

Byzantine Literature



Alan Haffa

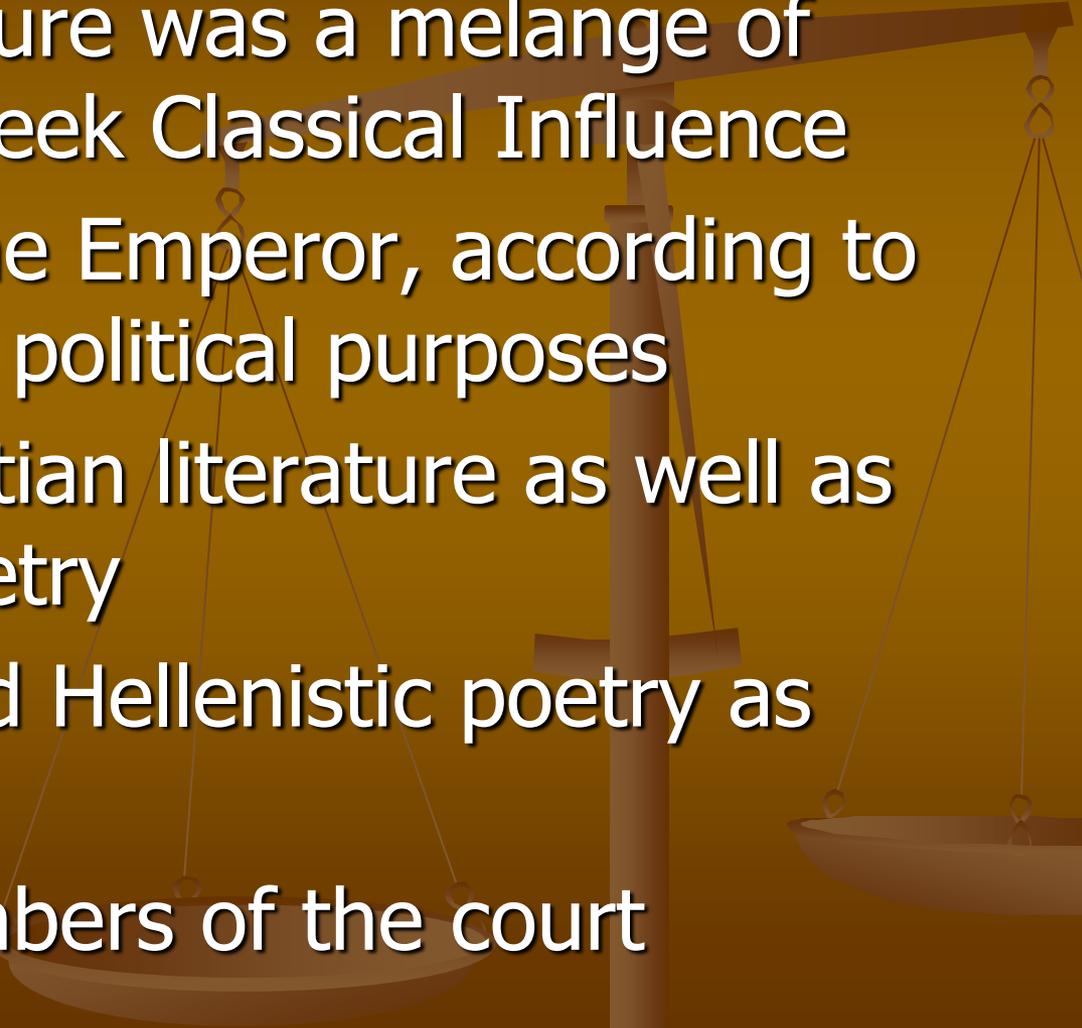
Please Silence Cell Phones

Procopius' *Secret History* (*Anekdotia*— *Unpublished*)

- Secretary for General Belisarius
- *The Wars* and *On the Buildings*
- Reveals a world of intrigue, plots and counter plots
- Although Justinian is a Christian Emperor, Procopius' Justinian and Theodora are anything but Christian—he calls them Demons!
- Story of Theodora as a show girl enacting the love of Leda and the Swan

