

# Katarzyna Warcaba

---

## The language and style of Cassia's secular poetry

---

Scripta Classica 6, 137-149

---

2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

---

*Katarzyna Warcaba*  
*University of Silesia, Katowice*

## The Language and Style of Cassia's Secular Poetry

**Abstract:** “Cassia having lost her chance to be an empress, put on a nun’s habit and started writing many canons, *stichera* and other remarkable poetry” we read in a work entitled *Scriptores originum Constantionopolitanarum* about the only Byzantine female poet who wrote not only religious but also secular poetry. In this article I shortly describe Cassia’s story and her works but the main subject of the text is the issue of language and style of her secular poetry. First, I present definitions of Byzantine levels of style and their characteristics. The analysis of Cassia’s language in some of the most clear examples leads to the conclusion that we can classify Cassia’s *gnomai* as an example of the middle style of Byzantine literature. She usually uses Attic Greek, but she does not avoid some popular expressions; she imitates classical models as well as the Bible and contemporary writers; she is creative in “proper” Attic word formation, but she also creates a noun based on an occupation which was not known to Attic authors, which was considered as “wrong practice”. All in all there are some vernacular elements in her poetry as well as posh, classical ones but they are integrated in such a manner that Cassia’s language is coherent, understandable and pleasant. I also do a short analysis of the dodecasyllable, a metre used by Cassia in her poems and I come to the conclusion that Cassia’s *gnomai* are written in purely unprosodic dodecasyllable. This fact determined Cassia’s poetry to be seen as not “classical” at the very first glance. But since she used this “vernacular” metre for her sentences written in learned language we can see it as a final proof that Cassia’s *gnomai* are a part of the development of Byzantine literature as a link between the classical, posh, and official literature and the later, vernacular literature on which it depended.

**Key words:** Byzantium, antiquity, Cassia, poetry, language

**T**his article focuses on an idea of language and style of Cassia’s *gnomai*. I would like to show a coexistence of classical and Byzantine elements in Cassia’s secular poetry and classify it as a middle-style Byzantine literature.

Since Cassia is not a very well known figure I'll start with giving some information about her life and work. We assume that she was an author of many religious hymns<sup>1</sup> and some verses of secular poetry known as epigrams or *gnomai*<sup>2</sup>. She was born probably about 800 or 805 A.D., the daughter of a *candidatos*, an official at the imperial court in Constantinople. She was well educated and as a young girl she had corresponded with the famous Abbot (Hegoumenos) Theodore of the important imperial monastery of Studion in Constantinople (though reservations must be expressed as to whether this is really credible<sup>3</sup>). She was a Christian of course and she wanted to be a nun. She eventually became a nun, but before she did, something else had happened. Like in the fairytale about Cinderella, the Empress-mother Euphrosyne invited all beautiful (and rich) young ladies from all over the Empire in order to introduce them to her son (stepson in fact). He — Emperor Theophilus (829—842) — was expected to choose one of them to be his wife. With a golden apple in his hand, as Johannes Zonaras describes the scene<sup>4</sup>, Theophilus strolled among the ladies in order to give the apple to whom he liked the most. One of the beauties was Cassia, and she was the one whom Theophilus chose. While giving her a gold apple he said (and it was a statement, not question): ἐκ γυναικὸς ἐρρήη τὰ φαῦλα ('women had been the source of evil'). Cassia calmly answered: ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττω ('but women had been also the source of better things'). So the story ends. Offended Theophilus gave the golden apple and the Empire to Theodora from Paphlagonia and Cassia missed her opportunity to be empress. We can speculate and

<sup>1</sup> She is believed to write 49 hymns (23 of them are probably really written by her), 47 troparia and 2 canons. Cf. A. Tripolitis: *Kassia. The Legend, the Woman and Her Work*. New York—London 1992, pp. XII—XVIII (*Introduction*).

