“Foreign(er)”, “Strange(r)” and “Extraordinary”: xenos and its Meanings in Byzantine (Metrical) Inscriptions

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Dedicated to Prof. Johannes Koder on the occasion of his eightieth birthday on 26 July 2022

The use of the term xenos (ξένος) has a very long tradition in the Greek language. First used in Homer’s epics, it can have various meanings. Basically, the word means “foreigner”/“stranger” but it also designates the “guest-friend”. As early as in Aeschylus, the adjective denotes “foreign” in the sense of “extraordinary”/“unusual”. The term xenos is also employed in inscriptions. The most famous ancient inscription using xenos is transmitted in Herodotus: it is the well-known address to the wandering stranger who is asked to tell the people in Sparta that he has seen the fallen Lacedaemonians at the Thermopylae. In late antique and Byzantine inscriptions (as well as in literary texts) the address xene is very often employed in (metrical) epitaphs. As in the famous Thermopylae epigram, the xenos is asked to stop, to have a look at the tomb and think of the deceased. Two further meanings of xenos are used very often in Byzantine metrical inscriptions: xenos (and its female form xene) is a very common term for monks (and nuns); they have escaped the worldly life and are xenoi on earth. In many cases xenos is employed in the sense of “extraordinary”/“unusual”; this is especially true for the description of buildings and various objects to which the inscriptions are attached, but, e.g., also for inscriptions on reliquaries in order to describe a saint’s qualities. In this contribution, I will describe the various meanings of xenos from Antiquity onward with a specific focus on Byzantine metrical inscriptions.

Keywords: Foreigner, Stranger, Epigraphy, Byzantium, Meter, Greek

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Introduction

The use of the term *xenos* (ξένος) has a very long tradition in the Greek language. Its etymology is uncertain, but it could be Pre-Greek. First used in Homer’s epics (e.g. Il. 6.215, Od. 1.313, 9.720, 17.522 etc.), it can have various meanings: “guest-friend”, “stranger” (especially “wanderer”/”refugee” under the protection of Zeus xenios), “foreigner”, and in rare cases also “hireling”; used as an adjective it can mean “foreign”, also in the sense of “unusual”/“extraordinary” as in Aeschylus, Pr. 688.

From very early, the word is also used in inscriptions. The most famous ancient inscription that uses *xenos* is transmitted in Herodotus (VII 228.2). The inscription, an elegiac distich, which is attributed to Simonides, is the well-known address to the wandering stranger (*xenos*), who is asked to tell the people in Sparta that he has seen the fallen Lacedaemonians at the Thermopylae: ὦ ξεῖν’, ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῇδε / κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ρήμασι πειθόμενοι (“Foreigner, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their commands”). Elsewhere in his Histories (IX 11.2, 55.2) one learns that the Spartans equate *xenoi* and *barbaroi*. Since this statement might have been unusual for his Greek readers, Herodotus was apparently compelled to offer this explanation.

The entry *xenos* in the tenth-century Suda lexicon, which is a compilation of earlier lexica, employs several citations in order to present the various meanings of the word:

*xenos*: a friend. “Embassies used to come from the cities because they considered him their guest-friend and an adviser on their manner of life and the establishment of temples and images. He set each of these things to rights.” And elsewhere: “[men] create guest-friends in their own countries.” A *xenos* is also someone who receives strangers. The Apostle [says]: “my friend the *xenos* greets you”.

*Xenoi* are to be distinguished from the locals, as can be seen, for example, in Hesiod, Opera et dies 225, who differentiates between ξένοι and ἐνδήμοι. This distinction is also made in a two-line mosaic epigram from the seventh century in the church of St Demetrius in Thessaloniki: Πανόλβιε Χριστοῦ μάρτυς φιλόπολις / φροντίδα τίθει καὶ πολιτῶν καὶ ξένων (“Most happy martyr of Christ, you who love the city, take care of both citizens and strangers”).

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1 Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.
2 Beekes, Etymological Dictionary of Greek, s.v. ξένος.
3 Liddell et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. ξένος. See also Mentzou, Bedeutungswandel, 3-5.
4 Translated by Godley, Herodotus. At VII 228.1-3 Herodotus mentions two further inscriptions.
5 Rom. 16.23.
This inscription is an invocation to Saint Demetrius, the city's patron. It distinguishes between the locals and non-locals coming from outside the city, but also between locals and non-locals (pilgrims) visiting the church, which was a famous place of pilgrimage.

