

Ascending the Ladder: *Editio Princeps* of
Four Poems on the *Ladder* of
John Klimakos (*Bodleian Baroccianus* 141)

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FOUR UNEDITED PARATEXTS on John Klimakos in dodecasyllables are preserved anonymously in *Bodleian Baroccianus* 141. I provide here a short introduction to Klimakos and the *Ladder*, a description of the manuscript and of the poems, the *editio princeps*, a translation, and a brief commentary.

John Klimakos and the Ladder

John Klimakos lived as a monk on Mount Sinai from his teenage years. He was advanced in age, and probably already installed as abbot of the Saint Catherine monastery, when he wrote the *Ladder*, an ascetic guide to heaven in thirty steps.¹ It is dated to the end of the sixth century or the first half of the seventh.² Two letters which accompany the *Ladder* in the manuscript tradition give some details about its origin. In the first letter, John, abbot of Raithou, requests that Klimakos write a new spiritual guide. In reply, Klimakos humbly accepts the task and writes the *Ladder*, followed by a short treatise, *To the Shepherd*. In his letter, John of Raithou mentions Jacob's

¹J. Chryssavgis, *John Climacus* (Aldershot 2004) 20–21.

²For discussion see J. L. Zecher, *The Role of Death in the Ladder of Divine Ascent and the Greek Ascetic Tradition* (Oxford 2015) 31–33; Chryssavgis, *John Climacus* 42–44; J. Duffy, “Embellishing the Steps,” *DOP* 53 (1999) 1–17, at 2 n.5; M.-J. Pierre, C. G. Conticello, and J. Chryssavgis, “Jean Climaque,” in C. G. Conticello (ed.), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition* I.1 (Turnhout 2015) 195–325, at 212.

ladder as a guideline. This refers to the passage in Genesis (28:12) where Jacob “had a dream: a stairway was set on the ground, with its top reaching to the sky; and angels of God were going up and down on it.”³ He asks Klimakos to describe such a ladder in order to enable those wishing to follow Christ to ascend to the gates of heaven. The image of the ladder dominates the reception of the work, to the extent that Κλίμακος even became part of John’s name. Also in the iconography, the work of Klimakos was clearly associated with a ladder. For example, in several manuscripts, the *pinax* is accompanied by an image of a ladder.⁴

More than 700 manuscripts containing the works of John Klimakos have been preserved.⁵ As is often the case with widespread works, the immense popularity of John Klimakos paradoxically accounts for the absence of a critical edition. There are only three editions of the *Ladder*: by Radder (1633, reissued by Migne, *PG* 88, in 1864 and Trevisan in 1941), Sophronios (1883, repr. 1970), and Archimandrite Ignatios (1987, repr. 1994).⁶

The Ladder in epigrams

In many manuscripts of the *Ladder*, the text is accompanied by metrical paratexts. In April 2016, the Database of Byzantine

³ Transl. E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible. Genesis* (New York 1962) 217.

⁴ See for example *Iveron* 415 f. 193^r, *Iveron* 739 f. 86^r, *Mosq. Synod. gr.* 229 f. 320^v. A better-known example is *Princeton Garrett* 16 f. 4^r, 194^r. Cf. J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Princeton 1954) fig. 31, 66; S. Čurčić, “Representation of Towers in Byzantine Art: the Question of Meaning,” in C. Hourihane (ed.), *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies, Essays in honor of Lois Drewer* (Princeton 2009) 1–38, at 28–33.

⁵ Pierre et al., *Jean Climaque* 213–214; H. R. Johnsén, *Reading John Climacus* (Lund 2007) 10; N. P. Ševčenko, “Monastic Challenges,” in *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies* 39–62, at 39. See also the Pinakes-database for further information on the manuscripts: pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/recherche-generale.html

⁶ Johnsén, *Reading John* 12–14; Chryssavgis, *John Climacus* 234; Ševčenko, in *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies* 39 n.1; Pierre et al., *Jean Climaque* 227, 254; Zecher, *The Role of Death* 9–10.

