though glued down by unbreakable adamant, you stay your steps ...

Epistrephein is polysemous here, able to be taken either as the handling of the boy’s body or as the perception of his body. These lines speak of the narrator walking no further, but the suspicion that an impressively hard erection has arisen also hovers at the margins, perhaps the glans does not flop at this point and even has an adamant hardness to it? The facets in meaning in this verb of physicality and perception accordingly are well-seen as both being in play. When Theodoros speaks of erotic biting from his emperor and then to a turning over, the reader is being taken on a journey that creates memories that not even the subsequent specification of the soul can erase. In these letters, then, Konstantinos and Theodoros play an intensely teasing and corporealising game. The content of these two letters are but a glimpse into a series of exchanges that provide insight into elite male culture in the empire of the mid-900s. There is, of course, more to say about the other letters they exchanged with each other.⁶¹

58 12.73.5–6: ... ἐκείσε γὰρ ἡ λιθόλευστος / κείνη καὶ δύσερως οἶδ' ὅτι που στρέφεται. NOTE: It is possible that it is not anal penetration simply; it could be rape if δύσερως can be seen to drive interpretation past the unproductive pleasures of anal sex into sexual coercion of all kinds.

59 12.93.3–6.

60 12.93.7–9.

61 Much more about these letters (and other contemporary letter collections) will appear in my forthcoming monograph: “Between Byzantine Men: Desire, Brotherhood, and Male Culture in the Medieval Empire.”

6 Conclusion

These two letters present same-sex desire from a number of angles. Desire provides a strong graphic metaphor for friendship and regard. Konstantinos proposes pederasty while Theodoros is more egalitarian. Both see the desire for each other as something that appears both in dreams and in waking visions. Furthermore, waking-visions are not our idle day-dreams. For the Byzantines the waking vision (ὕπαρ) had a privileged connection to reality, facts, and truth. This connection may be hard to grasp in this time of privileging the unconscious dream as more revelatory than what we might choose to think of while awake. Furthermore, the manipulation of desire's phenomenology and its frequent appearance make maintaining the idea that it's just a formal feature of the genre, at least in these letters, difficult to maintain. Is it not time to grant that we cannot rule out actual desire between these two men? They certainly can conceive of it. The knowing play, perceptible in both the letters and in the intertexts, with what is metaphorical and what is real poses a hard question to anyone who would insist that desire between these Byzantine men was not conceivable to them. Whatever the case, though, these letters attest to low rates of what we could call, anachronistically, homophobia in tenth-century Byzantium.

7 Appendix

Letter 3

Οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐμὰ τὰ γράμματα, μὰ τὴν σὴν ἀρετὴν, ἀλλὰ τι σμικρὸν παπαδύλλιον καὶ εὐτελὲς πρὸς τὴν τοιαύτην γραφὴν διηκόνησεν· ἡ δὲ ὑπαγόρευσις, εἰ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀρνησόμεθα, ἀλλὰ δῆλη τυγχάνει τοῖς τὸν ἡμέτερον ἤδη χαρακτήρα γινώσκουσι· καὶ γὰρ τὸ σαθρὸν τοῦ ἡμετέρου νοδὸς καὶ τὸ βάρβαρον καὶ σόλοικον τῆς ἡμέτερας ἀμουσίας οὐ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἄγνωστον καὶ κεκρυμμένον ἐστὶ, ἀλλὰ δῆλον καὶ προφανές, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀπαρνώμεθα.

Τὰς δὲ γλυκείας ὄντως καὶ μελιρρύτους ὁπώρας δεξάμενοι καὶ τὸν ἀνθοσμῖαν οἶνον, τὸ <ν> ὑπὲρ τὸ πάλαι λαλούμενον νέκταρ, ἀπεγευσάμεθα μὲν οἶονει τῶν σῶν γλυκερῶν χειλέων σμικρὸν τινα ἀσπασμὸν εἰσδεξάμενοι, ἐπὶ πλεόν δὲ τοῦτου ἐμφορηθέντες καὶ οἶονει κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον εὐφρανθέντες, τὸ θλίβον καὶ τρύχον τὴν ἡμέτεραν καρδίαν ἐγγὺς τῆς κύλικος ἐπιφυόμενον εὗρομεν, ὥσπερ, ὡς οἶμαι, τῷ ῥόδῳ πως ἀναφύεται καὶ ἡ ἄκανθα. Νόμος γὰρ οὗτος ἔρωτος καὶ φιλίας ἀνοθεύτου καὶ ἀληθοῦς καὶ γλυκείας καὶ ἐρασμίας. Τί γὰρ ἀκάνθης ἢ ῥομφαίας διστόμου πληκτικώτερον, εἰ μὴ στέρησις ἐρωμένου καὶ φίλου ἀποικία καὶ ἀπουσία, καὶ τοιοῦτου οὕτω πιστοῦ καὶ φιλοσόφου καὶ κατὰ πάντα ἥδη τὸ πρωτεῖον ἔχοντος; Μανικὸς γὰρ ὄντως ἐραστής τυγχάνω πρὸς τοὺς ἐμὲ οὕτω φιλοῦντας—μαίνομαι γάρ, ἀλλὰ σωφρόνως·