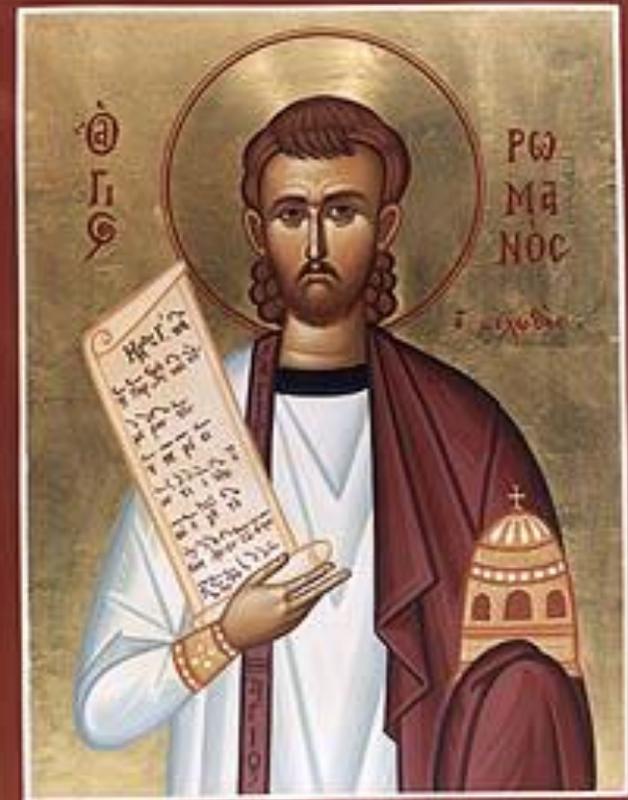


Procopius as a Prologue to Byzantine Love Epigrams

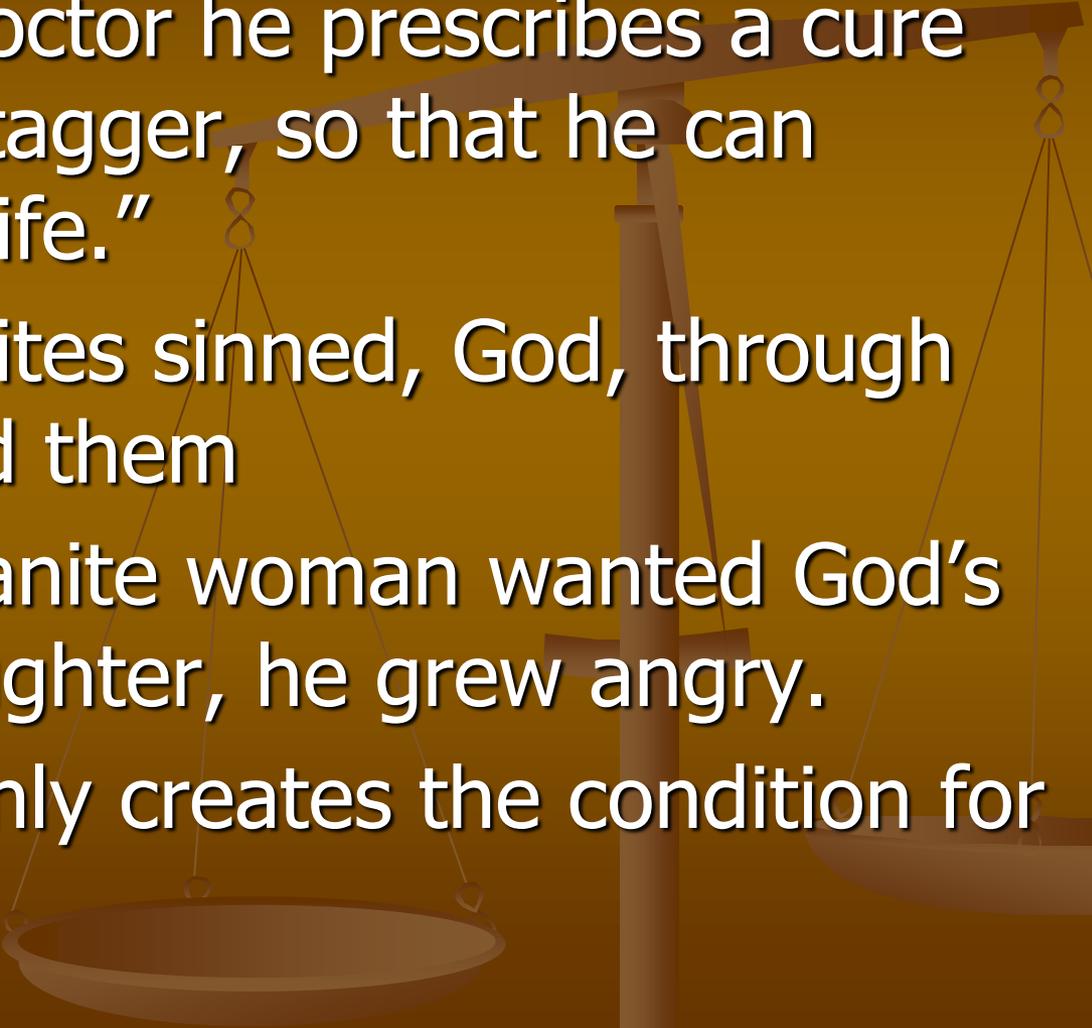
- Byzantine literature was a melange of Christian and Greek Classical Influence
 - Christianity of the Emperor, according to Procopius, is for political purposes
 - There was Christian literature as well as secular, love poetry
 - Took Roman and Hellenistic poetry as models
 - Poets were members of the court
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Romanos the Melodist

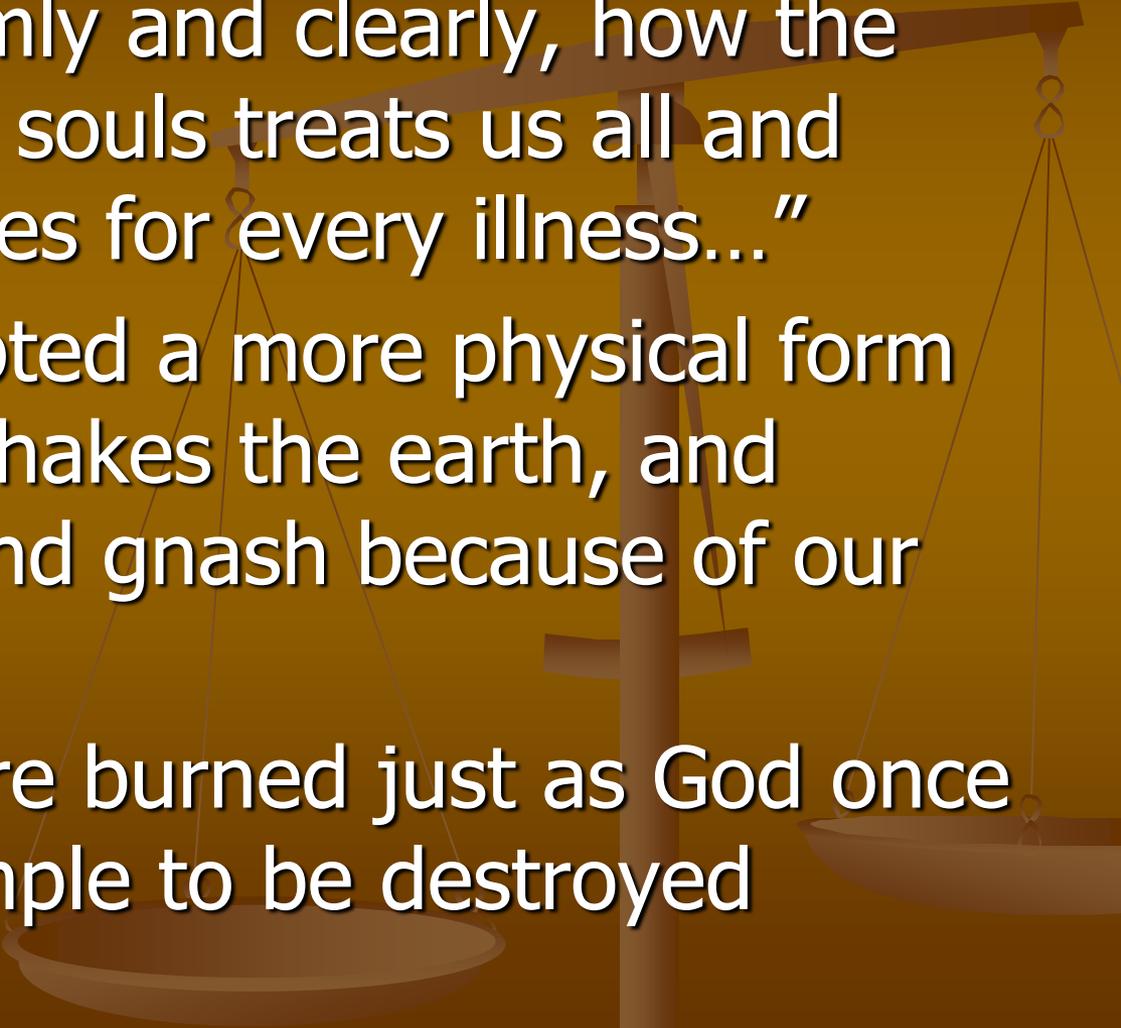
- Era of Justinian
- A deacon from Syria; wrote liturgical poems
- Performed at religious feast days for Saints and martyrs and church holidays
- Dramatic
- “Earthquakes and Fires” from period of “Nika” rebellion;
- God allows troubles to afflict us so that we turn to him for help “so he can supply eternal life”



