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Wordplays on Proper Names
in Metrical Inscriptions of Late Antiquity

The paper deals with etymological wordplays on proper names in late antique metrical inscriptions, discussing some select examples from the 3rd to the 6th century AD, of both funerary and honorary epigrams. In most of the texts etymological puns on proper names are usually quite 'easy' to detect, but there are examples of more sophisticated wordplays that require a higher level of engagement from the reader. Their presence is a further evidence that metrical inscriptions were meant also to be read. If the targeted audience were primarily cultivated people, performative reading (perhaps accompanied by on-the-spot exegesis) probably also enabled less educated groups to appreciate etymological wordplays, which were after all extremely popular in antiquity.

L'articolo analizza la presenza di giochi etimologici sui nomi propri nelle iscrizioni metriche tardoantiche, discutendo alcuni casi esemplari (III - VI sec. d.C.) di epigrammi sia funerari, sia onorifici. I giochi etimologici sui nomi sono solitamente piuttosto 'facili' da riconoscere, ma non mancano esempi di giochi più sottili e sofisticati che richiedono una maggiore attenzione da parte del lettore. La loro presenza è una riprova ulteriore del fatto che le iscrizioni metriche erano concepite per essere lette e non solo osservate. Ovviamente i primi destinatari erano coloro che avevano ricevuto una sufficiente educazione, ma la lettura performativa (magari accompagnata dall'esegesi in loco) permetteva probabilmente anche alle fasce meno colte di apprezzare i giochi etimologici, del resto estremamente popolari nell'antichità.

1. *Introduction*

In this paper I will deal with a special category of etymology, exploring the presence, and meaning of wordplays related to proper names[1] in Greek metrical inscriptions of late antiquity[2]. Etymological puns on proper names (*lusus nominis*) are relatively frequent in late antique and early Byzantine inscriptions, even though not as frequent as in their Latin counterparts, at least judging by the rich documentation collected by Maria Teresa Sblendorio Cugusi in two important articles[3]. For classical and Hellenistic epigrams good, although far from being exhaustive, treatments are offered in the recent monographs by Bruss, Tsagalis and Garulli[4]. However, we still lack a systematic research on imperial and late antique

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[1] A category well represented in literary poetry since Homer: see Louden 1995, Kanavou 2011 and the groundbreaking monographs by Paschalis 1997 and O'Hara 2017; further bibliography in Agosti 2018, 739-748.

[2] In what follows I continue my previous research on literary wordplays in late antique and early Byzantine poetry (see Agosti 2018 and 2019). There has been a renewal of interest about wordplays in literary poetry: an up-to-date bibliography in Kwapisz, Petrain, Szymański 2013 and Kwapisz 2019.

[3] Sblendorio Cugusi 1980, 257-281; 2007.

[4] Bruss 2005, 105, 107, 109, 115, 122, 128, 146 and n. 18; Tsagalis 2008, 281-285; Garulli 2012, 143-144, 264. The *locus classicus* for onomastic wordplays is Arist. *Rhet.* 1400b.

texts. It is not my ambition to fill this gap in a few pages. I would just like to provide some selected examples, taking into account both pagan and Christian inscriptions, and focusing on the possible functions attributed to, or presumed from, etymological wordplays. I will address the crucial questions of the audience response and other possible functions of «the often semantically exciting twists of sounds and words» in late metrical inscriptions[5].

Most of the examples I am dealing with belong to the realm of *paronomasia / adnominatio* rather than to that of «scientific etymology»[6], i.e. they display etymological wordplays strengthening the qualities of the *laudandus* or her/his achievements and often explicitly pointing them out to the attention of the beholder/ readers through «etymological signposts»[7] (like τοὔνομα, ἐπώνυμον etc.).

As for genres, puns on the 'true meaning' of proper names are a traditional feature of funerary poems, showing in some cases a high level of sophistication. Late antique funerary inscriptions are no exception and display numerous examples of this kind of wordplay. What is even more intriguing, such wordplays appear also in honorary and dedicatory epigrams, notoriously the most innovative genre of late antique epigraphic habit.

2. *Does the name shape your destiny?*

I open my selection examining the metrical epitaph engraved on the funeral monument of the βιολόγος Eucharistos, from Patara (*SEG* 43.982 = *SGO* 17/09/01, Lycia, 3rd c. AD)[8]:

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[5] An effective definition by Katz 2009, 86-87 (who also remarks that these twists «from the wider humanistic perspective have from the beginning of recorded history regularly engaged ordinary people, whose capacity for puns, spoonerisms, rebus writings, and the allegorization of language seems delightfully boundless»).

[6] For this distinction see the remarks by Den Boeft 1979, 275, who underscores that the main function of *adnominatio* «is not to provide arguments to prove a point, but, as one of the *figurae verborum*, to add *ornatus* to a text: *sunt orationis lumina et quodam modo insignia* (Cicero, *Orator* 135). *Adnominatio* is a stylistic technique, *etymologia* has an argumentative force». See also Ritti 1973-1974 on similar function of «onomastic images» in the Greek world. There is a renewed interest in ancient etymology, well represented by the recent volume on Hesiod by Vergados 2020 and the collection of essays by Zucker - Le Feuvre 2021, whose rich and up-to-date bibliography exempts me from providing further indications.

[7] For bibliography on this expression O'Hara 2017, 76 fn. 331.

[8] The monument is a late Hellenistic or early Imperial pedimental stele re-used in the 3rd c. AD. On the epigram (inscribed below a niche with representation of the bust of a bald man) see the fine analysis by Voutiras 1995, whose text is here reproduced. Ll. 1-5 hex-

Τὸ στόμα τῶν Μουσῶν, τῆς Ἑλλά|δος ἄνθος ἐπαινῶ{ν}, |
τῆς Ἀσίης ἀκρόαμα, κλυτῆς | Λυκίης προβίβασμα, |
Εὐχάριτον· ˙χαρίεν, σοφὸν οὔ|νομα, ἔξοχε μείμων, |
ὃς μόνος ἐν θυμέλαισι λέ|γων βιότου τὰ γραφέντα |
σκηνῇ καὶ φωνῇ θεάτροις | ὑπερῆρες ἅπαντας˙˙ | 5
Εὐχάριστος Εὐχαρίστῳ τῷ | τέκνῳ μνείας χάριν |
                              vacat
Φιλιστίωνος πυκνὰ λέγων τὰ παίγνια
πολλάκις ἔλεξα· ˙τέ[λος] ἔχει τὸ παίγνιον·˙
σειγῶ τὸ λοιπ[ὸν · τέλος ἔχω γὰρ] τοῦ βίου

I praise the mouth of the Muses, the flower of Hellas, the (best) player of Asia, pride of the famous Lycia, Eucharistos: 'lovely, (appropriately) wise name, most distinguished of mimes, who by depicting life alone on stage surpassed everyone with his performance and voice in the theatres. Eucharistos for Eucharistos his child to his memory. [*vacat*] 'I have often quoted the following sentence by Philistion: The game is finished. From now on I am silent; I am at the end of life'.