<sup>2</sup> Almost 300 verses of secular poetry by Cassia preserved in four manuscripts, these are: Cod. British Museum Addis. 10072 p. 15, Vol. 93 and 94, Cod. Laur. LXXXVII 16, Cod. Marc. Gr. 408, and Cod. Bibli. of Metochios 404 fol. 3, 4 and 303 (after B.A. Mystakides: "Kasia — Kassiane, onoma autes kai gnomai". *Orthodoxia* 1926, p. 250).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. V. Grumel ("Cassia". In: *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et Géographie Ecclésiastiques* 11, 1949, pp. 1312—1315) considers Cassia as addressee of all three letters written by Theodore to some Cas(s)ia, F. Drexel ("Kasia". In: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 5, 1933, p. 861) and J. Psichari ("Cassia et la pomme d'or". In: *Annuaire de l'Ecole pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences historiques et philologiques*. 11, 1910) think that letter 270 (ed. by J. Cozza-Luzi. NBP, Vol. 8, pt. 1, Rome 1871) was addressed to the poet Cassia, and A. Gardner (*Theodor of Studium, His Life and Times*. London 1905) thinks that it was letter II 205 (ed. by J.J. Sirmond: "Sancti Theodori Studitae epistulae, aliaque scripta dogmatic". Vol. 5. In: *Opera varia*. Ed. J. de la Baume. Paris 1696) which can be considered as written to the poet Cassia. However E.E. Lipšic („K voprosu o cvetskich tecenyiach v Vizantijskoj kulturie IX w. (Kasja)". *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 1951, No 4, pp. 132—148) claims that we cannot identify the addressee of Theodore's letters with the poet Cassia. See also I. Rochow: *Studien zu den Person, Werken und den Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia*. Berlin 1967, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> J. Zonaras: *Epitomae historiarum*. Hrsg. Th. Büttner-Wobst. Bonn 1897, III, pp. 354—355.

debate whether the story is true or not, but the final conclusion remains that Cassia never became empress of Byzantium.

But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good — the end of her political or social career is the beginning of our work. In *Patria Constantinupoleos* we read: Ἡ οὖν Εἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα τὸ τῶν μοναζουσῶν ἐνδιδύσκειται σχῆμα, κανόνας πολλοὺς καὶ στιχερὰ καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ἀξιοθαύμαστα ποιήσασα<sup>5</sup> — “So Ikasia<sup>6</sup> having lost her chance to be an empress, put on a nun’s habit and started writing many canons, *stichera* and other remarkable poetry”. Leaving all her religious poetry which is well described and analysed by many scholars to one side I shall focus on ἄλλα τινὰ ἀξιοθαύμαστα — [her] “other remarkable poetry”. From the study of Karl Krumbacher we have some knowledge about Cassia’s secular poetry<sup>7</sup>. There are nearly 300 verses of epigrammatic or just gnomic poetry preserved in manuscripts with the name of our poet. During this analysis I will use the oldest edition of these verses, because it is the only full and critical edition; it is Krumbacher’s study mentioned above.

There is no need to describe the genre of epigrams or *gnomai*, the only thing to underline is that it was a very popular genre throughout the Byzantine period, and especially during the so-called Dark Ages, when it was nearly the only poetic genre still in use<sup>8</sup>. This is important because Cassia is classified as a representative of this times, by some schools of interpretation<sup>9</sup>.

To make the following analysis clear, we should define what we mean when talking about the language and style of Byzantine literature. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* there is no great difference between these terms. We read that language is “the form of words in which something is communicated; manner or style of expression” or just “the style of a literary composition”<sup>10</sup>,

<sup>5</sup> *Scriptores originum constantinopolitanarum*. Rec. Th. Preger. Lisiae 1907, p. 276.

<sup>6</sup> Ikasia is one of versions of her name which are: Kasia, Kassia, Ikasia, Eikasia, Kassianne. The explanation for these differences should be seen in scribal errors as a result of changed pronunciation of Greek language in Byzantine times. Ikasia and Eikasia are combinations of a name and an article ἡ. This letter was pronounced in the same way as εἰ and ἰ, so we can be sure that it is just a fusion of an article and a noun, and the fact that version Ekasia (Ἠκασία) is not found should be rather proof of this hypothesis than its weak point, as I. Rochow suggested (cf. I. Rochow: *Studien zu den Person...*, pp. 4—5), because if a scribe (and a reader) see series of letters ηκασία most likely he/she thinks that η is an article.

<sup>7</sup> K. Krumbacher: „Kasia“. In: *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-philologische und der historischen Classe der k.b. München* 1897.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “Literature”. In: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Ed. A. Kazhdan. New York 1991, Vol. 2, p. 1235.

