

# EPISTOLARY POETRY IN BYZANTIUM AND BEYOND

An Anthology with Critical Essays

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# 4

## FUNCTIONS OF LETTERS IN VERSE AND PROSE

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# 4

## FUNCTIONS OF LETTERS IN VERSE AND PROSE

### A Comparison of Manuel Philes and Theodore Hyrtakenos

*Krystina Kubina\**

“But if you are engaged with other words and cannot easily come to us, send me by way of response the incomparable grace of your appearance, depicted through imitation, through which I will abolish the toils of my soul.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Manuel Philes, the most prolific poet of the late Byzantine era, asks a friend to send him a written image of himself—namely a letter.<sup>2</sup> Philes addressed many poems to his contemporaries—from a tax official to the emperor—mainly, but not exclusively, in the context of pleading for a gift or payment. Previous scholarship on Philes has failed to notice that these poems are clearly letters in verse and has therefore often come to problematic conclusions about the context and purpose of their composition. In fact, Philes’ oeuvre includes the richest collection of verse letters written by any Byzantine writer. This essay aims to provide an analysis of this vast corpus of Philes’ verse letters by studying the various functions they fulfilled. After a short introduction to the classification and importance of epistolary poetry in Philes’ work, I

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1. Εἰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλους ἀσχολούμενος λόγους / ἔλθειν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εὐχερῶς οὐκ ἰσχύσεις, / τῆς σῆς γε μορφῆς τὴν ἀσύγκριτον χάριν, / δι’ ἧς ἀναιρῶ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τοὺς πόνους, / μιμητικῶς γραφεῖσαν ἀντίπεμπέ μοι (M60.32–36, ed. Martini 1906, 78). For Philes’ poems, I use the sigla as indicated in Kubina 2020a, IX–X. They refer to the following editions: Miller 1855–57—sigla E, F, P, V, App.; Martini 1906—siglum M; Gedeon 1882–83—siglum G; Martini 1896—Siglum M-ap; Kubina 2020b—Siglum K-FP.
2. The idea that a letter is an image of its composer’s soul goes back to Aristotle and became a common topos in Byzantine epistolography (Karlsson 1962, 34–40). Philes strengthens the metaphor, as here the letter is not only an image of his friend’s soul but imitates his shape.

will present and discuss a model of three basic functions of letters, namely the referential, the social, and the literary. In order to highlight the peculiarities of Philes, I will compare his verse letters to the prose letters of the Constantinopolitan teacher Theodore Hyrtakenos. This will lead to final considerations about the reasons for Philes' preference for verse over prose when writing letters.

The poet Manuel Philes and the teacher Theodore Hyrtakenos have been mentioned in the same breath by previous scholars as well.<sup>3</sup> They were contemporaries, both born probably around 1270 and living at least up to the early 1330s.<sup>4</sup> Both were men of letters who are known to us almost exclusively through their own works. Under Philes' name, about 25,000 verses of various poetic genres have come down to us, while under Hyrtakenos' name 93 letters and several orations and hagiographical pieces have been transmitted. Hyrtakenos also composed verse (cf. Letters 1.3–4, 37.38–40, where Hyrtakenos refers to an encomium in hexameters, and 52), but none of this has survived. Like Philes, Hyrtakenos seems to have been a member of a middle class of literati who made a living with their learning and writing but never ascended the social ladder to a top position.<sup>5</sup> However, both were in contact with a great number of high-standing members of the Constantinopolitan upper class. They even shared some addressees.<sup>6</sup> Both writers worked for these aristocrats—Hyrtakenos as a teacher and orator, Philes as a poet writing on commission. Finally, their texts are full of pleas for material and intangible support. Because of these similarities, I suggest that through a comparison between Hyrtakenos' and Philes' writings, we can come to a better understanding of the functions

