Christodoros on the Statues of the Zeuxippos Baths: A New Reading of the *Ekphrasis*

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D URING THE REIGN of Anastasios (491–518), the poet Christodoros of Koptos in Egypt traveled to Constantinople where he wrote (and likely also performed) an *Ekphrasis of the statues in the public gymnasium called Zeuxippos*. The baths of Zeuxippos were originally built by Septimius Severus in the city of Byzantion toward the end of the second century and were subsequently incorporated into Constantine's refoundation of the city. They stood between the palace, the hippodrome, and the square known as the Augousteion. Malalas records that Constantine endowed the baths with columns and statues, the latter presumably including many (if not all) of the eighty statues (some in groups) that are described by Christodoros. His *Ekphrasis* of this collection, basically a series of epigrams, runs to a total of 416 hexameter verses; it later became Book II of the *Greek Anthology*. It is a major (if indirect) source for the transfer and public reception of ancient statuary in late antique Constantinople and exemplifies the rhetorical genre of descriptions of actual (rather than imagined) works of art.[1]

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[1] For the baths of Zeuxippos, see R. Guilland, "Les thermes de Zeuxippe," *JÖByz* 15 (1966) 261–271; and S. G. Bassett, "*Historiae custos*: Sculpture and Tradition in the Baths of Zeuxippos," *AJA* 100 (1996) 491–506, citing recent work. The main studies of the *Ekphrasis* are R. Stupperich, "Das Statuenprogramm in der Zeuxippos-Thermen: Überlegungen zur Beschreibung des Christodoros von Koptos," *IstMitt* 32 (1982) 210–235; Bassett 491–506, and her *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge 2004), esp. 51–58, 160–185 (Bassett is alone in counting 81 statues in the *Ekphrasis*). Christodoros belonged to the group studied by A. Cameron in "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia*

It is fair to say that Christodoros' *Ekphrasis* has typically been used by modern scholars as a source of information on the statues themselves and not read as a poem in its own right. Specifically, R. Stupperich in 1982 and S. Bassett in 1996 (and again in 2004) have tried to reconstruct the Zeuxippos collection and to imagine its position in the landscape and ideology of Constantinople. Bassett's book (2004) is a superb study of a long-neglected and misunderstood topic—the Byzantine use of ancient statuary—and should change the way in which scholars discuss both the evolution of Constantinople's urban landscape and the ideology of classicism in Christian late antiquity.[2] It is an indispensable contribution, but it must be corrected on some points, mostly of literary interpretation. Christodoros' *Ekphrasis* is a valuable source, but it will be argued here that some of its apparent shortcomings and even the information that it allegedly provides must be read in light of its poetic themes and ambitions.

1. *Poetry and the silent bronze*

Bassett notes that the epigrams in the *Ekphrasis* are "governed less by the desire to record physical appearance than by the need to document the perceived sensations of emotion and intellect experienced by the individual figures displayed. The result is that individual passages are often long on interpretation and short on documentation." This reading is basically correct, but we must also admit that it is itself inscribed within

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14 (1965) 470–509, here 475, 481, 489. For the place of his *Ekphrasis* in the *Anthology*, see idem, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford 1993), esp. 147–148.

  [2] For other studies of the reception of ancient statuary in Byzantium, see C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963) 53–75; H. Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990) 47–61; S. G. Bassett, "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople," *DOP* 45 (1991) 87–96; C. Lepelley, "Le musée des statues divines: La volonté de sauvegarder le patrimoine artistique païen à l'époque théodosienne," *CahArch* 42 (1994) 5–15; and P. Stewart, "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London/New York 1999) 159–189.

an interpretive framework of its own that conveys disappointment and even censure. There is a value-judgment lurking in Bassett's discussion of the poem's "florid language," "passing reference to physical appearance," "unclear details," and focus on "the ephemera of thought and feeling."[3] This is an art historian who wants specificity, an archaeologist who wants things, not words. Christodoros' "interpretation" is apparently an obstacle before the true object of our interest, the collection itself. Yet it has long been realized that ancient and Byzantine *ekphraseis* of actual works of art follow their own agenda, which is hardly that of strict descriptive realism.[4] And reading such texts at cross-purposes to their literary ambitions may result in a partially distorted reconstruction of the artwork itself.

Let us then reverse the direction, and treat the collection as the means and the poem as the end. What Christodoros insists on throughout the *Ekphrasis*, in rather strong language, is that bronze is "mute," that it cannot fully represent the intellectual, artistic, musical, and prophetic qualities of its subjects, those very qualities of mind and soul, in other words, that made those figures worth representing in the first place. These qualities, in turn, have to be supplied or even imagined by the poet himself, whose medium is the opposite of mute, being pure voice (whether live or textual). Bronze also cannot represent intentions, emotions, and historical circumstances (the latter in the case of heroes who were not poets, orators, or philosophers). This is a major theme in the *Ekphrasis*. The mind of Aristotle, the poet says, was "not idle *even* in the voiceless

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[3] Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 495–496. For similar language, see the studies cited by R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, "The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary's Poem on Hagia Sophia," *BMGS* 12 (1988) 47–82, here 53; and the challenge issued by L. James and R. Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places': Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14 (1991) 1–17, here 1–2, though even they sometimes seem to regard the art itself rather than the text as the ultimate goal of study (e.g., 3). The descriptive reliability of Byzantine *ekphraseis* of artwork is the main subject of H. Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art," *DOP* 28 (1974) 111–140.