Book Epigrams (DBBE) records 72 poems of variable length on Klimakos.⁷ Many of these poems refer to the ladder concept, for example: *inc.* βαθμούς διελθὼν γεννικὸς τρισσῶς δέκα,⁸ *inc.* κλίμαξ ἄνω φέρουσα τοὺς ἐναρέτους,⁹ and *inc.* τρίδομος κλίμαξ, τρισδέκα βαθμῶν πέλων.¹⁰ Also long metrical summaries containing the ladder concept as a theme are found, for example: *inc.* Πίναξ ὅδ' ἐστὶ τῆς παρούσης πυκτίδος (92 vv.),¹¹ *inc.* Ψήγματα χρυσᾶ τοῖς Λυδοῖς αἰρεῖ λόγος (226 vv.),¹² and *inc.* Στρουθὸς λογικὸς εὐρεθεὶς τῷ δεσπότη (136 vv.) by Manuel Philes.¹³ The cycle of four poems found in *Barocc.* 141 is part of this broad tradition of book epigrams on the *Ladder*.

The manuscript

Barocc. 141 (253 folios) was written on oriental paper ca. the second quarter of the fourteenth century.¹⁴ Titles and initials are written in red ink. The manuscript contains the *Ladder* of

⁷ The DBBE is an ongoing project at Ghent University, Belgium, which aims to collect all Byzantine metrical paratexts: see www.dbbe.ugent.be.

⁸ www.dbbe.ugent.be/occ/4605.

⁹ www.dbbe.ugent.be/occ/2751.

¹⁰ www.dbbe.ugent.be/occ/5090.

¹¹ T. Antonopoulou, “Ανέκδοτοι στίχοι για την Κλίμακα του Ιωάννη του Συναΐτη,” in T. G. Kolias and K. G. Pitsakis (eds.), *Aureus. Volume dedicated to Professor Evangelos K. Chrysos* (Athens 2014) 23–25.

¹² This poem is part of a cycle of four poems on Klimakos, totaling over 470 verses. The cycle is preserved in six manuscripts (in some cases partially): *Mosq.Synod.gr.* 229 (Vlad. 192), *Mosq.Synod.gr.* 480 (Vlad. 193), *Manchester Rylands Gaster* 1574, *Vat.Pal.gr.* 120, *Athos Megistes Lauras B* 102, *Paris.Coisl.* 264, and *Athos Iveron* 418. An edition of this cycle is being prepared by Renaat Meesters and Rachele Ricceri.

¹³ E. Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina* I (Paris 1855) 380.

¹⁴ The description of this MS. is based on H. O. Coxe, *Bodleian Library Quarto Catalogues I Greek Manuscripts* (Oxford 1969) 241; I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturhandschriften III.1 Oxford Bodleian Library* (Stuttgart 1982) 236; P. Canart, “Les reliures au monogramme des Paléologues. État de la question,” in G. Lanoë (ed.), *La reliure médiévale. Pour une description normalisée* (Turnhout 2008) 155–179, at 162; and on the digital image read at viewer.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/icv/page.php?book=MS._Barocci_141&page=1.

John Klimakos, accompanied by the still-unedited commentary of Elias of Crete.¹⁵ The commentary is written in the margin and begins on f. 1^r, where it surrounds a preface, ascribed in the manuscript to Daniel of Raithou.¹⁶ The *Life* of John Klimakos, written by the same Daniel, begins at the bottom of f. 1^r (ff. 1^r–6^r),¹⁷ and is followed by the *Letter* by John of Raithou and the reply by John Klimakos (6^r–9^r); a prologue (9^r–9^v);¹⁸ a table of contents of the *Ladder* (9^v–10^r); the *Ladder* (10^v–288^r); the same prologue as on 9^r–9^v (228^r); a brief exhortation (228^r–228^v);¹⁹ the treatise *To the Shepherd* (228^v–247^r); Poems 1 and 2 (247^r); Poem 3 (247^r–247^v); Poem 4 (247^v); and quotes from various monks and church fathers, written by a different hand: Isaak the Syrian, Niketas of Herakleia, Theodoros Balsamon, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximos, Neilos, Markos, Thalassios, Basileios, and others (247^v–251^r). At the end of the manuscript there are diverse notes in a later handwriting (251^r–253^v).

In comparing the table of contents on ff. 9^v–10^r to the *pinax* given in *PG* 88.629 and to the one in Sophronios,²⁰ it is clear that *Barocc.* 141 corresponds more to the one in Sophronios. The edition of Sophronios was based on manuscripts from the Dionysius monastery on Mount Athos, and *Barocc.* 141 seems thus to be more closely related to these manuscripts.