After this concise introduction, which highlights the diversity of xenos in the Greek literature, I will now describe the various meanings of the term in Greek inscriptions with a specific focus on inscriptions which date to the Byzantine millennium (fourth-fifteenth centuries). As will be demonstrated, xenos is very often employed in metrical inscriptions (epigrams). I will also discuss the different ways the term is used as both a noun and an adjective.

The Use of xenos in Greek Tomb Epigrams

The mode of address xene (ξένε) is often employed in metrical epitaphs. The famous Thermopylae epigram seems to be the first inscribed epigram, in which the xenos is asked to look at the tomb, to think of the deceased and to spread the glory of the deceased. The xenos is the “stranger”, but not in a pejorative sense, for the term describes the passer-by and the wanderer respectively. As the evidence suggests, this meaning seems to be restricted to epigrams. The following examples, which testify to epigrams addressing the xenos throughout the Greek hemisphere from Antiquity to Byzantium, will illustrate this:

The beginning of a tomb epigram from the second or first century BC from Kyme (north of Smyrna/Izmir) runs as follows: Μέντορα τὸν Χῖον λεύσσεις, ξένε, τόθ ὑπὸ μητρὸς / Χίας εἰς Ἄϊδος δῶμα καθελκόμενον (“Stranger, you see here Mentor of Chios being dragged down by his mother, originating from Chios, to the House of Hades”).

A tomb epigram from Egyptian Alexandria dating to the late Hellenistic epoch, which was composed for a sixteen-year-old girl, starts with the following words: Παῖδα Ῥοδιππώι, ξεῖνε, Λεόντιον ἥν τέκε μήτηρ, ἀστὴν Ἡδείαν τύμβος ὅδε (“This tomb took the child, the citizen Hedeia, stranger, who Leontion, her mother, brought into the world for Rhodippos”).

In the funerary epigrams, the xenos is not just someone who passes by, but someone who explicitly looks at the grave or is invited, or rather urged, to do so. Two verses of the metrical part of a Roman tomb inscription from the Arcadian town of Tegea run as follows: σῆμ’ ἐσορᾶς ὦ ξε<ῖ>νε, κατ’ Ἄϊδος οἰχομένοιο / πρὶν γλυκεροῦ γήρως οὔνομ’ Ὀνασικλέος (“You behold the tomb,14 o stranger, of Onasikleus (by name), who departed to Hades before sweet old age”).

The address to the xenos, who passes by, stops, beholds the grave and contemplates the deceased, bears witness to the culture of remembrance (memoria), which was highly important in Antiquity and generally in premodern cultures such as Byzantium. The xenos who perceives the grave is supposed to carry the memory of the dead out into the world.

8 Bauer, Eine Stadt und ihr Patron.
9 Bakirtzis, Pilgrimage to Thessalonike.
10 On this concept, see Tueller, Passer-by, especially 51-52 and González González, Funerary Epigrams, 48.
11 Merkelbach and Stauber, Steinepigramm, no. 05/03/05.
12 In Egypt, the term ἀστός denotes the “citizen of Alexandreia”, cf. Liddell et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v.
13 Bernand, Inscriptions métriques, no. 39.
14 For σῆμα with the meaning “tomb”, see Liddell et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. 3.
15 Von Gaertringen, Inscriptiones Arcadiæ, no. 179.
16 Van Bueren et al., Reformations and Their Impact. For Byzantium, see, e.g., Grünbart, Zur Memorialkultur and Schreiner, Schreiben gegen das Vergessen.
The xenos, and the viewer of the tomb in general, is also occasionally asked to reflect on his own fate: in a funerary epigram from Cyprus dating to the second century AD, it is the deceased who asks the passing xenos to remember that the journey to death is the same for everyone (verses 9-10): ... πάριθι, ξένε, „χαίρε“ προσείπας, / κοινός ἐπεί θνατοῖς ὁ πλόος εἰς φθιμένους (“Go on, stranger, after you have said ‘hail’, since common is the journey to the decaying for the mortals”).17 This reminder of the unavoidsability of death, known under the term memento mori (“Remember that you have to die”), is a topos which is often employed in funerary contexts.18

In the Christian context, the xenos is not just the mere stranger passing by, but also the pilgrim, who often comes from afar to visit the holy sites.19

As in Antiquity, the term xenos is used in tomb inscriptions which are metrical in shape. They use a higher language register than tomb inscriptions in prose, which, both in the Roman and the Byzantine era, traditionally start with Ἐνθάδε κεῖται (“Here lies”) (equivalent to the Latin Hic iacet) and the name of the deceased in the nominative case.