3. See, e.g. Krumbacher 1897, 484; Constantinides 1982, 95. For a comprehensive overview of the secondary literature on Philes, see Kubina 2020a, 21–8. Hyrtakenos has received much less scholarly attention. Recent contributions include the critical edition and translation by Karpozilos and Fatouros 2017; Caballero Sánchez 2014; Dolezal and Mavroudi 2002; Hernández de la Fuente 2002–3; Karpozilos 1990; Constantinides 1982, 93–95; on his activity as a teacher, see Mergiali 1996, 90–5; Karpozilos 1991, 256–59.
4. On the life of Philes (*PLP* 29817), see Stickler 1992, 10–36 and most recently Rhoby 2016b; Kubina 2020a, 3–12. On Hyrtakenos (*PLP* 29507), see Karpozilos 1990, 277–9.
5. On this group of literati, see Matschke and Tinnefeld 2001, 232–40.
6. Namely Andronikos Komnenos Palaiologos (*PLP* 21439; Philes, Poems E213, M65, M–ap 1, M11–M15; Hyrtakenos, Letter 15), Theodore Patrikiotes (*PLP* 22077; Philes, Poems App.2, F3, F4, F6–F17, F23–F31, F35, F35a, F46, F82, F83, F134–F136, F138, F189, F141, F144–F148, F156–F170, possibly also F36 and M75; Hyrtakenos, Letter 47), Pepagomenos (*PLP* 22345; Philes, Poems P78, P84–P90; Hyrtakenos, Letters 48, 51); John Kantakouzenos, the later emperor John VI (*PLP* 10973; Philes, Poems F1, M76, M79, M80; Hyrtakenos, Letters 54, 55); Theodore Kabasilas (*PLP* 10090; Philes, Poems K–FP4; Hyrtakenos, Letter 43). They both address numerous letters or poems to emperor Andronikos II (Hyrtakenos, Letters 1, 2, 32–34, 53, 58, 59, 64, 75, 83, 84, 88, 89, 92 as well as an oration to the emperor; Philes addresses dozens of poems to Andronikos II). Hyrtakenos wrote a monody for the deceased co-emperor Michael IX to whom Philes had addressed various poems (with certainty F214, M64, P61, and the poem on animals). For empress Irene Palaiologina (Yolanda of Montferrat), Hyrtakenos wrote another monody and Philes an epitaph (M7) as well as a verse letter (P149).

of the latter's verse letters. There is one major difference between the life and work of Philes and Hyrtakenos, however: Philes was so popular a poet among his contemporaries and later generations of readers that his work is transmitted in more than 150 manuscripts, about 60 of which date to the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Hyrtakenos' oeuvre survives in only one manuscript, and this was probably commissioned or executed by the author himself.<sup>8</sup>

Philes' poems belong to various genres: epigrams (especially epigrams on works of art, epitaphs, book epigrams), didactic poems, a *metaphrasis* of the psalms, and many more. Yet, there are about 320 similar texts that cannot be classified according to established genres. Understanding genre as a group of texts that share basic characteristics,<sup>9</sup> most of these poems can be considered verse letters due to specific explicit and implicit markers.<sup>10</sup> Philes himself calls one of his poems a "letter" or in Greek *γράμματα* (literally, "written words"—besides *ἐπιστολή* ["thing sent, message"] the most common Greek term for letter)<sup>11</sup> and another an *ἀντίγλωσσον* (literally, "tongue substitute"—a word coined by Philes; see Poems F110.18–19 and F57.8). For the rest of the poems, however, we have to infer their genre from various features they share. They are all addressed to a living individual. In all of them, a literarily constructed "I" speaks, who is spatially separated from his addressee. Often, the poems bear a heading in the form of *εἰς* or *πρὸς τινα* ("to someone") in the manuscripts. In addition, Philes regularly refers in these poems to the process of writing, sending, transmitting, and reading letters. Hence, words like "to write" (*γράφειν*) and "to send" (*πέμπειν*) are very common as are references to messengers. Furthermore, time and again the speaking "I" makes reference to a preceding act of communication and thus to an ongoing correspondence, of which only pieces survive. In some cases, the manuscript tradition presents a series of chronologically ordered poems, which—judging from their content—should be read as one side of a correspondence. In terms of formal aspects, there are formulae of address, (health) wishes, and traces of postscripts—all of which are generic features of the letter. Dominant themes in these poems are friendship and gift-giving, especially in connection with the idea of reciprocation, which are again highly characteristic of epistolography.<sup>12</sup> In short, the poems point in so many ways to letter-writing, both as a communicative practice and as a literary genre, that one cannot but understand them as verse letters.

However, not every poem that could have potentially been written and sent as a letter can be classified this easily, as quite often the aforementioned explicit markers are missing. In contrast to prose letters, verse letters are not assembled

7. See the list in Stickler 1992, 209–42.

8. See Caballero Sánchez 2014.

9. See Vofkamp 1977; Hempfer 1973; Hempfer 2010; and Introduction, 16–17.

10. For a fuller discussion, see Kubina 2018.

11. See Introduction, 10–11.

12. See Grünbart 2011b; Papaioannou 2007; Mullett 1988; Mullett 1999; and Introduction, 12.

in manuscript collections under the heading “letters” (ἐπιστολαί), which makes their identification rather difficult.<sup>13</sup> The exact corpus of Philes’ verse letters can thus not be established with certainty. Groups of texts that can be classified as a genre, however, always have fuzzy edges.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that the definition of the genre is not valid. Additionally, we should keep in mind that many prose letters, too, do not bear text-internal references to their epistolarity. Letter 55 by Hyrtakenos is a case in point: if it were not for the information in Letter 54, where Hyrtakenos states that he will send an encomium in the form of a letter, Letter 55 would read as an encomiastic oration without any epistolary features.

As a means of communication, the letter consists of three major components: its content, the connection between a sender and an addressee, and its form. Based on this distinction, I propose to identify three major functions of letters: the referential, the social, and the literary.<sup>15</sup> These are, of course, inextricably interconnected. In particular, the form and content of a literary text cannot be separated from one another, since the content is always mediated through the form. The suggested model can nonetheless serve as a hermeneutic tool.

