

“Like a Speechless Fish”: An Anonymous Byzantine Poem on Toothache

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Abstract: *This paper presents the first critical edition and English translation of an anonymous Byzantine dodecasyllabic poem On Teeth (περὶ ὀδόντων), preserved uniquely in the late thirteenth-century manuscript Marcianus gr. 524. The poem offers a vivid first-person account of toothache, combining personal suffering with medical, biblical, and classical imagery. Rather than functioning as a didactic medical text, it dramatizes pain as lived experience, using technical medical terminology alongside mythological and scriptural allusions to explore sin, bodily affliction, and speech. Placed between eleventh and twelfth-century literary culture, the poem resonates with works by Andronikos Protekdikos, Theodore Prodromos, Constantine Stilbes, and Michael Psellos in its tragic-ironic tone and skepticism toward medicine. Through close analysis of manuscript context, intertextuality, and language, the article argues that the poem exemplifies a Byzantine mode of poetic journalism, transforming private suffering into a performative act addressed to a small circle of educated readers in later medieval Constantinopolitan intellectual environments and social settings.*

In 1795, Robert Burns, the famous Scottish poet, tormented by an excruciating toothache, gave the pain poetic voice: “Whare’er that place be priests ca’ Hell / Whare a’ the tones o’ misery yell ... Thou, Toothache, surely bear’st the bell Among them a’.” Burns’ lament is striking not only for its vehemence but for its universality. Some pains are private, others widely shared; among the latter, toothache has long been counted among the most relentless. The most poetic of torments, it withholds food, sleep, and peace. When there is no escape, the sufferer’s last recourse is to make the agony into poetry—a response that resonates well beyond

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eighteenth-century Scotland, as Byzantine verse likewise attests.

The Marcianus gr. 524 (late 13th century) contains an anthology of 11th-12th century poetry, predominantly consisting of epigrams on artworks.¹ Among these texts, the manuscript also includes an anonymous dodecasyllabic poem titled *On Teeth* (περὶ ὀδόντων) (189 lines).² Foteini Spingou, who has extensively studied the codex and its epigrams, divides the anthology into three sylloges (A, B, and C). Syllogae A (ff. 103v–104v, 1–3v) and B (18–23v, 105–112v, 115v–120v, 33v–39v, 192v–193v, 45v–46v), both collections of anonymous poems, are separated by folia 3v-18, which contain attributed poems to Andronikos Protekdikos (ff. 3v–5), Theodore Prodromos (ff. 5–8v), Theodore Balsamon (ff. 8v–9)³ and Costantine Stilbes (ff. 10v–18).⁴ This poem follows the texts of sylloge A and is located on folios 9r–10v, between Balsamon’s and Stilbes’ poems. The anthologist’s aim seems to have been to put together a compilation of good poetry for his personal use, some from talented authors like Theodore Prodromos, Michael Psellos and Christopher Mytilenaeos.⁵

This poem survives exclusively in this manuscript. Spyridon Lampros, the first scholar to catalogue its contents, provided a transcription of both the incipit and explicit of the poem.⁶ He mistakenly recorded the length as 168 verses, whereas the poem actually comprises 189 verses, spanning folios 9r to 10v. Despite Lampros’ early work, the poem has not received much further scholarly attention,

¹ See E. Mioni, *Bibliothecae divi Marci venetiarum codices graeci manuscripti. The-saurus antiquus*, II (Rome, 1985) 399–407; F. Spingou, “The Anonymous Poets of the Anthologia Marciana: Questions of Collection and Authorship”, in A. Pizzone (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* (De Gruyter, 2014) 139–153.

² First mention of this text is to be found in S. Lampros, “Ο Μαρκανός κῶδιξ 524”, *NE* 8 (1911) 3–59, 12.

³ K. Horna, “Die Epigramme des Theodoros Balsamon”, *WS* 25 (1903) 165–217.

⁴ J. Diethart – W. Hörandner (eds.), *Constantine Stilbes: Poemata* (Munich/Leipzig 2005).

⁵ F. Spingou, *Words and Artworks in Byzantium. Twelfth-Century Poetry on Art from Ms. Marcianus Gr. 52* (Grosvenor House 2021) 31 and 38.

⁶ Lampros, *NE* 8 (1911) 12.

likely due to the text's poor state of preservation, with significant fading of the ink, especially on the right half side of fol.9r, covering the even lines up until l.40. Despite this neglect, the poem is highly intriguing—a true treasure chest of quintessential Byzantine literature. The author narrates his struggle with toothache, unfolding it within the 189 lines of the poem. As he describes his suffering, the very act of writing, and sharing, appears to ease his pain. With each word, the torment gradually subsides, until, by the final lines (188–189), he is at last free from it. Biblical allusions, classical and intertextual references, and just the right touch of medical knowledge—enough technical jargon to demonstrate erudition without becoming incomprehensible—all woven into good enough crafted dodecasyllabic verses. This paper offers the first critical edition and English translation of the poem, together with a broad discussion of the text's composition, function, and literary affiliations.

1. *Poetry and Medicine*

While Byzantine literature is not particularly abundant in medical poems, several texts in verse from the middle and late Byzantine periods do engage with distinctively medical themes.⁷ These include the extensive 1,370-line poem on medicine and a brief eight-dodecasyllable advisory poem on diet by Michael Psellos,⁸ the *Kanon on Urine* and the *Kanon on Blood* by Nikephoros Blemmydes;⁹ two anonymous short poems on the seven ages of man¹⁰, and the poem in political verse dedicated to Pope Nicholas V by George Sanginaios

⁷ The following list is taken from W. Hörandner, “Teaching with Verse in Byzantium” in W. Hörandner, A. Rhoby and N. Zagklas (eds), *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* (Leiden-Boston 2019) 459–86, 471. Note that the link between medicine and poetry is not without parallels in Byzantium and there are examples of poets who were also doctors (e. g. Nicholas Kallikles, who was Alexios I Komnenos' personal doctor).

⁸ L. Westerink, *Michaelis Pselli poemata* (Stuttgart 1991) 190–233 and 237–38.

⁹ A. P. Kuzes, “Les oeuvres médicales de Nicéphore Blémmydès selon les manuscrits existants. Praktika tes Akademias”, *Athenon* 19 (1944 [1948]) 56–75.

¹⁰ E. Boissonade, *Anecdota Graeca*, vol. 2, 456–57.

on the names of body parts (Ὄνομασίαι τῶν μελῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).¹¹

While all of these texts are didactic in nature, this poem is not. The text presents a narrative centered on a personal experience with tooth pain, intertwining elements of medical literature with the author's subjective account. While it touches upon the nature of toothache—explaining the genesis of the pain and the medical remedies—it does not aim to educate or provide a comprehensive guide to dental health. Instead, the medical explanations serve as a backdrop to the more prominent focus on the individual's own suffering and the often-overwhelming nature of their pain. The discussion of potential remedies is similarly anecdotal, reflecting the author's personal journey rather than offering structured medical advice.

The result is a text that favors reflection over instruction, employing medical concepts to explore the personal and subjective dimensions of pain. The poem is a 'dramatization of personal experience'¹², typical of 11th- 12th century, and the vivid re-telling of a personal experience puts it in the category of 'poetic journalism'¹³ or 'public diary keeping'¹⁴, like Psellos' *Psogos against scabies*¹⁵ (Στίχους Μιχαήλ τῆ καλῆ ψώρα πλέκω), or Christopher Mytilenaios' poetry.¹⁶ Most of the texts belonging to those two centuries were probably produced in the context of literary theatres and perhaps also schooling; however, as already argued by Paul Magdalino, one may wonder if such texts focusing on personal experience, were meant to keep to themselves, rather than be read aloud in public.¹⁷ It would

¹¹ Ed. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη — Bibliotheca graeca mediæ aevi*, vol. 5, vδ–vς; A. Rhoby, "Konsul, Lehrer, Arzt. Leben und Werk des Georgios Sanguignatios (Mitte 15. Jh.)", in: *Festschrift* (in print).