The poems

The four poems are written next to each other, divided into two columns. They are separated from the end of *To the Shepherd* by a simple red bar. The titles of the poems are in red ink, except for the title of Poem 2, of which only the initial is

¹⁵ *Inc.* Ἐξήγησις εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν κλίμακα.

¹⁶ *Inc.* Ἐσκόπησεν ὄντως ἀρίστως, entitled Προθεωρία τῆς ἁγίας κλίμακος. Cf. Sophronios, *Κλίμαξ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου* (Athens 1970) 6.

¹⁷ *Inc.* Τὸ μὲν τίς ἢ ἐνεγκαμένη (*PG* 88.596–605).

¹⁸ *Inc.* Τοῖς ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς. Cf. Sophronios, *Κλίμαξ Ἰωάννου* 11; see also *PG* 88.628C–D for the same prologue with a different closing.

¹⁹ *Inc.* Ἀναβαίνετε ἀναβαίνετε (*PG* 88.1160D).

²⁰ Sophronios, *Κλίμαξ Ἰωάννου* 185.

red. The first letter of each verse is in red as well. The end of each poem is marked by three red dots. The import of this last palaeographical detail was not taken into account by Coxe.²¹ Coxe apparently assumed that the poems are to be read vertically, and hence has erroneously taken the second verse of Poem 2, 3, and 4 as the incipit.²² This mistake could have been prevented by a correct understanding of the three red dots.

The black colour of the ink in which the poems are written is different from the brownish one of *To the Shepherd*. Interestingly, the comments in the margin on the previous folios are written in the same black ink. Moreover, the red used for the marginal scholia accompanying *To the Shepherd* is the same as that used for the poems. The red used for the initials in *To the Shepherd* itself is a slightly darker red. These palaeographical features might suggest that the poems were perceived as texts on a similar level as commentaries, as paratexts.

Poem 1

Στίχοι ἰαμβικοὶ εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν κλίμακα
 Ξένην φύσιν κλίμακος καὶ θέσιν βλέπω,
 ἐξ ἀρετῶν ἔχει γὰρ αὐτῆς τὰς βάσεις,
 εἰς οὐρανὸν φέρει δὲ πλὴν ξενотρόπως·
 τὸν γὰρ τοσοῦτον ἀναβάσεως τόπον
 5 βαθμίσι μετρεῖ τριάκοντα καὶ μόνας.
 Τὸ χάσμα λοιπὸν τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν βλέπε,
 ἅπας ἀνελθεῖν ἀσφαλῶς ταύτην θέλων·
 κὰν γὰρ πολὺ κέχηνε, λανθάνει δ' ὅμως.
 Εἰ γὰρ μεταξὺ βαθμίδων διαστάσεις
 10 κρημονοὶ τελοῦσι καὶ πλανῶσιν ὡς βάσεις,
 καὶ τοὺς παραρρίπτοντας αὐταῖς τοὺς πόδας
 αἴφνης καταστρέφουσιν εἰς ὕδου στόμα.
 Δεῖ δὴ τολοιπὸν ἀκριβοῦς ποδηγέτου
 ὡς εἰς ἀληθεῖς τοὺς πόδας στήση βάσεις

²¹ Coxe, *Bodleian Library* 241.

²² Vassis, who follows Coxe, also makes the same mistake: I. Vassis, *Initia carminum byzantinorum* (Berlin 2005) 206, 376, 647.

- 15 τῆς τῶν βαράθρων ἐκκαλούμενος πλάνης.
 Μόλις γὰρ οὕτω τὴν κατάπτωσιν φύγης,
 τὴν γῆν ὑπερβάς καὶ πρὸς οὐρανὸν φθάσας.
 2 γαρ αὐτ(ης) cod. 3 δε cod. 6 ἀναβάθμ(ων) cod.
 8 κέχυνε cod.

Iambic verses on the holy ladder

I gaze upon the strange nature and setting of the ladder.
 Its stairs consist of virtues
 and it leads to heaven in a strange manner,
 as the ladder divides the length of such a long track upwards

- 5 into only thirty steps.
 Also, take a look at the chasm between the rungs,
 you who are willing to ascend this ladder safely.
 Although it is yawning widely, this still goes unnoticed.
 If the separations between the rungs
 10 are abysses that deceitfully present themselves as steps,
 then they suddenly throw down into the mouth of hell
 those who risk placing their feet in such gaps.
 This being the case, it is necessary to have a guide,
 who places your feet on the true stairs,
 15 and who calls you back from the delusion of the deep pit.
 That way, you will escape the fall with much effort
 as you transcend the earth and reach for heaven.