God as a Physician: Hurts to Heal

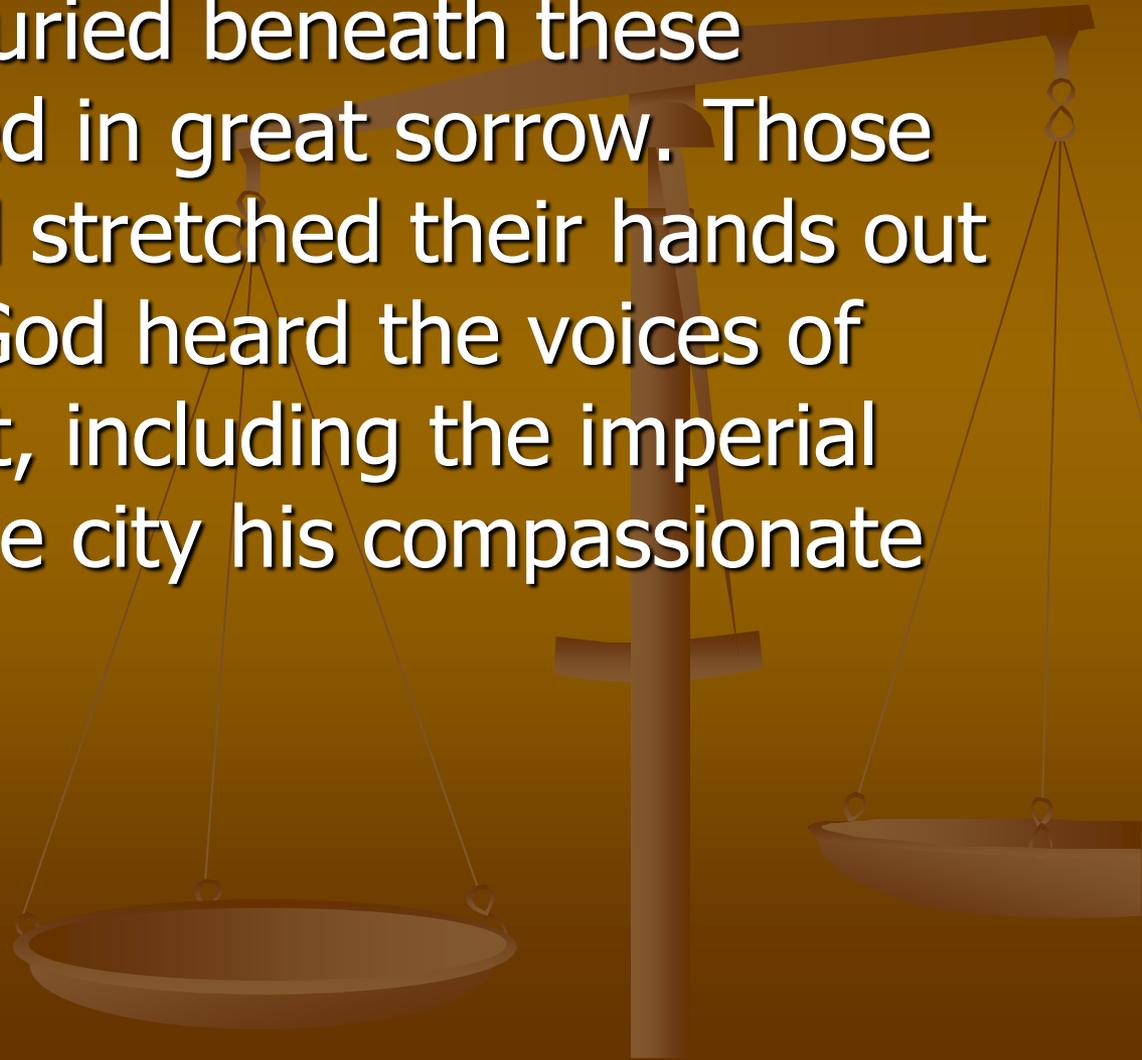
- “Like a skilled doctor he prescribes a cure for those who stagger, so that he can supply Eternal Life.”
 - When the Israelites sinned, God, through Moses, punished them
 - When the Canaanite woman wanted God’s cure for her daughter, he grew angry.
 - But His Anger only creates the condition for His Mercy
- 

Earthquake and Fire: Remedy to Rebellion

- “Let us see, calmly and clearly, how the Physician of our souls treats us all and compounds salves for every illness...”
 - “So he has adopted a more physical form of therapy: he shakes the earth, and makes the ground gnash because of our sins.”
 - The Churches are burned just as God once allowed the Temple to be destroyed
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Cries of Mercy by Imperial Couple lead to God's Mercy

- “The city was buried beneath these horrors and cried in great sorrow. Those who feared God stretched their hands out to him...When God heard the voices of those crying out, including the imperial pair, he gave the city his compassionate pity.”



Hagia Sophia as a Type of the Temple

- The Temple in Israel was rebuilt with Basilicas by Constantine and Helena
- “Today the royal pair, piously discharging their imperial duties, have done things truly magnificent, brilliant, worthy of wonder, Far surpassing the accomplishments of previous emperors..

Holy Sophia, the very home of our church, is being reconstructed with such skill that it imitates heaven, the throne of God, which supplies Eternal Life.”

Paulos: 807

■ She plucked one thread
Of her glinting hair
And caught my hands
Within that snare.

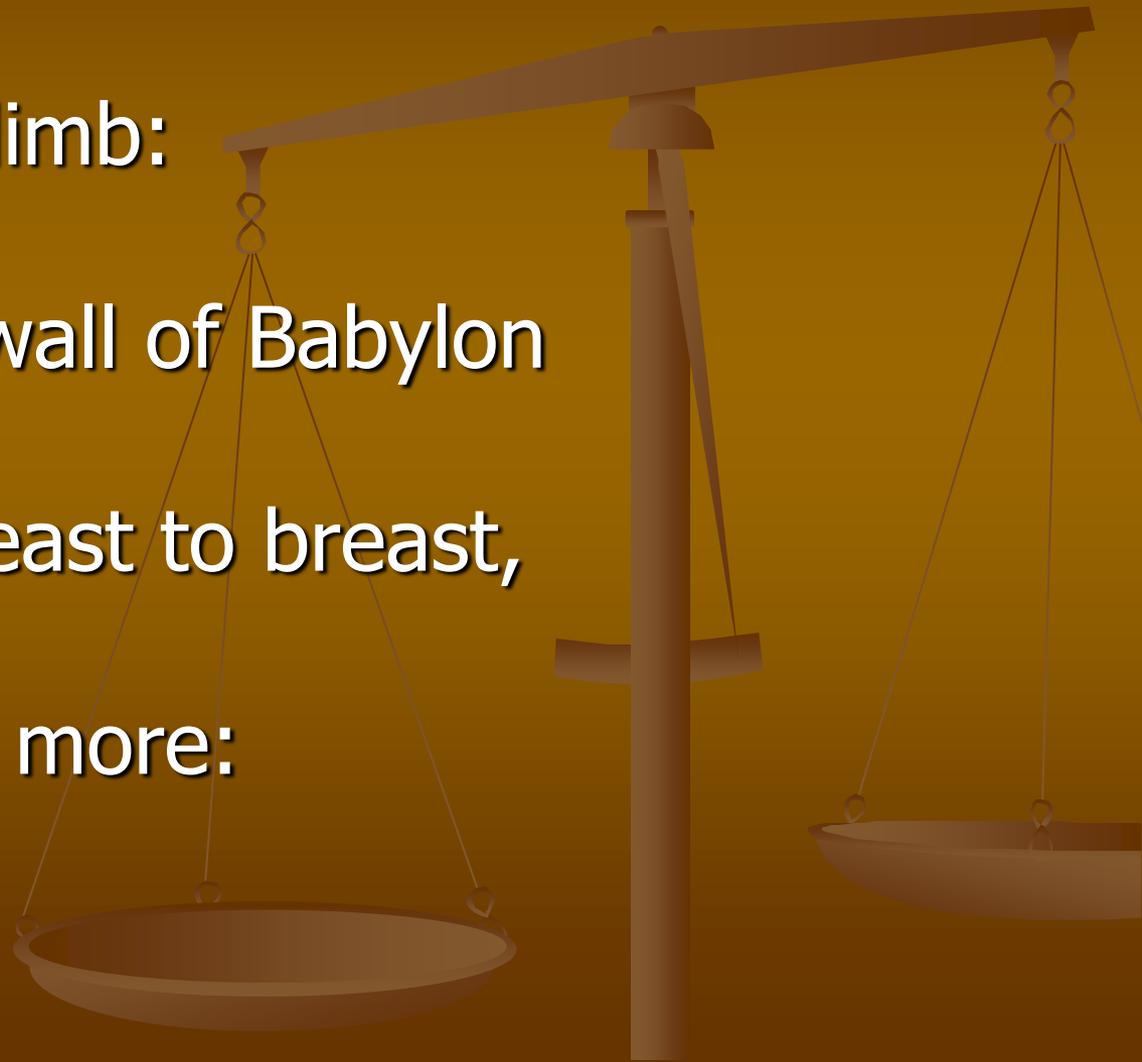
Laughing, I tried
To shake them free:
The hair, like steel,
Imprisoned me.