¹² P. Magdalino, "Cultural Change? The Context of Byzantine Poetry from Geometres to Prodromos", in F. Bernard, K. Demoen (eds.), *Poetry and its Contexts in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Ashgate 2012) 19–36, 21.

¹³ Magdalino in *Poetry and its Contexts* 22.

¹⁴ M. D. Lauxtermann, "Text and Contexts", in W. Hörandner, A. Rhoby and N. Zagklas (eds.), *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* (Leiden-Boston 2019) 19–37, 52.

¹⁵ Psellos, *Poemata*, ed. Westerink 430–31, no. 62, vv. 1–43.

¹⁶ Magdalino in *Poetry and its Contexts* 20.

¹⁷ Magdalino in *Poetry and its Contexts* 34.

be difficult to provide an answer to these questions, but I would agree with Magdalino in saying that it would make sense if ‘we imagine it happening among a group of friends who trusted and liked each other, who thought of themselves as cultural equals’.¹⁸ In this regard, this text is closer to poems addressing specific illnesses, such as John Mauropous’ poem 92,¹⁹ Christopher of Mytilene’s poem 142²⁰, the aforementioned Psellos’ *Psogos against Scabies*²¹, and Prodromos’ poems 62 and 68, where the author laments his illness, possibly chickenpox, which he describes as ‘the worst of diseases.’²²

Additionally, another feature linking this text to the latter group is its strong critique of medicine.²³ The author shows a lack of trust in doctors, claiming that nothing can relieve his pain, which is so intense that it ‘folds all the books of Galen and Hippocrates’ and ‘puts to shame the healing discipline’ (ll. 135-37). Medicine was a subject often criticized in Byzantine literature, with satirical poems targeting doctors being particularly prevalent. Among these, one

¹⁸ Magdalino in *Poetry and its Contexts* 34.

¹⁹ F. Bernard – C. Livanos, *The Poems of Chrystopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, DOML, 50 (Harvard University Press 2018) 496-503.

²⁰ Bernard – Livanos, *The Poems* 309.

²¹ Psellos, *Poemata*, ed. Westerink, 430–31, no. 62, vv. 1–43. One must note the authorship of this poem has been questioned, first by Westerink, *Poemata*, 429.

²² For an edition of these poems see W. Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte* (Vienna 1974), 494; 508-9. Poems 77 and 78 are too on illnesses, see Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos*, 544-549. For a translation and commentary of these two poems, see N. Zagklas, “Epistolarity in Twelfth-Century Byzantine Poetry: Singing Praises and Asking Favors in Absentia”, in K. Kubina – A. Riehle (eds) *Epistolary Poetry in Byzantium and Beyond. An Anthology with Critical Essays* (Routledge 2021) 64-77. Interestingly enough, both authors employ classical references to describe the severity of their diseases: Prodromos compares it to the Hydra (poem 62, l.10), the multi-headed monster, while the anonymous author defines his threefold strength as that of ‘Ades’ trident’ - incidentally, a wrong reference, as the only god with a trident was Poseidon. The comparison to the Hydra can also be found in Stilbes’ *Poem on the Great Fire* (l.74), in reference to the power and strength of the fire.

²³ On this topic see A. Kazhdan, “The Image of the Medical Doctor in Byzantine Literature of the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries”, *DOP* 38 (1984) 43–51, and M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*, II (Vienna 2019) 142-3.

should note Christopher of Mytilene's poem 85, 'On a Conceited Doctor' (11th century);²⁴ Prodomos' satirical text *The Executioner or the Doctor*, in which he vividly recounts his experience with a dentist²⁵; a passage in Manasses' *Hodoiporikon* (3.71-74);²⁶ and the anonymous dialogue *Timarion*.²⁷ The aforementioned *Psogos against scabies* by Michael Psellos is the closest comparison to the tooth poem:²⁸ in both texts, the subject cannot sleep, cannot eat nor drink, cannot sing; in Psellos' text the author cannot write but does it nonetheless, in this text the author cannot speak but does it anyway.²⁹ Complaints about the incompetence of doctors were not unique to Byzantium; similar sentiments can be found in 12th-century Latin West, as exemplified by letter n.30 of Arnulf of Lisieux.³⁰

As for the specific theme of toothache, the only other text I am aware of that addresses this affliction is Demetrios Kydones' letter n.301, in which he implores his doctor for assistance. Kydones laments that he is unable to sleep or drink and cannot seek help in person, forcing him to find his own solution: either the pain must end, or it will be made more bearable through conversation with his doctor.³¹

2. *Literary and socio-cultural context*

As this poem has been transmitted anonymously and just in this manuscript, looking at its con-texts, which 'are the other texts in a

²⁴ Bernard – Livanos *The Poems* 173.

²⁵ For an edition and translation see T. Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici in greco letterario di Teodoro Prodomo: introduzione, edizione, traduzione, commento*, PhD Thesis (Pisa 2010).

²⁶ Ed. K. Horna, "Das Hodoiporikon des Konstantin Manasses", *BZ* 13 (1904) 313-355; ed. and modern Greek tr. K. Chryssogelos, *Κωνσταντίνου Μανασσή Ὀδοιπορικόν* (Athens 2017).

²⁷ B. Baldwin, *Timarion*. Translated with Introduction and Commentary (Detroit, 1984)

²⁸ Lauxtermann in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* 32.

²⁹ Lauxtermann in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* 32.

³⁰ F. Barlow, *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux* (London, 1939) 50-5.

³¹ Demetrios Kydones, *Letters*, ed. R.-J. Loenertz, *Démétrius Cydonès. Correspondance*, 2 vols (Vatican 1956-60) II, 219.

poetry book, small sylloge, anthology, or miscellany³², may provide useful information on its genre, purpose and subject matter. Since all texts, in fact, ‘engage in an intricate dialogue with the other texts of the manuscript they are in’,³³ let us see how such dialogue can help us. While Spingou argues that there are no clear arranging criteria in the collection,³⁴ the placement of an anonymous text alongside non-anonymous poems from the 11th-12th century, as shown in the introduction, rather than within a seemingly dedicated section for anonymous/non-attributed works, warrants closer examination. By integrating the anonymous text with attributed poems, the editor may be signaling the text’s thematic, stylistic, or cultural alignment with the works of known authors from the same period.

Looking at the some of its con-texts, such as Prodrimos’ *Katomyomachia*³⁵, Andronikos’ Protekdikos *Poem in the form of a Semeioma* (ca. 12th century), and Constantine Stilbes’ *Poem on the Great fire*, some similarities emerge. All of the four texts are in dodecasyllables. All of them have a tragical element to it: the *Katomyomachia* is a ‘satire in the form of a parody of a tragedy’³⁶; Andronikos’ *Semeioma*’s object is a tragedy about a cannibal nun who ate her daughter, as clearly stated by the narrator (l.25);³⁷ Stilbes’ text is a ‘lament’ on the destruction of the city, with the author himself stating he is ‘writing a tragic drama’ (l.35).³⁸ Two specific lines in the toothache turns the text into a narrative that feels unmistakably tragic, yet ironically so:

³² Lauxtermann in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* 21.