The referential function connects literary texts to the extra-literary world. In this aspect, the similarities between Philes and Hyrtakenos are striking. Not only do the biographies of the two authors seem to converge in several respects, as mentioned before, but they also use the same vocabulary when they refer to their situation in life. Both describe in detail their education and rhetorical skills, with the help of which they hoped to gain social and material profit. Hyrtakenos sets his hopes primarily on his career as a teacher while Philes highlights in general his knowledge of rhetoric and the sciences as well as his ability to compose verse. Both repeatedly vent their frustration with their failure to achieve the advancement they aspire to: while artisans strive and accumulate wealth, they suffer from poverty (e.g. Philes, *Poems* App.52 = *Anthology* no. 45, P149, and the poems to Theodore Patrikiotes: *Anthology* nos. 38–43; Hyrtakenos, *Letters* 1, 8, 16, 38, 63, 64, 74, 77, 93). This kind of lament of the (allegedly) impoverished intellectual is a common topos from the twelfth century onwards. Well-known examples include Theodore Prodromos, the so-called *Ptochoprodromos* (probably to be identified with Theodore Prodromos), and Michael Haploucheir.<sup>16</sup> Both Hyrtakenos and Philes emphatically say

13. See Rhoby 2015, 276 who remarks that rubrics only very rarely identify poems as letters. On collections of prose letters and their transmission, see Riehle 2020c, 477–90; Tinnefeld 2000; Kotzabassi 2014; Papaioannou 2012.

14. See Kubina 2018.

15. See Bühler 1932, with Jakobson 1960. For a fuller analysis of the functions of Philes’ laudatory poems, see Kubina 2020a, 168–224; for a similar model applied to Byzantine letters, see Riehle 2011a, 202–14.

16. See Theodore Prodromos, *Poems*, no. 38, ed. Hörandner 1974, 377–81; *Ptochoprodromos*, *Poems*, no. 3, ed. Eideneier 2012, 173–94; Michael Haploucheir, *Dramation*, ed. Leone 1969, 268–79.

“Farewell” to the books. Philes cries out, “Begone, oh words, books, labors!” (Οἴχεσθε λοιπὸν ὧ λόγοι, βιβλίοι, πόνοι, Poem App.52.8 = Anthology no. 45) using assonance in vowel sounds of /o/ and /i/ in an asyndetic construction. Hyrtakenos makes similar use of parallelism: “But if not [sc. if I do not get help], Hermes for those young people—go to Cerberus! School—or better bile—to hell with you!”<sup>17</sup> He refers to ancient mythological figures, namely Hermes as the god of learning and Cerberus, the dog guarding the gates to the underworld; he uses proverbial curses (ἐς Κέρβερον [“go to Cerberus!”] and ἐς κόρακας [“go to hell (literally, ‘to the ravens!’)”) known from ancient comedy; and, finally, he creates wordplay with the rhyme σχολή (“school”)—χολή (“bile”)—most likely an allusion to the life of Diogenes the Cynic as narrated by Diogenes Laertius.<sup>18</sup> In both passages cited, the authors turn their backs on learning while, ironically, at the same time vaunting their education.

The similarities between Philes and Hyrtakenos do not end here. Both complain that the guards of the imperial or patriarchal palace do not grant them access to their benefactors (e.g. Philes, Poems F101, P175; Hyrtakenos, Letters 3, 4). They use semi-formulaic expressions to open their requests, such as ἀναφέρω and τολμηρῶς, which are both technical terms for ritualized petitions to the emperor (e.g. Philes, Poems F100.tit, V17.tit, V91.tit, P50.22, P58.165, P196.70; Hyrtakenos, Letters 1.2, 2.2, 32.2, 33.2, 34.2).<sup>19</sup> They describe the same environment, in which learning is valued and can advance careers, although they themselves fail to achieve this.<sup>20</sup> Their letters hence fulfil the referential function in very similar ways. There is, however, an important difference between the two: Philes always asks for specific remuneration for his texts. It seems that he works as a freelance author without regular income, who receives payment for each commissioned work. Although Hyrtakenos, too, asks for this kind of payment, he also repeatedly petitions the emperor to grant him a *sitēresion*, i.e. an annual allowance of grain, for his regular teaching activities. In this way, he seeks official court employment.

Striking similarities can also be found with regard to the social function. Both authors use similar techniques in terms of self-disclosure,<sup>21</sup> the creation of a relationship between sender and recipient, and the requests that they articulate.

17. Theodore Hyrtakenos, *Letters*, no. 63, eds. Karpozilos and Fatouros, 234.17–19: Εἰ δ’ οὖν, Ἐρμῆς αὐτοῖς νέους ἐς Κέρβερον, σχολή, χολή δὲ μᾶλλον, ἐς κόρακας.

18. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VI.24: Δεινός τ’ ἦν κατασοβαρεύσασθαι τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τὴν μὲν Εὐκλείδου σχολὴν ἔλεγε χολήν.