A shackled slave,
I rue my laughter:
Now, where she leads
I stumble after.



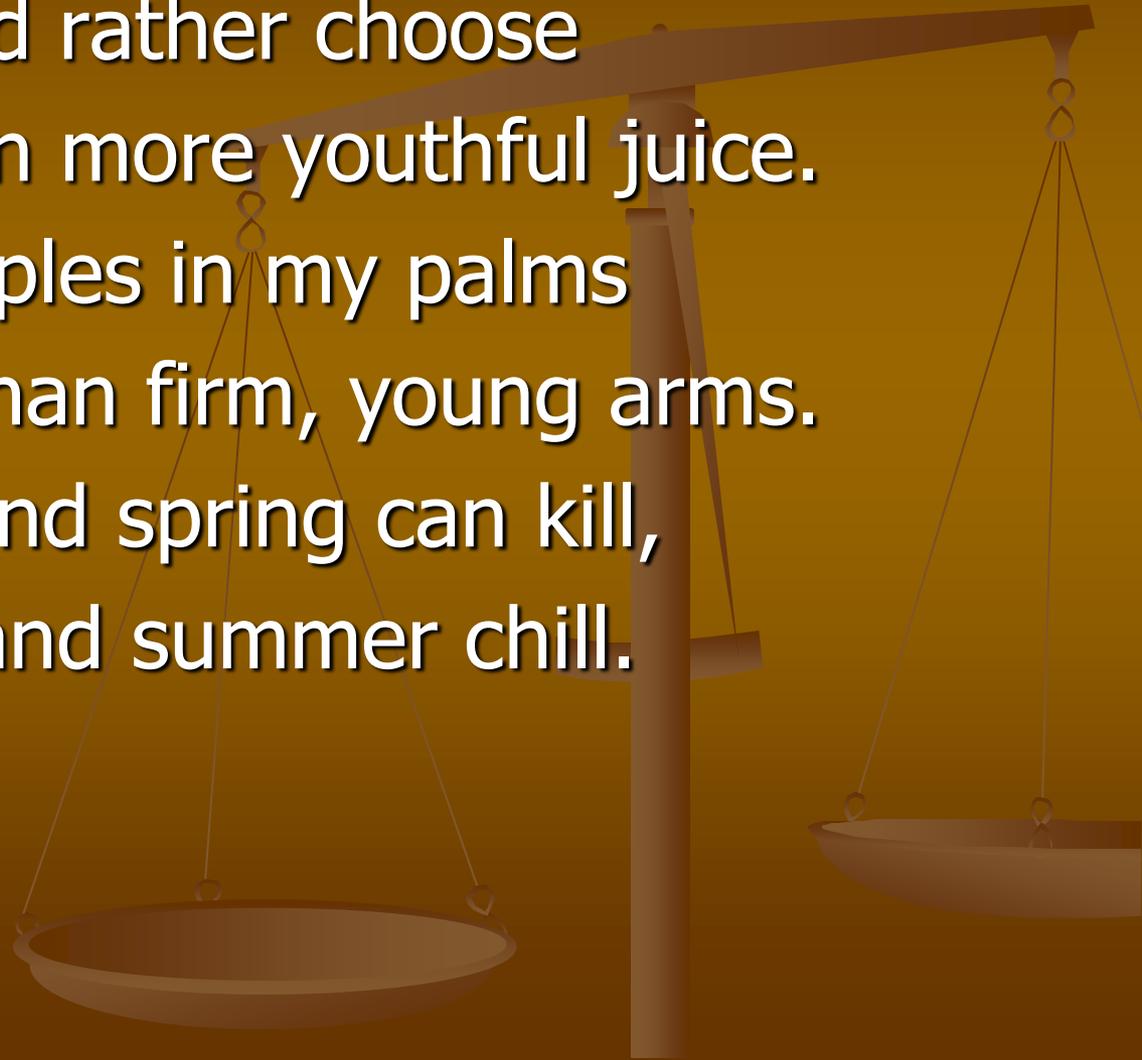
Paulos, 810

■ Slip off that gown,
Let limb
Lie locked in naked limb:
The sheerest weave
Seems thick as the wall of Babylon
When we embrace.
Come, let us join breast to breast,
Link lip with lip,
And...no! I'll say no more:
I hate
An idle tongue.

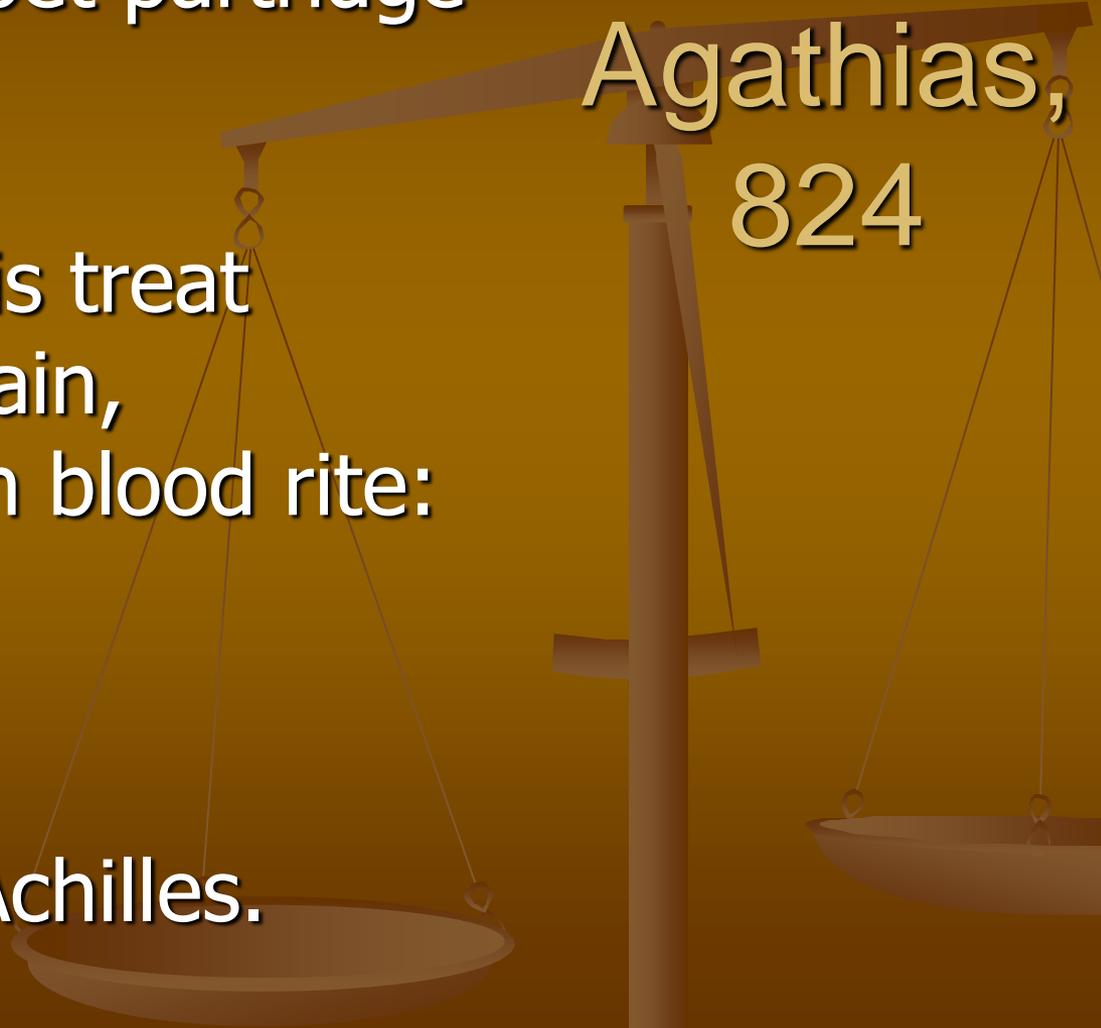


Paulus on Autumn love

- Philinna, I would rather choose
Your wrinkles than more youthful juice.
Your clustered apples in my palms
Are more to me than firm, young arms.
Autumn can joy and spring can kill,
Winter can burn and summer chill.