Poem 2

Ἴτεροι εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν βίβλον

Κλίμαξ προμήκης καθορᾶται μοι ξένη,
 ἐκ γῆς πρὸς ὕψος ἀδύτων οὐρανίων
 βροτοὺς φέρουσα· καὶ τίς ἢ κλίμαξ λέγε.
 “Οὐκ ἀσφαλῆς ἡ πεῦσις.” Ἄλλ’ ἔτι διασάφει.

- 5 Μὴ γὰρ κλίμακα τὴν Ἰακώβ μοι λέγεις,
 τὴν κατάγουσαν ἀγγέλους οὐρανόθεν,
 βροτῶν παλαιστὰς τῆς χοϊκῆς οὐσίας;
 “Οὐκουν ἐκείνην, ἦν δ’ ἀνιστᾶ τεχνίτης
 ἐκ τῆς καθ’ ἕξιν μυστικῆς λεπτοουργίας
 10 τῷ τῆς ἐπιστήμης τε καθηδρασμένῳ
 εἰς ἀκρότητα τῆς τεχνουργίας φθάσας,
 ἧς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐδράσας μέχρι πόλου,

πηξάμενός τε τὰς βάσεις πανευστόχως,
 βάσιμον αὐτὴν τοῖς βροτοῖς σχεδιάσας
 15 τὴν ἀνάβασιν εὐχερῆ προδεικνύει.”

5 μή γαρ cod.

Other verses on the same book

This elongated ladder seems to me a strange thing
 since it leads mortals from the earth to the height of
 the inaccessible places in heaven. What is this ladder? Tell me.
 “It is risky to ascertain.” Come, explain more.

5 You do not speak of the ladder of Jacob, do you?
 The one which leads the angels down from heaven,
 those who wrestle against humans of material substance?
 “Of course not of that one. I speak of the ladder set up by a
 craftsman,
 who, with his experienced, fine, mystical workmanship,
 10 his solid grasp of skill,
 has reached the summit of craftsmanship.
 He has placed the top of the ladder as far as heaven,
 fixed its fundamentals most precisely,
 and has devised it to be passable for mortals,
 15 thus showing that its ascent is easy.”

Poem 3

Ἔτεροι εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν βίβλον
 Ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς φιλονεικήσας φθάσαι
 πρὸς οὐράνιον ὕψος ὑπερημένον,
 ἐξ ἀρετῶν ἤδρασε κλίμακα ξένην,
 ἣτις διήκει καὶ μεταρσίους πύλας
 5 τὰς οὐρανίους, καὶ θεοῦ πέλας φθάνει,
 οὕτως ἔχουσα τῶν ἀρρήτων βαθμίδων.

Tit. τ(ον) αὐτ(ον) βίβλ(ον) cod.

Other verses on the same book

A man who strove to arrive from the earth
 at the exalted heavenly height,
 has set up a strange ladder consisting of virtues,
 which extends even to the heavenly gates
 5 high in the sky, and which arrives close to God,
 a ladder having such unutterable steps.

Poem 4

Ἄτεροι στίχοι εἰς τὸ αὐτό

- Ἦψος πρὸς οὐράνιον εἰ φθάσαι θέλεις
καὶ κατιδεῖν, ἄνθρωπε, τερπνὰ τοῦ πόλου,
χοροὺς ὁσίων, ἱεραρχῶν, μαρτύρων,
δήμους προφητῶν, πατέρων, ἀποστόλων,
5 τάξεις ἀύλους ἀγγέλων, ἀρχαγγέλων
καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖσε συμμετασχεῖν ἡδέων,
ἄνελθε τὴν κλίμακα ταύτην εὐτόνως,
σταυρὸν ποδηγόν, χειραγωγὸν κατέχων.

Other verses on the same

- If you want to arrive at the heavenly height
and to behold, O man, the delights of heaven,
the choirs of saints, of hierarchs, of martyrs,
the assembly of prophets, of fathers, of apostles,
5 the immaterial ranks of angels, of archangels,
and if you want to participate in the pleasures of that place,
then vigorously ascend this ladder,
with the cross as a leader and a guide.