<sup>9</sup> When writing about Dark Ages I follow *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (mid-7<sup>th</sup> C. — ca. 800) and it means that Kassia’s poetry doesn’t belong to this period, but some scholars want Dark Ages to last longer.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. “Language”. In: *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Eds. J.A.H. Murray, H. Brandlay, W.A. Craigie, C.T. Onions. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford 1989, Vol. 8, p. 634.

while a style is “a symbol of literary composition”<sup>11</sup>. What can we say about them in terms of Byzantine literature? Firstly, we deal with the situation of *diglossia* not only in Byzantine society but also in Byzantine literature. Proper literary texts are written in the so-called *Hochsprache*, and they are of ‘high style’; the rest are written in vernacular language and are considered to be ‘low style’ literature. It would be naive to be so sure that the distinction was really so straightforward and uncomplicated. However, we cannot forget that there are differences between modern and Byzantine linguistic norms. About such a basic difference Ihor Ševčenko wrote:

Students of style in a modern language compare their evidence with some norm of which a given style is a specialized or individual variant. For them, the ‘conversational’ or ‘usual’ speech or prose of an average educated person is such a norm and ‘high style’ is then seen determined as a deviation from it. In the wake of our Byzantine predecessors, we Byzantinists proceed in the opposite way: we assume with them that works in high style provide the norm, even if we can guess that such works had little to do with the language spoken by their educated authors. Unlike modern linguists, we cannot directly confront the subjects of our study. But we do have at our disposal a large body of prose that can be considered the Byzantine counterpart of the average modern educated speech and can serve as a norm by which to judge Byzantine high style<sup>12</sup>.

In other words, we assume that a high style is a norm and, what is more, just a “normative” norm, correctly defined by Byzantine grammarians. They decided what is considered as “Attic” and good (or rather posh), and what as “non-Attic” and bad (or maybe just ordinary). For instance contracted forms of nouns and verbs, Attic declensions, the indefinite pronoun (particularly in their shorted forms τού, τῷ), reduplication instead of the pluperfect with auxiliary verb, the middle voice, the optative, the accumulation of negations, the pleonastic use of particles, the perfect with present tense meaning, the *figura etymologica*, and many other forms were preferred because they were held to be Attic. On the other hand they avoided Latin expressions or names of people and lands which were not known to Attic authors, so they did not use them in their works<sup>13</sup>.

If they defined the characteristics of high style in so strict a manner, they had to be aware of at least two levels of styles — the high, which followed all the rules

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. “Style”. In: *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Eds. J.A.H. Murray, H. Brandlay, W.A. Craigie, C.T. Onions. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prep. by J.A. Simpson, E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford 1991, Vol. 16, p. 1008.

<sup>12</sup> I. Ševčenko: “Levels of Style in Byzantine Literature”. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 1981, Vol. 31 (1), p. 309.

<sup>13</sup> I follow H. Hunger: “On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΕΣΙΣ) of Antiquity”. *Dumabarton Oaks Papers* 1969—1970, Vol. 23, pp. 30—32.

they described, and the low, which ignored the rules. Byzantinists, however, distinguish one more level — the middle one — according to ancient theories (as, for example, the one by Dionysios of Halicarnassus which was known to some Byzantine theoreticians as well<sup>14</sup>). Ševčenko proposed a return to the ancient theory of styles, which is also used by modern linguists as the Theory of Three Style. He claims that according to this theory, Byzantine scholars will “instinctively” classify as a high style work which

uses periodic structure; its vocabulary is recondite, puristic and contains *hapax legomena* made up on a classical template; its verbal forms, especially its pluperfects, are for the most part Attic; its Scriptural quotations are rare or indirect and its classical ones, plentiful. In a work of middle style, periods are rarely attempted and fill-words and clichés, more abundant; it requires a use of patristic lexicon; and its Scriptural quotations are more frequent than classical ones. A work in low style uses largely paratactic structures; its vocabulary contains a fair number of words unattested in standard dictionaries or coming from languages other than Greek; its verbal forms are not Attic; its Scriptural quotations, more frequently than not, come from New Testament and Psalter<sup>15</sup>.