[4] See James and Webb, *Art History* 14 (1991) 1–17.

bronze" (18–19: χαλκῷ ἀφθόγγῳ). The bronze, in other words, is an impediment to his thinking; it can at most suggest *that* he was thinking, perhaps by representing him in a certain pose, but it can merely "hint" and "indicate" *what* he was thinking (21–22; the verbs are ἐμαντεύοντο, σήμαινον).[5] This silencing oppression of the bronze is highlighted strongly in the following epigram, on Demosthenes. Christodoros infers from his posture that the orator wanted to "endow his dumb statue (ἄπνοον τύπον) with voice, but *technê* kept him fettered under the seal of her brazen silence" (29–31: ἀλλά ἑ τέχνη χαλκείης ἐπέδησεν ὑπὸ σφρηγῖδα σιωπῆς). This dire predicament becomes more pressing in subsequent epigrams. Hesiod even "did violence (βιάζετο) to the bronze by his longing to utter inspired verse" (39–40). Likewise the prophet Polyeidos (42–44: τινάξαι … δεσμῷ) and Pythagoras (122–123: ἐβιάζετο). So whereas art historians may be disappointed with Christodoros for not giving us exact descriptions, he is disappointed with the *technê* of the artist for being unable to "mix sweet song in with the bronze," as he puts it in the case of Simonides (47–48).

Christodoros does not discourse directly on the limitations of the bronze-casters' art nor directly scold them for their failing. What he does is represent many of his subjects as struggling, often "violently," against the medium of that art. On the surface, then, the contest is not so much between verse and bronze as it is between the essential qualities of the represented figures and the bronze in which they are "trapped" or "bound." The bronze robs poets and orators of their essential attributes, as it does martial heroes of their intentions, feelings, and immediate circumstances. That is why Christodoros hammers away throughout the *Ekphrasis* at precisely those qualities that bronze cannot represent: thought, inspiration, intention, prophesy, and especially speech and song.

Having laid out his challenge in the first few epigrams, as we have seen, Christodoros varies his approach. In one modality, he highlights the contradiction between subject and bronze

[5] For ancient theories and vocabulary of signification (mantic and other), see P. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton/Oxford 2004).

medium: "clear-voiced" Sappho sat there "devoted to *silent* Muses" (69–71); so too Erinna (108–109). He imagines that a nightingale must have "struck up its clear song" near the lips of "clear-voiced" Stesichoros (125–130), but obviously all we can hear is the voice of the poet, who is projecting it all. "Silence" is a recurring characteristic of these bronze figures (e.g., 189, 245, 303), many of whom were devoted to voice, such as Apollo "the lord of song" (266–267). According to another modality, Christodoros rectifies the bronze's shortcomings by imputing speech to the statues (141–147, 157–159) or by imagining the battlefield settings of heroic action (60), inventing situations that could not be known from the dumb bronze alone. These are all ways by which the poet complements, corrects, and challenges.

Having established the priority of his own art in this crucial respect, in some cases Christodoros graciously ameliorates the shortcoming of the rival art. For example, he interprets the silence of Kalchas as the seer's deliberate concealment of his thoughts (53), in other words he reinterprets the inherent limitation of the material as an aspect of its positive representation. But this must be done on behalf of the bronze by poetry. Likewise, that *technê* has dried Hekabe's tears is a sign of the "drought of your incurable woe" (187–188; he is addressing her in the second person). So too Amphiaraos was "musing on a secret sorrow" (260). Thus appearances are saved, but this can only be done by poetry's intervention.[6]

The *Ekphrasis*, therefore, presents itself as a description of the statues of the Zeuxippos but ultimately contains reflections on the relationship between visual art and verbal art. This relationship, especially as it plays out in ancient and Byzantine rhetorical *ekphraseis* on works of art, has received a great deal of attention in recent scholarship and there is no way to survey it all here, at least not without drowning the meal in its own sauce. Liz James and Ruth Webb have offered a basic ex-

[6] Cf. the contemporary orator Chorikios' explanation of why one cannot hear the words of a painted angel in his *Encomium for Bishop Markianos*: the distance is too great to hear them (*Or.* 1.48, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig p.15); cited by Maguire, *DOP* 28 (1974) 129.

ploration of the goals of *ekphraseis* of works of art which can
help us to position Christodoros within the spectrum of his art,
though his stance is somewhat more extreme than most. The
rhetorical practice of *ekphrasis*, in its basic form a variety of *pro-
gymnasma*, was not primarily concerned with actual works of art
but with the evocation of persons, places, and events. When
applied to works of art, the goal was to recreate the subject-
matter in a manner "far beyond what could possibly have been
represented in a picture."[7] This can be seen clearly in Phi-
lostratos the Elder's *Imagines*, which tell much more about the
figures and circumstances in the paintings than could have ac-
tually been depicted in them. The effect was to produce a "par-
allel" or "comparable" description of the work, which could
even be taken as a rival representation, and was so formulated
by some writers. The orator's art, in other words, competed
with that of the painter (or, in this case, sculptor).[8]

In his essay *The Hall*, Lucian concedes the immediate power
of painting, sculpture, and architecture, and the fascination
that they arouse especially in vulgar viewers, but ultimately
endorses the superiority of the educated man's verbal represen-
tations: the "true winner [is] Lucian the literary artist who, as it
were, hijacks the debate in an ironic display of mastery." His
"ecphrastic exercises challenge experienced readers to 'look'."[9]
These are the views that we expect to find among sophists in
the Roman empire, those verbal virtuosos. In many Byzantine
ekphraseis the stance was usually maintained that the text was
merely explicating the intention of the artist, whose work was

[7] James and Webb, *Art History* 14 (1991) 4–9.