In line 3 the etymological wordplay on the name and the profession of the deceased is explicit and does not ask the reader for a particular exegetical effort. The addition σοφὸν οὔνομα, «clever name»[9], clarifies χαρίεν, and the periphrasis λέγων βιότου for βιολόγος is not particularly challenging, considering ἔξοχε μείμων (and in the last three trimeters the repetition of λέγ- and βίου at the end). The author and/or the patron wanted to be sure that the reader would catch the pun. However, as easy as it is, the wordplay between Εὐχάριτον and χαρίεν probably contains an additional meaning, for it explains the compound as «whose *charis* is excellent» and not simply «charming», emphasizing Eucharistos' extraordinary skills. The etymological pun somehow restores the 'original' meaning of the compound – a technique discussed by Aristotle[10], which is common to other late verse inscriptions.

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ameters, l. 6 catalectic trochaic tetrameter, ll. 7-9 iambic trimeters. In the last three verses the deceased is speaking. Εὐχάριτον at l. 3 is due to metrical reasons. Translation mine.

[9] For the meaning cp. σοφὰ γράμματα in *I. Métr.* 168.33 Bernand, with Mairs 2017, 235.

[10] *Top.* II 112a32-38: «it can be argued that the original meaning of a word should be preferred to its current meaning. To its original meaning on the ground that it is more fitting to take it in this sense than in that now established. For example, 'stout-souled' can be used to mean not 'courageous,' which is its established meaning, but it can be applied to a man whose soul is in a good condition [εὔψυχον μὴ τὸν ἀνδρεῖον, καθάπερ νῦν κεῖται, ἀλλὰ τὸν εὖ τὴν ψυχὴν ἔχοντα]; […] and similarly 'fortunate' can be used of one whose fortune is good [εὐδαίμονα οὗ ἂν ὁ δαίμων ᾖ σπουδαῖος], as Xenocrates says "Fortunate is he who has a noble soul"; for his soul is each man's fortune» (transl. E.S. Forster).

Within this category the best represented pun is probably that of on Θεόδωρος/Θεοδώρα - which is particularly common in Christian inscriptions, as is obvious[11]. Texts displaying this wordplay present a recurrent structure: the expression «gift of God» is put at the beginning, assuming the function of a *motto*, and the personal name comes out later, usually two or more lines below. I reproduce the first lines of an inscription (only partially metrical), from Diocletianopolis (Thrace, 5th-6th c. AD; *SGLIBulg* 224 = *ICG* 4282)[12]:

> ☩ **Θεοῦ δῶρον** προσεκομήσθη
> τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ **θεοῦ** τηρήσας
> **Θεόδωρος** τῆς λαμπρᾶς μνήμης
> καὶ πρὸς **θεὸν** μέλλ<ω>ν ἀναλύειν
> 5 ἐπιποθήσας τε τὸ ἀείδιον οἰκητήριο(ν)
> ἐν τῷ σεβασμίῳ τούτῳ οἴκῳ τοῦ ἁγίου
> ἐνδόξου πρωτομάρτυρος Στεφάνου
> τὴν κατάπαυσιν ἐνθάδε ηὕρατο

(As) a gift from God was offered, keeping God's commandments, Theodor with bright memory. And when he was willing to go to God and was wishing (to have) his eternal home in this venerable house of the holy glorious protomartyr Stephen, here he found comfort (trans. Prodanova).

In this case too we can reasonably assume that the beholder/reader had no difficulty in catching the pun; moreover, the repetition of Θεοῦ/Θεό-/θεόν in the first four lines emphasised the message displayed. Theodore was a true gift *from* God and has returned *to* God. The etymology at the outset provides the true meaning of the name of the deceased and a guide for interpreting the whole text, which is based on the implicit meanings of the name Theodore, who is a gift, a commandment, and a bright memory of God.

Similar considerations apply to a roughly contemporary funerary inscription from Beroia (Macedonia, 5th/6th c. AD) for a certain Theodora, probably the ab-

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[11] Cp. Agosti 2018a, 757 with further bibliography. A nice example from the late Byzantine period is BGR 3 Rhoby, v. 5 (1428 AD) ἡ γὰρ Θεοδώρα τοὔνομα (καὶ) τῷ τρόπῳ.

[12] Text by Beševliev 1964, 155-156. M.Prodanova in *IGC* (http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/ica/icamainapp/inscription/show/4282), points out allusions to NT in l. 2 (Mt 19.17: εἰ δὲ θέλεις εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν, τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς, and Jo 14,15: Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶτέ με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε) and in l. 5 (2Cor. 5.2 τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπενδύσασθαι ἐπιποθοῦντες).

bess of a convent. The first two lines are trimeters/dodecasyllables, the rest flawed dodecasyllables (*I.Chr.Mac.* 60 = *ICG* 3070)[13]:

> ✠ ΧΜΓ **θεῖον δώρημα**, ἁγνίας διδάσκα|λος,
> τὸν μακαρισμὸν Κ(υρίο)υ κτησαμένη, |
> μήτηρ παρθένων εὐσεβῶν <κ>αθηγεμόν, |
> λέγω <δ>ὴ Μυγδονίης κ(αὶ) Γρατισήμης,
> 5 ῥίζης ὁσίης| κλάδων ε<ὐγ>ε<ν>εστάτων, |
> **Θεοδώρα τοὔνομ[α]**, |ἀειπάρθενος,
> τὸ πν(εῦμ)α παρ[α]{φ}θεμένη τῷ θ(ε)ῷ | κ(αὶ) δεσπότῃ,
> τύμβῳ τὸ σῶμα φρουρῖν καταλί|ψασα·
> τὰς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ποιεῖτε ἱκεσίας.