³³ Lauxtermann in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* 21.

³⁴ F. Spingou, *Words and Artworks in the Twelfth Century and Beyond: The Thirteenth-century Manuscript Marcianus Gr. 524 and the Twelfth-century Dedicatory Epigrams on Works of Art* (PhD thesis Oxford 2013) iv.

³⁵ H. Hunger, *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg* (Graz/Vienna/Cologne 1968). On this text, see P. Marciniak and K. Warcaba, “Theodore Prodrimos’ *Katomyomachia* as a Byzantine Version of Mock-Epic” in A. Rhoby and N. Zagklas (eds), *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Texts and Contexts* (Brepols 2018) 97–110.

³⁶ R. Macrides, “Poetic Justice in the Patriarchate. Murder and Cannibalism in the Provinces”, in G. Nagy, *Greek Literature in the Byzantine Period* (New York 2001) 341–72.

³⁷ Macrides in *Greek Literature* 343.

³⁸ T. Layman, *The Incineration of New Babylon: The Fire Poem of Konstantinos Stilbes* (Geneva 2015) 54.

‘the organs of my voice have now been turned into musical instruments of tragedy that cry ‘alas!’ aloud and bewail because of the pain’ (ll. 148-9); ‘our organs have bent, as Scripture says, to sorrow and tragic ‘melody’ (ll.162). The ‘tragic’ tone is strengthened by the use of $\phi\epsilon\upsilon$, a specifically tragic word.

The whole tone set by author is rather mournful and tragic-like, which given the topic treated almost results in a parody of a tragedy, a ‘tragi-hilarious struggle’ with toothache³⁹, and this is what makes this text closer to the *Katomyomachia* than the *Semeioma* or the *Poem on the Great fire*, which focus on life dramatic events. Both the author of the toothache poem and Stilbes succeed in bringing to life and re-telling a close experience to their audience, with the only difference being the subject matter. In the case of Stilbes, he grapples with narrating a harrowing experience—a catastrophe that unleashed widespread destruction. By contrast, our author describes the brief, transient pain of a toothache, a discomfort that passes without any lasting consequences. It would be hard not to see the irony in this: by shifting the focus from a catastrophic event to a minor illness, the reception of the text changes drastically. Stilbes pictures ‘himself in physical pain’, his writing has rekindled the fire: his speech is affected by it, as it burns both his innards and mouth, he cannot ‘roar back’ to the fire, which is destroying everything it finds in its way.⁴⁰ The author of this poem employs terminology that closely mirrors that of Stilbes in his description of the fire, but shifts to a water metaphor. The acidic liquid causing the toothache is likened to a destructive stream of water, sweeping away everything in its path (ll.40-50)

The ending of the toothache text and the *Semeioma* are quite similar: while in the *Semeioma* the Judge defer everything to judgement of the despotes and the holy synod, which have the power to ‘bind and loose’ (ll.160), so to at the end of the toothache God is asked to let go of the bridle and let the author’s binded jaws be loose (ll.186)

The theme of generational conflict, a common trope of tragedy, recurs across these texts. In the *Katomyomachia*, the anonymous

³⁹ see Lauxtermann’s definition of Psellos’ struggle with scabies: Lauxtermann in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* 32.

⁴⁰ See the introduction in Layman, *The Incineration of New Babylon* 11-14.

mother mourns the loss of her daughter, while in the *Semeioma*, ‘the daughter’s belly becomes her mother’s tomb’ (l.34).⁴¹ This theme is also a central motif in this text. In lines 29-30, the author invokes ‘the bitter grape of the ancestor’, which gave ‘toothache to the descendants’, quoting Ezechiel 18:1-4 and Jeremias 38:29. This proverbial saying was a way to exonerate oneself from one’s own responsibilities and, in fact, in the following lines 31-32, the author admits that he is the one ‘squeezing the sour grape’, and responsible for his own faith, i.e. the toothache. Similarly, ll.64-67 of the *Semeioma* speaks about the power of time giving and destroying, and leaving the offspring the same legacy as their forefathers.

The topic of accountability and family relationship is brought forth once again in ll.80-82, where the author describes himself as being pregnant with ‘matricide’ viper-like creatures. The imagery of viper offspring killing their mother is based on Nicander, *Theriaca*, 128-36, in which Nicander explains that once they mate, the female viper kills the male, and then the offspring is born through eating the mother’s belly, thus killing her, too.⁴² In a recent paper, Kathryn Wilson points out that there was a trend among ancient readers to draw a parallel between Nicander’s vipers and the storyline of Euripides’ *Oresteia*, as some scholia testify.⁴³ This is confirmed in this text, too: the author employs the adjective μητροφόντης (‘matricide’) to refer to his viper-like offspring, and such an adjective is to be found in Eur. *Or.* 475, where it is accompanied by the word ‘serpent’ (δράκων).

The theme of matricide re-emerges in the subsequent lines (83-85) where the author draws upon the myth of Medusa, referring to ‘what is celebrated in stories.’ The author portrays himself as being pregnant with a ‘monstrous child,’ harboring a ‘deadly matter’ on his head, and fearing the ‘sword’ of pain, analogous to the sword of Perseus that beheaded Medusa.⁴⁴ The expression ‘monstrous child’ is particularly noteworthy, as it appears in Paul of Aegina (*Med.*

⁴¹ Macrides in *Greek Literature* 343.

⁴² K.D. Wilson, “Avenging Vipers: Tragedy and Succession in Nicander’s *Theriaca*”, in *Classical Journal* 113 (2018) 257-280, 259.

⁴³ Wilson, *Classical Journal* 113 (2018) 262.

⁴⁴ I would like to thank Stratis Papaioannou for this insight.

Comp. III, 76) in the context of ‘difficult labor,’ where the adjective *τεράστιον* is used to describe a fetus (*κυτόμενον*) with anomalies, such as having ‘two heads,’ which could lead to a challenging delivery.⁴⁵ Particularly noteworthy is also the references to the birth-pang goddesses, *Eileithyia*, with the epithet *μογοστόκος*, found in *Iliad* (*Il.* 11, 270: *δριμύ, τό τε προΐεισι μογοστόκοι Είλειθυιαί*). Although found in Eustathios’ commentaries (1, 663, 1.23, *θέσφατον, θεσπέσιον, θεόσδοτον, μογοστόκος Είλειθυιαί*) and in Manasses’ *Chronicle* (1.340 *Lampsidis: ὠδῖνας ἐπηράσατο δριμείας, μογοστόκος*) the adjective is rarely found in sources after the Classical period.

These texts have also in common another theme, that of eating. As noted by Tomasz Labuk, in fact, the ‘owner of this miscellany manuscript must have possessed a keen interest in the matters of eating’.⁴⁶ The mice of the *Katomyomachia* fight against a voracious cat; the main character of the *Semeioma*, a nun, was accused of murder and cannibalism for consuming her daughter, and the toothache author speaks about eating and drinking throughout the poem. The word *παμφάγος* occurs in all three texts (referring to the cat, to the nun and the author of toothache) and also in Stilbes’ poem (1.57), in reference to the all-destroying nature of the fire. In ll. 88-102, the author introduces the topic of eating (1.88: ‘What shall I say in fitting wise concerning food?’), complaining that he cannot drink nor eat, because the ‘mouth’ spits out everything. His inability to drink is compared to that of Tantalus, and the language employed is yet again quite interesting. The word *φιλοτησία* is relatively rare in Byzantine sources, and usually refers to the ‘cup of friendship’, or to ‘toast to someone’s health’, here probably to toothache medication (*φιλοτησία φαρμάκου*). According to Eustathios ‘to drink the toast of Tantalus’ was a proverbial saying (*Comm. On Odyssey*, 1.437.17), attested in Phil. *Vita Apollonii*. L.92 *κάρας ὑπερέλλοντα φρίπτοντες λίθον* is vaguely reminiscent of the *ὑπερέλλοντα πέτρον* found in Euripides’ *Orestes* (1.6), when Tantalus is mentioned as someone who cannot control his tongue: Tantalus becomes an analogue of

⁴⁵ J.L. Heiberg, *Paulus Aegineta* (CMG IX) I, III, 76, 4.