[8] For Philostratos (as well as for some of the other points raised above),
see also J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the
Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge 1995) 21–39. For a collection of stim-
ulating studies, see J. Elsner (ed.), *The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis
in Antiquity* (*Ramus* 31.1 [2002]). For *ekphrasis* and art in Byzantium, see H.
Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton 1981).

[9] G. W. Dobrov, "The Sophist on his Craft: Art, Text, and Self-Con-
struction in Lucian," *Helios* 29 (2002) 173–192, quotations at 189 and 177;
see also Z. Newby, "Testing the Boundaries of Ekphrasis: Lucian on *The
Hall*," in Elsner, *The Verbal* 126–135.

to be celebrated.[10] This is obviously not what is going on in Christodoros. (It is, moreover, possible that more reverential attitudes predominated in *ekphraseis* of religious art and architecture while more self-aggrandizing sophistic subtlety was reserved for discussions of secular or secularized works.)

At any rate, most *ekphraseis* of works of art praise the artists for contriving through their wonderful skill to endow their subjects with virtually living properties,[11] and Christodoros does maintain this stance on a certain level. For instance, he never attacks the artists and does leave us with the impression that their works are really magnificent and worth seeing. But there is a contrary dynamic operating in his poem, as we have seen. The artist's *technê* imprisons its subjects and deprives them of voice. Others would praise the statue for seeming to be *alive*; but when Christodoros does so, the accent falls on the *seeming*, as he repeatedly notes that it is in fact dumb and voiceless (e.g., 112, 117–118, 311–313). Christodoros' syntax tends to attribute the hints of what the statues might be thinking, feeling, and saying *to those who are being represented* and not to the skill of their craftsmen. In contrast to Philostratos, he never discusses *technique*, that is, how the bronze-caster achieved specific artistic effects. He is impressed by the statues but reaches beyond them to the persons being represented, who provide him with the inspiration by which to supplement and even transcend the voiceless bronze.

We have, then, a striking conflict between poetry and the art of sculpture. The latter silences and imprisons its subjects, who struggle, sometimes violently, to free themselves from its oppression. Poetry, on the other hand, can lend them voice, thereby also asserting its power over the mute *technê*; more importantly, through its very presence—whether it is read silently or recited aloud—poetry reminds us what many of the figures stood for, namely their *logos* (verses, songs, prophesies, orations). Even for those who were not poets and orators, poetry

[10] E.g., Macrides and Magdalino, *BMGS* 12 (1988) 47–50.

[11] For a selection of passages to this effect, both well-known and obscure, see K. Simopoulos, Ἡ λεηλασία καί καταστροφή τῶν ἑλληνικῶν ἀρχαιοτήτων (Athens 1993) 38–41.

can restore, i.e., imagine, their intentions and feelings and even their circumstances. It is *logos* that ultimately gives expression to the imagination, however much it may be stimulated by the sculptor's *technê*. Viewing statues, then, or at least viewing them well, is a matter of engagement, interpretation, and poetic imagination. The poet has won the contest, precisely through what have been called his "florid descriptions" and "interpretations."

2. *Context, performance, and interpretation*

But just how far does imagination go in this poem? Is the sculptor's art necessary at all, even as a stimulant? It is possible to suspect that Christodoros invented all these sculptures, which, after all, he "interprets" rather than "describes" (as has been suspected of Philostratos' *Imagines*). Direct and unelaborated description, after all, would concede ontological priority and so victory to the sculptor's art. The "mute bronze," to the contrary, could itself be part of the poet's imagination and the perpetration of the fiction a testament to his power of representation. The possibility of wholesale invention was in fact considered by scholars who were skeptical of Byzantine texts, until excavations at the Zeuxippos turned up two statue bases inscribed with the names of Hekabe and Aischines, figures who receive epigrams in the *Ekphrasis*.[12] So Christodoros was writing about a real collection. But what was the relationship between his poem and that collection? For example, it is not necessary that he has described every statue in the Zeuxippos.

The question is of course impossible to answer with certainty. The only thing we can rule out is that the epigrams that make up the *Ekphrasis* were meant to be inscribed on the statue-bases. They were not inscribed on the bases that were discovered, and the verbs are inappropriate anyway. Most are in the past tense: the heroes "stood there," "sat," or "shone." Sometimes the

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[12] S. Casson, D. Talbot Rice, and D. F. Hudson, *Second Report upon the Excavations Carried Out in and near the Hippodrome of Constantinople in 1928* (London 1929) 18–21: "Christodoros was actually describing existing works which he had seen"; and S. Casson, "Les fouilles de l'Hippodrome de Constantinople," *GBA* SER. VI 3 (1930) 213–242, here 235; cf. Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 497–499.

poet speaks in the first person, again in the past tense: "I saw" or "I marveled." But in a few he directly addresses his audience ("look at") or the statues themselves ("hail," "tell me"). Is he, then, reporting a visit to the baths or is he present before the statues, addressing them as well as a group of listeners? Our answer should, in any case, not be decided by the verbs. The past tense does not establish that Christodoros could not have been reciting the poem before an audience. The tense is, rather, part of the epic and specifically Homeric flavor of the *Ekphrasis* (which is written in Homeric hexameters) and acts as an invitation to imagine the heroes and poets in their ancient settings, engaged in action or thought rather than trapped in bronze in a bath house in Constantinople. It also reinforces the poet's strong links to Homer, whom at one point he calls his "father" (320; more on this below). He turns to Hekabe with the verb ἔννεπε, a direct allusion to the first line of the *Odyssey*. And Homer too, who narrates his action in the third person, does occasionally address some of his characters in the second person (notably Eumaios and Telemachos).