οἶδε γὰρ φιλία πάντα καινοτομεῖν. Σοὶ δὲ τὰ πλείονα παραχωροῦμεν ὥς εἰδότες οὕτω πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ διακείμενον καὶ διακεισόμενον.

Ἐμὲ δὲ καὶ πολλὰ καὶ πολλάκις οἱ ὄνειροι καὶ ταράσσουσι καὶ εὐφραίνουσι, καὶ ὥσπερ εἰ τὸν φίλτατον ἐν χερσὶ διδῶσι καὶ προσομιλεῖν πλανῶσι καὶ καταφιλεῖν ἀπατῶσι. Τὸ δὲ ὕπαρ πολλὰ καταρῶμαι καὶ ζημίας πρόξενον ἡγοῦμαι· οὐ γὰρ καθ' ὕπνου ἀπολαύω καὶ ποσῶς τῆς ἐφέσεως ἐμφοροῦμαι {καὶ} ἀφυπνισθεὶς μάταιος τῆς τοιαύτης ἡδονῆς εὐρίσκομαι, καὶ εὐχομαι Κυρίῳ τῷ Θεῷ μου δοῦναι καιρὸν φιλήσαι τὸν φιλούμενον καὶ ποθήσαι τὸν ποθούμενον καὶ δακεῖν οὐχὶ πληκτικῶς ἀλλὰ φιλικῶς· δάκνουσι γὰρ καὶ οἱ φιλοῦντες, οὐχ ἵνα πληξωσιν, ἀλλ' ἵνα πλέον ποθήσωσιν. Εὐχου τοίνυν τὸν καιρὸν ἔλθεῖν ἵνα τῆς ἐφέσεως ἀπολαύσωμεν.⁶²

These things of mine are not a letter, by your virtue (*arete*), but something small has done service, characteristic of a little priest and cheap, in answer to the sort of letter [you have written]! The idea [that this is so], even if I will deny it, is surely clear to those who know what I'm like. Indeed, the shoddy state of my mind and the barbarity and incorrect usage of my muse-less state are not unknown to many and it's not hidden from them either. It is clear and evident, even if I should venture to deny it.

Having received the summer fruit, truly sweet and dripping with honey, and the wine scented with flowers, which was called in very ancient times nectar, I have tasted it as though having received some small kiss from your sweet lips. But, while filled up by this all the more and as though, according to what has been written, gladdened, I found constriction and distress in my heart arising in the company of my wine glass, just as, I suppose, the thorn thrives, somehow, near the rose. This is the law of *eros* and of *philia* that's unbastardised, true, sweet, and lovable/erotic. What is more wounding than thorns, or a two-edged sword, unless it be the loss of one's *eromenos*, the absence and being away of a friend, and of such a one so trustworthy, wisdom-loving, and holding the first place surely in all things. For I am, as it turns out, an *erastes* maddened as regards those who have *philia* for me, for I am mad but [I am mad] temperately, for friendship [as far as I am concerned] knows how to innovate in all things. But I allow more to you, as I know that you are well-disposed to us and will remain so.

Many times and in many ways, dreams disturb and delight me. And just as if they put my dear one in my hands, they counterfeit conversation/intercourse and deceive me about kissing. But then I curse many times the waking-vision and believe it a bringer of loss, for what I enjoy in dreams and however much of desire I am filled with, I, awakened, discover myself bereft of such pleasure and I pray to my Lord God to give me the moment to kiss my dear friend and the moment to desire my desired one and to bite him not in a hostile way but in a friendly way, for those who feel *philia* bite not

62 Letter 3, Konstantinos to Theodoros (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 87–88).

so much so that they may harm but so that they may desire all the more. Pray therefore for the moment to come so that we may satisfy our desire.