⁴⁶ T. Labuck, *Gluttons, Drunkards and Lechers: The Discourses of Food in 12th-Century Byzantine Literature: Ancient Themes and Byzantine Innovations*, PhD Thesis (Katowice 2019) 8.

him not just because of thirst but for the latter reason too.

The author, in fact, plays with the imagery of the mouth as both means to speak and to eat. In ll. 17-25, he confesses to having uttered harmful words that wounded his brethren, using his tongue like an arrow and turning it into a harlot. The linguistic texture of these lines is particularly interesting: the author first uses a Homeric formula (l.20: 'winged words'), then, quoting Ps.63.3-4, he refers to the 'sharp arrow' of his tongue, playing with the double meaning of στόμα, which can be translated to 'mouth' but also to 'the point of weapons'. In the Bible the mouth has the power of life and death (*Proverbs*, 18:21) and this is why, having used it in the wrong way, he is now 'tasting the soul-destroying wood', i.e the tree of knowledge of Adam and Eve, and experiencing a toothache. The disease is portrayed as a direct consequence of sin (ll.14-16 and 33-34). The connection between sinning and teeth has biblical roots (Ps. 3:8), where it is stated that God will destroy the teeth of the impious. A more precise explanation linking the misuse of words to toothache can be found in a passage from Athanasios (*Exp. in Psalmos*, PG 27, 69D): 'The teeth of sinners are the unreasonable discourses that naturally arise within us. For just as teeth, our enemies approach us to consume our flesh'.

Although sin is listed as the first cause of toothache, in ll. 35-40, the author introduces a second and 'more natural' cause: a bitter fluid coming down from the top of the head is eroding his teeth. Such description is consistent with what is found in Hippocrates. According to Hippocratic theory (*De affectionibus*, 4, 24), toothache results from an excess of phlegm accumulating in the mouth, leading to tooth decay. The remedies listed by the author in lines 137-144 are too what one would find in medical books of the time. The author in fact employs precise medical terminology such as αἰμωδία (ll. 32 and 11, 'having the teeth set on edge'), φλέγμα (l.138, phlegm), ἀχολήν (l.138, bile), ἀμυχὰς (l.141, scarifications), σικύας (l.141, cupping-glasses), the processes of revulsion (ἀντίσπασις) and depletion (κένωσις).

These dual explanations—natural and divine—which are not mutually exclusive, reflect a broader opposition between divine healing and traditional medicine. This dichotomy was not unique to the Byzantine period but has roots in Roman and Greek tradi-

tions.⁴⁷ Throughout the Byzantine era, scientific medicine coexisted with divine and miraculous interpretations of illness and healing.⁴⁸ The author's emphasis on both divine and natural causes of toothache aligns with this long-standing tradition.⁴⁹ Illness, according to the author, originates in the 'bad use to which [man] has put his own free will,' specifically the sin committed in Paradise. (see ll. 26 and 28 about the 'tree of forbidden knowledge', and 'behaving like a woman').⁵⁰

Since speaking too much is what brought forth toothache, as poetic justice goes, the author is now unable to speak properly: he has injured his 'sweetly-speaking instrument' (l.77). He compares himself to a fish bereft of speaking being grilled on a fire (ll.69-70), to an 'owl wailing out of tune' (l.76), to Philomela being deprived of his tongue by Tereus (l.170). Later in the text, ll.148-55, the author complains his voice has assumed a tragic tone and compares his mouth to a lyre, whose bridges (teeth) have been altered and broken in pieces by the pain, and every sound he makes strikes the grave tone, and produces a tragic melody. The setting, the tone and the language of these verses is very similar to a passage of Manasses' *Monody on death of the Goldfinch* 3.1.10: 'to tune the mournful lyre of discourse, to grieve over the sweet-speaking in lamenting echoes' [...] the golden-winged has been deprived of his ornament'.⁵¹

The author compares the fluid running through his mouth to a stream of water destroying everything it comes across, to the infernal rivers (l.5), and its bitterness to that of the fountain of Marah (Exod. 15:22-27), whose water was for the Israelites too bitter to be drunk. He wishes to die rather than bearing the pain, with his

⁴⁷ J. Haldon, "The miracles of Artemios and contemporary attitudes: context and significance", in V.S. Crisafulli, J.W.Nesbitt, J.Haldon (eds), *The Miracles of St. Artemios, A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium* (Brill 2021) 33-74, 44-47.

⁴⁸ Haldon in *The Miracles of St. Artemios* 45.

⁴⁹ Haldon in *The Miracles of St. Artemios* 47.

⁵⁰ J. C. Larchet, *The Theology of Illness* (Crestwood, New York 2002) 26.

⁵¹ K. Horna (ed.), *Einige unedierte Stücke des Manasses und Italikos*, Progr. Sophiengymnasium (Vienna 1902) 3-26. Translation is taken from I. Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Authorial Voice of Constantine Manasses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020) 78.

sleepless nights being dark as the darkness of death (ll.54-55 and 58-60). He calls his suffering ‘sleepless’ and the word ἀκοίμητος is not randomly chosen: one of the eternal punishments, together with the gnashing of teeth, is the ‘sleepless worm’ (*Is.* 66, 24: ὁ σκώληξ ὁ ἀκοίμητος). The gnashing of teeth, the weeping all night, the perennial night, the infernal rivers, they all recall a last judgement atmosphere, as it is specified in ll. 107-109.

3. Authorship

As previously noted, the poem has been transmitted anonymously. While definitively identifying its author remains a challenging endeavor, it is nonetheless possible to offer a tentative profile based on the available textual and contextual evidence.

As the previous discussion has shown, this text shares many features with other examples of 12th-century poetry (e.g., Constantine Stilbes, Andronikos Protekdikos, and Theodore Prodromos), while still retaining distinctive elements that set its author apart (register of the language, use of metre, style). The hypothesis of a 12th-century set is further supported by the language. Although the linguistic register is not particularly highbrow, the author does employ a few rare verbs, suggesting a level of erudition characteristic of the period, such as ἐκκυβέω (only attested in Suda and Zonaras) or, metri causa, ἐξιούω (instead of the more common ιούω), ἀντικελαδέω (Niketas Eugenianos, *Monody to Theodore Prodromos*, 462, 17; Constantine Manasses, *Monody on a Goldfinch*, 5, 13), εὐθυδικέω (attested in John Tzetzes (*Iliad Allegories*, Σ, 731)⁵², and the verb ζοφώω, all mostly attested in the 12th century.

The text is most likely intended for an audience of literati, probably the author’s peers. The author assumes a level of familiarity with specialized medical terminology, offering no explanations or descriptions of toothache remedies. This is evident in references to techniques such as ‘scarification’ and the use of ‘cupping glasses’, as well as medical processes like ‘depletion’ and ‘revulsion’, which are mentioned without further clarification.