There is a strong possibility that the *Ekphrasis* was performed before an audience at the Zeuxippos. Later in the sixth century, Paulos *silentiarios* wrote an *ekphrasis* of Hagia Sophia in 1000 verses that was also performed: "there are notes in the only manuscript indicating where there were breaks in the recitation while the company moved from one part of the church to another."[13] In a letter to a friend in Constantinople, Synesios of Kyrene (ca. 400) refers to such gatherings as *panhellenia*—assemblies of learned men—and wonders anxiously how his text would be received if it were read out there.[14] Conversely, the Zeuxippos was used for public debates and therefore prob-

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[13] A. Cameron, "Poetry and Literary Culture in Late Antiquity," in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford 2004) 327–354, here 347, citing additional examples; cf. also James and Webb, *Art History* 14 (1991) 12. For Paulos, see also Macrides and Magdalino, *BMGS* 12 (1988), esp. 61–63.

[14] Synes. *Ep.* 101, on which A. Cameron and J. Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley 1993) 79–80.

ably also for public performances of this kind.[15]

In the context of such an original performance, then, the poetry would have complemented the bronze, in fact it would have engaged with it explicitly and directly competed with it. Both the ears and the eyes of the audience would have been stimulated, and the baths would have been criss-crossed by roving gazes as they resonated with the words of the *Ekphrasis*. But Christodoros problematizes the sense of sight. Would his audience have understood what they were seeing before they were told by him? Some of the statue-bases were inscribed, so at least some names could be known (see below). But even then one would have had to hear his verses to know what the "mute bronze" was really representing. The poet was presumably also on a pedestal, or at least standing high so as to be seen and heard. In performance, then, Christodoros himself would have been ranked among the mute statues, among the heroes and the poets of old—one of them his "father." But, unlike them, he would have had a voice: he was the living thing beside the mute simulacra, his own speaking presence reminding the audience of the bronze's limitations in yet another way. A presumptive order was reversed: the poem seemingly directs our attention to the statues itself, which are its own ostensible launching-point, but the poem snatches its audience's attention back and makes itself the center of attention and the object of contemplation. The poet is the conductor, and he does not have to take back from the statues what was never theirs to begin with. This dynamic is a function of the particular setting and collection of the Zeuxippos, and would not have operated in quite this way, for instance, in the case of Philostratos standing before a gallery of paintings in a villa by Naples. Is Christodoros' assembly seeing or listening as they turn their attention now to the statues and now back to the poet? Those who are assembled may think of themselves as alive and vocal com-

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[15] Socr. *HE* 2.16 (the prefect Philippos invited the patriarch Paulos to a debate there and arrested him); *Chron.Pasch.* s.a. 467 (the interrogation of Isokasios), transl. M. and M. Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale, 284–628 AD* (Liverpool 1989) 88. For public debates in late antiquity, see R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 1995).

pared to the mute statues of poets, but now they are silent as the poet gives voice to his heroes; the assembly of statues prevails over the living assembly of Constantinopolitans.

This reversal is heightened when we read the poem without having the statues to gaze upon. After all, even if it was composed for and performed on a specific occasion, the *Ekphrasis* can still be read on its own, as a text, and was certainly designed with this eventuality in mind. But reading it without having the statues before one's eyes utterly reverses the poem's ontological priorities and deconstructs (in a technical sense) the relation between seeing and hearing. The implied "dramatic setting" makes it feel as though one is gazing at statues while hearing epigrams, that the latter act merely supplements the former. But for any *readers* of the text, and for all of us who live after 532 when the collection was destroyed in the conflagration sparked by the Nika Riots, the relation is reversed: it is only by reading the poem that our imagination is stimulated to recreate the statues' physical appearance. The poem is now a commentary on the very mental images that it itself brings forth: seeing is a function of reading. The "mute bronze" is subsumed beneath the power of the *logos*, and this power of rhetorical representation was understood in the ancient theoretical tradition: an *ekphrasis* "is a reading that is also a viewing."[16] It is the poet who now solely creates both being and presence, and the *technê* of the bronze-worker has become a figment of his art. It is probably in this way that we should understand Christodoros' refusal to divulge the identity of the sculptors (except in one case: see below for Homer). He literally suppresses the artists in favor of their subjects, reversing the injustice of imprisoning poets and heroes in bronze. This may also account for the ambiguity of his referents: are the subjects of his verbs the statues or the heroes themselves? He often seems to bypass the intermediate bronze and adopt an epic mode of direct discourse, adding thought, feeling, and circum-

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[16] Elsner, *Art* 25; James and Webb, *Art History* 14 (1991) 6. For a fascinating Byzantine declaration of the power of *logos*, see P. Gautier, "Le dossier d'un haut fonctionnaire d'Alexis Ier Comnène, Manuel Straboromanos," *REB* 23 (1965) 168–204, here 179.

stance, and freeing himself from the constraints of an onto-logically secondary description.

3. *The scope of invention: the Trojans*

The Zeuxippos collection was real. It is attested in other historical sources and has been confirmed by archaeology; it was not a figment of Christodoros' poetic imagination. But the *Ekphrasis* is heavily interpretive, so where do we draw the line? How much of what we "know" about the collection is based on direct description and how much comes from the poet's inter-pretation? In many cases Christodoros imagines an orator's thoughts or invents the circumstances of a hero's action to ex-plain his posture or accoutrements. We cannot *know* these things about the statues in question because what we are given is not really information. It cannot be used by the archaeologist or art historian. What, then, about Christodoros' identifications of the figures? So far they have been taken at face value, but there are grounds for caution in some cases.