19. On petitions, see Macrides 2004. The expression is also known from official documents; see Hunger 1978, 1:217.

20. On the contribution of rhetoric to politics and social advancement in this period, see Gaul 2011; Laiou 1996.

21. I have separated the function of self-disclosure from the social function elsewhere with regard to Philes’ laudatory poems (see Kubina 2020a, 168–70 and 185–208: “expressive Funktion” and “soziale Funktion”). In the present context, it seems more logical to address these together as the most important elements of communication.

Philes' poems to Theodore Patrikiotes are a case in point (see Anthology nos. 38–43). This tax official was part of the Byzantine civil service in Thrace and must have possessed considerable wealth. He was also a correspondent of Theodore Hyrtakenos (Letter 47) as well as of Michael Gabras (Letters 169–174, 192, 196, 252, 323, 327 and 328, ed. Fatouros 1973), an official of the imperial chancellery.<sup>22</sup> Within Philes' oeuvre, there are 62 poems that we can identify with certainty as addressed to him, most of which can be classified as verse letters containing requests for material support.<sup>23</sup> One might expect that Philes in such pleas would position himself far below his addressee to gain profit. Yet, Philes' poems draw a much more complex picture. On the one hand, he praises him for his generosity, his general virtue, and his high, unattainable nature. On the other hand, he stages a close friendship between himself and Patrikiotes. Three epithets he uses to describe himself and Patrikiotes, all derived from the word "soul" (ψυχή), are telling in this respect: while he opens one poem with the words "To the one with a great soul [i.e. Patrikiotes] from the one with a small soul [i.e. Philes]" (Πρὸς τὸν μεγαλόψυχον ὁ συμκρόψυχος, Poem F135.1), in another poem he calls his correspondent "light of the same soul" (ὁμόψυχον φῶς, Poem F141.10). These different forms of address are due to the literary character of the poems. Whereas F135 uses an antithetical setting, contrasting Patrikiotes' wealth with Philes' poverty, F141 is concerned with Patrikiotes' praise, and the request for help is expressed only briefly. The focus is here on the friendly relationship between the sender and the recipient. Status, as expressed in literary terms, should therefore be regarded as variable (i.e. depending on context) and not as a static entity. Accordingly, strategies of self-disclosure can never be analyzed without considering the fluid relationship between sender and addressee, as status itself is a relational category.<sup>24</sup> Status is also relative insofar as it can be adapted to author, addressee, and occasion, while different roles can be assumed at the same time. In the passages cited, the power relations are clear: whether Philes positions himself on the same level as Patrikiotes or below him, it is the poet who requests something from the tax official, whose influence rests on his fiscal authority and material wealth. In this way, their relationship is asymmetrical, with Philes occupying a lower level. Yet, this asymmetry can be reversed when Philes emphasizes his power—namely his literary production and its social impact. Some of the verse letters read like demand notes. In these, Philes highlights the value of the poems he wrote for Patrikiotes, urges him to pay, and threatens not to write verses in the future if the recipient does not meet his demands (see e.g. Poems F6, F10, and F162 = Anthology nos. 38, 40–41). What is more, the poet not only threatens to

22. *PLP* 22077. On Patrikiotes, see Tziatzi-Papagianni 2011, who focuses on the *realia* in Philes' poems, and Matschke and Tinnefeld 2001, 40–42.

23. See Kubina 2020a, 215–21; Kubina 2018, 166–7.

24. For similar observations on devotional epigrams, see Drpić 2016, 343–51.

withhold his service, but also warns him that he might make use of his power over Patrikiotes, implying that he will publicly censure his correspondent if the latter does not show himself to be worthy of praise. To achieve this end, the poet uses irony and sarcasm in several poems, undermining the hyperbolic praise established in other texts. In Poem F166 (= Anthology **no. 42**), Philes praises Patrikiotes for the fine dishes that he sent in order to refine the poet's kitchen. He then comments on a specific gift: "The dressed fish, swimming backwards as is its nature, / once eaten wriggled up in the manner of a crab / in order to be spat out and change its course" (vv. 7–9). The fish he received was of such an exquisite quality that it wriggled up from the poet's stomach and reversed its course. The whole poem is written in an encomiastic mode. It is only in the second-to-last verse with the word ἐξερασμός ("vomiting") that this tone changes and the actual aim of the poem becomes clear, namely to rebuke Patrikiotes for his nasty gift. In this way, the seeming encomium of Patrikiotes is turned into a *psogos*, or speech of blame, which in rhetorical theory is the negative counterpart of encomium. Even though the playful rejection of a friend's gift is a common topos in letter-writing,<sup>25</sup> the abuse should not be dismissed. The verse letters prove that status and power are highly fluid and can be rapidly created and reversed.