The first group gathers the highest educated people of those times who wrote for a handful of similarly educated people. The second group, which is the most numerous, is also the most interesting one, because authors who can be classified as writing in middle-style manner are engaged in both learned and vernacular literature. On the one hand, leaving strict rules of so-called Atticism they were precursors of a vernacular literature; on the other hand they brought some elements of ordinary speech into the learned literature. When we accept this level of style in Byzantine literature we can see it as more natural and we can reject a rigid division into puristic learned literature and a completely independent vernacular one. Rather we can consider the proposition of Erich Trapp, who wrote:

[...] scholars of Byzantine studies have been mostly used to accepting a rather strong contrast between learned and popular literature. This contrast is mainly founded upon the evident intention of the literary circles, especially at the court of Constantinople, to emulate ancient writers, a phenomenon somewhat called ‘Atticism’. But on the other hand, as Byzantium in many aspects of life evidently had been a combination of old and new elements, so to say an empire of both the New and Old Center, why shouldn’t this be true of literature too?<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> I. Ševčenko: “Levels of Style...”, p. 290.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

<sup>16</sup> E. Trapp: “Learned and Vernacular Literature in Byzantium: Dichotomy or Symbiosis?” *Dumabarton Oaks Papers* 1995, Vol. 47, p. 116.

If we examine Byzantine literature in this way, a common opinion that this literature had little aesthetic value and was an inferior continuation of its Greco-Roman and patristic or biblical models<sup>17</sup> is not proper any more, as we can see a living language expressed in original texts, reflecting in their form the complicated Byzantine world. Therefore this mixture of old and new is also reflected in Byzantine literature on various levels — language is only one of them.

To find a point in time when this coexistence of learned and vernacular language had started we should look for it in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when the preparatory phase of the vernacular literature had its beginning (according to E. Trapp<sup>18</sup>), what means that from this time we can see a tendency to use vernacular words and phrases in official literature. This tendency was apparently strengthened in the Dark Ages after George of Pisidia and restrained in the age of Photios and later by Symeon Metaphrastes during the times of Macedonian Revival (9<sup>th</sup>—10<sup>th</sup> century). Somewhere between these epochs we meet Cassia's poetry. In which of these epochs should we locate her poetry, or by which was it more influenced, these are the questions we cannot answer wholeheartedly unless we analyse its language and even then we should be very careful about opinions. But our task is to describe the language of these particular epigrams/*gnomai* and use this analysis to determine their style in terms of the Theory of Three Styles mentioned above. What I want to do is just show some characteristics of Cassia's language and, comparing them with rules I quoted at the beginning, define her style as high-, middle- or low-.

The first opinion about Cassia's language was formulated by K. Krumbacher saying, that her language is simple, easy to understand and learned without being over-wrought<sup>19</sup>. That is true, all the *gnomai* are written in simple and understandable manner. Understandable for these people who know ancient Greek, of course (probably that is what Krumbacher meant). Generally we can read Cassia's *gnomai* using the Liddell—Scott—Jones Dictionary<sup>20</sup>. Generally, but not always — the vocabulary the poet uses is usually Attic, but sometimes we meet some confusing word or form which we have to look for in a patristic dictionary<sup>21</sup>, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Period*<sup>22</sup>, *Lexicon of Medieval Greek Folk Literature*<sup>23</sup> or even modern Greek lexicons. There are not many such words or phrases but they are important for our study, so we can deal with them at the beginning.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "Literature". In: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Ed. A. Kazhdan. New York 1991, Vol. 2, p.1235.

<sup>18</sup> E. Trapp: "Learned...", p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> K. Krumbacher: „Kasia...“, p. 338.

<sup>20</sup> I use two editions of this dictionary, these are: *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Compiled by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, A New Edition Revised and Augmented throughout by H.S. Jones. Oxford 1940, Vol. 1—2 and *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Compiled by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. Oxford 1901.

<sup>21</sup> *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Ed. G.W.H. Lampe. Oxford 1995.

<sup>22</sup> *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Period*. Ed. E.A. Sophocles. New York 1975.

<sup>23</sup> Λεξικό της Μεσαιωνικής Ελληνικής Διμώδους Γραμματείας. Ed. E. Kriara. Thesaloniki 1973, Vol. 1—14.



In this section I would like to focus only on some forms, these would be: a comparative ἡδύτερος (I, 22), nouns γεννητρία (I, 55), ἰσαμός (I, 2), περισσοπράκτωρ (I, 144) and verbs διαρρήσω (I, 44, 48) and συναντάω (I, 13) with its syntactic connections. All of them are not Attic and are closer to usual speech than to highly learned one.