Many of the statues would certainly have stood on inscribed bases, and these names would have fettered Christodoros' imagination. Others would have been well known by their ap-pearance, e.g., most of the gods and goddesses and historical figures such as Demosthenes, who had an easily recognizable face. But one of the three bases excavated at the Zeuxippos had no inscription, and this was likely to have been the case with at least some (if not many) of the others. At this point we should mention one of the peculiar features of the collection: of the eighty statues in the *Ekphrasis*, almost thirty represent figures associated with Troy (not counting many of the gods and the two images of Homer). In particular, many of these Trojans and Achaians seem to stand (or are represented by Christo-doros as standing) at the moment of the city's destruction, an *Ilioupersis* in bronze. On the other hand, the four figures of Pan-thoos, Thymoetes, Lampon, and Klytios, come straight from *Iliad* 3.146–147 (the elders on the walls before Helen appears); their thoughts and anxieties have been entirely imagined by Christodoros. Be that as it may, Stupperich argued on the basis of the Trojan theme that the aim of the collection was to re-inforce the notion of Constantinople as New Troy (a notion that could, in turn, reinforce the idea of Constantinople as New

Rome). Bassett rejected this interpretation in her 1996 article, rightly stressing that it could not have been the chief principle by which the collection was ordered, as the majority of it, after all, did not have anything to do with Troy. The Trojan War was a popular theme and omnipresent in other collections and artistic media; it need not have conveyed a specific and focused ideology in this case. In her 2004 monograph, however, she seems to moderate her position and makes room for a Romano-Trojan ideology in the collection.[17]

But before ideology in this case there is a text. This interpretation implies that all the Trojan and Achaian statues were labeled and that Christodoros' poetic invention was limited to *ekphrasis* and did not extend to the identifications themselves. But what if he was facing a collection that was only partially labeled, as was almost certainly the case? It is very unlikely that the imperial agents who scoured the eastern provinces for statues found all bases labeled *in situ*, or that the locals whose art was being stolen were always forthcoming with names and stories;[18] that they carefully noted the name of each figure; or that they ensured that the right base was attached to the right statue after their voyage was complete. Once the statues were set up in the Zeuxippos, many of their identities would certainly have been invented, mistaken, or misunderstood. Christodoros' audience may in fact have been expecting the poet to clarify some of these ambiguities for them, and there were instances when even he was unsure.

For example, he seems to have thought that a laurel wreath (εὐπέταλος δάφνη) was the mark of a seer, and thus made Aglaos into one (χρησμηγόρος), misidentifying him as the father of the seer Polyeidos on the basis of (local?) hearsay

[17] Stupperich, *IstMitt* 32 (1982) 232–235; Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 503–504, *Urban Image* 53–55. For the symbolic and ideological significance of Troy itself in antiquity, see A. Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power* (Oxford 2001).

[18] Cf. Hieron. *Chron.* s.a. 334 (*PL* 27.498): "Constantinople was enriched with the nudity of almost every other city," a vivid and appropriate metaphor, cited by Bassett, *Urban Image* 16. The labeled statue-base of Theophanes of Mytilene was found in Constantinople: Bassett 230.

(263–265: φασίν; Polyeidos' father was actually Koiranos). None of the figures we know named Aglaos was a seer. It is possible that Christodoros knew one who was, or else he combined the name on the label with the profession he believed was signified by the wreath. We cannot rule out the possibility of mismatched labels and statues either. Likewise with a base inscribed "Alkmaion": as the statue did not have a wreath (οὐδ' ἐπὶ χαίτης δάφνης εἶχε κόρυμβον), Christodoros decided that it must have been the poet Alkman instead (393–397).[19] This idea, incidentally, namely that a wreathed statue must be a prophet (and its converse, that a statue without a wreath could not be a prophet), was one of the ways by which Christodoros established and performed his scholarly credentials as an iconographer before his audience. It may not convince modern art historians, but it was probably sufficient for his late Roman audience. His authority was established in the very act of correcting the name, Alkmaion to Alkman. These identities were apparently not necessarily fixed in stone; the poet-scholar had authority over the hand that carved the names too.

But what did Christodoros do when facing unlabeled and unrecognizable statues? It is possible that he decided to fit them into a Trojan cycle (for reasons we will soon discuss), thus producing the Trojan slant noted above. For what is troubling about the Trojan theme in the *Ekphrasis* is not so much the number and proportion of statues that it accounts for but the obscurity of many of the figures (e.g., Deiphobos, Helenos, Panthoos, Thymoetes, Lampon, Klytios, and others), who are not otherwise known to have been sculpted and for whom Bassett cites no parallels in her catalogue.[20] It is possible that these

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[19] Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 502–503, *Urban Image* 160, 164. Bassett assumes that all bases were labeled, which is implausible, and does not consider the possibility that even labeled bases and statues may have been mismatched.

[20] Cf. *LIMC* III.1 362–367 (Deiphobos) and VIII.1 613–614 (Helenos), who (beyond the statues mentioned by Christodoros) were part of a statue complex at Olympia mentioned by Paus. 5.22.2–3; also VII.1 173–174 (Panthoos), VI.1 191 (Lampon), and 83 (Klytios III), who have no other statues listed. Thymoetes has no entry.

statues came from Troy itself, which, we know, was still a popular tourist attraction in late antiquity and where the statues of the local heroes were revered even by the local bishop in the fourth century, at least if we trust Julian.[21] On the other hand, it is also possible that the identification of some or many of these Trojan figures was a figment of Christodoros' poetic imagination. This could be as true for the well-known figures as for the more obscure ones, since he could easily have "invented" both from the pages of Homer to complement the Trojan and Achaian heroes in the collection who were already labeled. But why would he do this?