Pleading is a prevalent theme and often openly addressed. Philes abundantly uses imperatives to urge his addressees to send him various commodities such as a horse, fodder for his horse, meat, money, a cloak, books, gold and silver, among other things (see e.g. Poems App.52, M70, E191, F6, F162, F166 = Anthology **nos. 45, 44, 35, 38, 41–42**). Indirect forms of request are not lacking either. In Poem F170 (= Anthology **no. 43**), for example, Philes says that he always praised his addressee Patrikiotes for his good behavior towards his friends and ends with the line: "Should I now look with suspicion at you, great mind?" The appeal here is implicit: if his addressee wishes to be considered a good friend, he should comply with Philes' request. Philes also begs for forgiveness of the emperor after he had lost his favor because of some offence (ἁμαρτία) that he does not specify. Whatever the background of this incident, it seems to have caused Philes enduring problems because of lack of imperial support.<sup>26</sup> Finally, in the context of friendship Philes asks the addressee to either send him a letter or visit him. These are well-known topics of epistolography and show the strong connection that Philes' verse letters have to prose letters.

The comparison with Hyrtakenos further enhances this impression. Although more stable than Philes' self-representation, the picture he creates of himself still oscillates between that of a self-declared servant (δοῦλος) of his addressee (especially if this is an emperor) and a proud teacher who is aware of the value of his writings. As Hyrtakenos accentuates his position as a teacher

25. Riehle 2011b, 270–1.

26. See Stickler 1992, 32–36 and Kubina 2020b, 884–5.



and a man of learning, it does not come as a surprise that he often calls himself a servant of Hermes (e.g. Letters 7.42, 28.16), who was a symbol of education and literature in Byzantium.<sup>27</sup> He repeatedly complains about the ingratitude of his pupils or their parents in letters to (former) students or to persons of influence. He does not refrain from reporting to one of the highest state officials, the *meḡas logothetēs* Theodore Metochites, that the wealthy parents of his students fail to pay the tuition fees (Letters 8, 9, 38, 66, 81).<sup>28</sup> In one letter, he even scolds Metochites' own son for his bad behavior in class, which he describes in detail (Letter 19).<sup>29</sup> The way he builds the relationship with his addressees is dependent on the position of the addressee. In letters to the emperor, he addresses his professional claims but does not create a personal bond, whereas in poems to friends he speaks about the affection he feels for them and longs to see and speak with them. However, the kind of fluctuating relationship with single addressees and the irony and sarcasm that can be found in Philes' poems to Patrikiotes, as discussed earlier, are alien to Hyrtakenos, and sharp rebukes and even abuse of his addressees' gifts do not occur at all. Pleas are enormously important in Hyrtakenos' letters. He pleads for similar commodities such as a horse, fodder, a cloak, money, and the earlier-mentioned *sitēresion*.<sup>30</sup> However, while Philes uses different shades of forthrightness, from very indirect pleas to imperatives, Hyrtakenos almost always directly states what he needs and wants. Requests are hence even more in the center of Hyrtakenos' letters than in Philes. In sum, the realization of the communicative act has a wider range of different forms in Philes than in Hyrtakenos. Overall, however, the social function of both author's letters is by and large the same.

The same holds true for the literary function. This function is directly addressed by both Philes and Hyrtakenos in rather similar terms. In Poem E191 (= Anthology **no. 35**), Philes describes the anticipated pleasure (τέρψις) his poems will give his addressee. In Poem F162 (= Anthology **no. 41**) he rebukes his addressee for not giving something (namely food) in return for his verses. Interestingly, he refers to the verse letter itself when he says that by failing to pay for the very verses he is sending, Patrikiotes would be insulting him (vv. 9–10). Both passages show that not only poetry in general but specifically verse letters were valued as pieces of literature. Philes repeatedly stresses that his verses are made according to art (τεχνικός, e.g. Poems F9.5, P55.14, F15.7, F43.37, F80.31). As such, they must meet the rhetorical ideal of suitability and be adapted to the addressee and occasion (πρέπον, Poems E191.32, F15.6–7).

27. See Hunger 1978, 1:226.

28. On the identification of the *meḡas logothetēs* addressed in the letter headings with Metochites, see Karpozilos and Fatouros 2017, 56–7.