The comparative ἡδύτερος comes from the adjective ἡδύς and its regular comparative form is ἡδίωv. The form ἡδύτερος is not a mistake if we consider it as a part of Byzantine Greek language, it was used by many authors from 4<sup>th</sup> and later, especially by John Chrysostom (he used it 26 times). We should also notice that the great Photios uses both Attic and popular forms of comparative, so perhaps in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the comparative ἡδύτερος was such a common form that even for him it sounded well. This excuse does not change the fact that for linguistic purists this form was incorrect.

The noun γεννητρία is interesting for similar reasons, which is not visible at a first glance by the way. The Liddell—Scott—Jones Dictionary says that γεννητρία means the same as γεννήτειρα (which can be found in Plato's *Cratylos*) and according to this dictionary it is a feminine form of γεννητήρ which does not exist, but happily means the same as γεννητής which means *begetter* or *parent*, so using this classical dictionary we can find a meaning. But to find out something more about the form we need use other lexicons. The *Patristic Dictionary*, according to its function, informs us that the noun γεννητρία is used by the Church Fathers (found in *Apophthegmata Patrum* for instance) and means *mother* or *source*. The most interesting information is given by the *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Period*, which compares this form to the Latin *genetrix*. As the ancient feminine form of this noun is γεννήτειρα, the form γεννητρία is likely to have been influenced by Latin *genetrix* especially as it was created in times of Latin and Greek languages coexistence. Later, when people in the East no longer knew Latin, forms like this were probably not considered as strange since the root was Greek and the ending was so similar to Greek. And of course γεννήτειρα and γεννητρία in modern pronunciation sound really similar. However, if there was no semantic difference between these forms (and as we know there was not), Byzantine linguistic purist would have chosen the form used by Plato.

We deal with a similar situation in case of the verb διαρρήσω which is a Byzantine variant of the Attic διαρρήγνυμι. We find the form διαρρήσω in the New Testament, in works of the Church Fathers (such as John Chrysostom or Origen) and some Byzantine writers (such as Gregory Monachos, Hesychius, Romanos Melodos or Socrates Scholasticus). In Cassia's poem verb διαρρήσω is used together with πατάσσω, so we may suspect that she chose this form on purpose, in order to strengthen an impression of destruction (which is included in the meaning of both these verbs) by sound effect. And probably she really did that, but even so we cannot be sure that she knew both forms διαρρήσω and διαρρήγνυμι, and that she made conscious choice between them. The interesting thing is that the form



used by Cassia can be considered as a “truly Byzantine” one, because it was used only in this period. The Modern Greek verb διαρρηγνύω comes direct from the ancient διαρρήγνυμι (as modern Greek σβήνω from Attic σβέννυμι or αναμιγνύω from Attic μείγνυμι), so the verb διαρρήσσω may be seen as a part of the Byzantine spoken language from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

We can say the same about the noun ἰσασμός which is also very Byzantine. But the difference is that this form existed in Antiquity and later disappeared from the learned language. However, the existence of this form in Antiquity is not very well proved — it can be found in work of Epicurus<sup>24</sup> but only in one, uncertain place. The Liddell—Scott—Jones Dictionary gives us a meaning of this noun — ‘equalisation’ — which comes from a verb *to* ‘equalise’ and is created in the same manner as a Greek noun ἰσασμός from a Greek verb ἰσάζω (perfectum ἰσασμαι). Such a way of creating words was very common among the authors of Byzantine Chronicles, as *Grammatik der Byzantinischen Chroniken*<sup>25</sup> says, and probably it was considered as a classicizing word formation. But since we know that a noun ἰσασμός was a common word in the late Byzantine period among folk writers, we should suppose that Cassia used the popular vernacular word rather than she created her own deriving it from ancient verb as some other authors did.

Another example of using contemporary language is the verb συναντάω. As Attic it should have a dative form as an object, but in Cassia’s poetry it is connected with the accusative. Such a syntax was proper only among Asiatic Greeks. But since we know that modern word συνανδῶ has an αιτιατική — accusative as an object and that the dative form, which does not exist at all (apart from occasional stock phrases) in modern Greek, in Byzantine Greek was less and less used, we can think that it is again a mistake of using common, contemporary forms instead of the ancient ones. Apart from this one point, there are no more syntactic mistakes (in terms of Attic syntax) in Cassia’s *gnomai*, or at least not such evident ones. We can see as a syntactic mistake also abuse of particle δέ which in some verses (I, 15, 16, 19, 27, 64 and 112) is used without syntactical reason, which could of course be a wrong imitation of Menander’s sentences taken out of a context, as Krumbacher suggested<sup>26</sup>.