The abundant use of classical and mythological references points

⁵² F. Boissonade (ed.), *Tzetzæ Allegoriae Iliadis* (Paris 1851) 253.

towards this too. The allusions to the myths of Philomela, Tantalus and the more obscure one to Medusa are not explained, and Homeric quotations are interspersed throughout the text. For instance, at line 56, the author cites *Iliad* 9.325, the moment when Achilles refuses to rejoin the battle. This quotation is followed by a reference to the “brazen slumber,” further evoking Homeric themes and imagery. When the author compares his pain to that of a woman in labour, that is also an allusion to *Il.* XI, 270-72, when Agamemnon gets hurt and compares his sharp pain to that of a woman in travail. The river similes of ll. 40-44 echo *Il.* XI, 492-47, when Ajax is attacking the Trojans.⁵³

In conclusion, I would argue that this poem was most likely written in the 12th century, by an author who was probably a member of the intellectual circle of Constantine Stilbes, Theodore Prodromos and Andronikos Protedkikos.

Text and Translation

The text of the Venetian manuscript and its punctuation have been preserved as faithfully as possible. I intervened only where grammatical or syntactic errors required correction; otherwise, the text remains largely as it appears in the manuscript. Some readings have been amended through conjecture, with only a small portion of line 27 left blank due to a lacuna in the manuscript.

As with most Byzantine poems, the treatment of dichrona, as either short or long, has no consistency, as one can note in the different measuring of *πάλιν* in the different verses: *ὠθεῖ πάλιν ἢ σοῦβλα καὶ θλίβει πλέον* and *καὶ πάλιν ἀντιβαίνει τῶν ριζῶν κράτος* (l.119), where the alpha is first short and then long. After Late Antiquity ‘no poet produced verses without at least some metrical inconsistencies’⁵⁴, so one must stress the metrical errors, such as when the epsilon or omicron is treated as a long vowel (l.11 *ὄδονταλγία*;

⁵³ ὡς δ' ὅποτε πλήθων ποταμὸς πεδίον δὲ κάτεισι / χειμάρρους κατ' ὄρεσφιν ὀπαζόμενος Διὸς ὄμβρω/πολλὰς δὲ δρυὸς ἀζαλέας, πολλὰς δὲ τε πεύκας / ἐσφέρεται, πολλὸν δέ τ' ἀφυσγετὸν εἰς ἄλα βάλλει / ὡς ἔφεπε κλονέων πεδίον τότε φαίδιμος Αἴας.

⁵⁴ Lauxtermann *Byzantine Poetry* II 267.

1.17 στόμα; 1. 27 πρὸς αι[.]ον; 1.31 ὄμφακα; 1. 62 τὰ; 1.63 γαστέρα; 1.184 σιαγόνας; 1.58: χάλκεον; 1.72: τετάρτη; 1.143: ἐν ἀντισπάσει; 1.43: σκόλοπας; 152 στόμα) or long syllables are treated as short ones (47 ῥίζας, 90 κοιλία, 127 ῥομφαία, 124 τὰς 1.119: καὶ πάλιν ἀντιβαίνει; 8 καρωτικός, 15 ἐκείθεν πρῶτον, 27 πρὸς αι[.]ον, 72 τετάρτη). One must also note the use of wrong accents to mask the prosodic irregularity at line endings: 1. 44 βρίθον, 1. 98 ψηφίδα, 1. 101 λεπτύναι, 1. 146 στύφον, 1. 180 κράμα, since these words are normally written with a circumflex, not an acute accent. The author uses *correptio attica* quite well in some occasions: 1.39: καὶ τοὺς προβλήτας τῶν ὀδόντων ἐκτρίβει; 1.98: Ὡς γὰρ μικρὰν τις ἐκκινήσας ψηφίδα; 1.128: ὡσεὶ τριγλῶχιν ὁ τριφυῆς τὴν βίαν; 1.152: τὸ στόμα πλουτεῖ τῆς κιθάρας τὴν θέσιν. In 1. 130 the omega of Πλούτωνος is treated as short. While this may seem a metrical irregularity, it reflects the Byzantine freedom in handling proper names that do not fit neatly into the metre, so it should be considered perfectly acceptable.⁵⁵ The most frequent caesura in the text is the penthimimeres (74 % against the 26 % of the ephthemimeres), with 50 % of the stress pattern on the fifth syllable, 39 % on the fourth and for 11 % on the third. When the caesura is ephthemimeres, the word is usually proparoxytone (62%) or paroxytone (38%) but never oxytone.

Περὶ ὀδόντων

- Μόλις διασχὼν ἐξ ὀδύνης τὸ στόμα,
 (κλείει γὰρ αὐτὸ τῶν πόνων ἢ σφοδρότης,
 δριμὺν κερῶσα τοῖς ὀδοῦσι τὸν σκύφον)
 5 λέξω μικρὸν σοὶ τῆς νόσου τὴν πικρίαν
 ὡς συμμετάσχης τῆς ὀδύνης τοῖς φίλοις,
 ἄριστε φίλων, συμμεριστὰ τῶν πόνων
 ἐξ ἀκοῆς γὰρ πληκτικὸς [καταρ]ρέων
 τὰς καρωτικὰς ψηλαφῶ καταδύσεις
 πικρὸν τὸν ἰὸν ἐξεμῶν ὡσπερ δράκων.
 10 Ἄκουε λοιπὸν τοὺς δυσηκόους λόγους:
 τὸ πάθος ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ὀδονταλγία
 ἢ μᾶλλον ἄλγος τοῦ βάθους τῆς καρδίας·
 ἐφάπτεται γὰρ καὶ μυχῶν τῶν ἐγκάτων.
 Τὴν γὰρ βρύσιν ἔσχηκεν ἐξ ἁμαρτίας·

⁵⁵ See Lauxtermann *Byzantine Poetry* II 272- 274.