29. On this letter, see Browning 1997, 107–8.

30. On pleading in Hyrtakenos, see Gaul 2011, 269–71 and the classic study by Ševčenko 1975, 74–5.

Similarly high expectations concerning the quality of rhetorical pieces are also prominent in Hyrtakenos' letter collection. He describes in detail the reading of a text by a friend of his in a *theatron*, a kind of literary salon, which enjoyed great popularity with intellectual elites in this period (Letter 5).<sup>31</sup> A group of people had assembled to attend the rhetorical performance of this friend, and everyone continued to applaud the text even as they returned home. Hyrtakenos in his letter urges his friend to send him a copy of this text so that he can read it again and copy it lest it be forgotten in the course of time.<sup>32</sup> In a number of letters, he praises his correspondents' literary achievements, often followed by a request for a copy (Letters 6, 7, 18, 91). He also asks others to judge his own works, among them a hexameter poem on a philosopher (Letters 25, 37, 51, 52). In Letter 50, Hyrtakenos censures his addressee for having sent letters of a poor literary quality and describes his expectations. Good letters should be rhetorical, refined, and wise (ἔρρητορευμένος, κεκομψευμένος, and σοφός, line 12) as well as learned, embellished according to art and beauty (λόγιος, πρὸς τέχνην καὶ κάλλος κομμωτικός, lines 14–15), and representative of their author's learning. Instead, his letters were simple and prosaic (ἀπλοϊκός and πεζός, line 13).<sup>33</sup> With this rejection of prosaic letters, Hyrtakenos may also refer to rhythmic qualities which link the aesthetic ideal of prose with that of verse.

The opposition of verse and prose is the most obvious difference between Philes and Hyrtakenos. However, the boundaries are not as strict as a modern reader might expect. When the Byzantines comment on rhetorical texts, they usually do not distinguish between verse and prose unless they explicitly treat the meter. Prose was concerned with rhythm and meter as much as verse, as evidenced by the frequent use of defined rhythmical patterns at the end of a clause or sentence.<sup>34</sup> Despite this proximity of prose and verse, the Byzantines did perceive these two categories as different, as suggested by their visual presentation in manuscripts: prose is written *in continuo*, whereas verses are usually (though not always) marked by a line break.

Philes is the only prominent author of the late Byzantine era from whom we possess almost exclusively verse, written in the two most important Byzantine meters, the dodecasyllable and the political verse. His only prose work constitutes a *protheōria*, or preface, to a sermon by Nikephoros Blemmydes. He explicitly notes in this context that his listeners would have expected him to write a *protheōria* in verse and explains the prose form with the extraordinary

31. On the *theatron*, see Gaul 2020; Gaul 2018; Gaul 2011, 18–53; and Grünbart 2007.

32. For a commentary and partial translation of this letter, see Gaul 2018, 231; Gaul 2011, 35.

33. *Letters*, no. 50, ed. Karpozilos and Fatouros 2017, 196.11–15: Ἀλλὰ πρὸς τί μὴ, γράμμασιν ἐπιστείλας, εἰωθόσιν ἐχρήσω, ἔρρητορευμένοις δηλαδή κεκομψευμένοις τε καὶ σοφοῖς, ἀπλοϊκοῖς δὲ τισὶ καὶ πεζοῖς, καὶ τούτοις δι' ἄλλοτρίας χειρὸς; μὴ, δέομαι, τοῦ λοιποῦ, μὴ, λογιῶν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τέχνην καὶ κάλλος κομμωτικοῖς, ὁποῖοις ἢ σὴ παιδεία πρεσβεύεται.

34. Bernard 2014, 46–47 and Introduction, 4–5, 8–9. On prose rhythm, see the seminal study by Hörandner 1981, 121–68.

character of the sermon. He is, thus, aware of the exceptional character of his prose work.<sup>35</sup>

All of Philes' verse letters are written in the dodecasyllable, which is characterized by the fixed number of twelve syllables, a caesura after the fifth or the seventh syllable, and a stress on the penultimate syllable (paroxytonic ending).<sup>36</sup> In general, the Byzantines did not distinguish between prose and verse when speaking about rhetorical works. They were all just *logoi*.<sup>37</sup> Although this applies also to Philes, who uses the word *logoi* to refer to all of his works (including his verse letters), he mentions them explicitly as written in verse. Time and again he uses the word *στῆχος* or derivations thereof, which already in classical antiquity frequently meant "verse" (Poems App. 52.17 = Anthology **no. 45**, E91.26, F6.2 = Anthology **no. 38**, F55.2, F162.9 = Anthology **no. 41**, F163.15, F168.4, P6.36, P86.4, P205.1). He also speaks of writing in meter (*μέτρον*: e.g. Poems App. 52.17 = Anthology **no. 45**, F147.5, E91.26, P1.58, P149.67, F1prol.4) and even of composing iambs (P149.45). Most frequently, however, he refers to his own compositions with the word *κρότοι* (literally, "applauses": e.g. Poems F95.196, F112.19, P31.25, G1.173, F1.944, M76.275). The word was used by Byzantine theoreticians of rhetoric in the sense of "beat" in the rhythm of verse and rhythmical prose.<sup>38</sup> Most important in our context is that he stresses the metrical character of his works by using these terms.

Philes was, indeed, perceived by his near contemporaries as an outstanding poet. This is suggested, among others, by a mid-fourteenth century manuscript of a treatise on rhetoric from the mid-thirteenth century in which he is already mentioned as a model author for the composition of dodecasyllables only a few decades after his death.<sup>39</sup> Philes combines the possibilities of meter with the abundant use of various rhetorical figures such as assonance, homoiopoton, and a great number of both asyndetic and polysyndetic parallelisms as well as the avoidance of enjambments.