> ✠ Christ born of Mary (?). Divine gift, teacher of chastity, recipient of the blessing of the Lord, leading mother of the pious virgins, I speak of Mygdonia and Gratissima (?), noble offshoots of a holy root named Theodora, an eternal virgin, who entrusted her spirit to (her) God and Lord and left the keep of her body to the tomb. Make intercession for them (transl. Ogereau).

The structure is basically the same as in the previous text, with the etymology at the beginning and the *retardatio* of the proper name at l. 6 (Θεοδώρα τοὔνομ[α]). However, the author of this inscription proves to be a little more skillful than the previous one: he combined the etymological explanation with the idea of purity (ἁγνίας διδάσκα|λος l. 1: then at l. 3 εὐσεβῶν <κ>αθηγεμόν, and 5 ῥίζης ὁσίης), and with the concept of maternity (μήτηρ παρθένων l. 3 and ῥίζης ὁσίης | κλάδων ε<ὐγ>ε<ν>εστάτων, l. 5). Through the emphasis on virginity (παρθένων εὐσεβῶν l. 3), he reached the climax of the praise with the paradoxical ἀειπάρθενος l. 6. We can say that the *motto* in the first line functions as an interpretive clue of the entire text, which aims at showcasing how much the initial statement is grounded and true. From this perspective, Θεοδώρα τοὔνομ[α] can be read also as «she was a true gift of God».

These three inscriptions are nice examples of the widespread belief that names reflect the nature of things (although Augustine insisted on the danger of *signa pro rebus accipere*)[14] and that 'etymology' can hold the key to reveal the true meaning of names as well as the destiny of their bearers. A strong link between names, and the

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[13] Ed. Feissel 1983, 64-66. I discussed at length this inscription in Agosti 2019, 306; transl. by J. Ogereau in *IGC* (http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/ica/icamainapp/inscription/show/3070).

[14] See Opelt 1966; Gualandri 2017, 125-128; Males 2018, 35-40.

nature and destiny of those who bear them is ubiquitous in late antique and Medieval culture[15]. Wordplays based on this kind of relationship are usually easy to grasp, because their function is to be effective and meaningful for any reader, like the one in *IGUR* 1351 (3rd/4th c. AD), for Φίλητος (v. 10) who was αἴσιος ἐμ φιλότητι (v. 3), «favorable, propitious in friendship»[16]. Or the long epitaph for Eugenios, a «presbyter of God» belonging to the Novatians, *SGO* 14/06/05 = *IGC* 52 = E10 Nowakowski (3rd/4th c. AD, area of Laodicea Combusta), who is praised for his nobility (εὐγενίη) at ll. 2-4 of the verse (more or less dactylic) section of the inscription[17]:

Εὐγενίου θανεόν|τος πολλὴ μνήμη ἐπὶ | γέῃ·
Εὐγένιε, νέος θάν|ες· ἠελίοιό σε γὰρ ἐγίνω|σκαν πάντες,
ἀντολίη | τε δύσις τε με<ση>μβρία | τε κὲ ἄρκτος
ὄλβῳ τε πλ|ούτῳ τε **εὐγενίη** τε κ|ὲ θάρσι·

Of Eugenios dead (there is) much remembrance on the earth.
Eugenios, thou didst die young. For all men under the sun knew
thee: both east, and west, and north, and south, for thy prosperity, and wealth, and nobility, and courage (transl. Calder)

Even in honorific epigrams, as I mentioned before, it is possible to find this kind of wordplay. For instance, in the first inscription for the renovation of Hammat Gader baths (*SGO* 21/22/02 = 50 Di Segni, 491-518 AD)[18]:

ὃν χρόνος ἠμάλδυνεν | ἐλισσόμενος κατὰ κύκλον|
στῆσεν Ἀναστάσιος | βασιλεὺς μεγαλώνυμος ἥρως|
σπουδῇ Ἀλεξάνδροιο | περίφρονος ἡγεμονῆος |
Καισαρίης ναετῆρος ❧ ❧ | ὃς ἔλλαχεν ἡνία Νύσης.

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[15] For examples from Latin poetry see Gualandri 2017, 130-131; Males 2018, 1-2 points out the wide dissemination of etymology in Medieval world and its importance to understand the relationship between language and knowledge.

[16] Cp. also one of the epigrams for Porphyrius the charioteer, *APl* 359,1-2 (Σῆς τόδε διφρελάτειρα τὸ χάλκεον ἄνθετο Νίκα / δείκηλον **μορφᾶς, Καλλιόπα, ζαθέας**, «Victory, the charioteer, dedicated to thee, Calliopas, this brazen image of thy divine form», transl. Paton), where the statue as image of Calliopas' (the other name of the charioteer) μορφᾶς […] ζαθέας alludes perhaps to the second part of the name (ὄψ).

[17] For a detailed commentary on the text see Nowakowski 2018, 630-632 (the text has a section in prose [ll. 1-8], followed by 8 verses). The same wordplay in *CLE* 1447.1 (Marseille, 6th c. AD) † **Nobilis Eugenia praeclari sanguinis ortu**, see Bolaños Herrera 2017, 17.

[18] Marble slab from the eastern wall of the Hall of Fountains. The text is organized on 8 lines divided at the main caesura. Two dots separate each word from the next.

> (This place) which Time crushed, revolving in its cycle, raised
> Anastasius, king-hero with a great name, under the care of
> Alexander, the thoughtful governor, dweller of Caesarea, who
> obtained the reins of Nysa (transl. Di Segni).

The *figura etymologica* on Anastasius' name is here particularly appropriate, since ἀνίστημι is a technical term for raising a building (it is often used, for example, in Procopius' *De Aedificiis*). The same wordplay occurs also once in a passage of the *Panegyric speech for Anastasius* 7 by Procopius of Gaza: καὶ τείχη τὰ μὲν γεγηρακότα νεάζει, τὰ δὲ νῦν πρῶτον ἀνίσταται[19]. Therefore, Anastasius is a true «building raiser» whose «great name» announces his extensive building program, attested by many inscriptions and literary sources[20].

Honorific inscriptions display also more sophisticated wordplays. Let us see a couple of examples. The first one is *IG* II/III² 13293 = *ICG* 1877 celebrating the erection of the *bema* in the theatre of Dionysus by the archon Phaedrus son of Zoilus (end of the 4th – beginning of the 5th c. AD)[21]:

> σοὶ τόδε καλὸν ἔτευξε, φιλόργιε, βῆμα θεήτρου
> Φαῖδρος **Ζωίλου** **βιοδώτορος** Ἀτθίδος ἀρχός.