- 15 ἐκεῖθεν πρῶτον ἐξανοίγονται φλέβες,
 μῦσος δ' ἀποβλύζουσι πολλῆς σαπρίας·
 ἀνθ' ὧν μολύνω τὸ στόμα σαπροῖς λόγοις,
 ἐναδολεσχῶν ὕβρεσιν ἀλλοτρίαις
 καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τραυματίζω τῶν λόγων,
- 20 ὥσπερ φαρέτρης ἐπτερωμένοις λόγοις
 στόμα τε κυρτῶν καὶ περικλῶν τὰς μύλας,
 ὄξύ τε γλώττης ἐντιθεὶς θάττον βέλος·
 ἀνθ' ὧν τε δειπνῶ τὰς τρυφὰς τὰς σαρκίνους
 καὶ [κυ]λίω τὴν γεῦσιν εἰς ἀμαρτίαν
- 25 καὶ τὴν ἔνοικον γλώτταν εἰς πόρνην τρέπω
 καὶ γεύομαι, φεῦ, τοῦ ψυχοφθόρου ξύλου
 ψυχῇ συνάμα συζυγούση πρὸς αἰ[...]ον,
 οὐκ ἀρρενωπῶς προβάλλων τὰς ἐνστάσεις.
 Ὡς πικρὸς ὄμφαξ τῶν πάλαι προπατόρων
- 30 εἰς γομφιασμὸν τοὺς ἀπεγγόνους τρέπων
 ἢ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς καὶ τὸν ὄμφακα θλίβων
 τρώγων τε δειπνῶν τὴν πικρὰν αἰμοδιάν.
 Πρώτην μὲν οὖν εὔρηκεν ἡ νόσος βρύσιν,
 ἐκ τῶν φλεβῶν ὡς εἶπον τῆς ἀμαρτίας,
- 35 τὴν δευτέραν τε καὶ γε φυσικωτέραν,
 ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς τῶν φλεβῶν τῶν σαρκίνων.
 Χυμὸς γὰρ αὐταῖς ὡς δριμύς ἐπιβρίσας,
 ὡς ῥεῦμα ῥοχθεῖ καὶ τὸ θαλάσσης κῦμα
 καὶ τοὺς προβλήτας τῶν ὀδόντων ἐκτρίβει fol. 9v
- 40 καὶ τὰς ῥαχίας τῶν μυλῶν ἐπιτρίβει.
 Ὡσπερ δὲ καὶ χεῖμαρρος ἐκρέων μέγας
 εἷς τι κάταντες ἐκ μεταρσίων τρέχων,
 καὶ δένδρα καὶ σκόλοπας ἔλκει καὶ λίθους
 ἐκ γῆς ἀνασπῶν καὶ τὸ πέτρινον βρίθου,
- 45 οὕτω τὸ ῥεῦμα τῆς ἐμῆς καχεξίας
 ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς τῶν λόφων ἀποβρύον,
 καὶ ρίζας αὐτὰς τῶν ὀδόντων ἐκθλίβει
 καὶ τῶν μυλῶν φάτνωμα καὶ τὰς συνθέσεις,
 ἔλκει τε τὴν ὄστωσιν ὡς σκληροὺς λίθους.
- 50 Ὡς ῥεῦμα πικρὸν τάχα καὶ Μερρᾶς πλέον·
 ὃ ῥεῦμα, χεῦμα φαρμάκων ὀλεθρίων,
 κώνειον ἢ κύπελλον ἰώδους λύμης,
 Στυγὸς τε χύσις, Ἀχέροντος πλημμύρα.
 Ἐντεῦθεν αὐτὸς τὴν μὲν ἡμέραν σκότος,
- 55 τὸ δὲ σκότος κέκρικα θανάτου σκότος·
 νύκτας ἀύπνους ἐξιαύω τοῖς πόνοις
 καὶ παννυχίζω γρηγορῶν εἰς τοὺς γόους.

- Ὡς εἶθε πρὸς χάλκειον ὕπνον ἐτράπην
 εἰς δ' αὖ ἀδιύπνιστον ἐκλίθην κάρων,
 60 ὡς λήξιν εὖρον τῶν ἀκοιμήτων πόνων.
 Πυκνῶς στρέφω τὸ σῶμα κατὰ τῆς κλίνης,
 ἐπὶ τε τὰ δίδυμα τῶν πλευρῶν μέρη
 εἰς γαστέρα τε καὶ ῥάχεις μετατρέπων
 ἐξυπτιάζω, κύμβαχον [θέσ]ιν φέρω,
 65 ὡς πεσσὸς ἀπλῶς ἀστατῶ μου τοῖς πόνοις.
 Καὶ δυστυχῶ φεῦ τὰς μεταπτώσεις πάσας,
 ξηροῖς ἀτεχνῶς ἐγκυβεύων ὀστέοις,
 σπαίρω τε πυρὸς ὡσπερ εἰς μέσην φλόγα,
 ἰχθὺς ἔρημος τῶν λαλούντων ὀργάνων.
 70 Πρώτη φυλακὴ νύκτερος παρερρῦη
 καὶ τῶν σκοπευτῶν γρηγορεῖν ἔχω πλέον·
 τρίτη παρήλθεν, εὐδρομεῖ καὶ τετάρτη·
 ὄρνις κελαδεῖ τοῦ σκότους ὠροσκόπος,
 ἀντικελαδῶ νυκτερινοῖς τοῖς γόοις
 75 καὶ ῥήγνυμι, φεῦ, ἐκ μέσων τῶν ἐγκάτων,
 νυκτικόραξ καθάπερ ἐκμελῆς βρέμων·
 τὴν εὐλάλον γὰρ ὀργάνωσιν ἐθλίβην.
 Λέων βρυχῶμαι κἂν μυδὸς φέρω πλάσιν,
 κἂν τοῖς τοσοῦτοις ἐξενευρίσθην πόνοις.
 80 Οἶον με συνθλίβουσι τικτούσης πόνοι·
 ἐγκυμονῶ γὰρ τὰς ἐχιδναίας φύσεις,
 τοὺς μητροφόντας τῆς ἀμαρτίας γόνους·
 ἐῶ γὰρ εἰπεῖν τὸ κροτούμενον μῦθους,
 ὡς ὠδίνησα τὸν τεράστιον τόκον,
 85 ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τὴν ὀλεθρίαν ὕλην,
 δι' ὃν πτοοῦμαι καὶ θεὰς μογοστόκους
 ἢ τὸν πόνου σίδηρον ἐκτέμοντά με.
 Τροφῆς πέρι δε τί προσαρμόσας φράσω;
 ζητεῖ φάρυγξ μὲν, ἀλλὰ τὸ στόμα πτύει,
 90 δεξαμενὴ, κοιλία καὶ σωλὴν βρῦει.
 Διψῶμεν οὐκοῦν φιλοτησίαις μέσαις,
 τὴν Ταντάλου τίνοντες ἀθλίως δίκην,
 κάρας ὑπερτέλλοντα φρίττοντες λίθον
 καὶ τὸν καταθλάττοντα τὰς μύλας πόνον.
 95 Κἂν καὶ βιασθῆ φύσεως τὸ παμφάγον,
 σίτων τε παράψαιτο καὶ τῶν πεμμάτων,
 εὐθὺς τὸ ῥεῦμα συγκινεῖται σὺν βίᾳ.
 Ὡς γὰρ μικρὰν τις ἐκκινήσας ψηφίδα
 ἤνοιξε ῥεῦμα πολλάκις τῶν πλησμίων,
 100 οὕτω κινήσας τῶν ὀδόντων μετρίουσ,