These few examples show why Cassia’s language is not so Attic and “posh” as every good snobbish Byzantine author wanted to be. However, apart from very few non-Attic forms and formulas (those mentioned above and some similar ones) Cassia’s syntax is correct and her language is completely understandable for everyone who knows ancient Greek. What is more, sometimes she shows her linguistic abilities for instance in the field of word formation. As examples of this practice

<sup>24</sup> Epicur Phil.: *Deperditorum Librorum reliquiae*. Treatise 29, Fragment 22.

<sup>25</sup> Stamatios B. Psaltēs: *Grammatik der Byzantinischen Chroniken*. Göttingen 1974, pp. 257—258.

<sup>26</sup> K. Krumbacher: *Kasia...*, p. 343.

we can consider the participle *ὑπερπλουτισθέντες* and the adjective *φauλῶδες* which occurs in a poem on the Armenians (III, 42 and 34 respectively).

The first of them, *ὑπερπλουτισθέντες* comes probably from the verb *ὑπερπλουτίζω*. Probably, because apart from Cassia no-one uses this participle (and the verb it probably derives from). There is a similar verb *ὑπερπλουτέω* in ancient Greek used (or even created) by Aristophanes which means ‘to be exceedingly rich’. A difference between *πλουτέω* and *πλουτίζω* is simple, the first means ‘to be rich, wealthy’ while the second means ‘to make wealthy’. Cassia then created a new word based on the existing terms and her *ὑπερπλουτίζω* by analogy means ‘to make exceeding wealthy’, which in this particular case is ‘made exceeding wealthy’.

Also the next example, an adjective *φauλῶδες* is made by analogy to an existing ancient word. There is the adjective *φauλος* with the suffix *-ώδης* which ending is characteristic of ancient rather than of medieval Greek. And the analogy is obvious because we have an adjective *μανιώδες* in a very next verse.

Another situation is the noun *περισσοπράκτωρ* which probably comes from the verb *περισσοπρακτέω* — ‘to exact more taxes than is due’ rather than from a conjunction of *περισσός* — ‘beyond a natural number or size’ and *πράκτωρ* — ‘one who does’ which is what A. Tripolitis suggests by her translation<sup>27</sup>. I agree with A. Kazhdan who underlines that Cassia created a neologism “possible hinting at the imperial administration in which the *praktor* was an important financial official”<sup>28</sup>, which means that she created a term strictly connected with contemporary world what was bad seen in terms of high style language as was told earlier.

But returning to proper and praiseworthy practices, we come back to the epigram on Armenians. Despite the virtue of word formations mentioned above, this epigram is also good example of creative imitation of classical models. If we look at the last verse we find a superlative *φauλεπιφauλότατοι*, which could be considered as another example of Cassia’s word formation initiative since we had not already found it somewhere else. The same complicated superlative was used by Demodokos from Leros, who wrote a poem on the Cappadocians. Comparing these two poems — Cassia’s epigram on the Armenians and Demodokos’s on the Cappadocians<sup>29</sup> we can see similarity in their construction. From verse III, 37 (which is the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of this epigram) Cassia imitate Demodokos’s poem introducing this imitation by words: *εἶπε τις σοφός*. In next 4 verses she uses an adjective *φauλος* and its degrees in the same manner as Demodokos did. She takes a form, a structure of epigram from the ancient writer and fills it with contemporary content.

<sup>27</sup> She translates this noun as “person inclined to overdo”. Cf. A. Tripolitis: *Kassia. The legend...*, p. 125.

<sup>28</sup> A. Kazhdan: *A History of Byzantine Literature*. Athens 1999, p. 324.

<sup>29</sup> *Anthologia Graeca*. Ed. H. Beckby; *Anthologia Graeca*, 4 Vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Munich 1965—1966, TLG, book 11, epigram 238.

The opposite situation is a poem on Destiny (I, 71—73) which is an imitation of Palladas's distich. The main thought in these poems is the same and first verses nearly identical. Only the form make a difference — Cassia's poem is in dodecasyllable verse and Palladas's is an elegiac distich. So, in this case our poet puts an ancient content into a contemporary metrical form.