In some cases, however, it is noteworthy that Philes departs from metrical norms. Poem M70 (= Anthology **no. 44**) deals with a book exchange. Philes has given a book of his works to a friend, and now asks the latter to give it back and pay him for it. Since his friend refuses to do so, Philes uses an ironic twist to reproach him. He accuses the latter of "loving material things" (*φιλόουλος*) and calls him Hermes. While addressing somebody as Hermes is usually meant as a compliment regarding the education of the addressee,<sup>40</sup> Philes in this case apparently alludes to his character as the god of thieves. The poem ends with

35. See Agapitos 2007 (here at p. 16, lines 51–54, with the comment on p. 10); and Munitiz 2006. Philes also wrote numerous metrical prefaces to sermons; see Antonopoulou 2010.

36. On the dodecasyllable, see Maas 1903; Lauxtermann 1998; Bernard 2014; and Introduction, 6–7.

37. Bernard 2014, 41–7; Valiavitcharska 2013, 76–89.

38. On Philes, see extensively Kubina 2020a, 172–5; more generally see Valiavitcharska 2013, 76; Hörandner 1981, 23 and n10; Lauxtermann 1998, 24–5.

39. See Hörandner 2012a, 129 and Rhoby 2015, 260.

40. Hunger 1978, 1:226.

the line: “For what is sweeter on earth than friendship?” (v. 10). Its last word is stressed on the antepenultimate syllable (ἡδύτερος, proparoxytonic ending), which in general is a violation of the rules of the dodecasyllable. Here, however, it underlines the irony of the so-called friendship between Philes and his addressee, which turns out not to be of great value.

A similar case is the already-mentioned Poem App. 52 (= Anthology no. 45). Although its authorship is not certain because of the heading in the manuscript and some metrical irregularities (see Commentary), one can safely assume that if it is not by Philes, it was certainly written in imitation of his style. In a section in which he describes how his horses suffer from hunger, he puts the internal break after the seventh syllable in eleven successive verses and combines this with strong syntactical parallelisms in order to emphasize his point (vv. 41–51). In the same poem, he stresses that he knows how to write verse in the correct meter (στιγίξειν ἑμμέτρως, v. 17). The aesthetic ideal and mastery of Philes thus lies in his versatile use of meter, as he himself explicitly states and as his verses prove.

Rhythm, on the other hand, is also an issue in Hyrtakenos’ letters. In the earlier-mentioned Letter 50 in which he criticizes the poor quality of a friend’s letter, he consciously employs various rhythmical schemes. He starts with a set of addresses in the superlative following the same rhythmical pattern with the stress on the antepenultimate syllable (proparoxytonic ending). Similarly, the description of the expected (good) and actual (bad) quality of the letter consists of three cola of 9 or 10 syllables and ending with a stress on the last syllable (oxytonic ending, lines 12–13). In the following lines, he rebukes this letter vividly using short cola with oxytonic endings (lines 14–15), thus highlighting the emotional intensity of the rebuke, whereas in the following, more rational part, the cola are longer again.<sup>41</sup>

In order to understand Hyrtakenos’ literary technique, it is indispensable to be aware of his close relationship with classical traditions. His letters are replete with allusions to ancient myths and quotations from ancient authors, most prominently from Homer,<sup>42</sup> but also from Sappho, Theocritus, Hesiod, Pindar, Libanios, and others. Time and again, he also includes references to or quotations from the church fathers and the Bible.<sup>43</sup> It was a common practice in Byzantine epistolography to allude to classical mythology and texts,<sup>44</sup> but in

41. See the quotation earlier in n33. The structure of the rhythmical cola can best be studied by reading the text from the manuscript with the original punctuation. Unfortunately, the recent edition of Karpozilos and Fatouros obscures these rhythmical patterns through the implementation of a modern punctuation system.

42. Karpozilos 1990, 290.

43. Hyrtakenos also used the Byzantine epistolographer Michael Choniates (ca. 1138–ca. 1222) as a model. See Tinnefeld 2000, 373 and Fatouros 2002, 705–6.

44. See e.g. Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, ed. Hörandner 2012a, 106.111–14. In general, see Littlewood 1988.

Hyrtakenos they are ubiquitous. This prominence of intertextuality is also visible in the manuscript, which was probably either written by or executed under the supervision of the author himself,<sup>45</sup> and which includes many marginal notes that mark classical allusions regarding myths (using the term *ἱστορία*, literally “story, history”), proverbs (*παροιμία*), maxims (*γνώμη*), and prayers (*εὐχή*). Direct quotations are marked by double quotation marks (*διπλαῖ*) in the margins if he does not explicitly refer to them by inserting a phrase such as “as Homer says” in the text itself.<sup>46</sup> The texts from which he draws are for the most part school texts that every pupil in Byzantium had to read.<sup>47</sup> Hyrtakenos’ close relationship with classical tradition, therefore, hardly comes as a surprise, as these were part of Hyrtakenos’ daily life as a school teacher.<sup>48</sup>