- ὡς καὶ τεμεῖν τὸν ἄρτον, ὡς καὶ λεπτύναι,
 εὐθύς τὸ ρεῖθρον ἕξανοιίγω τῆς νόσου.
 Ὡ τῶν ὀδόντων ἄλγος, ὃ μύλης πόνος·
 ἐκ τοῦ στόματος εἰσρέων τοῖς ἐγκάτοις
 105 ὡς ἐξ ἀμάρας εἰς βαθύτερον κύτος.
 Ὡ τῶν ὀδόντων ἄλγος, ὃ πόνος πόνων·
 σήμαντρον ἄλλο τῶν τελευταίων πόνων
 καὶ τῶν ὀδόντων τοῦ βρυγμοῦ καὶ τῆς φρίκης.
 Ὡ βρυγμὸς οὗτος, πρόδρομος τῶν ἐσχάτων· fol. 10r
 110 πῶς ἐκλαλήσω τὴν τοσαύτην πικρίαν;
 πῶς ἐκφράσω τὰ μέτρα τῆς αἰμωδίας
 καὶ ποιότητα τῶν πόνων καὶ τὴν βίαν,
 ἂν συνθολῶμαι τῇ τοσαύτῃ πικρίᾳ;
 Ἐγγὺς ὅμως ἡ πείρα καὶ λαλεῖν θέλει·
 115 σούβλα δοκεῖ πείρουσα τὰς ρίζας κάτω,
 ὡς πᾶν τὸ φυτὸν τῶν ὀδόντων ἐκτέμη,
 ὡς δ' ἦν κραταιὸν ἐκ πλοκῆς ῥιζωμάτων
 ὠθεῖ πάλιν ἡ σούβλα καὶ θλίβει πλέον,
 καὶ πάλιν ἀντιβαίνει τῶν ῥιζῶν κράτος·
 120 μάχη τε πολλὴ καὶ κλόνος πρὸ τῆς μάχης·
 ἡ δ' ὀξύτης τῆς σούβλας ὑπὸ τῆς βίας
 τανῦν μὲν ἐξάλλοιτο πρὸς τὴν καρδίαν,
 τανῦν τὸν ἐγκέφαλον ἐκτέμνειν θέλει,
 ζωῆς τὰς ἀρχὰς συγκυκῶσα τὰς δύο,
 125 σφάττουσα καὶ φράττουσα τῆς πνοῆς χύσιν,
 ὡς καὶ τελευτᾶν τὴν ὀδύνην εἰς μόρον.
 Ῥομφαία τοιγάρ ἐστὶν ὁ πλήττων πόνος,
 ὡσεὶ τριγλῶχιν ὁ τριφυῆς τὴν βίαν·
 τέμνει μύλας γάρ, ἐγκέφαλον, καρδίαν·
 130 Ἄιδου τρίαινα, Πλούτωνος τοῦτο ξίφος.
 Οὕτως ἀμυδρῶς ζωγραφῶ μου τὸν πόνον
 καὶ τῷ μέλανι τὸν ζοφοῦντά με γράφω·
 ὑπὲρ λόγον γάρ ἐστὶν ὡς ὑπὲρ πόνον.
 Ἱπποκράτους δὲ καὶ Γαληνοῦ βιβλία
 135 ἔπτυξε πᾶν τε τῶν ὀδόντων τὸ θλίβον
 καὶ τὴν θεραπεύουσαν ἐντρέπει τέχνην.
 Μάτην καθαίρει τῆς κεφαλῆς τοὺς πόρους,
 κενοὶ τε φλέγμα καὶ χολὴν συνεκχέει,
 καὶ τοῖς ἐνύγροις καὶ ποτοῖς τῶν φαρμάκων,
 140 καὶ τὰς ἀμυχὰς εἴτε σικύας μάτην
 εἰς τοὺς τένοντας ὑπάγει καὶ τὰς ῥάχεις,
 ὡς ἐκροφᾷ τὸ θλίβον ἐν ἀντισπάσει·
 τὸ πλημμύρον γὰρ τὴν κένωσιν ἐκτρέχει

- ἀντίσπασιν δὲ τὸ σκιρωθὲν ἐκτρέπει·
 145 οἱ γὰρ ὀδόντες ἐνδακόντες τὸ στύφον,
 οὐ φασι λῦσαι τῇ βίᾳ τῶν φαρμάκων.
 Ὅργανα φωνῆς τῆς ἐμῆς παρετράπη
 εἰς μουσικῆς ὄργανα νῦν τραγωδίας,
 τὸ φεῦ βοῶντα καὶ γοῶντα τοῖς πόνοις
 150 ὡς μουσικῆ φθέγγματος, ὡς ταύτης λύσις.
 Τὸ στόμα πλουτεῖ τῆς κιθάρας τὴν θέσιν,
 ὁ τῶν ὀδόντων στοίχος ὡς τῶν μαγιάδων,
 καὶ σφίσιν ἐντείνονται τῆς χορδῆς τάσις·
 ἢ γλώσσα χορδὴ καὶ τάσις ἐν τοῖς λόγοις
 155 καὶ τῆς κιθάρας ἐμμελῆς ἅπας κρότος.
 Ἡ σύνθεσις δὲ νῦν παρ' ἡμῖν ἠλλάγη,
 ἀργοῦσιν αἱ μαγιάδες ἐκτετραμμέναι
 ἢ καὶ θρυβεῖσαι τῶν ὀδυνῶν τῇ σφύρα
 καὶ μουσικῆς ὁ φθόγγος ἡμῖν ἐρρῦη·
 160 κἂν τι παρηχῆ, τὸν βαρὺν ἦχον κρέκει·
 ὄργανα παρέκλιναν, ὡς γραφῆς λόγος,
 εἰς πένθος ἡμῖν καὶ τραγωδίας μέλος.
 Ὅδόντες ἡμῶν ὄπλα καὶ βελῶν στόμα
 καὶ τοὺς φοροῦντας ἔκταναν ἀντιστροφῶς·
 165 λέγε, προφήτα, τίς δυνατὸς ἐν κράτει
 ἀμαρτανόντων τοὺς ὀδόντας συντρίβειν;
 πάντως ὁ μισῶν ἄφρονας τούτων λόγους.
 Οὐ μῦθος ἡμῖν οὐδὲ τερθρεία ξένη,
 ἀλλ' οὐδὲ Τηρεὺς τὴν λαλοῦσαν ἐκτρίβει·
 170 τομῆς δὲ πικρὰ τοῦ χυμοῦ τοῦ παμφθόρου
 σφοδρὸς τε θυμὸς εὐθυδικούσης δίκης,
 τὴν τῶν ὀδόντων ἐκθερίζουσι στίχα
 καὶ τραυλὸν ἡμῖν ἐκτελοῦσι τὸ στόμα.
 Ὁ θριγγὸς ἦρται καὶ μαραίνεται στόμα·
 175 πτηνοὶ λόγοι σιγῶσιν ἐν τῷ κηπίῳ· fol. 10ν
 κλύζει γὰρ αὐτὸ δασιλέστερον χύμα.
 Ὡ παιδαγωγὴ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀμαρτίας,
 στήσον μικρὸν σου τὴν πατάσσουσαν βίαν
 καὶ τῷ στύφοντι μῖξον ἰλαρὸν κράμα,
 180 ὁ καὶ Γαληνὸς καὶ πρᾶϋθυμος μόνος,
 ὁ καὶ μαλάσσωσιν τὰς ἀνηκέστους νόσους.
 Κιμῶ χαλινῶ, τῆς γραφῆς λέγει στόμα,
 σιαγόνας ἔσφιγξας ἡμῶν πρὸς βίαν,
 ὡς ἀνακόνης ἄλμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας
 185 τὰς ἀλόγους τε τῶν παθῶν ἀταξίας.
 Ἄνεξ βραχὺ τι τοῦ χαλινοῦ τὴν τάσιν

καὶ μαστίγων σὴν βίαν ἡρέμα τρέπε·
πληγεῖς γὰρ ὄψε συγκομίζομαι φρένας.

17: Eph. 4:29 and Marc. 17:15 29–32: Ez. 18:2 and Jer. 38 (31):29–30 40–44: cfr. *Il. XI*, 492–97 50: Exod. 15:23 and cf. Greg. *Naz. Carmina moralia*, Column 586, line 4 56: *Il. IX*, 325 58: *Il. XI*, 241 86: *Il. XI*, 270 91: Philost. *Vita Ap.* 3.32.22 107: Matt. 8:12, 162–3, Lam. 5:15 162–3 Job 30:31 164: Ps. 57:4 166, Ps. 76 (77):14 167: Ps. 3:8 (3:7) and 57:7 (58:6); 170: Ps. Apoll. *Bibl.* 3, 14, 8 171: Prov. 30:14 183–4, Ps. 31 (32):9

27 προβαλλων] προσκαλών | 50 Μερράς] Μεράς | 67 σπαίρω] σκαίρω
| 69 τερθρεία] τερθρία | 81 ἐχιδναίας] ἐχιδναίας | 92 τίνοντες] τείνοντες
| 100 μερίους] μετρίους | 115 πείρουσα] σπείρουσα | 124 δύας] δύο | 186
κιμῶ] κημῶ χαλινοῦ] χαλινοῦ