Metrical analysis

	Poem 1 (17 vv.)	Poem 2 (15 vv.)	Poem 3 (6 vv.)	Poem 4 (8 vv.)
<i>Binnenschlüsse</i> after the 5 th syllable				
accent on the 3 rd syllable	0/17 vv.	5/15 vv.	2/6 vv.	0/8 vv.
accent on the 4 th syllable	4/17 vv.	5/15 vv.	2/6 vv.	3/8 vv.
accent on the 5 th syllable	7/17 vv.	3/15 vv.	1/6 vv.	2/8 vv.
total	11/17 vv.	13/15 vv.	5/6 vv.	5/8 vv.
<i>Binnenschlüsse</i> after the 7 th syllable				
accent on the 5 th syllable	6/17 vv.	1/15 vv.	1/6 vv.	3/8 vv.
accent on the 6 th syllable	0/17 vv.	1/15 vv.	0/6 vv.	0/8 vv.
total	6/17 vv.	2/15 vv.	1/6 vv.	3/8 vv.

Overall, the verses aim at prosodic correctness. Of course, as is typical for Byzantine verses, there are deviations concerning the dichrona. In comparing the position of the *Binnenschlüsse* and accent positions, we get the results shown above.

There are also some 'real' mistakes concerning prosody and metrics. In Poem 2, v. 4 has 14 syllables; it is the only verse in the cycle not having 12 syllables. One could, however, consider replacing the more common *compositum* διασάφει by the rare *simplex* σάφει in order to get a metrically correct verse. Another solution would be that the author accidentally combined two heptasyllabic cola. This might be explained because each colon functions as a separate phrase in the dialogue, causing the *Binnenschluß* to be extra strong.²³

Of course, given the limited number of verses, it is difficult to advance a concrete thesis. However, some tendencies can be noticed. The metrical structure of Poem 1 rather contrasts with that of Poem 2 and 3. Poem 1 has no deviating accent positions on the 3rd or 6th syllables and has, compared to Poem 2 and 3, a higher frequency of *Binnenschlüsse* after the 7th syllable. Besides, the number of prosodic mistakes regarding the dichrona is more limited in Poem 1. Poem 2 has the most metrical deviations: a verse of 14 syllables and a high frequency of deviating accent positions, especially on the 3rd syllable. The number of verses of Poem 3 and 4 is very limited and does not allow a complete statistical analysis. However, Poem 4, without deviating accent positions and a higher frequency of *Binnenschlüsse* after the 7th syllable, seems to correspond to Poem 1. These metrical results might have some implications for the question of the authorship of the cycle (see below).

Literary comments

Poem 1

1: In the first verse, a unspecified spectator is introduced. For the rest of the poem he will function as an authorial narrator.

²³ Personal communication with Mark Janse and Julie Boeten (28 January 2016).

Describing a ladder as having “a strange nature” is a motif that also appears in the description of Jacob’s ladder in the 12th/13th-century Konstantinos Stilbes, *Versus sepulcrales*, Poem 1.12–14: ὁ πατριάρχης Ἰακῶβ ὑπνοῖ λίθῳ / πλὴν ἄλλ’ ὑπνοῖ, κλίμακα τὴν θεῖαν βλέπει / ἀνάβασιν τε καὶ κατὰβασιν ξένην.²⁴ The same theme appears in the poems of Nikephorus Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–ca. 1335), *Carmina*, Poem 4 stanza 10.3–4: κλίμακα δὲ πάλιν ὁ Ἰακῶβ ἑώρα, / καὶ γέφυράν σε ἄλλος ξένην διέγραφεν.²⁵

2: Stairs consisting of virtues are a typical aspect of the *Ladder* of Klimakos. In some passages, it seems that he applied the ladder concept specifically to the steps concerning virtues. For example, on the first line of step 9, the virtues are compared to the ladder of Jacob, and the vices to the chains that fell from Peter.²⁶ Klimakos indeed expands on virtues in steps 4–7 (fundamental virtues) and in 24–30 (higher virtues), whereas he deals with vices in steps 8–23.²⁷ In step 28, he clearly refers to the ladder as “the whole ladder of the virtues.”²⁸ The concept of a ladder consisting of virtues, however, was even older than Klimakos. It already appears in Gregory of Nyssa *In sanctum Ephraim*,²⁹ referring to Ephraim the Syrian, who frequently refers to the ladder leading to heaven, but who does not yet use the expression κλίμαξ ἀρετῶν.³⁰ V. 2 resembles a passage from

²⁴ J. Diethart and W. Hörandner, *Constantinus Stilbes, Poemata* (Munich/Leipzig 2005) 1.