A long epigram of 40 verses dating to the year 1198 is explicitly addressed to the visitor to the church San Domenico in Messina. Today it is no longer preserved, but we know that it was written on an aristocratic sarcophagus and an accompanying plate in the church. It starts with the following verses: Τὸν ναὸν ὅστις τοῦτον εἰσί ξένε, / δεῦρο πρόσελθε, τόνδε τὸν τάφον σκόπει· / ἄνδρα γὰρ οὗ κλέος μέγα φέρει (“Whoever you are, stranger, who enters this church, come here and look at this tomb! For it carries within it a man whose fame is great”).20 The visitor to the church and beholder of the tomb is again addressed in the verses 28-29: Σύ δ᾽ ὅστις εἶ καὶ τόνδε τὸν τάφον βλέπεις / τὸ τοῦ βίου μάταιον ἐνθα μανθάνω (“You, whoever you are and look at the tomb / recognize here the vanity of life”). As in the second-century inscription from Cyprus mentioned above, the xenos is reminded of the inevitability of death.

In the Messina epigram, the xenos is explicitly invited to look at the tomb. Other tomb epigrams address the xenos literally as θεατής (“beholder”), as is the case in an only partially preserved inscription of the thirteenth/fourteenth century in the church of John the Forerunner in Portaria (near Volos): [Σ]ὑ δ’ ὅστις εἶ καὶ τόνδε τόν τάφον βλέπεις / τό τοῦ βίου μάταιον ἐνθα μανθάνων (“You, whoever you are and look at the tomb / recognize here the vanity of life”).21 Unfortunately, neither the text that precedes nor that which follows this passage is preserved. However, one can easily imagine that the text continued with a request to “recognize” (μάνθανε) the perishability of life, as is the case in the previously mentioned epigrams.

In the Portaria epigram, the terms ξένος and θεατής are used together, but there are many epigrams of similar content that use θεατής as the sole appellation – or alternative terms such as ἄνθρωπος (“man”) or βροτός (“mortal”) – to refer to the one who reflects on
the transience of life. The *xenos* is occasionally also additionally called παροδίτης ("passer-by"/"traveler") or the latter term is used instead of *xenos*. This usage dates already from the archaic period; παροδίτης is also abundantly employed in the epigrams of the *Anthologia Graeca*.22

*Xenoi* are also addressed in funerary epigrams which are constructed in dialogue form. This is a tradition that was already cultivated in Antiquity.23 In Byzantium, several authors who worked on commission for the imperial household and the aristocracy, including Nicholas Kallikles (twelfth century) and Manuel Holobolos (thirteenth century), composed funerary epigrams in the form of dialogues that provided a dramatic backdrop.24 In a long epigram by Kallikles, the *xenos* converses with the tomb (τύμβος), which tells him who is buried there.25 No such explicit dialogical funerary epigrams have survived as inscriptions from the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. However, there is a long tradition of tomb epigrams which start with an introductory address to the *xenos*. The verses which are inscribed on a third-/fourth-century tabula ansata found in Bulgaria may serve as an example: Εἴ με θέλεις, ὦ ξεῖνε, δαήμεναι τί πόθεν εἰμί / Λαδικίης πάτρης εἰμί, τοὔνομα Κυρίλλα … ('If you want to learn from me, stranger, who and from where I am: my fatherland is Ladikia, my name is Kyrilla …”).26

This section ends with the mention of the tomb epigram for the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos, who died on 24 September 1180.27 The funeral verses, which are no longer preserved, were engraved on his sarcophagus, the lid of which consisted of seven domes that made the sarcophagus look like a model of a church or a ciborium.28 The epigram’s length is considerable: it once consisted of more than 40 dodecasyllables. The first verse is a traditional address to the *xenos*: Ὁρῶν τὰ καινὰ ταῦτα θαύμαζε, ξένε (“Admire these new things as you see them, stranger!”).29 While καινά is to be understood in the sense of “new, without precedent”, i.e. exceptional, the stem *xen-* is used again in verse 11, but as a feminine proper name. The verses 9–11 deal with Manuel’s (second) wife Maria from Antiocheia,30 who was – like his first wife Bertha/Eirene – of Western origin: ἡ δ᾿ αὖ βασιλὶς καὶ σύνευνος Μαρία, / τῇ δὲ στερήσει τοῦ φεραυγοῦ δεσπότου / αὐγοῦσα σεπτὴ βασιλὶς πάλιν Ξένη (“The empress and his wife Maria, despite the deprivation of the resplendent ruler, is a venerable augusta (and) empress again Xene”).31 The verses play on the double meaning of *Xene*: in Byzantium

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22 See the entries in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG)*: http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ (accessed on 25 April 2022).