> For you, lover of passionate rites, this beautiful stage has been
> built by Phaedrus, son of Zoilus, archon of the livelihood-giv-
> ing land of Attica (transl. Sironen).

The vocabulary of this short but not irrelevant poem is characterized by the presence of rare poetic terms like φιλόργιος and βιοδώτωρ (which belong to the highbrow poetic language of the 5th century)[22], and the 'technical' use of the Homeric ἀρχός as ἄρχων[23]. Βιοδώτορος, set next to the name of Phaedrus' father,

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[19] Similar wordplays based on building terminology are frequent. For a nice example see *APl* 361,1-2 (for Porphyrius the charioteer) Οὗτος, **ἐγερσιθέατρε**, τεὸς τύπος, ὅν τοι **ἐγείρει** / ἑσμὸς ἀριζήλων, Καλλιόπα, στεφάνων («O Calliopas, thou who raisest applause in the theatre, this is thy portrait which a swarm of much envied crowns raises to thee», transl. Paton).

[20] E.g., Malalas 16,21, p. 335,60-63 Thurn ἔκτισεν δὲ καὶ εἰς ἑκάστην πόλιν τῆς Ῥωμανίας διάφορα κτίσματα καὶ τείχη καὶ ἀγωγούς, καὶ λιμένας ἀνακαθάρας καὶ δημόσια λουτρὰ ἐκ θεμελίων οἰκοδομήσας, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἐν ἑκάστῃ παρέσχε πόλει. Cp. Haarer 2006, 230-245.

[21] For an extensive discussion on the epigram see Sironen 1994, 43-45 and 1997, 117-118 (whose translation is here reproduced).

[22] For the occurrences see Agosti 2010, 347.

[23] Cp. Sironen 1994, 31. It appears also in *SEG* 63.797, epigram celebrating the construc-

Ζωίλου, functions as single-adjective gloss, implying that the act of «giving life» (Ζωί/ζωή) is a natural and intimate quality of Phaedrus' family[24]. In addition, we might also consider the possibility of a (more subtle) pun in the sequence Φαῖδρος Ζωίλου βιοδώτορος, since Φαῖδρος irresistibly reminds to light (φαιδρός) and the equivalence of light (φῶς) and life (ζωή) is ubiquitous in late antique texts. The *laudandus* has his destiny inscribed in his name.

Light imagery and vocabulary were well suited to etymological wordplays in dedicatory epigrams, in virtue of the idea of 'beauty' associated to brilliance and light in late antique aesthetics[25]. In one of the verse inscriptions celebrating the restoration of the bath complex called "Faustina's baths" in Ephesus, by mediation of a certain Hesychius - who is plausibly to be identified with the historian Hesychius *Illustris* of Miletus (sixth century AD), or with his homonymous father - there is a *paronomasia* with the honorific rank (*I.Milet.* VI.1 341 = *SGO* 01/20/19 = *ICG* 1797)[26]:

> οὐδὲ σέθ[εν, Μί|λ]ητε, θεὸς λάθε, σῶν δ᾿ [ἀ]|πὸ κόλπων
> ἐνναέτης| βλάστησε φίλος κρατερῶι β|ασιλῆϊ
> Ἡσύχιος, πατρ|ὸς μὲν ὁμώνυμος, ἐν δ᾿ ἄρ᾿| ὑπάρχων
> **ἀστράπτων** ῥη|τῆρσιν, ἑῶν δ᾿ ἠλλάξατο| δώρων
> αἰτῆσαι βασιλ|ῆα φίληι θρεπτήρια πάτ|[ρ]η[ι]
> ἔνθεν τοῦτο |λοετρὸν ἐτῶν ἑκ[α]τὸν| μετὰ κύκλα
> ἀστοῖσιν ἀδ|όκητον ἐὴν πά[λι]ν ἤ[γ]|αγε τέρψιν.

> Nor has God forgotten you, Miletus; for a Milesian has sprung from your womb, a friend to the mighty emperor, Hesychius. He shares a name with his father, and among the prefects' orators he shines like lightning; and now, appealing to the emperor, he has requited his beloved homeland for the gifts he has received at her hands. Whence this bath-house, after the cycle of a hundred years, has again brought unexpected pleasure to the citizens of Miletus (transl. Thonemann)

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tion of the frigidarium of the Forum Baths at Ostia (4th c. AD) by a Βίκτωρ ἀρχὸς ἐὼν κύδιμος Αὐσονίης (i.e., Flavius Aurelius Victor, praefect of the annona under Constantine).

[24] Similar wordplays are frequent in Latin inscriptions (e.g., *ICUR* 4225 *Verus, qui semper vera locutus*): see Sblendorio Cugusi 1980 and 2007, 205.

[25] Examples of the rich vocabulary related to light in ekphrastic inscriptions are collected in Leatherbury 2020, 54-56.

[26] Rehm 1928, no. 343, 5-6, and Herrmann 1997, 213-214; Busch 1999, 153-185; Thonemann 2011, 315.

This refined poem begins with the adaptation of a Homeric verse, *Il.* 4.127-8 οὐδὲ σέθεν Μενέλαε θεοὶ μάκαρες λελάθοντο / ἀθάνατοι. As already Rehm, the editor of the inscriptions from Miletus, suggested, ἀστράπτων at l. 4 is a pun on the honorific title *Illustris*: the verb has the double meaning of «shine» and of «be glorious»[27]. In fact, the wordplay cannot be coincidental, because another epigram from the same baths extols Hesychius' merits and the ὅλη […] πατρίδος **ἀγλαΐη**, the «whole beauty of the fatherland» (v. 2; *SGO* 01/20/20 = *LSA* 548 = *ICG* 1799).

Restoration/edification of baths was particularly suitable to this kind of word-play (in many of them the light and the brightness are the main features of the renovated structure[28]). Another intriguing case is the epigram composed by a professional rhetorician, Eudemus of Laodikeia (who proudly calls himself «Roman sophist», perhaps the young talented rhetorician mentioned by Libanius in *epist.* 1493 F. or the Eudemus author or rhetorical treatises[29]), to celebrate the magnificence of Lampadius' baths (*SEG* 35.1055 = 105 Puech = p. 133 Busch, ca. 365 AD)[30]. Lampadius is the *signum* of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, who was *praefectus urbi* in 365/66[31]. His rich epigraphic *dossier* includes a dedication of a statue of Dionysus in Ostia (*LSA* 2539), where he is recorded as *vir clarissimus* and former prefect *(Volusianus v(ir) c(larissimus) ex praefectis tauroboliatus d(o-no) d(edit))* The baths are probably the *thermae* of Aquae Albulae (ca. 8 km from Settecamini and 6 from Tivoli)[32].