²⁵ M. Jugie, “Poésies rythmiques de Nicéphore Calliste Xanthopoulos,” *Byzantion* 5 (1929/1930) 362–390, at 371.

²⁶ *PG* 88.840–841; cf. Acts 12:7.

²⁷ Chryssavgis, *John Climacus* 28–29.

²⁸ *PG* 88.1132B. This and the following translations from the *Ladder* are from Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, *Saint John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Brookline 2012).

²⁹ *PG* 46.828D.

³⁰ Ephraim the Syrian *De patientia et consummatione huius saeculi*, ed. K. G. Phrantzoles, *Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα* IV (Thessalonica 1992) 175; *De paenitentia*, V (1994) 59; *Adhortatio de silentio et quiete*, VI (1995) 42; *Precationes ad*

Ephraim, bishop of Cherson,³¹

τῆς ἀληθοῦς κλίμακος, τῆς οὐ πρὸς γεώλοφόν τι ὕψος ἐπανα-
γαγούσης ἡμᾶς, ἀλλὰ ταῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν ἀναβάσεσιν, ὥσπερ τισὶ
βαθμίσι, πρὸς οὐρανόν τε καὶ τὰ οὐράνια ἡμᾶς διαβιβαζούσης

or from Gregory of Nazianzus,³²

ἀλλ' ἐπαινῶ καὶ τούτου τὴν οὐχ ὄραθεῖσαν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ
διαβαθεῖσαν κλίμακα ταῖς κατὰ μέρος εἰς ἀρετὴν ἀναβάσεσι.

John Chrysostom was also familiar with the concept of a ladder composed of virtues.³³

3: The fact that the ladder leads to heaven is its most typical feature; it is a shared characteristic of the *Ladder* of Klimakos and Jacob's ladder. *ξενοτρόπως* corresponds to the strange nature of the ladder in v. 1.

4–5: The strange nature of the ladder is explained in these two verses. The mystery is concealed in the paradox of a ladder reaching as high as heaven with only thirty steps. At the end of the *Ladder*, a brief exhortation explains that the number of thirty steps refers to the thirty years Christ lived on the earth before he was baptized: in these years he “fulfilled the thirtieth step in the spiritual ladder.”³⁴

6–8: Those willing to ascend the ladder are warned about the gap between the rungs. Klimakos himself also warns about the chasm, but he does not associate it with the gap between the steps. For him the chasm is the burning pit of hell.³⁵

9–12: These verses emphasize the dialectical aspect of the *Ladder*.³⁶ The steps of the *Ladder* form a tight unity. You cannot reach heaven when missing one step, i.e. when stepping in the

³¹ *dei matrem*, VI 362, 364.

³¹ Ephraim *De miraculo Clementis Romani* (PG 2.636A).

³² Greg. Naz. *Or.* 43.71, ed. J. Bernardi, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 42–43* (Paris 1992) 284.

³³ John Chrys. *In Joannem Homiliae* (PG 59.454).

³⁴ PG 88.1160A.

³⁵ Step 7 (PG 88.804C).

³⁶ On dialectics in Klimakos see Chryssavgis, *John Climacus* 12.

chasm between two steps. Even someone who is well advanced on the ladder cannot be sure of reaching heaven. This is what Klimakos means when quoting James 2:10, “He who shall keep the whole spiritual law, yet stumble in one passion, that is, fall into pride, has become guilty of all.”³⁷ The sudden fall is stressed by αἴφνης in v. 12. Contiguous to this idea in the *Ladder* as a whole is the notion that someone on a lower step cannot be perceived as inferior. He is still ascending, and someone who has already well advanced can still fall into sin. This is why Klimakos, giving advice on how to ascend the ladder, cites the famous passage from the gospels, “The last shall be first, and the first last.”³⁸ In some manuscripts, this quotation sometimes appears next to the *pinax* represented as a ladder.³⁹