These are not the only imitations or intextual allusions in Cassia's poetry. We also find there some similarities with such an important genre as ancient drama; however we can be nearly certain that she did not know all ancient tragedies but only some pieces included in the school syllabus or widely known from some *florilegia*. But even so verses I, 141, 142 and III, 62 can be considered as an imitation of the ancient tragedy practice because of the many exclamations as παπαῖ, ἰώ, φεῦ, οὐαί, πόποι, οἴμοι used together like it was in tragedies.

There are also imitations of Menander's verses, but only his verses, not whole comedies. Few examples: Cassia's verse I, 20 Φίλος τὸν φίλον καὶ χώρα χώραν σῶζει and Menander's: Ἀνὴρ τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ πόλις σῶζει πόλιν<sup>30</sup> or Cassia's κρεῖσσον καὶ νόσος τῆς κακῆς εὐεξίας (I,78) and Menander's νόσον δὲ κρεῖττόν ἐστιν ἢ λύπην φέρειν<sup>31</sup>.

However she imitates not only the classical models. For instance verse III, 97: θεὸν ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὸ τέλος is a paraphrase of Gregory of Nazianzus's ἀρχὴν ἀπάντων καὶ τέλος ποιοῦ θεόν. Also verses I, 138—143 (and III, 4—7) are imitations of Gregory's epigram (I, 2. 22) which starts with the same word δεινόν and ends with nearly the same verse. A. Kazhdan suggests that whole epigram on the Fool (which included verses mentioned above) is related to the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach* which is full of invectives against μωρός — the fool<sup>32</sup>.

According to this short analysis and to the rules I presented at the beginning, we can classify Cassia's *gnomai* as an example of the middle style of Byzantine literature. She writes usually Attic Greek, but she does not avoid some popular expressions; she imitates classical models as well as the Bible and contemporary writers; she is creative in "proper" Attic word formation, but she also creates a noun based on an occupation which was not known to Attic authors, which was considered as "wrong practice". All in all there are some vernacular elements in her poetry as well as posh, classical ones but they are integrated in such manner that Cassia's language is coherent, understandable and pleasant. This pleasure of reading Cassia's *gnomai* is caused also by stylistic figures which we find in these texts. And the analysis of language and style would not be complete if I did not mention at least some of them.

<sup>30</sup> *Fragmenta comicorum Graecorum*. Ed. A. Meineke. Vol. 5.1. Berlin 1857, repr. De Gruyter, 1970 TLG, Menandri Sententiae I, 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 383.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Kazhdan: *A History...*, p. 324.

A Kazhdan expresses an opinion that Cassia's "favourite play is polyptoton (traductio) and similar figures which bind the sentence lexically"<sup>33</sup> as for instance verses I, 2—3 φίλω φιλοῦντι χαρίζου τὸ φιλεῖσθαι, τῷ δ' ἀγνώμονι εἰς κενὸν τὸ φιλεῖσθαι where a noun φίλος and related verb φιλέω are repeated four times in two lines. A similar figure is alliteration which we can see for instance in verse I, 57 πλουτῶν πλήθυνον τοὺς φίλους ἐκ τοῦ πλούτου where an effect of polyptoton πλουτῶν — πλούτου is braced with one more word — πλήθυνον which is of a different root but beginning with the same sound. Talking about her favourites we have to mention an anaphora used for instance in an epigram about hatred, which fills whole II collection (and is partly included in I, 85—92) where each single verse begins with a verb μισῶ. If verses I, 77—82 are considered as one epigram, we have an anaphora again, but not in the whole poem as before, because the poet decided to abandon a figure of anaphora in the last 2 verses in favour of developing a thought from verse 80. Another interesting example is the long epigram III, 74—97, where Cassia uses a combination of anaphores. There are 3 verses beginning with a word μοναχός, the next 5 verses beginning with a phrase μοναχοῦ βίος then she returns to the expression μοναχός ἐστίν (six verses) and again to phrase (a little changed) βίος μοναστοῦ. There are only 2 verses in whole epigram which are excluded from this anaphoric play (77 and 89) and their function is to separate the first group of verses beginning with μοναχός ('monk') from verses beginning with μοναχοῦ βίος or βίος μοναστοῦ ('monk's life').