25 Kallikles, Poems, ed Romano, no. 9.

26 Beševliev, *Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften*, no. 220 (itacistic variants are corrected).

27 Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

28 Cf. Patterson Ševčenko, *Tomb of Manuel I Komnenos*.


30 Brand, Maria of Antioch. Maria (in one Western source also called Marguerite) was the daughter of Raymond of Poitiers and Constance of Tyre.

31 See n. 29.
it was customary for men and women of the imperial household and the aristocracy who entered a monastery at the end of their lives, especially if their wife or husband had died, to take the name Xenos or Xene, because it meant that they were dedicated to separation from the world.\(^{32}\) In this verse, however, Xene refers not only to the fact that Maria became a nun but also to the fact that she was a “stranger”, i.e. not of Byzantine/Greek origin, because she stemmed from a Western aristocratic family.\(^{33}\) Xenos/Xene with the meaning “devoted to separation from the world”, i.e. monk/nun, is already attested as early as in Late Antiquity.\(^{34}\)

A similar pun to that in Manuel’s tomb epigram is also employed in two verses that are taken from the iambic calendar of Christopher of Mitylene (eleventh century) for 24 January.\(^{35}\) These verses, which were painted on a wall in the narthex of the cathedral of the monastery of Treskavac (near Prilep, Northern Macedonia),\(^{36}\) dating to the middle of the fourteenth century, are dedicated to Saint Xene, who was originally called Eusebia but became a nun to avoid marriage: Ἀποξενοῦται τοῦδε τοῦ βίου Ξένη, / οὗ ζῶσα καὶ πρὶν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἦ ξένη (“Xene is alienated from this life, to which she was in truth also alien before in life”).\(^{37}\) The epigram plays with the word stem ξεν- which is used thrice (ἀποξενοῦται, Ξένη, ξένη).

The Use of xenos in Non-Tomb Epigrams

The mosaic epigram from St Demetrios in Thessalonica mentioned above (p. 196) testifies to the use of the term xenos in non-funerary inscriptions. In many inscriptions where the xenos is also addressed, he is asked to stop and look at the inscriptions found on monuments other than tombs.

A hexameter epigram, which is transmitted in the Greek Anthology (IX, no. 686),\(^{38}\) seems to have been attached to the Eastern gate of Thessalonica’s city walls. The xenos is told to rejoice because he sees a statue of the prefect Basilius at the gate: Ἡνορέης ὀλετῆρα ὑπερφιάλου Βαβυλῶνος / καὶ σέλας ἀκτεάνοιο Δίκης Βασίλειον ὕπαρχον, / ξεῖνε, νόῳ σκίρτησον, ἰδὼν ἐφύπερθε πυλάων … (“Rejoice in your heart, o stranger, as you behold above the city gates the prefect Basil, him who destroyed the might of arrogant Babylon and who shines with the splendor of incorruptible Justice …”).\(^{39}\) The epigram seems to belong to the early Byzantine period, although it was recently dated as late as the tenth century.\(^{40}\) Likewise from the early Byzantine period (c. 379) is a fragmentary epigram from the ancient city of Stobi (Northern Macedonia), which also addresses the xenos and invites him to look at the gate and a


\(^{33}\) See also Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, 671.

\(^{34}\) See Lampe, Patristic Greek Lexicon, s.v. ξένος D.

\(^{35}\) Follieri, I Calendari, 2, 151.

\(^{36}\) Cf. Rhoby, Andreas, On the inscriptional versions.

\(^{37}\) Rhoby, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, no. 37. Some parts of words of the second verse are not preserved but can easily be restored by referring to the manuscript tradition of the epigram.

\(^{38}\) Cf. Feissel, Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine, no. 87; Gkoutzioukostas, Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata, 95-141; Begass, Der Kaiser als Schutzwall.

\(^{39}\) English translation by Gkoutzioukostas Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata, 139.

\(^{40}\) Gkoutzioukostas Thessalonikeia epigraphika meletemata, 139.
The presence of gates, statues and accompanying inscriptions mentioning the “stranger”, who is about to enter the city and is to be distinguished from the local citizen (πολίτης), seems to have been more widespread throughout the Byzantine millennium than the surviving evidence suggests; this is especially true for the early Byzantine period but not exclusively so, as the inscription from Korinthos indicates.

The address to the xenos does not necessarily have to be at the beginning of the epigram, but can also occur in other positions or even at the end, as is the case with an inscription that no longer exists today, but was once placed on a tower belonging to the fortifications of Herakleia Pontike (today (Karadeniz) Ereğlisi, Turkey). The purpose of the epigram is to invite the xenos not only to look at the building and marvel at it but also to spread the news of its construction (in the year 1211 or thereafter) under the emperor Theodore I Laskaris, the ruler of Nikaia. The last three verses, which were already no longer fully preserved when the epigram was first copied from the tower in the nineteenth century, run as follows:

κέλευσμα μικρὸν προσ……………… / Κο<μν>ηνοφυοῦς Λασχάρ[ου] Θεοδώρου / αὐτοκρατοῦ τὸν πύργον ἤγει[ε]ρε, ξένε ("A small order … of the Comnene-born Theodore Laskaris, ruling by himself, has erected the tower, stranger").