On teeth

Barely opening my mouth because of the pain
(for the vehemence of the aching shuts it,
pouring a bitter cup on the teeth)
I shall briefly tell you about the bitterness of the disease,
5 so that you share the pain with your friend,
oh, best of friends, sufferings' sharer!
Through hearing, the numbing pain streams downwards
and touches the depths of sopor,
vomiting out the bitter poison, like a serpent.
10 Hear now the hard-to-hear words:
Toothache is my disease
or better, a pain coming from the bottom of the heart:
for it affects even my innermost organs.
Having sprung from sin
15 from there, first the veins open up,
then they spurt out the uncleanness of much rot;
because I defile the mouth with corrupted talks,
jabbering with outrageous insults
and wounding my brothers with words,
20 winged words as if they belonged to a quiver
opening my mouth and closing down my molars,
swiftly positioning the sharp arrow of my tongue;
because I enjoy the luxurious meals of flesh,
and I roll my taste into sin,
25 and my tongue I turn into a harlot
and, alas, I taste the soul-destroying wood,
with my soul joined towards [...],

not putting forth my resistance in a manly way.
 Oh, bitter grape of the first ancestors,
 30 giving toothache to the descendants,
 or, rather, I am the one squeezing the sour grape
 biting and eating with my teeth set on bitter edge.
 The disease finds its first source,
 as I said, from the veins of sin.
 35 The second and more natural source
 comes from the fleshy veins of the head.
 A very bitter humour falling upon them,
 gushing like a stream of water or a sea wave,
 wipes out the projecting teeth,
 40 and wears off the outer-edges of the molars.
 Like a stream of flowing water,
 running downhill from up high,
 dragging away trees, stakes and stones
 drawing up from earth even rocky weights,
 45 so the stream of my own misdeed,
 pouring from the top of the head
 wrings out the tooth roots,
 the mandible and the junctions,
 and drags the bone as if hard stones.
 50 Oh bitter stream, more bitter, probably, than Marah's flow!
 Oh stream, flow of deadly poisons,
 hemlock or poisonous goblet of filth,
 flood of the Styx, Acheron's stream.
 Because of it my day has become night,
 55 and the night I reckon as the darkness of death.
 I go through sleepless nights in pain,
 moaning, awake, through the entire night.
 I wish I had turned to the brazen slumber,
 or cast into the torpor from which you don't wake up
 60 so as to find the end to sleepless sufferings.
 I often turn the body against the bed,
 twisting around on both sides,
 onto the stomach and onto the spine;
 I turn on my back, assuming a head first position,
 65 shifting, like a dice, with my pains.
 I suffer, alas, all of the ups and downs,
 as if playing at dice with dry bones,
 flaying amidst the flames of fire,
 like a fish bereft of speaking.

- 70 The first night shift drifted away
and I remain more vigilant than the watchers;
The third came, and the fourth ran quick;
a bird, a night-watcher, sings,
and I answer back with nightly cries,
- 75 and I shatter, alas!, deep from my innards,
like an owl wailing out of tune,
for I have injured my sweetly-speaking instrument.
I roar like a lion even though I have the constitution of a
mouse
and I have been stripped of my strength by such great pains.
- 80 The pain afflicting me is like that of labor;
I am pregnant with viper-like creatures,
matricide offspring of sin;
not to mention what is celebrated in stories:
namely that I delivered a monstrous child,
- 85 a deadly thing on my head,
for which I am scared of the birth-pang goddesses
or of the sword of pain cutting me.
What shall I say in fitting wise concerning food?
The throat seeks yet the mouth spits,
- 90 the belly both receptacle and conduit pours (any) food out.
We thirst, indeed, amidst of cups,
miserably undergoing Tantalus' penalty,
fearing a stone hanging over the head,
and a molar smashing pain.
- 95 Even if the omnivorous nature is forced (by me)
and might get hold of bread and drinks,
immediately the flow is violently stirred up.
For just as someone, having moved a small pebble,
would often open up an overflowing stream,
- 100 so, having moved the most moderate among teeth
to cut the bread or make it thin,
I immediately stir up the stream of the disease.
Oh toothache! Oh molar pain!
Streaming from the mouth into the insides,
- 105 just as from a channel to a deeper hollow place.
Oh toothache, worst of the sufferings!
A new symbol of the ultimate sufferings
and of gnashing and shuddering of teeth.
Oh the gnashing, forerunner of the last days!
- 110 How shall I describe such bitterness?

- How shall I talk about the immeasurable mouth rot,
 and which kind of sufferings and violence,
 if I am confused by such great bitterness?
 Yet the experience is here and wants to speak:
 115 it appears to pierce the roots below, like a skewer,
 so as to cut off the teeth entirely like plants;
 since they are strong because of the roots' interlacing,
 again the skewer pushes and presses more,
 and once more the powerful roots withstand it.
 120 A mighty struggle and turmoil before the battle;
 now the sharpness of the spit, because of its force,
 at one time would leap off against the heart,
 now it wants to cut through the brain,
 setting in tumult the two principles of life,
 125 cutting off and blocking the fluency of breath,
 so that the pain might end in death.
 For the smiting pain is indeed a sword,
 like a three-edged one with thrice the strength;
 for it cuts the molars, the brain, the heart;
 130 the trident of Hades, this is, the sword of Pluto.
 Thus, only so dimly do I portray my pain
 and with ink I depict my gloom:
 it is beyond words as much as beyond pain.
 The books of Hippocrates and Galen,
 135 this toothache folds them all,
 and puts to shame the discipline of healing.
 In vain the latter cleanses the ducts of the head,
 empties the phlegm and pours out the bile
 through liquid and watery drugs;
 140 in vain does it apply scarifications or cupping-glasses
 to tendons and the spine,
 since the affliction gulps it down in revulsion;
 for the excess fluid runs out through the emptying process,
 while what has indurated turns into revulsion.
 145 Even if the teeth bite into the bitter medication,
 they reject healing from the force of the drugs.
 The organs of my voice have now been turned
 into musical instruments of tragedy
 that cry 'alas!' aloud and bewail because of the pain.
 150 Oh music of the sound, oh her release
 the mouth is elevated to the place of the lyre,
 the row of teeth becomes like its bridges,

- and the tension of the string would be tightened by them.
 The tongue is string and tension through words,
 155 and every melodious bit of the lyre.
 Yet now the arrangement has changed for us,
 the bridges stopped working, been diverted
 or rather broken in pieces by the hammer of pain,
 and the sound of music has flowed out of us.
 160 Even if something resounds, it strikes the grave tone;
 our organs have bent, as Scripture says,
 to sorrow and tragic melody.
 Our teeth, our weapons and point of arrows,
 have turned against and killed those who carry them.
 165 Tell us, prophet, who has the strength
 to crash the teeth of sinners?
 it must be the one who hates their silly words.
 It's not some myth in my case, nor some far-fetched sophistry,
 nor is Tereus devouring my speaking tongue.
 170 The sharp knife of the all-destroying humour,
 and the right judgment's violent anger,
 cut out the row of teeth
 and give us a stammering mouth.
 The fence is removed and the mouth withers;
 175 fleeting words are all silent in the garden:
 for a larger wave floods it.
 Oh teacher for my sins,
 hold briefly your smiting force,
 and mix some joy with the astringent
 180 just as Galen [does], the only one with a gentle mind,
 the one who soothes incurable diseases.
 With bit and bridle, so speaks Scripture,
 you have bounded my jaws by force,
 so to stop the leaps of sin,
 185 and the irrational disorders of passions.
 Let go briefly the tension of the bridle
 and gently keep off the strength of your whip;
 having been smitten, I finally come to my senses.

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