I might add that she avoids tautologies, accumulation of synonyms and hendiads but instead her expressions are direct and strong as in the epigram with the anaphoric use of μισῶ, especially verse: μισῶ τὸν μοιχόν, ὅταν κρίνη τὸν πόρνον (I, 86 = II, 2). And I end this part of the analysis by saying one more important thing.

All poetry is distinguished from the rest of literature by one thing — its form. And this form is named versification. Today it seems to be less important but in ancient poetry a metre was a constitutive aspect of every piece of poetry. I will not write at length about ancient and Byzantine metric, but there are some essential things which should be underline.

First of all, ancient metric was prosodic what means that they distinguished long and short syllables and built their metrical patterns on a basis of the syllables' "quality". And one day Greek language users realised that they could not hear a difference between long and short vowels any more. But as they were brave and resourceful; they did not stop writing poetry based on prosodic patterns. That is the reason why Byzantine poets still tried to write hexameters, anacreontics, elegiac distichs and iambic trimetre. The fun was great: especially for those who wrote, probably for those who read too. But here we have another catch — ancient poetry was not created in order to be read but in order to be recited and to be heard. And

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 325.

Byzantine poetry was the same<sup>34</sup>. So, more time passed and Byzantine society realised that their iambic trimetre was slightly different from the ancient one, because their iambic trimetre was “pure”. This means that it consisted of 12 syllables. After some long time 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars decided that these trimetres are not iambic trimetres any more, but they are Byzantine dodecasyllables. It is quite easy to describe this “new” metre: Byzantine dodecasyllables generally need 12 syllables, a stress on penultimate 1, a pause (cezura) after the fifth syllable (penthemimeres) or after the seventh one (hephthemimeres)<sup>35</sup>. These are most important rules. There are some minor ones, described very precisely by H. Hunger<sup>36</sup> and P. Maas<sup>37</sup>, but since there is no place and no time to characterize them, I shall say only that Cassia’s dodecasyllables deal with all of them perfectly, and that she did not write even one prosodic iambic trimetre (apart from 8 verses based on Menander’s ones).

Why it is so important? Because it determined Cassia’s poetry to be not “classical” at the very first glance. As M. Lauxtermann says:

Cassia is not a member of the club of classicizing verse mongers. Her dodecasyllables are purely accentual and show complete disregard for prosody. [...] the unprosodic variant of the dodecasyllable is essentially a metre used for two genres only: gnomic epigrams, such as the ones by Cassia, and Aesopic fables “translated” into Byzantine Greek

and

gnomic epigrams and metrical fables are forms of Byzantine lowbrow literature. They make use of ‘vulgar’ unprosodic dodecasyllable. Their style is unpretentious, their language plain and unadorned<sup>38</sup>.

That is true, Cassia’s *gnomai* are written in purely unprosodic dodecasyllable, but it is worth underlining that since such a metre in 9<sup>th</sup> and even in 10<sup>th</sup> century was used very rarely and usually in a genre of gnomic epigrams we can consider Cassia as an one of the authors who first used this essentially Byzantine metre. And she not only used it in very proper way, according to all major and minor rules, but she also used it for her sentences written in learned language. And that is

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. P. Marciniak: “Byzantine Theatron — A Place for Performance?” In: *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*. Ed. M. Grünbart. Berlin—New York 2007, pp. 282—285.

<sup>35</sup> These pauses concern early dodecasyllables, later we have a strong pause in the middle of a verse, after the sixth syllable.

<sup>36</sup> H. Hunger: *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*. München 1978, Vol. 2, pp. 92—93.

<sup>37</sup> P. Maas: “Der byzantinische Zwölfsilber”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 1903, Vol. 12, pp. 278—323.

<sup>38</sup> M. Lauxtermann: *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*. Wien 2003, p. 253.

the point — Cassia's *gnomai* are a part of the development of Byzantine literature as a link between the classical, posh, and official literature and the later, vernacular literature on which it depended. Studying the language and style of her poetry we may see how classical, highly sophisticated elements characteristic of Byzantine high style literature are mixed with some truly live pieces of contemporary language. And we can pompously say that such a poetry proves Erich Trapp's reflection I noted at the beginning: "[...] as Byzantium in many aspects of life evidently had been a combination of old and new elements, why shouldn't this be true of literature too?"<sup>39</sup> Since we find them in Cassia's language, it is true.

---

<sup>39</sup> E Trapp: "Learned...", p. 116.