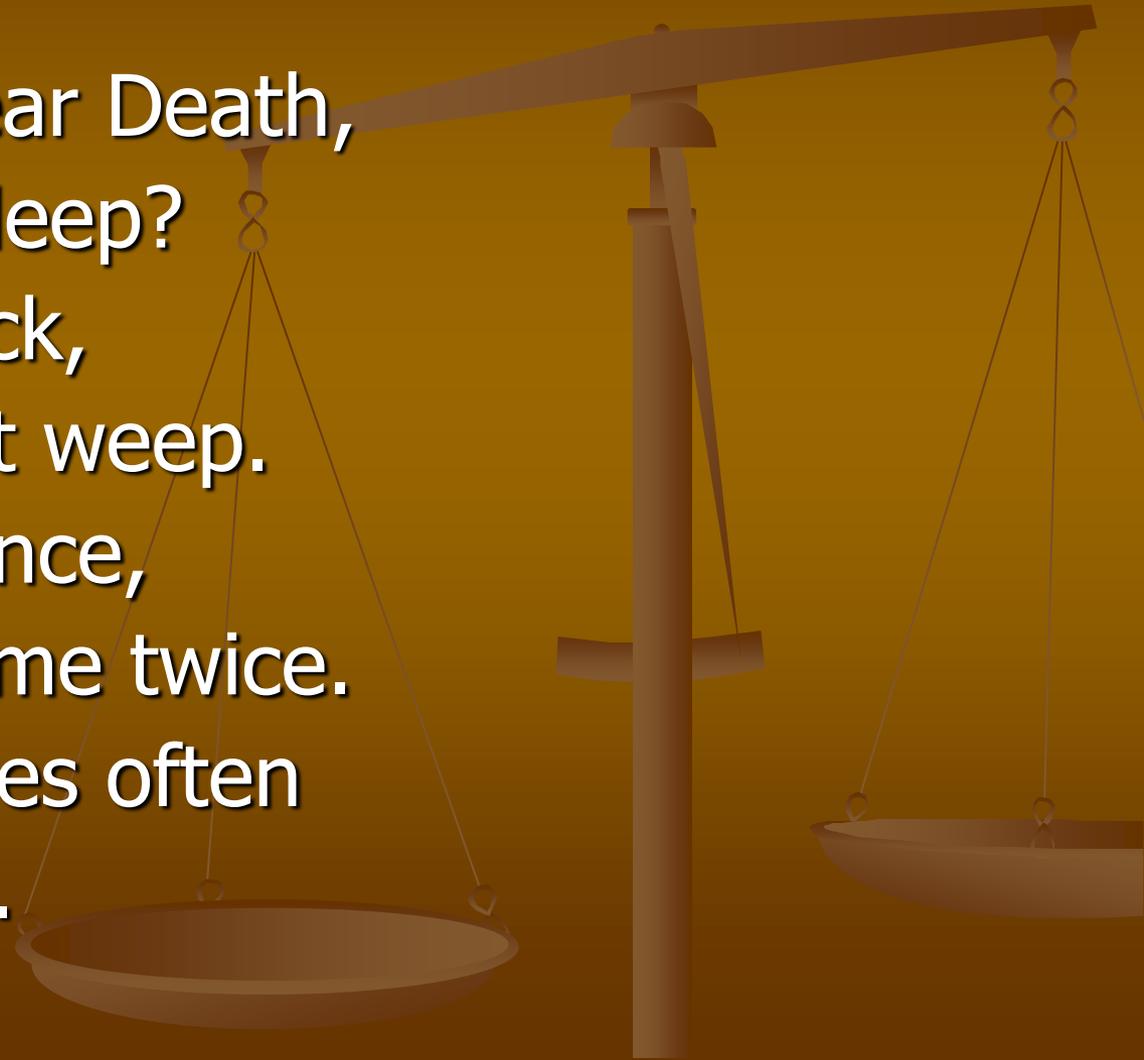
■ You expect, Puss-in-Boots
To go on treating my house
As your house
After treating my pet partridge
As a comestibile?
No, pet partridge!
Over the bones of his treat
The cat shall be slain,
And you honoured in blood rite:
As Pyrrhus, recall,
Rightfully slew
Polyxena
Over the corpse of Achilles.