Λαμπαδίου τάδε λουτρά | τί τοι φρένας ἐπτοιῆσθαι |
  τῶν μεγάλων πτολίων | ἔγγυθι δειμαμένου; |
πάντοθεν **ἀστράπτει** | χάρις ἄσπετος εἰς ὅ κε λεύσῃς, |
  ὕδατα Νυμφάων, | λουτρά, δόμοι, Χάριτες· |
οὗτος ‹τ›οῦ κλέος εὐρὺ | κατὰ χθόνα καὶ κατὰ πόντον,   5
  ὁ κλυτὸς ὡς οὔτις | καὶ σοφὸς ὡς ὀλίγοι, |
γείτονας ἔδρας ἔχων βασιληΐδος | ἐγγύθεν αἴγλης |
  ἀνθ' ἑκατομβοίων | τὴν θέμιν ἡρέσατο |
Εὔδημος Λαδικεὺς | σοφιστὴς Ῥωμέων.

4. Χάριτες Moretti: χάριτες Busch   5. ‹τ›οῦ Moretti

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[27] The whole expression means that Hesychius was not «un rhéteur quelconque mais un des avocats de la préfecture du prétoire», Feissel 2010, 268.

[28] See e.g., *AP* 9.35 and Busch 1999, *passim*.

[29] See Janiszewski - Stebnicka - Szabat 2014, *PGRSRE* # 336, 337 e 335.

[30] Moretti 1984-1985; Busch 1999, 133-146; Puech 2002, 236-237; Gregori 2013, 160-161; Agosti 2015b, 14-15].

[31] See *PLRE* s.v. Volusianus 5.

[32] Moretti 1984-1985, 239-240. Translation mine.

> Why is your soul amazed at these baths that Lampadius has built near the big city? Everywhere unspeakable grace sparkles, whatever you look at: waters of the Nymphs, baths, buildings, graces. This man, whose fame on land and at sea is vast, illustrious like no one and wise like few, he who, having his seat near the imperial splendour, preferred the justice to the sacrifices of a hundred oxen. *Eudemus of Laodicea, sophist of the Romans*.

In l. 3 ἀστράπτει might allude to the etymology of *Lampadius* (from λαμπάς/*lampas*)[33]. Such a wordplay – once again, not particularly demanding for cultivated readers – fits well the general tone of the epigram, as well as the portrait Ammianus gives of the contemptuous Lampadius[34]. No doubt, Lampadius was pleased and flattered by the elegant and clever epigram Eudemus had composed for his baths.

Etymological wordplays between Latin and Greek[35] are well attested in other late antique epigrams. A nice example come from Trier, *IGTrev* 6 = *SEG* 30.1242 (5th c. AD)[36], a fragmentary text whose nature is debated (a dedication of a church of St Agnes, or a funerary epigram for a Christian woman), but which displays at least two etymological puns in the first four lines:

> **ἀγνὴν παρθ[ένον**------
> Εὐστόργιος θῆκ[ε-----
> σκηναῖς πάν[---]σπ[---
> **ἀμνόν** τ᾽ ἀβρὰν ἐοῦ[σαν---

If the pun between the name of the deceased and the adjective in l. 1 is not certain (depending on the reading Ἁγνὴν or ἀγνὴν), in l. 4 ἀμνόν alludes to a

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[33] See also in l. 7 the presence of αἴγλη (although not referred directly to Lampadius).

[34] XXVII 3,5 *urbis moderator Lampadius, ex praefecto praetorio, homo indignanter admodum sustinens, si etiam cum spueret non laudaretur, ut id quoque prudenter praeter alios faciens, sed non numquam severus et frugi* («Symmachus was succeeded as prefect of the city by) Lampadius, a former praetorian prefect, a man who took it very ill if even his manner of spitting was not praised, on the ground that he did that also with greater skill than anyone else; but yet he was sometimes strict and honest», transl. Rolfe).

[35] Several instances of wordplay between Greek and Latin are attested in Imperial and late antique inscriptions: see for example, *IGUR* III 1305 = EDR125560 (2nd c. AD), a Greek funerary epigram for Petronia Musa, celebrated as Μοῦσα καλή, and other cases collected in Sblendorio Cugusi 1980 and 2007, 203 and 205.

[36] Text according to D.Groß in Siede - Schwinden 2012, 55-65 (discussion on the etymology at 61-62).

current interpretation of the Greek name in Latin, as established for example by Augustine (*Serm.* 276,3 *Agnes Latine agnam significat; Graece castam*).

3. *Challenging the reader*

More sophisticated texts may contain complex wordplays. Since these latter are not immediately detectable, it is a reasonable assumption that they required a higher level of engagement from readers. In other terms, this kind of wordplays might have had the function of challenging readers' interpretative skills, in a way not too far from plays in literary poetry. The line separating challenge from over-interpretation is very thin, and it calls for caution, of course[37]. Needless to remind, metrical inscriptions are not (or not only) literary texts, but they have their own specific communicative functions, which depend on and interact with the cultural and social context where they are displayed. In many cases it is very difficult to decide if the wordplay was intentional or is the result of our too confident reading. I would like to clarify this point by discussing a not particularly sophisticated text, an inscription from Hawran, *SGO* 22/44/01 = *IGLS* XIII/2 9773 (4th c. AD) commemorating the erection of a family tomb by a certain Diomedes, where in the beginning the deceased is described as πινυτός[38]:

> Διομήδης πινυ[τ]ός με ἐδίματο τῷδ’ ἐνὶ χώρῳ
> αὐτῷ κὲ πέδεσιν καὶ ἐδύ<η> παρακύτι
> νηὸν Πλουτῆει κὲ ἐπενῆ Περσεφονείη
> ἐσθ[λ]ῆς ἐγ γεωργείης· νῦ<ν> δ’ οὐδενός εἰμι τάφος.
> < ------------------------ >· εἰ δ’ ἄρα κὲ δεῖ,
> δεξέμιν γηράσκοντας, εὐδέμονας, τεκνώσαντας.