The answer has less to do with imperial ideology than with Christodoros' own poetic genealogy. We have already noted the epic quality that he imparts to his epigrams. More interestingly, the longest of them by far is on Homer, taking up forty verses (311–350). Its praise for Homer surpasses that in any other epigram. This is the only case where Christodoros comments on the identity of the artist of the statue, and what he says cannot be taken literally: the artist was none other than Athena herself. Moreover, it is clear that this ascription is predicated not on the exemplary artistic qualities of the statue but on the fact that it is a statue of *Homer*. Again, the subject trumps the statue itself. What we are supposed to understand is that Athena made Homer the poet, not so much that she physically made this statue of Homer. It is the figure represented that exalts the bronze and not the reverse. This reinforces Christodoros' theme about the true relationship between poetry and bronze as well as establishing his own poetic pedigree: just as poetry prevails over bronze, so too does Homer prevail over all the other heroes and poets of antiquity. He was "the companion of Apollo, *my father*, a godlike man,

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[21] Julian *Ep.* 79 Bidez/Cumont (19 Wright). For the tradition of tourism at the site, see C. C. Vermeule, "Neon Ilion and Ilium Novum: Kings, Soldiers, Citizens, and Tourists at Classical Troy," in J. B. Carter and S. P. Morris (eds.), *The Ages of Homer: A Tribute to Emily Townsend Vermeule* (Austin 1995) 467–482 (essentially a catalogue); and M. Sage, "Roman Visitors to Ilium in the Roman Imperial and Late Antique Period: The Symbolic Functions of a Landscape," *Studia Troica* 10 (2000) 211–231.

divine Homer" (320–321). This link may explain why Christo-
doros might have been so eager to populate his *Ekphrasis* with
figures from the Trojan War: it drew him closer to his "father."

Of course, there was always the chance that this would
arouse suspicion. How could Christodoros possibly know the
names and recognize the statues of these obscure Trojans,
when even those in the audience who had their Homer would
probably not know them? This is where the poet's hexametric
genealogy and iconographical expertise stepped in, as guar-
antors of authenticity, and they were reinforced by the per-
formance of scholarship. Modern scholars, after all, regularly
employ rules of thumb to ascertain "authenticity," which in-
clude the *lectio difficilior*, "circumstantial detail," and professions
of ignorance (why would someone who is faking it admit that
he does not know something, for he can just as well make that
up too?). The problem with the way in which these rules are
applied, however, is in the assumption that ancient writers did
not also know them and did not consciously correct for them in
devising their fictions. For example, the author of the *Historia
Augusta* knew perfectly well how to fake authenticity by adding
circumstantial detail, by mixing demonstrable truth with
invention, and by occasionally professing ignorance.[22] Accord-
ingly, he was not found out until the late nineteenth century. In
our case, the very obscurity of some of the heroes functions as
the *lectio difficilior*. We turn to our handbooks to find out who
they were, but Christodoros' audience would have been in-
timidated and secretly chastened by what they did not know.[23]
Thus, obscurity covers fiction's tracks.

[22] D. Fehling, *Herodotus and His 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*,
transl. J. G. Howie (Leeds 1989), accused Herodotos of doing the same. He
was mostly answered as to the facts by W. K. Pritchett, *The Liar School of
Herodotos* (Amsterdam 1993), but I am not convinced that Herodotos did not
know how to fake it with artistry. For forgery in general, see W. Speyer, *Die
literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer
Deutung* (Munich 1971) esp. 195–199 for early Byzantium; cf. A. Grafton,
Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship (Princeton 1990).

[23] Cf. A. Kaldellis, "Things Are Not What They Are: Agathias *Mythistori-
cus* and the Last Laugh of Classical Culture," *CQ* 53 (2003) 295–300, on
testing readers.

It is interesting that Christodoros' single admission of ignorance, concerning the name of a wrestler (229–232), occurs in the middle of the greatest density of Trojan figures in the *Ekphrasis*: οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ δεδάηκα διακρῖναι, he admits, a strong Homeric verb of learning and teaching. Who could be more trustworthy than a poet-scholar who confesses his ignorance? And what could be more predictable in late antiquity than poetic invention and liberty with the facts?[24]

4. *Pompeios, the Romans, and the poets*

While Homer is Christodoros' "father," "the one who fathered the noble race of the emperor Anastasios" was a certain Pompeios (403–404). His statue receives the third-to-last epigram, and it calls for a close commentary, because there is some confusion about the identity of this man, this "leader of the Ausonians" who conquered the Isaurians. Stupperich took him to be the general of the late Republic. Bassett categorically rejects this interpretation, identifying him with the emperor Anastasios' nephew, the consul of 501 named Pompeios, executed by Justinian in the aftermath of the Nika Riots in 532. She adds that "there is no reason to doubt Christodoros' identification."[25] But this is not Christodoros' identification. In fact, what he says makes Bassett's impossible. One would never call a man's nephew "the one who fathered his race." Moreover, the epigram is able to link Anastasios' own campaigns against the Isaurians to those of Pompeios only because the two were different: Anastasios showed himself a true descendant of this Pompeios by the very fact that both men vanquished the Isaurians. There is no evidence that Anastasios' nephew was involved in the Isaurian campaigns of the late fifth century, which were under the command of Ioannes the Skythian and Flavius Ioannes Kyrtos.[26] No, we are certainly dealing here

[24] Cf. A. Kaldellis, "Agathias on History and Poetry," *GRBS* 38 (1997) 295–305, for a poet-historian's perspective.

[25] Stupperich, *IstMitt* 32 (1982) 225–226; Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 504 and n.75, *Urban Image* 55, 182.