Agathias,
824

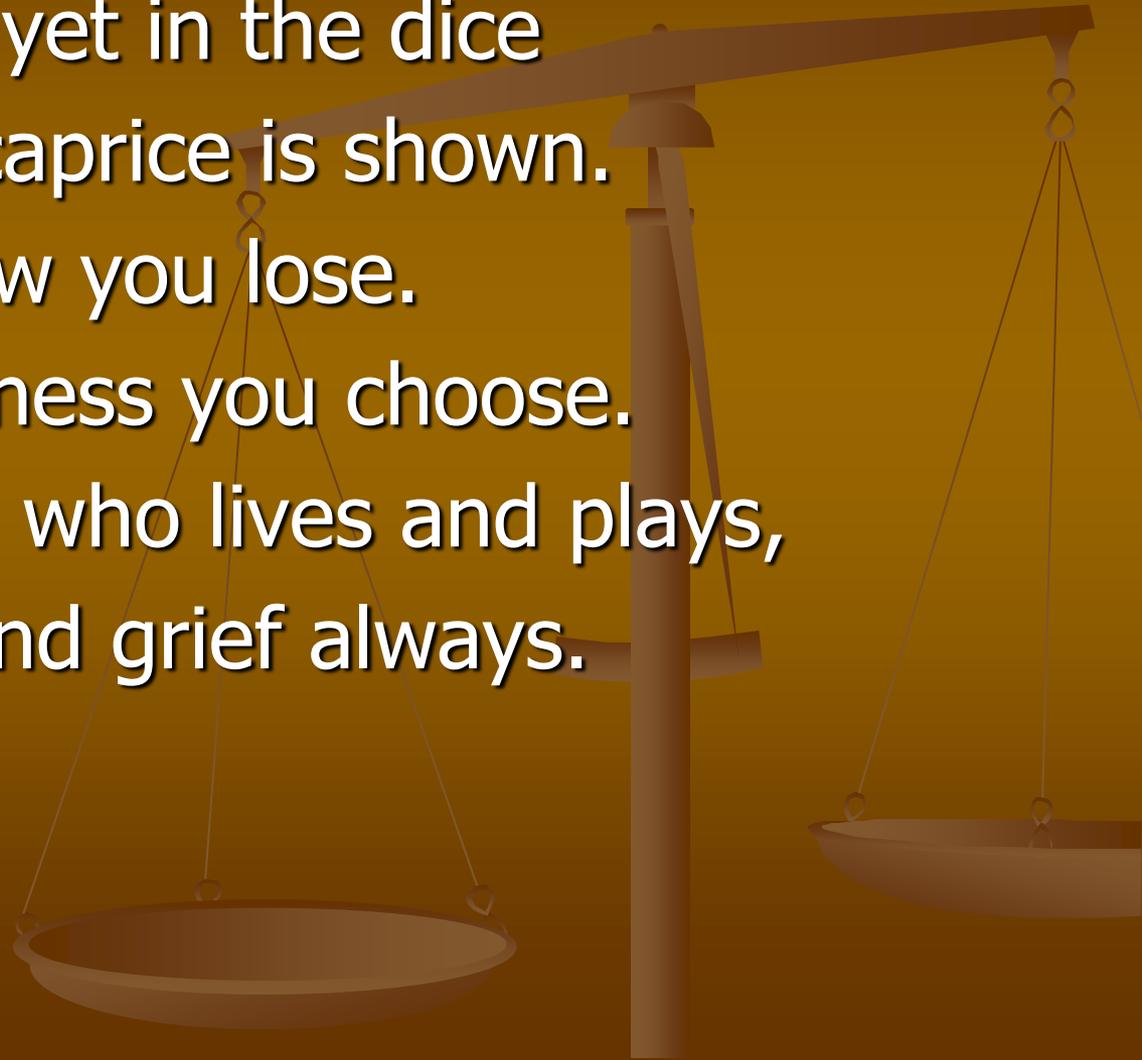
Agathias and Greek Stoicism

- Why do you fear Death,
The mother of sleep?
She cures the sick,
Quiets them that weep.
She visits only once,
She does not come twice.
But disease comes often
In many a guise.



“On a Dice Game”

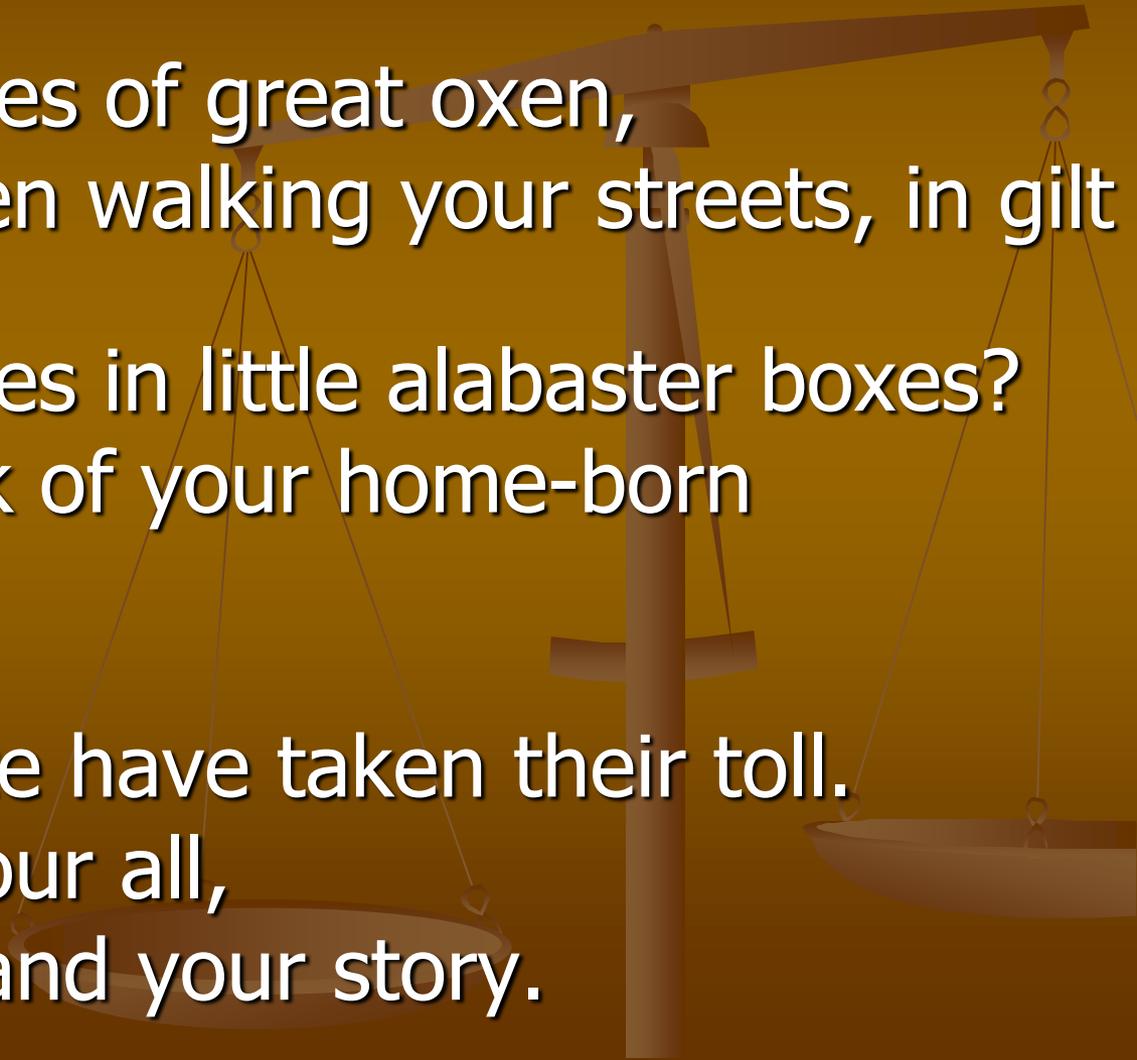
- This is a game, yet in the dice Fortune and her caprice is shown. Now you win—now you lose. This is life’s fickleness you choose. Praise to the man who lives and plays, Moderate in joy and grief always.



“Troy”