> The wise Diomedes built me here for himself, his children and his venerable wife, a temple for Pluto and the fearsome Persephone, thanks to the noble agriculture. Now I am no one's grave. [- - - - - - - - -] But if it is necessary, may I receive them old, happy and with children.

It would be tempting to suggest that Diomedes was «wise» because in his name were thoughts (worth) of Zeus. However, another epigram from the same region,

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[37] Cp. O'Hara 2017, XVIII-XIX, whose remark and invitation to skepticism I find particularly welcome.

[38] Text according to M.Sartre in *IGLS* XIII/2 9773; translation mine.

from Rimea (Nabatea, *SGO* 22/23/01) displays the same incipit but with a different name (Caelestinus)[39]. Furthermore, the text of our epigram is reused *tel quel* for a different tomb in the same village of the Hawran (*SGO* 22/44/02). This points out that local epigraphic workshops had at their disposal a model suitable to be slightly adapted to the needs of the commissioners - nothing particularly surprising. In the light of this, it would be better to consider the pun on the name Diomedes as unintentional, although it is true that the name of the deceased combined with πινυτός fits perfectly with the content. Shall we assume that Diomedes' family (or the author) wanted the formula because it added something more to the praise?

Although clear-cut interpretations are often very difficult, nonetheless I think that we can confidently say that some texts display subtle etymological wordplays, especially high-quality texts. An intriguing example is offered by *IG* II/III² 13281 = Puech 208 = *ICG* 1867 = *LSA* 134, honorary epigram for the sophist Plutarch (Athens, 408-410 AD):

> δῆμος Ἐρεχθῆος βασιλῆα λόγων ἀνέθηκεν
>   Πλούταρχον σταθερῆς ἔρμα σαοφροσύνης·
> ὃς καὶ τρὶς ποτὶ νηὸν Ἀθηναίης ἐπέλασσεν
>   ναῦν ἐλάσας ἱερήν, πλοῦτον ὅλον προχέας.

> The people of Erechtheus dedicated (this statue of) Plutarchus,
> the king of words, the mainstay of firm prudence, who rowed
> the Sacred Ship three times in all near to the temple of Athe-
> na, spending all his wealth (transl. Sironen)[40].

Errki Sironen identified this Plutarch, sophist and rhetorician, with the author of another epigram in honor of the prefect Herculius, found on the left side of the original entrance to the Library of Hadrian (*LSA* 134). It is undoubtful that the pun on the name Plutarch from πλοῦτος is a very simple one, as Sironen already remarked (unnecessarily wondering also whether it was an unintended play). Nonetheless, I do not think that we should characterize this text as «not very brilliant»[41], because of the triviality of the etymological wordplay and the stock phraseology. The author has enough command of poetic language, I find, and I wonder if we can detect other, and much more subtle, wordplays. At l. 1

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[39] Cp. also *SGO* 08/08/13.3 = D/BIT/02/01 Nowakowski (Hadriani ad Olympum, 4th/5th c. AD), Νικάτορις πινυτός.

[40] Transl. by Sironen 1997, 78. The stone at l. 1 reads δῆμος Cρεχθῆος βασιλῆΛ λόγων ἀνέθηκεν.

[41] Sironen 1997, 78.

βασιλῆ<α> λόγων is perfectly appropriate after δῆμος <Ἐ>ρεχθῆος: in the city of *king* Erechteus Plutarch can be no other than the *king of words*, as his name itself reveals (Πλούτ-αρχος). I wonder whether reusing the stock expression δῆμος <Ἐ>ρεχθῆος followed by ἔρμα at l. 2 the poet wanted to suggest a more sophisticated wordplay on the name Erechteus, linking its first part to ἔρ-υμαι «to keep off, protect, save» instead of the popular connection with ἐρέχθω «rend, break»[42]. Already Callimachus in a passage from *Hecale* (fr. 70.9 Hollis) explained Ἐριχθόνιος as ἔρυμα χθονός, suggesting an etymology of the name (known also under the rare form Ἐρυχθόνιος), as M. Skempis has brilliantly shown[43]. With all due caution, I suggest that the author of our epigram wanted to display the same idea. Athenians, the inhabitants of the city of wisdom and the δῆμος Ἐρ-εχθῆος, cannot but honor the generous Plutarch calling him ἔρ-μα σαοφροσύνης[44].

Likewise, puns on the names of the cities in honorific inscriptions are characterized sometimes by a certain level of subtlety[45]. For instance, in *LSA* 2636 = *BE* 2012.450, the dedicatory inscription for a statue of Justinian, who built the wall in the city of Cyrrhus (Syria Euphratensis), it is said that the city changed its name in *Iustiniana*, thanks to the mediation of Eustathius[46]:

> Κῦρον Ἰουστινιανὸς ἄναξ | κακότητι καμοῦσαν |
> νῦν πάλιν ἐξετέλεσσε πόλιν, | μέγα τ(ε)ῖχος ὀπάσας. |
> Τοὔνεκα καὶ βασιλῆος ἐπώ|νυμον ἔλλαχε κῦδος |
> Εὐσταθίου διὰ μῆτιν. Ἐπ᾽ | ἀγλαΐη δ᾽ἀρετάων |
> εἰκόνα σὴν φορέει, βασιλεῦ, | πόλις ἔρκος ἀνάγκης·

> The emperor Justinian now raised again to the rank of city
> Cyr(r)hus which had suffered badly through wickedness, by

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[42] The correct etymology is from ἐρι-, see the dictionaries by Chantraine and Beekes s.v.

[43] Skempis 2006.

[44] One referee (whom I thank again) pointed out the implausibility of such a wordplay, which would have been too difficult to grasp, since: a) is based only on Ἐρ-; b) because of the different breathings between Ἐρ-ιχθόνιος and ἔρμα (this second argument seems to me less effective for to an audience of the 4th c. AD). It was not without hesitation that I decided to keep my suggestion in the text, although I am aware of the risk of an overinterpretation.

[45] For an effective example in literary epigram see Christodorus, *AP* VII 797,5-8.