Hyrtakenos uses two different techniques of intertextuality: the first is to use allusions to stories and quotations of single expressions or lines from other authors, while the second is to model a whole text on an earlier example. In Letter 2, Hyrtakenos addresses the emperor and asks for grain to feed both himself and his horse. The text is peppered with allusions and quotations. He opens the letter with the “proverb” (*παροιμία*, labeled as such in both the text of the letter and a marginal note), “Against two not even Heracles can win.”<sup>49</sup> The two invincible things in this case are hunger and his horse. He calls the former the Chimaera and compares the latter to Pegasus and himself to Bellerophon— an unfavorable comparison, as it turns out, because Hyrtakenos’ horse is gaunt and weak and threatens to eat his owner because it does not get grain. Hyrtakenos quotes two verses from the *Iliad* and alludes to another one. Overall, the letter is a pastiche of classical mythology, gaining wit and humor from the contrast between the heroic figures Hyrtakenos evokes and his own wretched situation.

Another petition of Hyrtakenos, Letter 63, is entirely based on a letter by Libanios (AD 314–394), who was an important literary model for Byzantine authors, especially in the Palaiologan period.<sup>50</sup> The text is another example of a lament of an intellectual about his fate. It is addressed to an unnamed state official close to the emperor, the head of the state treasury (*prokathēmenos tou bestiarion*), who must tell the emperor about the speaker’s misfortune by transmitting to him another letter (Letter 64) so that the latter will grant Hyrtakenos payment. Otherwise, he must give up his teaching activities. The model for this text is a letter-petition by Libanios.<sup>51</sup> In this petition, Libanios on the

45. Caballero Sánchez 2014.

46. On the marginal notes, see Gaul 2011, 284–8.

47. See Nousia 2016. On school education in general, see Rhoby 2016a; Giannouli 2014; Mergiali 1996.

48. It is telling in terms of self-fashioning strategies that Maximus Neamonites, a contemporary of Hyrtakenos, who was himself a teacher and from whom we possess 14 letters, makes similarly abundant use of classical allusions; see Mitrea 2014, 221–2.

49. *Letters*, no. 2, ed. Karpozilos and Fatouros 2017, 72.2–3: πρὸς δύο οὐδ’ Ἡρακλῆς, παροιμία φησί.

50. See Gaul 2011, 185–8; and Dennis 1988, 155–6.

51. Libanios, *Letters*, no. 348, ed. Foerster 1921–22, 10:328–30; trans. Bradbury 2004, 97–8.

one hand praises his addressee Anatolios for having granted a certain Touskianos an office, but at the same time blames him for the low prestige and salary that is connected to this office. Touskianos, in his opinion, should be awarded a much better position. Neither of these persons, however, is named in Hyrtakenos' letter. The key sentence to decipher the allusion is a quotation from Libanios at the end of Letter 63. Hyrtakenos states that if the addressee manages to convince the emperor to help him, the emperor will imitate God (i.e. his compassion), "but you will be like the cloud from which Zeus let rain fall on the Rhodians."<sup>52</sup> The story ultimately goes back to Pindar (*Olympian* 7.49–50), but Hyrtakenos took it *verbatim* from the late antique rhetorician. By equating the petitioner of Libanios' letter, Touskianos, with himself as a petitioner in Letter 63, Hyrtakenos ascribes the virtues of Touskianos to himself: erudition and noble character. The letter is only fully comprehensible to a reader well versed in rhetoric. Displaying one's own erudition implies the expectation that the addressee will recognize it. In this sense, self-fashioning through classical allusions such as this is again a relational issue.

To sum up, Philes' and Hyrtakenos' letters fulfill fundamentally the same functions. The main difference between them is the specific way in which they employ the literary function, since both authors use different literary techniques to convey their message. Characteristic of Hyrtakenos' style is his abundant use of classical allusions and quotations, which showcase his learning and rhetorical knowledge. Philes, on the other hand, demonstrates his qualities by writing fine dodecasyllables. These differences can be explained by the differing strategies of their authors in self-fashioning. Hyrtakenos shows off his versatility in classical learning because this was an essential part of his profession. His letters are intended to prove and promote his qualities as a teacher. Philes, on the other hand, is a professional freelance poet who often uses verse letters to request payment for his service. This explains the lack of prose letters from his pen. Like the rest of his poetry, his letters are intended to prove and promote his qualities as a poet.

Philes and his vast number of epistolary poems seem to be exceptional in Byzantine literature. When examined more closely, however, it appears that he engages in what all the intellectuals of his period do: letter-writing. That these letters are at the same time poems is due to his self-fashioning as a poet. In this light, these texts are perhaps not as extraordinary in terms of genre as they may appear at first sight. They are simply letters—verse letters.

52. *Letters*, no. 63, ed. Karpozilos and Fatouros 2017, 234.15–16: σὺ δὲ τὴν νεφέλην, ἀφ' ἧς χρυσὸν Ῥοδίοις ὕσεν ὁ Ζεὺς.