A similar epigram is attached to a bridge near Karytaina on the Peloponnese dating to the year 1439/1440. The xenos is vigorously exhorted to take note that Manuel Rhaul Melikes, a local magnate, recently erected the monument, which seems to have been damaged before: Νέον δομήτορα γεφύρας, ὦ ξένε, / ῾Ραοὺλ γίνωσκε Μανουὴλ τὸν Μελίκην ("Take note, o stranger, of Manuel Rhaul Melikes, the new builder of the bridge").

While, as mentioned above (p. 199), dialogues were widespread in ancient epitaphs, Byzantine funerary epigrams in dialogue form have only survived in manuscripts, but not as inscriptions. However, an eleventh-century inscriptive epigram in dialogue form is attached to a marble stone block which is broken in two pieces and now displayed in Istanbul’s Archaeological Museum. The content of the fragmentarily preserved epigram proves that

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41 ξῖ νος inscr.
42 Feissel, Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine, no. 273B.
43 Cf. Berger, Statues of Constantinople, 8.
44 Maltezou, Historikes peripeteies.
45 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. GR73.
46 On Constantinople, see Berger, Statues of Constantinople.
47 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. TR44. The term κέλευσις (a variant of κέλευσις) indicates an official document issued by the emperor: cf. Dölger, Byzantinische Diplomatik, s.v. κέλευσις.
48 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. GR66.
the stone block was once part of the fortifications of Dyrrhachion (now Durrës, Albania), which was called Epidamnos in Antiquity. The inscription consists of two parts: the first part (verses 1-7) is a question by the xenos and the second part (verses 8-22) is the city’s answer. Both parts are introduced by verses which indicate the content of the respective following verses. Verse 1 is almost completely lost but was reconstructed by Cyril Mango analogously to verse 8: (v. 1) [Ἐρώτησις τοῦ ξένου πρὸς Ἐπίδαμνον (“Question of the stranger to Epidamnos”) and (v. 8) Ἀνταπόκρισις τῆς πόλεως πρὸς {τὸν} ξένου (“Answer of the city to the stranger”).49 Due to its fragmentary state, it is not possible to fully grasp the content of the dialogue epigram. In the first part, Epidamnos is called “(well) accessible”,50 and the xenos, the “stranger”, who is about to enter the city, states that it “stands like an adorned” girl. In the second part, the city seems to report its fate.51 The dialogue form is ideally suited for the public presentation of the text. If one assumes that inscribed epigrams were recited publicly on certain occasions (in the case of tomb epigrams at the funeral and on the commemoration days, and in the case of monuments at the inauguration ceremony and on the anniversary of dedication, etc.),52 this is particularly conceivable with epigrams in dialogue form, as they make a lively rendition very likely.

Finally, mention is made of two late Byzantine dedicatory epigrams from Mystras. The first one, which is no longer preserved, was once displayed in the St Sophia church. It is an inscription of 46 verses, perhaps dating to the year 1360, which mentions the dedication of the church, but is primarily dedicated to praising the despot of the Morea Manuel Kantakuzenos and his imperial parents John VI Kantakuzenos and Eirene.53 In the second half of the epigram, at the end of verse 32, the xenos is addressed (ξένε). This verse introduces the laudatory description of Manuel. When the epigram was recited in public, which is – as stated above – to be assumed, the appellation “stranger!” indicated to the audience that they should now listen attentively to the following lines. The second epigram from Mystras in which the form of address xenos is used comes from Taxiarchoi Chapel, dated to the year 1454/1455. Very similarly to the epigram from Karytaina mentioned above (p. 201) – but less vigorously – the xenos is asked to take note of the founder of the church and his deed (verses 1-2): ῞Ηγερται ναὸς οὗτος ἐκ βάθρων, ξένε, / παρά γε τοῦ εὐγενεστάτου Λουκάνη (“This church was erected, stranger, by the noblest Lukanes”).54 Nikephoros Lukanes served as archon of the Peloponnese from 1453-1459.55