[26] For these men, see the *PLRE* II 602–603 (Ioannes 34), 617–618 (Ioannes 93), 898–899 (Pompeius 2); for the latter's career, see also G. Greatrex, "Flavius Hypatius, *quem vidit validum Parthus sensitque timendum*: An Investi-

with a statue of Pompey the Great.

But why Pompey? Why is Anastasios linked to him rather than, say, to Julius Caesar, the subject of an earlier and equally flattering epigram (92–96)? One reason is that Pompey had campaigned specifically in southern Asia Minor, whereas Caesar had not. Moreover, one of Pompey's famous campaigns was directed against the pirates of the southern coast, and in the fifth century the Isaurians were reviled as wild brigands and pirates by many later Romans in spite of the fact (or rather because of it) that one of them had ruled as emperor under the name Zenon (474–491), backed by his mountain-bred henchmen. Zenon was Anastasios' immediate predecessor; in fact, Anastasios was presented to the people in the hippodrome as a true Roman, i.e., not as an Isaurian, which signaled the end of Isaurian rule and brought on the campaigns against them.[27] Christodoros was complicit in this ideological reaction. The *Suda* tells us that he wrote an epic poem, the *Isaurika*, celebrating the victories of Anastasios' generals over the Isaurians.[28] That poem is lost, but we hear its echoes in the *Ekphrasis*, from which we can infer that in the *Isaurika* Christodoros may have

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gation of his Career," *Byzantion* 66 (1996) 120–142, here 129–131. Inexplicably, having made this identification, Bassett then places the nephew Pompeios in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (instead of late fifth and early sixth), to allow his statue to be dedicated in the Zeuxippos in 467 (by which time he would barely have been born). A dedication of (unspecified) statues in that year is mentioned by the *Paschal Chronicle* in connection with the interrogation of Isokasios (n.15 above), but there were probably many more dedications at other times.

[27] For the Isaurians in late antiquity, see B. Shaw, "Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace: The Mountains of Isauria-Cilicia," *JESHO* 33 (1990) 199–270; W. D. Burgess, "Isaurian Names and the Ethnic Identity of the Isaurians in Late Antiquity," *AncW* 21 (1990) 109–121; and H. Elton, "The Nature of the Sixth-Century Isaurians," in S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London 2000) 293–307. For Anastasios presented as a true Roman, see M. Whitby, "Emperors and Armies, A.D. 235–395," in Swain and Edwards, *Approaching Late Antiquity* 156–186, here 182.

[28] *Suda* s.v. Christodoros (IV 827 Adler). For the literary and political context, see F. Nicks, "Literary Culture in the Reign of Anastasius I," in Mitchell and Greatrex, *Ethnicity* 182–204.

compared Anastasios to Pompey the Great, who were both conquerors of the Isaurians and true Romans. This comparison may in fact have been part of the court's own propaganda, for it is also made at the beginning of an extant panegyric of Anastasios, a poem in Latin by Priscian. Introducing the victory in the Isaurian war, Priscian (10–18) traces Anastasios' ancestry to Pompey (*cede nepoti*, etc.).[29] This panegyric was written between 503 and 515, so probably after Christodoros' poems (the epic and the *Ekphrasis*). But we are probably not dealing with a case of literary influence here; the invocation of Pompey had likely been promulgated by the court at the time of the wars themselves, if not earlier, and so provided the material for both poets.

We should not, however, entirely write Pompeios the nephew out of the picture. He was consul in 501, shortly after the conclusion of the Isaurian campaigns and so a year that is a very good candidate for the *Ekphrasis* itself. To link the reigning emperor to an ancient conqueror when the emperor's nephew (and consul) is named after that hero is a significant rhetorical and political act. It may be that the commissioner and recipient of the poem was in fact Pompeios the consul, who is thus indirectly and very artfully alluded to at the end of the poem in the textual interstices between the classical *exemplum* and the praise of his uncle, the emperor. A further possibility is also opened up, which was first proposed by Alan Cameron, that the name of Anastasios' father was in fact Pompeios. The name ran through the family, belonging to Anastasios' nephew (the son of his sister Kaisaria) and to the son of that nephew's brother Hypatios (also the son of Kaisaria, also killed after the Nika Riots). The artistry of the epigram on the ancient general would then be superb indeed: Pompey is "the father of Anastasios' race" not only because he was the ancient Roman general who conquered the Isaurians (as Homer is the father of Christodoros), but also in a literal sense as well. The theory

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[29] P. Coyne, *Priscian of Caesarea's De laude Anastasii imperatoris* (Lewiston 1991) 41, 53, with commentary on 77–81. P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2006) 204, views this genealogy, in the context of the reign of Anastasios, as "conservative and aristocratic."

would also explain why the court—or at least Christodoros and Priscian both—insisted that Anastasios was literally descended from Pompey, rather than merely setting him forth as a model for his campaigns.[30]

The problem with this theory is that Pompeios the consul was the son of Anastasios' sister, and Pompeios the grand-nephew was the grandson of that same sister. Both would presumably have been named after some member of her husband's family, not after her own father (assuming that they were named after anyone in particular, which was not the rule in this period). Kaisaria's husband was Sekoundinos, consul in 511 (oddly, ten years after his son Pompeios was consul).[31] Still, the possibility that the nephew Pompeios was named after his uncle's father cannot be ruled out, as Anastasios was an imperial secretary and may have been worth cultivating in this way. He was already old when he took the throne in 491 after a career that was, presumably, spent at the court. Sekoundinos' career, by contrast, does not begin in our sources before his father-in-law came to the throne in 491, and his late consulship (ten years after that of his son) may indicate that he was an honored nonentity who may have been pleased to name his son after his father-in-law's father, even before Anastasios came to the throne. Cameron also argues that the consul of 517 Flavius Anastasius Paulus Probus Sabinianus Pompeius Anastasius was also a great-nephew of the emperor, a grandson of his brother Paulos, which would firmly attach the name Pompeios to the family of Anastasios and take it away from that of Sekoundinos.