[46] See Alpi 2011, who reminds to Proc. *De aed.* II 11,3 Προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου ἡ Κῦρος τά τε ἄλλα ὑπερώφθη καὶ ἀτείχιστος ὅλως μεμένηκεν. Ἀλλὰ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς […] πόλιν εὐδαίμονα καὶ λόγου ἀξίαν πολλοῦ, τείχους τε ἀσφαλείᾳ ἐχυρωτάτου καὶ φρουρῶν πλήθει καὶ οἰκοδομιῶν δημοσίων μεγέθει, καὶ τῆς ἄλλης κατασκευῆς τῷ ἐς ἄγαν μεγαλοπρεπεῖ, πεποίηται Κῦρον.

providing it with a large wall. Thereby she also gained the glory of bearing the emperor's name, through the wisdom of Eustathius. To [honour] the splendour of your virtues, the city carries your image, Emperor, as a defence against evil[47].

The beginning with Κῦρον, with one *rho*, is not due to corruption, nor to an engraver's fault, but it is an intentional wordplay on the name of the Persian king, which alluded to the ancient origins of the city, as F. Alpi suggested[48]. The emperor restored Cyrrhus to its ancient status of city (l. 2 πάλιν ἐξετέλεσσε πόλιν, a stock phrase); the ancient heritage expressed in the city's name remains and just left the place to a more powerful one, that of Justinian. The new name improves Cyrrhus' inborn royal destiny (note also the paronomasia Κῦρος /κῦδος).

A similar wordplay is attested in the last line of the Greek text of the funerary epigram in honour of an Egyptian physician (*GVI* 1907 = *SEG* 34.1003 = 495 Samama), written on a wide white marble board discovered under the floor of the basilica of the Holy Apostles in Milan (4th/5th c. AD)[49]:

τοὔνομα πατρὸς ἔχων Διόσκορος· ἦν δ᾽ ἀπὸ πάτρης
    Αἰγύπτου ζαθέης, ἡ δὲ πό|λις τὸ **Γέρας**.   10

He had his father's name, Dioscorus. His fatherland was divine Egypt, his hometown Gerras.

In l. 10 the reading γέρας has been interpreted in different ways (although it cannot but mean «our city was his glory»), but Denis Feissel found the solution, acutely suggesting that γέρας is the name of Gerra/Geras, a small town not far from Pelusium[50]. Dioscorus, like many other skilled Egyptian physicians, made his career abroad and became a renowned physician in Milan. One could wonder, however, if local people, reading the inscription in the church, were able to recognize the name of the Egyptian hometown of the deceased. I am rather inclined to think that in ΓΕΡΑΣ the author put an intentional *double entendre* (*Geras* and glory), to emphasize the role Milan played in Dioscorus' fortunate career. In addition, Egypt is defined divine (ζαθέη), which is a standard feature of Egyptian

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[47] Transl. by U.Gehn in *LSA*, adapted.

[48] In *LSA* U.Gehn prefers a different interpretation, «the emperor Justinian now raised again to supreme power (κῦρον) the city», but apart from the fact that we should restore κῦρος (the noun is neutral), such a text would sound much less effective, in my view.

[49] Text by Samama 2003; translation mine.

[50] Feissel 1984, 559.

Lokalpatriotismus, but could also be read as a subtle play on the name Διόσκορος (son of Zeus), suggesting how appropriate was a divine motherland for somebody who was the «son of Zeus».

An elegant epigram from Ephesus, in honor of the proconsul Isidorus, shows a wordplay on the Egyptian origins of the honorand: *LSA* 797 (410-435 AD):

> ✝ ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ· /
> ✝ ὄρχαμον Ἰσιόδω/ρον ὁρᾷς / Φαρίης / ἀπὸ γαίης /
> καὶ Νείλου γονόεντος, / ὃς ἀνθυπάτων / καὶ ὑπάρχων /
> θῶκον ἑλὼν κόσμη/σεν ἀγακλέα καὶ / πολιήταις /
> ἤνυσε καρποτόκου / Δημήτερος ὄμπνιον / ὄλβον.

> Good luck! The leader Isidorus, you are looking at. He, born from the land of Pharos and of the Nile, who, holding the office of proconsuls and prefects, managed famous events and for the citizens brought about the bountiful wealth of fruit-bearing Demeter (trans. Lenaghan, slightly modified)

The pun is on Nile's fertility and the abundance Isidorus (a true «gift of Isis, i.e. of Egypt») brought with himself and distributed when he was appointed to Ephesus[51].

A pun on the name of the city has been suggested, and widely accepted, for an intriguing inscription in rhythmic verse, reused as block in the wall of the mosque of Amaseia, but coming from the city of Euchaita (*SGO* 11/10/01, probably dated between 515 and 518 AD)[52]. The poem extols the erection of the church, thanks to the intercession of Mamas (possibly a bishop):

> ✝ ὁ τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ ἀθλητὴς καὶ τῶν ἐπουρανίων πολί|της
> Θεόδωρος ὁ τοῦδε τοῦ πολίσματος ἔφορος |

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[51] Incidentally, another epigram extolling the achievements of the same Flavius Anthemius Isidorus displays a wordplay on the part of his name (*SGO* 03/02/13 = *LSA* 662): ll. 4-5 ἄψ μ᾽ Ἰσίδωρος ἔχειν χαρί/εν γέρας ὤπασεν ἥβης /καὶ μ᾽ ἀνάειρε πεσόντα, ὁ/ρῶ δ᾽ ἐμὰ ἔνπεδα γυῖα («Isidorus made me have the graceful gift of youth. And after I had fallen, he lifted me up and I can see my firm limbs», trans. Chaniotis). The text celebrates the restoration and re-erection of a statue to a certain Peison (Piso), probably Tiberius Claudius Piso, an imperial priest of the 2nd century and an ancestor of Isidorus. At l. 4 χαρίεν γέρας **ὤπασεν** ἥβης is an evident pun on the second part of the latter name Ἰσί-**δωρος**.

[52] See Mango - Ševčenko 1972, 382-385 (whose translation is reproduced); also Nowakowski 2018, 486-489 and *Cult of Saints, E00969* - http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00969 (whose text I follow). I follow here Agosti 2019, 312-314, with some changes and improvements.