It comes as no surprise that the appellation xenē (‘stranger!’) is not only used in inscriptions but also in verses which are transmitted in manuscripts only. In many cases the latter verses were intended to be inscribed too, but the physical monument or object no longer
exists. Many attestations of the term are found in the oeuvre of Manuel Philes (c. 1270 - after 1332/1334?),56 a poet on commission for the court and the aristocracy in the first half of the fourteenth century. Of his many epigrams, unfortunately, only a few exist that are still preserved in situ,57 among them the famous epigram on the outer cornice of the chapel of the St Mary Pammakaristos church in Constantinople.58 According to the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG),59 Philes uses the form of address ξένε 61 times; interestingly enough, the vocative is only used 17 times in his tomb epigrams;60 the remaining usages occur in epigrams composed for fresco paintings, icons and other objects. As in inscriptional epigrams, its position is almost exclusively at the end of the dodecasyllabic verses.61 This has prosodic reasons: ξένε consists of two short vowels which, according to prosodic rules, can only occur at the end of a twelve-syllable verse. This also applies grosso modo to hexameters and pentameters, but Philes did not write any poems in these verse meters. In addition, the use of the appellation ξένε at the end of the verse creates tension.

As has already been stated, ξένε is not the only form of address for the one looking at the tomb, a depiction or an object. Philes uses the form of address ἄνθρωπε (“man”) even more often (76 times) than ξένε, as the search results in the TLG testify, without any significant difference to the latter. The form of address θεατά (“beholder”) is used 35 times. There are no results for βροτέ (“mortal”) or παροδῖτα (“wanderer”), which are used less in Byzantium than in Late Antiquity.

Xenos in its Meanings “Extraordinary”, “Unusual” and Similar

As mentioned in the introduction, the adjective xenos can mean “strange” in the sense of “unusual”, “extraordinary” and similar; this meaning is already attested in Aeschylus, Aristotle and other ancient authors.62 Christian authors reinforce this meaning by also using xenos with the meanings of “wonderful” and “marvelous”.63 Of course, there are numerous passages from middle and late Byzantine literature that attest to the same meanings.

Byzantine inscriptions, again mainly metrical, often use the adjective xenos too. It appears in various contexts:

For example, it is employed in a thirteenth-century tomb epigram from a church in Makrinitisa (near Volos). It is used in a verse addressing the beholder; the wording is reminiscent of the epigram from Korinthos quoted above (p. 201). The viewer is invited to look at the grave and perceive the “extraordinary”, i.e. the grave and the person buried in it: Ἀλλ᾿, ὥθεατά, ὁρῶν τὸν τύμβον, ξένε (“But beholder, look and see the extraordinary”).64 It is not only

56 On Manuel Philes, see Stickler, Manuel Philes und seine Psalmenmetaphrase and Kubina, Enkomiastische Dichtung; see also Rhoby, Wie lange lebte Manuel Philes?
57 Cf. Paul, Dichtung auf Objekten.
58 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. TR76 = Miller, Manuelis Philae, 1, no. E223 (pp. 117-118).
60 Papadogiannakis, Studien zu den Epitaphien des Manuel Philes.
61 With the exception of Miller, Manuelis Philae carmina, 2, no. Pt87, v. 7 (p. 202).
62 See Liddell et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. B.
63 See Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, s.v. C.1.
64 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. GR83, v. 12. Although ξένα at the end of the verse seems to be the correct reading (unfortunately, the available images of the inscription do not allow verification of the reading), one could also imagine the vocative ξένε when comparing it with the verse of the tomb epigram from nearby Portaria cited above (p. 198): [Σ]ὺ δὲ, θεατά, ὁρῶν τὸν τύμβον, ξένε.
the appearance (of a monument) that can be extraordinary (θέα ξένη), as stressed in a ninth-century, not fully preserved epigram attached to the sea walls of Constantinople, but also the monument itself: [...] τὸ πρὶν ἡμαυρω[μένον / ταῦτα] διαυγές καὶ θέαν ξένην ἔχον / [... (“... the previously turned black now radiant and with extraordinary appearance ... ”). 65

A further epigram attached to a tower of the city walls of Dyrrhachion addresses the beholder in its verses 1-3 with the following words: Μαθών, θεατά, τίς ὁ πήξας ἐκ βάθρων / τὸν πύργον, ὀνπέρ καθορᾶς, κτίσμαξ εὖν, / θαύμαξ τούτου τὴν ἄρισταβουλίαν (“By recognizing, beholder, who erected the tower from its foundations, which you see, this extraordinary building, admire its excellent planning”). 66 The one who had the tower built in 1224/1225 was Theodore I Dukas Komnenos, who ruled Epirus from 1215 to 1230. While the second part of the epigram (verses 4-8) is devoted to praising Theodore, the concluding part (verses 9-13) is dedicated to mentioning the year. 67