Letter 4

Τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἀπουσίας ὑμῶν χθεσινὴν κατήφειαν ἢ σήμερον ἐλθοῦσά μοι τιμία καὶ πάνσοφος καὶ φρονιμωτάτη γραφὴ διεσκέδασε καὶ πρὸς εὐθυμίαν μετήμειψε, καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ μου φλόγα τοῦ πόθου τῆς βασιλείου ὑμῶν στεφηνόρου καὶ θείας κεφαλῆς ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἀνήψετε καὶ ἐξέκαυσε, καὶ ἤδη μου φλέγεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπιθυμοῦσα καὶ ζητοῦσα τὰ ἐλπιζόμενα· οἱ δὲ ἐκ τῆς γλυκοστόμου καὶ μελιρρύτου σου πηγῆς, τοῦ σωφρονούντος καὶ παγχρύσου σου στόματος, ἐπιδάψιλεύμενοί μοι κρουνοὶ οὐ μόνον <οὐ> σβεννύουσι τὴν φλόγα, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσανάπτουσιν. Ὅθεν καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν φαντάζομαι τὸν ποθοῦμενον, τὸν χρυσαυγὴ μοι καὶ ὑπέρλαμπρον, καὶ νύκτωρ δεξιός μοι παρέστηκας ὄνειρος, καὶ σὲ βλέπω μετὰ τοῦ γενναίου καὶ μετὰ θαύματος ἀγαπωμένου αἰεὶ βλοσυροῦ καὶ βασιλικοῦ μειδιάματος· καὶ ποτέ σε κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους προετρεψάμην ταχύτερον θεῖν, ἵνα μὴ τις προφθάσῃ σε καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ σοὶ τὰ βασίλεια, καὶ αὐτὸς συμπροεθυμούμην μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τῆς ὀξύτητος τοῦ ὑμετέρου ἵππου παντ' ἐγίνετο δεύτερα.

Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν τῆς ἀληθινῆς εὐφροσύνης ἀπολειπόμενα, ὅσον εὐφραίνειν κατὰ τὴν φαντασίαν δοκεῖ, τοσοῦτον ἀνιᾶ κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ἡμᾶς δὲ εἴη τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐμφορηθῆναι συνουσίας καὶ ὁμιλίας σου, ὦ Θεὲ καὶ Κύριε, ὁ πάντα μετασκευάζων ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον.

Τῶν δὲ χθίζων ὀπωρῶν, οὐδὲν ἔχουσιν λαμπρὸν ἢ μόνην τὴν προαίρεσιν, πολλαπλασίαν ἐδεξάμην τὴν ἀμοιβήν, τοὺς ὥραίους σου λόγους καὶ γλυκεροῦς, οἵπερ ἐν τῷ δάκνειν ἐρωτικῶς καὶ στρέφειν μου τὴν ψυχὴν πλεόν εὐωδιάζουσιν ἢ περ ὁ ἐπαινεθεὶς ἀνθοσμίας οἶδεν εὐφραίνειν καρδίαν ἀνθρώπων ἢ καὶ τὸ νέκταρ αὐτό, ᾧ περ οἱ μάκαρες ἐμεθύσκοντο.⁶³

Your letter, which honours me and is all knowing and quite smart, arrived today [and] has dispelled yesterday's gloom over being apart from you. It has changed [the gloom] to cheerfulness and sets alight and causes the flame in my heart to burn, [as well as the flame] of desire for the crowned and divine head of our imperial one. Already my soul is on fire, as it desires and seeks hoped for things. The sources of the sweet-mouthed and honey-dripping spring of you, of your wise and all-golden mouth, [the sources] lavish for me not only quench the flame, they enkindle it. Hence then, during the day I envision for myself my desired one, gold gleaming for me and beyond light-filled, and during the night you, a dream, stood at my right, and I see you in your nobility and in the beloved marvelousness of your always valiant and imperial smile. And at the moment I urged you to run faster in my dreams so that no one would beat you and close

63 *Letter 4*, Theodoros to Konstantinos (Tziatzi-Papagianni 2012, 88–90).

the palace to you, and I took zealous part so as not to be left behind. All things were second to “the snorting” of your “horse.”⁶⁴

But these things fall short of true gladness, for however much one seems to be gladdened in a vision, to that extent one rages against the truth. May it happen that we be filled with your true intercourse and conversation, O God and Lord who converts everything to a better state.

I have received recompense many times over for yesterday’s fruits, these fruits that have nothing brilliant about them other than the fact that they were chosen [for you by me], [recompense that is these] beautiful and sweet words of yours, words that, through desirous/erotic biting and turning over my soul, are fragrant. [And they are] more fragrant than [even] how the praised scent of flowers knows how to gladden the heart of men or even nectar itself, on which the blessed ones used to get drunk.

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64 cf. 1er. 8:16.

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