Ἀναστάσιου πῖθει τὸν εὐσεβῆ τροπεοῦχον |
εἴδρῦσε θρόγον ἱερῶν μυστηρίων ἐπώνυμον· |
οὗπερ λαχὼν Μάμας ὁ καθαρότατος μύστης |
κινεῖ μὲν ἀεὶ τοῖς θεοτεύκτοις ἄσμασιν τὴν | γλῶτταν,
πληρῶν τῆς πνευματικῆς χορίας τόν|δε τὸν τόπον,
ἕλκι δὲ φιλοφροσύηην ὡς | ἑαυτὸν ἀπάγτ(ων)☩

☩ Christ's athlete, who is a citizen of Heaven – Theodore,
the guardian of this town, has persuaded Anastasius, the pi-
ous triumphator, to found a throne bearing the name of the
holy mysteries. Mamas, the most-pure priest has obtained it;
he constantly moves his tongue in divinely composed song
while he fills this place of spiritual congregation, and attracts
to himself the good-will of all. ☩ (transl. Mango - Ševčenko)

The « throne bearing the name of the holy mysteries» in line 4 is clearly a sign-post alluding to a proper name. Most of the editors followed Mango and Ševčenko who suggested an etymological wordplay on the name of the city of Euchaita connected to εὐχή[53], while a few others preferred to interpret the line as an obvious reference to the name of the saint, Theodore, who underwent martyrdom in Amaseia to become later patron of Euchaita[54]. The text looks suitable to both interpretations, and one might also solve the difficulty thinking of an intended ambiguity. However, one wonders if people reading the text displayed in the church of St Theodore really needed to see, and accept, a rather obscure etymological wordplay (not to speak of the *double entendre*) instead of the expected one connecting the line with the name of the saint[55]. In fact, a second inscription in prose (which is the summary of a letter of the emperor Anastasius) helps to dispel our doubts[56].

☩ ὁ ψήφῳ θ(εο)ῦ τῶν ὅλων κρατῶν Ἀναστάσιος εὐσεβὴς αὐτοκρά-
τωρ τόνδε τὸν ἱερὸν χῶρον πολίζι καὶ τὸ κάλλιον ἐνπνευσ-
θεὶς παρὰ τοῦ μάρτυρος ἐγίρει τῷ πολίσματει τεῖχος,
ἄσυλον μὲν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἣν πρῶτος αὐτὸν εἴδρυσεν

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[53] A derivation from χαίτη would be more plausible, however: Euchaita the «well-wooded» city, see Haldon 2018, 212.

[54] On the cult of St Theodore at Euchaita see Haldon 2016, 13-14; 2018, 212-221.

[55] It would be an example of what O'Hara 2017, 79-80 calls «suppression», when the reader is implicitly invited to supply a missing word/name.

[56] Ed. Mango - Ševčenko 1972, 380-381; *Cult of Saints, E00969* - http://csla.history. ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00969.

ἀρχιερατικὴν καθέδραν τηρῶν, ἄξιον δὲ δῶρον θ(ε)ῷ προσ-
ενέγκας καὶ μάρτυρας τῆς εὐσεβίας τοὺς εὖ παθόν-
τας πτωχούς. τοῦτον φυλάττοι Τριὰς ὁμοούσιος ἐν
τοῖς σκήπτροις νικητὴν ἀναδικνῦσα. ✝

✝ The pious emperor Anastasius who rules the world by
God's decree has made into a city this holy spot. Happily in-
spired by the Martyr, he has erected a wall for the city so as
to preserve inviolate in all respects the archbishop's seat that
he had been the first to found. He has offered God a worthy
gift as well as a testimonial of his piety, namely the poor who
have fared well (at his hands). May the consubstantial Trin-
ity guard him and prove him victorious in his kingdom. ✝
(transl. Mango - Ševčenko)

Probably displayed in the church, this inscription appears to be the prose *Vor-lage* of the poem. Textual links between the two inscriptions are evident[57]. In l. 5 δῶρον θ(ε)ῷ it is an obvious allusion to the name of Theodore and the preced-ing participle τηρῶν might allude to the denomination of Theodore, the Recruit (τήρων/*tiro*)[58], who had his martyrdom in Amaseia under Galerius and Maximi-nus Daia. In the light of this, it seems to me that l. 4 of the poem refers undoubt-edly to the name of Theodore, not to an (alternative?) Christian etymology of the city. People looking at and reading both the texts (with whom they were well ac-quainted, frequenting the church) had no doubt, in my view.

4. *Conclusions*

In the examples we have discussed above etymological wordplays on proper names are clues used to emphasize the message displayed in the texts, and to call the viewer's/reader's attention on the qualities of people praised. The crucial ques-tion is to what extent the audience was able to read and grasp them. I have already remarked that metrical inscriptions are not only literary poems, and we cannot, in my submission, consider their communicative functions in the same way of literary poetry. In the epigrams discussed above most of the etymological word-

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[57] L.1 Ἀναστάσιος εὐσεβὴς comes out in l. 3 of the first inscription Ἀναστάσιον πίθει τὸν εὐσεβῆ. L. 3 τῷ πολίσματει τεῖχος is also in l. 2 of the first τοῦδε τοῦ πολίσματος ἔφορος. L. 5 καθέδραν occurs also l. 4 of the first inscription as θρόνον.

[58] This name distinguished him from the later Theodore (according to IX c. sources), called στρατηλάτης.

plays are easily recognizable by the readers. Needless to remind, the definition of what is «easily recognizable» is highly debatable and ultimately depends on various and not always verifiable factors, ranging from the monumental aspect of the inscription, the appearance, and visibility of the letters, to the social and cultural context. Unlike other wordplays, like acrostics, that were graphically signaled to readers and could also be visually perceived, etymological puns required going through the text to be detected - primarily, but not exclusively, by literate people. Recent research on late antique inscriptions has dramatically shown that the texts were meant to be read, spoken aloud in a sort of performance, involving different modes of response[59]. From this perspective, we can confidently conclude that puns on names - as any other rhetorical devices - added new layers of meaning to the texts, securing an effective reception of them by the audience at any level. A performative reading could well emphasize the presence of the wordplays, if not explain them[60]. In some cases, the connection between etymology and proper names creates ambiguity[61], especially when the wordplay proves to be particularly sophisticated. Even in these cases, however, we should be cautious not to think exclusively of an educated readership, as the performative reading could clarify the puns for a less educated audience, as well.

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[59] See among others Papalexandrou 2007; Debiais 2009; Liverani 2014 and 2016, Agosti 2010, 2015a; Rhoby 2012 and 2017, Sitz 2017; Mairs 2017; Leatherbury 2019, 14-15, all with further bibliography on the topic.

[60] Cp. for ex. Mairs 2017, 229 on «literate companions who might 'perform' the riddle by reading it aloud and explaining the text».

[61] It would be worth to explore if subtle strategies of equivocation based on homophony were displayed in inscriptions, as later in Byzantine texts (Krausmüller 2006).

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