However, not only monuments are labeled xenos but also (religious) objects, for example reliquaries. Verses on a now lost twelfth-century reliquary that came to France (Châteaudun) after the Fourth Crusade in 1204 state that the hand relic of St John the Forerunner, which appears to have been encased in gold, is something “extraordinary”, i.e. something to be marveled at. The first three verses, which also interact with the beholder and the owner of the relic respectively, run as follows: Ὁ καρπὸς ὀστοῦν, ἡ δὲ χεὶρ χρυσῆ· πόθεν; / ἐκ τῆς ἐρήμου καρπὸς, ἐκ Παλαιστίνης, / χρυσῆ παλαιστὴ χρυσόδακτυλος ξένον (“The wrist is bone, the hand is gold. From where? The wrist is from the desert, from Palestine, the golden palm with golden fingers is something extraordinary”). 68 This epigram is cleverly designed from a rhetorical perspective because the term καρπός has two meanings, namely “wrist” and “fruit”. While it means “wrist” in verses 1 and 2, it means “fruit” in verse 4: Ὀστοῦν ὁ καρπὸς ἐκ φυτοῦ Προδρόμου (“Bone is the fruit from the tree of the Forerunner”). 69 Another object, kept in the Moscow Kremlin and dated to the twelfth or thirteenth century, seems to have served as silver-gilt sheathing for a hand relic of St Barbara. The attached inscription consists of two verses which employ the term xenos twice: Ξένη τις ἡ χεὶρ ὧδε παρθένου ξένης. / Χεὶρ Βαρβάρας λύουσα λοιμώδεις νόσους (“The exceptional hand of an exceptional virgin here. The hand of Barbara which cures diseases”). 70 It is no coincidence that xenos is used as the first and last word in verse 1. This stylistic device, also called a kyklos, underlines the extraordinary material as well as the spiritual value of the relic.

The Ermitaž in St Petersburg houses a wooden object, probably dating to the fourteenth century, which may have served as the base of a cross. The epigram, which is placed under the carved depiction of the Dormition of the Mother of God, uses the term xenos in reference to two statements in the text. It is “extraordinary” that Mary remained a virgin despite

65 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. TR88.
66 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein., no. AL2; cf. Rhoby, Interactive inscriptions, 321-322.
67 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, 110-111.
68 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Ikonen, no. Me13. Translation (with adaptations) by Pitarakis, Female piety in context, 160.
69 Pitarakis, Female piety in context, 160.
70 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Stein, no. AddII15.
having given birth and it is “extraordinary” that she continues to live despite her death: Ὑπὲρ λόγον τεκοῦσα παρθένος μένεις. / Θανοῦσα δὲ ζῇς· ταῦτα γὰρ ἄμφω ξένα· (“Beyond all reason, you have given birth and yet remain a virgin. Having died you live. For both of these things are extraordinary”).

The attribute xenos does not only mean “strange” in the sense of “extraordinary”, but also “strange” in the sense of “outlandish”. In the monk’s cell at St Neophyto’s Enkleistra near Paphos (Cyprus) we find late-twelfth-century representations of two saints identified as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. Both saints hold scrolls in their hand each containing one verse. As can be seen from the content, the verses correspond. While the verse on Basil’s scroll reads Τί καθορῶν ἐξίστασαι σαφῶς φράσ[ον] (“What are you looking at that makes you lose your mind, say clearly!”), the verse on John Chrysostom’s scroll reads Ξένον θέα[μα] Χριστὸν [ἐ]σταυ[ρωμένον] (“The outlandish sight of Christ crucified”). Xenos is not used here to express the beholder’s excitement, but to describe his dismay at the crucifixion, which is a strange spectacle alien to mankind. The same topos is employed in an epigram which is attached to a fourteenth-century epitaphios (i.e. a cloth bearing an image of the dead body of Christ) now kept in the Monastery of Putna (Romania): Ξένον βλέπων θέαμα δήμος ἀγγέλων / ἀϊνον ξένον κέκραγεν, ὦ Θεοῦ Λόγε (“When they saw the outlandish sight, the people of the angels sang extraordinary praises, O Logos of God”). The source of both epigrams, as well as of other attestation of ξένον θέαμα, is a troparion for the Holy Sunday.

In my view, in this epigram, xenos is used with two meanings that differ slightly from each other: while the praise sung by the angels is “extraordinary”, the sight of Christ crucified is outlandish because it is – as in the epigram from St Neophyto’s Enkleistra – alien to mankind.