13–17: After the warning of the fall, advice is given about how to prevent it. Having a spiritual father is fundamental to the monastic way of living. It reminds us of the letter of reply of Klimakos to John of Raithou.⁴⁰ In the letter, obedience is stressed as the argument because of which Klimakos accepts the task to write the spiritual guide. Obedience is also the theme of step 4 of the *Ladder*, which is an exceptionally long step because of its importance. It logically follows upon steps 1, 2, and 3 concerning the renunciation of the world. After leaving the material world, the first condition for ascending the ladder is submission to your superior; or as Klimakos puts it at the beginning of step 4, “As the flower precedes the fruit, so exile, either of body or will, always precedes obedience. For with the help of these two virtues, the holy soul steadily ascends to Heaven as upon golden wings.”⁴¹

Poem 2

1: The content of this first verse is almost equal to v. 1 of

³⁷ Step 26 (*PG* 88.1065C).

³⁸ Step 27 (*PG* 88.1105B); cf. Mt 19:30, Mk 10:31, Lk 13:20.

³⁹ For example *Iveron* 415 f. 193^r, *Mosq. Synod. gr.* 229 f. 320^v.

⁴⁰ *PG* 88.625–628.

⁴¹ *PG* 88.677C.

Poem 1. In both, the ladder is seen by an unidentified first-person narrator, and its strange nature is stressed.

2: As in v. 3 of Poem 1, the most typical feature of the ladder, reaching from earth as far as heaven, is mentioned. The word ἀδύτων stresses the mystical character of the ladder: paradoxically, “the unreachable places in heaven” become within reach. The same paradox already occurs in a description of Jacob’s ladder by John Chrysostom: οὕτω γὰρ καὶ τὰ ἄβατα τῶν χωρίων, καὶ ὑψηλότερα, βατὰ γίνεται, βάρων καὶ κλιμάκων ὑποτεθειμένων ἡμῖν.⁴²

3–4: The concept of Jacob’s ladder being accessible to mortals is not yet explicitly present in Gen 28:12. It was, however, a widely accepted idea and formed the essence of the ladder concept as applied by Klimakos. In the second part of v. 3, a question is asked which initiates a dialogue with a second unidentified person. The evasive answer of the second speaker allows the first to interrupt him. A similar dialogue of someone asking an explanation about the ladder, in this case of Jacob’s ladder, is found in Theodoros Prodromos’ *Epigrammata in Vetus et Novum Testamentum*.⁴³

5–7: The first speaker continues. It seems that he is well acquainted with Gen 28:12. He immediately notices the difference between the ladder of Klimakos and that of Jacob. As already noted, in Genesis Jacob’s ladder is not used by mortals, but by angels. An interesting parallel is again in *De miraculo Clementis Romani* by Ephraim of Cherson:⁴⁴

κλίμακος, καὶ τῆς Ἰακώβ ὀραθείσης οὐδὲν ἀποδεύσης, οὐκ ἀγγέλους δι’ αὐτῆς ἀνιόντας καὶ κατιόντας ἡμῖν δεικνυούσης,

⁴² John Chrys. *Expositiones in Psalmos* (PG 55.339).

⁴³ –Τίς, ἢ κλίμαξ, σὺ καὶ τίς ἐστήριξέ σε; / πόσοις δὲ βαθμοῖς καὶ πόσου μέχρι φθάνεις; / τίνες δ’ ἄνεισι καὶ τίνες κάτεισί σε; / –Τὸ Μωσαϊκὸν ταῦτ’ ἐρώτα βιβλίον. / Κλίμακα αἰθερίην ποτὲ δέρκετο διὸς Ἰακώβ, ed. G. Paragiannis, *Theodoros Prodromos: Jambische und hexametrische Tetrasticha auf die Haupterzählungen des Alten und Neuen Testaments II* (Wiesbaden 1997) 33.

⁴⁴ PG 2.636A.

ἀλλὰ ἀνθρώπων ψυχὰς ταῖς θειοτάταις παραινέσεσιν, ὡς ἐκ
βαθμῶν εἰς βαθμοὺς δι' ἀρετῶν τῷ Θεῷ συνεισφερούσης.