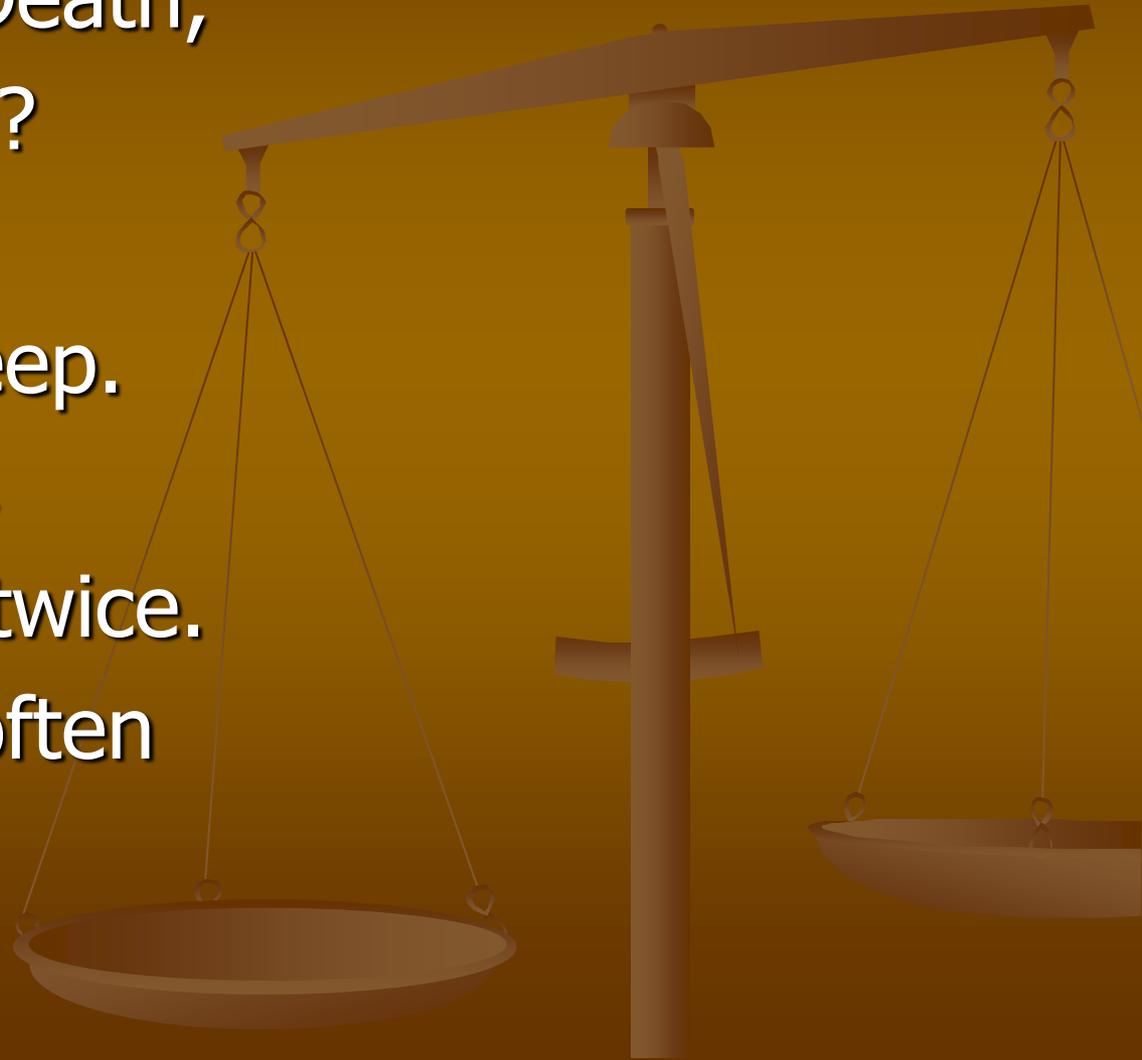
- Whither, O city, are your profits and your gilded shrines,
And your barbecues of great oxen,
And the tall women walking your streets, in gilt clothes,
With their perfumes in little alabaster boxes?
Where is the work of your home-born sculptors?

Time, war and fate have taken their toll.
Envy has taken your all,
Save your douth and your story.



On Death

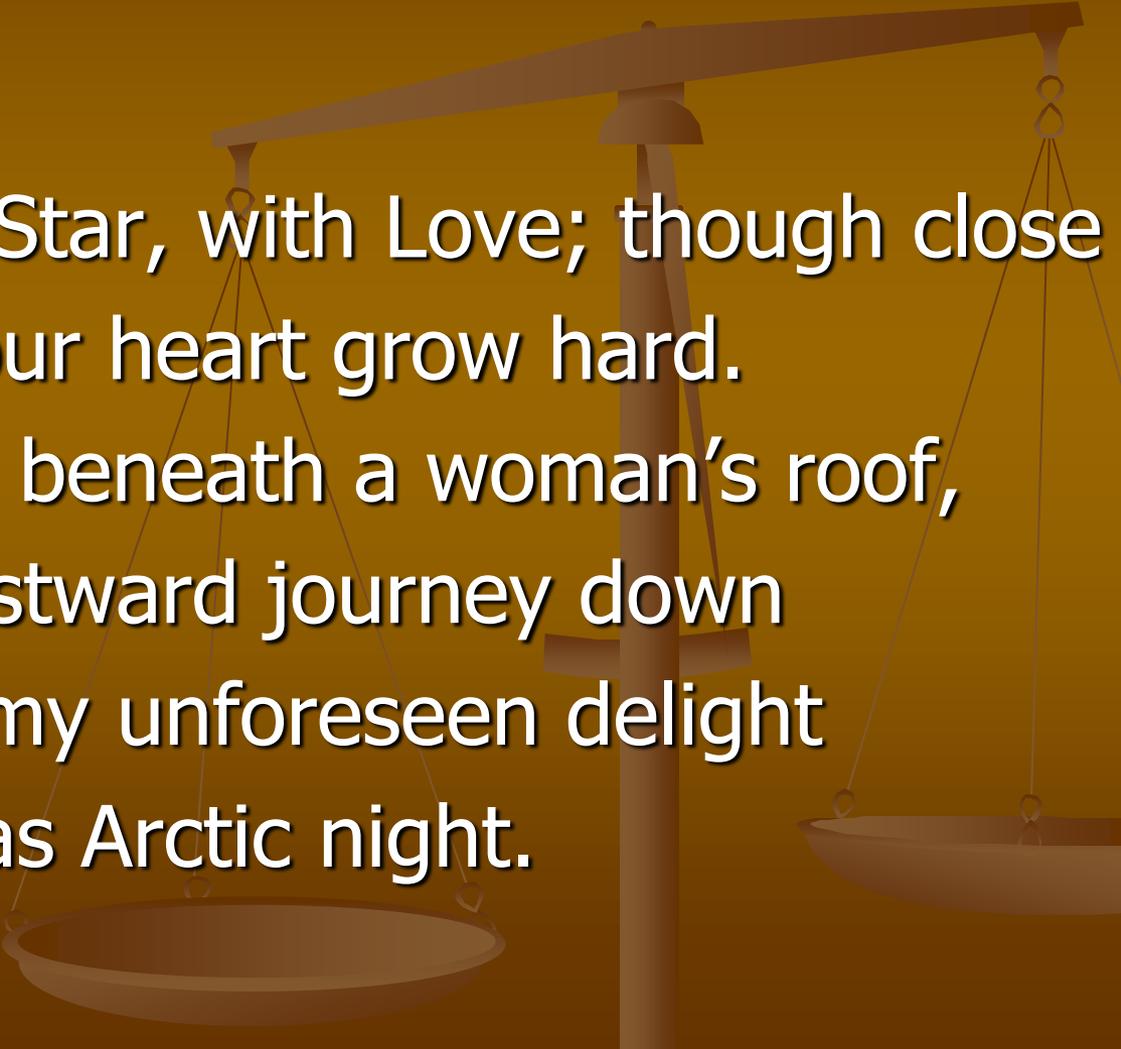
■ Why do you fear Death,
The mother of sleep?
She cures the sick,
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Macedonius, consul for Justinian