In order to demonstrate the various connotations of the adjective xenos, a poem on the Seven Wonders of the World embedded in the historical work of George Cedrenus may serve as an example. While the latter’s verses in his History start with Κενὸν φρύαγμα τῶν παλαι πυραμίδων, the version which is transmitted in the commentary on the verses in cod. Vat. gr. 573 reads as follows: Ξένον θέαμα τῶν πάλαι πυραμίδων / Ἀἴγυπτος ἅσπερ εἶχε κόμπον ἡ πλάνος (“The extraordinary spectacle of the ancient pyramids that elusive Egypt boasted with”). The commentary, which follows theses verses, discusses the meaning of both θέαμα and ξένος: on xenos it reads: ξένον δὲ τὸ οἶον εἰπεῖν ἀλλότριον καὶ ἐκτὸς τῶν ἐν συννηθείᾳ ἡμῶν πραγμάτων δηλονύτοι τὸ παράδοξον (“xenos, on the other hand, is synonymous with alien and is foreign to what is familiar to us, i.e. extraordinary”). As indicated in this phrase, the verses play with the two meanings of xenos: on the one hand, the term describes the amazement at the sight of the pyramids, on the other hand, however, it means “foreign” in the sense of “pagan” and “non-Christian” respectively. The latter meaning is stressed to an even greater extent by the use of κενὸν φρύαγμα (“empty pride”) in the manuscripts of Cedrenus’ History.

It goes without saying that this list could easily be expanded by examples of inscriptive and non-inscriptive Byzantine poetry.

71 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Ikonen, no. Ho8.
72 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, nos. 245-246.
73 Rhoby, Epigramme auf Ikonen, no. Te11.
74 Follieri, Initia, 2, 563; see also Johnston, Byzantine Tradition, 119.
75 Tartaglia, Georgii Cedreni historiarum compendium, 1, 326 (ch. 196.20).
76 Barbero, Un commento bizantino inedito 8.
77 Barbero, Un commento bizantino inedito 8.
The adjective *xenos* in the meaning of “extraordinary”, “unusual” and similar belonged to standardized vocabulary employed in Byzantine poetry. However, it was also interchangeable with other terms with a similar meaning since the use of specific terms was also due to metrical and prosodical requirements. This may, for example, be testified to by a fragmentary epigram, perhaps dating to the twelfth century, which was once attached to the medieval walls of the fortress of Skopje: Νέαν πόλιν, ἄνθρωπε, θαυμάζεις βλέπων / καὶ τερπνὸν ὡράισμα ... (“Full of admiration you are seeing a new town and the lovely adornment ...”). Not only τερπνός could have been replaced by ξένος but also ἄνθρωπος by θεατής or ξένος, but the current wording was intentionally employed to accommodate the metrical and prosodical demands of the dodecasyllables.

**Conclusion**

The term *xenos* is used in Greek literature from Antiquity to modern times. This is likewise true for inscriptions. As the discussion has shown, the form of address ξένε is almost exclusively attested in metrical inscriptions, and the same is true for the adjective ξένος/-η/-ον. In tomb epigrams, the *xenos* is the “stranger” and the “guest” respectively, who comes from outside (the city and therefore differs from the local inhabitant), stops and looks at the tomb. The address is meant not only to make him/her aware of the evanescence of life but he is also addressed in order to spread the deceased’s fame beyond the place where he is buried. However, as has been demonstrated, other forms of address were also used instead of ξένε. This is especially true for other epigrams in which the beholder of the monument/object or the listener to the text is addressed. Whatever the case, the form of address ξένε (or similar vocatives) attracts the attention of the listener, assuming that these texts were read aloud on certain occasions.

The adjective *xenos* with the meaning “unusual”, “extraordinary”, “exceptional” or similar is also very popular in all kinds of epigrams. It is likewise used in order to elicit specific attention from the beholders, readers and listeners at the epigram’s performance.

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79 The study of the usage of ξένος and the form of address ξένε in so-called Byzantine book epigrams was beyond the scope of this paper. A search in the Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams (DBBE) offers many impressive examples: https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/ (accessed on 25 April 2025)

80 Cf., e.g., Speck, *Theodoros Studites. Jamben*, 270 (no. CvI): Επίγραμμα εἰς ξένους. Χριστὸν ξενίζει πᾶς διατρέφων ξένους / δ’ ὁ προθύμως τῆς τούς ξενομένους / μάλα τρέφοτε, καὶ τραφήσεσθε ξένως (“Epigrams on Strangers. Everyone who hosts guests hosts Christ. Therefore, willingly entertain the strangers here, and you will be entertained in a wonderful way”). Like other examples in this essay, the author employed the various meanings of the stem *xen*-. For further examples in Greek literature, ibid.
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