Ephraim here makes a clear distinction between Jacob's ladder and the ladder of virtues, the first being used by angels, the second by humans. In a similar way, a distinction between the two ladders is made in Poem 2. The wrestling angels in v. 7 refer to the famous passage in Gen 32:25–33, in which an angel wrestles with Jacob.

8–15: The second speaker confirms the supposition of the first one and gives a longer explanation of the ladder. The craftsman mentioned in v. 8 is John Klimakos. He is praised as a skilled craftsman/author, who built the ladder/book. It is possible that this praise, an acknowledgement of the qualities of Klimakos, is an answer to his humbleness as expressed in two passages of his own works. In step 27 he mentions that he, “as an unskilled architect,” has constructed a ladder of ascent.⁴⁵ At the end of the treatise *To the Shepherd*, he even rhetorically praises John of Raithou as if he were in fact the architect of the ladder of virtues, the one who laid its foundations and even completed it.⁴⁶ V. 14 again stresses that mortals can ascend the ladder. εὐχερῆ in v. 15 contrasts with μόλις in v. 16 of Poem 1 and gives a more optimistic vision, which is in agreement with Matthew 11:30, “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Poem 3

Ἄνθρωπος mentioned in v. 1 again refers to John Klimakos as the constructor of the ladder, without any specification. In fact, the whole poem is a collection of the various *topoi* on the *Ladder*, which are already mentioned in Poems 1 and 2. The ladder reaching as far as heaven (vv. 2, 4–5) is mentioned in Poem 1 vv. 3 and 17 and in Poem 2 vv. 2 and 12; the ladder consisting of virtues (v. 3) in Poem 1 v. 2; the strange nature of the ladder (v. 3) in Poem 1 vv. 1 and 3 and in Poem 2 v. 1. The only novelty is the expression τῶν ἀρρήτων βαθμίδων (v. 6),

⁴⁵ PG 88.1105B.

⁴⁶ PG 88.1205–1208.

which might be a wordplay referring to the *topos* of the κλίμαξ ἀρετῶν and which underlines the mystical aspect of the ladder.

Poem 4

This fourth and final poem of the cycle is, like Poem 1, an encouragement to the reader, who is referred to by ἄνθρωπε (v. 2). In this poem, some verses explicitly deal with the desire to follow the example of many holy predecessors who ascended the ladder (vv. 3–5). As in Poem 1 vv. 13–15, the necessity of a guide is stressed, in this case represented as the cross (v. 8). Stylistically, the poet placed ποδηγόν next to χειραγωγόν, alluding to feet and hands as the physical parts of the body used when ascending a ladder.

Authorship and cycle aspects

As already mentioned, the four poems are preserved anonymously. Moreover, it is not entirely clear whether the four can be ascribed to a single poet. In the comments on metrics, Poem 1 and Poem 4 were described as having some distinctive metrical features. This might indicate that they were written by a different poet. It would, in any case, not be exceptional that book epigrams by different poets were placed next to each other. An example can be found in the *Barocc.* 194, containing eight poems on the Psalms (f. 48^r–48^v).⁴⁷ In that manuscript, a certain Makarios compiles several frequently occurring poems, which he combines with some of his own creations in order to form a well-organized cycle. In contrast to the cycle of Makarios, the cycle in *Barocc.* 141 seems to lack such an internal structure. One could only state that the cycle starts (Poem 1) and ends (Poem 4) with an exhortation to the reader. This last encouragement would then be a parallel to the exhortation to the reader, *inc.* Ἀναβαίνετε ἀναβαίνετε,⁴⁸ which in the manuscripts appears at the end of the *Ladder*.

Barocc. 141 is the only testimony for the four poems. It is,

⁴⁷ Ed. R. Meesters, R. Praet, F. Bernard, and K. Demoen, “Makarios’ Cycle on the Psalms, Bodleianus Baroccianus 194,” *BZ* (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ *PG* 88.1160D.

however, possible that a compiler has found the poems in several manuscripts, now lost, and put them together as a cycle. As demonstrated above, there are many repetitions of content in the poems. It might be that the assembled poems were selected because they have the same topic: the ascent of the *Ladder* of John Klimakos. Given the lack of evidence from other testimonies, however, it remains possible that a single author was responsible for the whole cycle, whether or not the cycle was composed especially for *Barocc*. 141. Neither the option of a compilation nor the option of a unique composition can be proven with any certainty.⁴⁹

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