Pompey's presence in the *Ekphrasis* is therefore overdetermined. He was part of the court's Isaurian propaganda (as attested also by Priscianus) and his name was the same as that of the consul of 501 and possibly the emperor's own father as well. If he was not already present in the Zeuxippos, he would have to be invented. And there is reason to believe that some aspects of Christodoros' epigram were invented. Christodoros claims that the statue represented Pompey treading upon

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[30] A. Cameron, "The House of Anastasius," *GRBS* 19 (1978) 259–276, here 259–263.

[31] See *PLRE* II 986 (Secundinus 5) and 1314 (stemma 9).

Isaurian swords, but we may doubt that Pompey was ever represented as specifically conquering Isaurians; in any case, we may certainly reject the possibility that the name of this particular vanquished enemy was inscribed on the statue-base, for Christodoros to read five centuries later. These *Isaurian* swords were imagined by the scholar-poet's timely expertise, possibly even the identity of the conquering general as well. Christodoros simply *had* to have a Pompey in the group, given the historical circumstances.

These considerations—any one of them suffices—suggest furthermore that Pompey does not appear at the end of the poem because that is where this statue stood in the sequence of the Zeuxippos (assuming that Christodoros was following some kind of architectural sequence here).[32] Rather, the final three epigrams of the *Ekphrasis* form a curious group. After Pompey we find "another Homer," not a second statue of *the* Homer, but a statue of a different poet named Homer, a tragic poet from Byzantion whose mother was Moiro: "he adorned his Byzantine *patris* with his verses" (407–413).[33] The last epigram is on Vergil, "the beloved of the Ausones," who became like "another Homer." So we have, in the sequence of the final three epigrams, an ancient Ausonian general who lends his imperial and military prestige to the Romans of today; then a "second Homer," a poet who adorned Byzantion with his verse; and finally the Ausonian epic poet Vergil. The general is linked through symbolic (or real) genealogy to the reigning emperor and, possibly, to his consul nephew, who happens to share the name. The two poets who follow are clearly linked to Christodoros himself and refract his two guises symbolically. He is a descendant of Homer, and as a poet adorning Byzantion with verse he too is "another Homer," like the son of Moiro. The *Suda* also informs us that Christodoros wrote an antiquarian work on the urban landscape of Constantinople, and this further links him to this second Homer, a native of the

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[32] Stupperich, *IstMitt* 32 (1982) 216–227, attempted to reconstruct the sequence; *contra*, Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 500–501.

[33] For this poet, about whom very little is known, see F. Pressler, "Homeros aus Byzantion," *NPauly* 5 (1998) 699.

city. Finally, as the author of the *Isaurika* he is also a Roman epic poet like Vergil, who was himself also "another Homer." The conjunction and sequence at the end is too artful, and indicates that the conclusion of the poem, at least, is finished as we have it.[34] The final epigrams point to our poet in his guises as a descendant of Homer, as "another Homer," as a poet of Byzantion, and as a Roman (Ausonian) epic poet, as well as to his links with the leading Romans of his own time, who were the descendants of ancient Roman generals.

A number of conclusions emerge from this study. First, we see how by A.D. 500 the Greek-speaking rulers and intellectuals of the remaining Roman empire, namely the early Byzantine empire, selectively constructed symbolic genealogies to buttress their claims to political, military, or poetic authority. Anastasios was a descendant of Pompey, Christodoros of Homer and, to a lesser degree, of Vergil. Their contemporary, the orator Aineias of Gaza, had one of the interlocutors in his dialogue *Theophrastos* refer to Plato as his "ancestor" (*progonos*).[35] Such Greek, Roman, and also biblical models would serve to establish symbolic ethnicities—in reality ideological and cultural affinities—throughout the Byzantine millennium. But they were not merely rhetorical. Christodoros' Homeric persona shapes much in the *Ekphrasis*, possibly more than the meter, as I have argued. And interest in the generals of the late Republic was intense in Constantinople in the late fifth and sixth centuries, at least among some intellectuals.[36]

Second, the *Ekphrasis* (and texts like it) must be scrutinized with more caution before factual information about the statue

[34] *Pace* Bassett, *AJA* 100 (1996) 495. For the study of Vergil in Christodoros' Egypt, see Cameron, *Historia* 14 (1965) 494–496. For Christodoros' popularity in Constantinople in his own time, see A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford 1973) 151–154.

[35] *PG* 85.880A, p.6 Colonna. In general, see E. Watts, "An Alexandrian Christian Response to Fifth-Century Neoplatonic Influence," in A. Smith (ed.), *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown* (Swansea 2005) 215–229.

[36] A. Kaldellis, "Republican Theory and Political Dissidence in Ioannes Lydos," *BMGS* 29 (2005) 1–16.

collection of the Zeuxippos can be extracted from them. Their poetic and rhetorical ambitions may account for more than a preference for florid detail over description: "interpretation" in this case may run deeper, to the very constitution of the collection itself and the identification of its basic elements. Our priorities come into question. Instead of trying so hard to circumvent an extant text so as to gain access to a lost collection, perhaps we should focus our attention on what we have, which is a subtle work crafted by a master of late antique rhetoric, verse, and performance. In many ways, it tells us far more about what educated people were *thinking* than what common people were *seeing*—the very theme of Lucian's *The Hall*.[37]

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