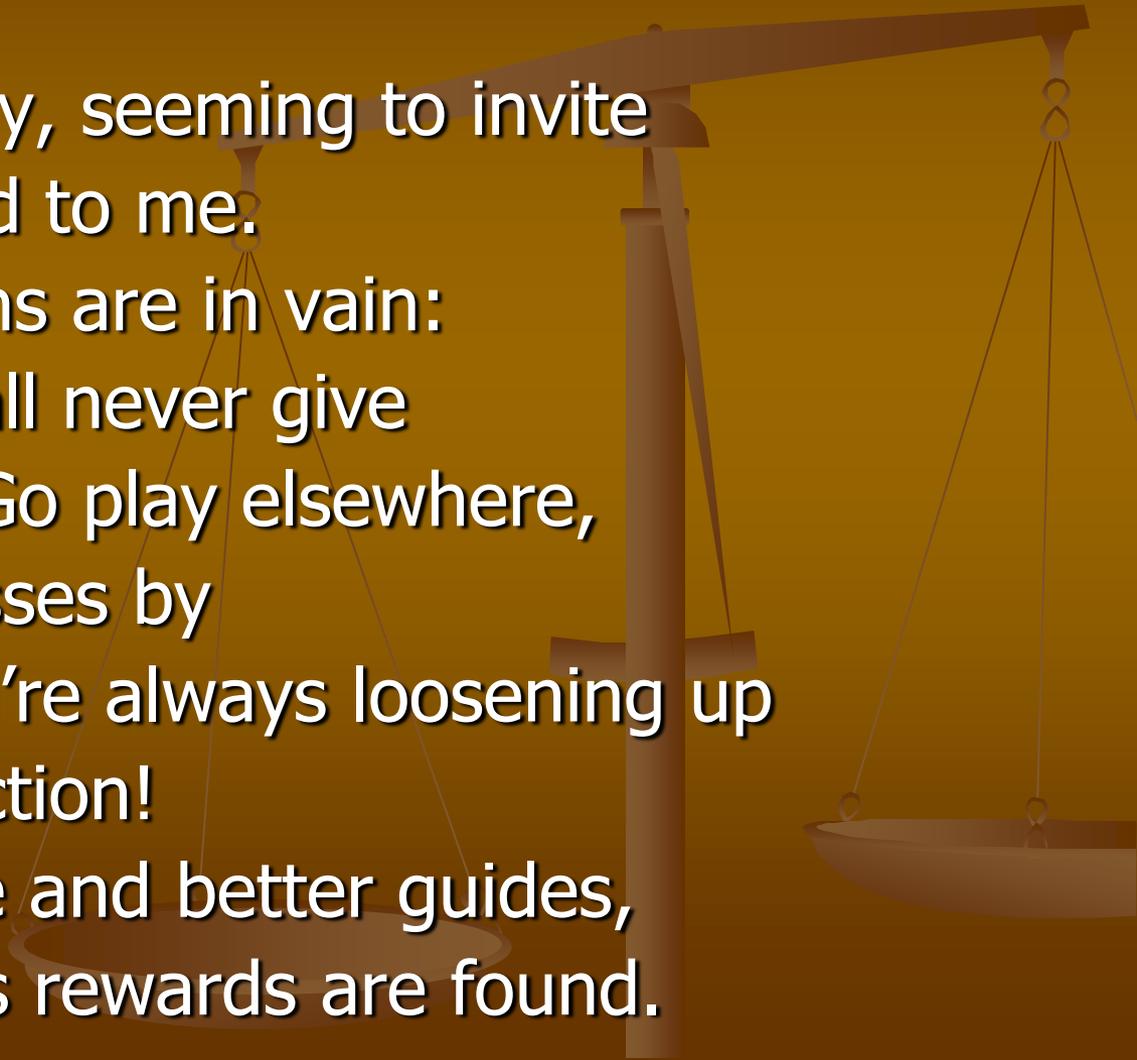
■ 834:

Be patient, Morning Star, with Love; though close
To Mars, don't let your heart grow hard.
You've seen the Sun beneath a woman's roof,
And slowed your westward journey down
Before; then crown my unforeseen delight
With darkness long as Arctic night.



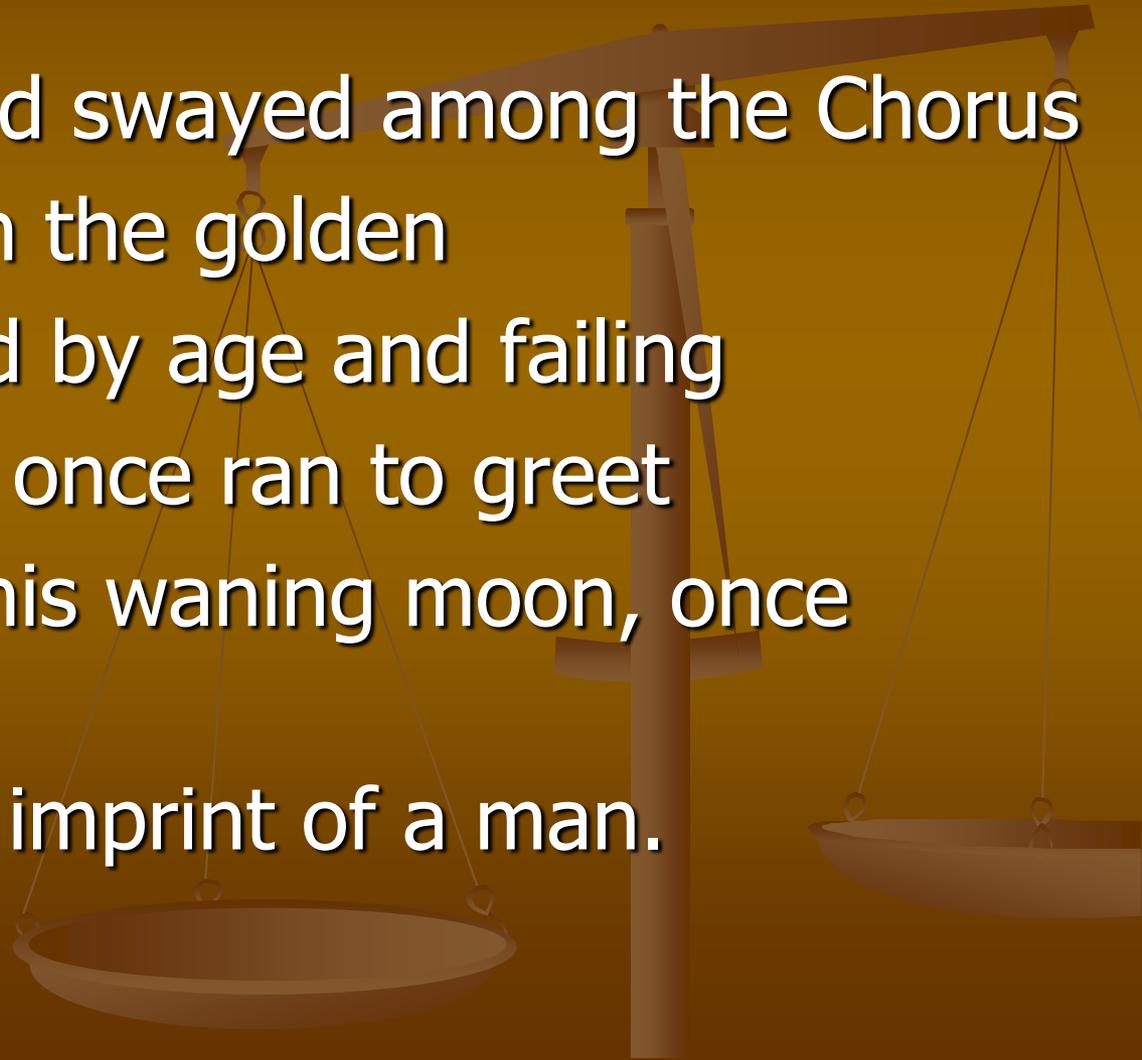
Macedonius, 841

- You neigh and whinny, seeming to invite
A mate; you quietly nod to me.
But all your provocations are in vain:
I've sworn my eyes shall never give
A tease a gentle look. Go play elsewhere,
And blow your futile kisses by
Yourself; those lips you're always loosening up
Have never seen the action!
But I've a better course and better guides,
Who know where love's rewards are found.



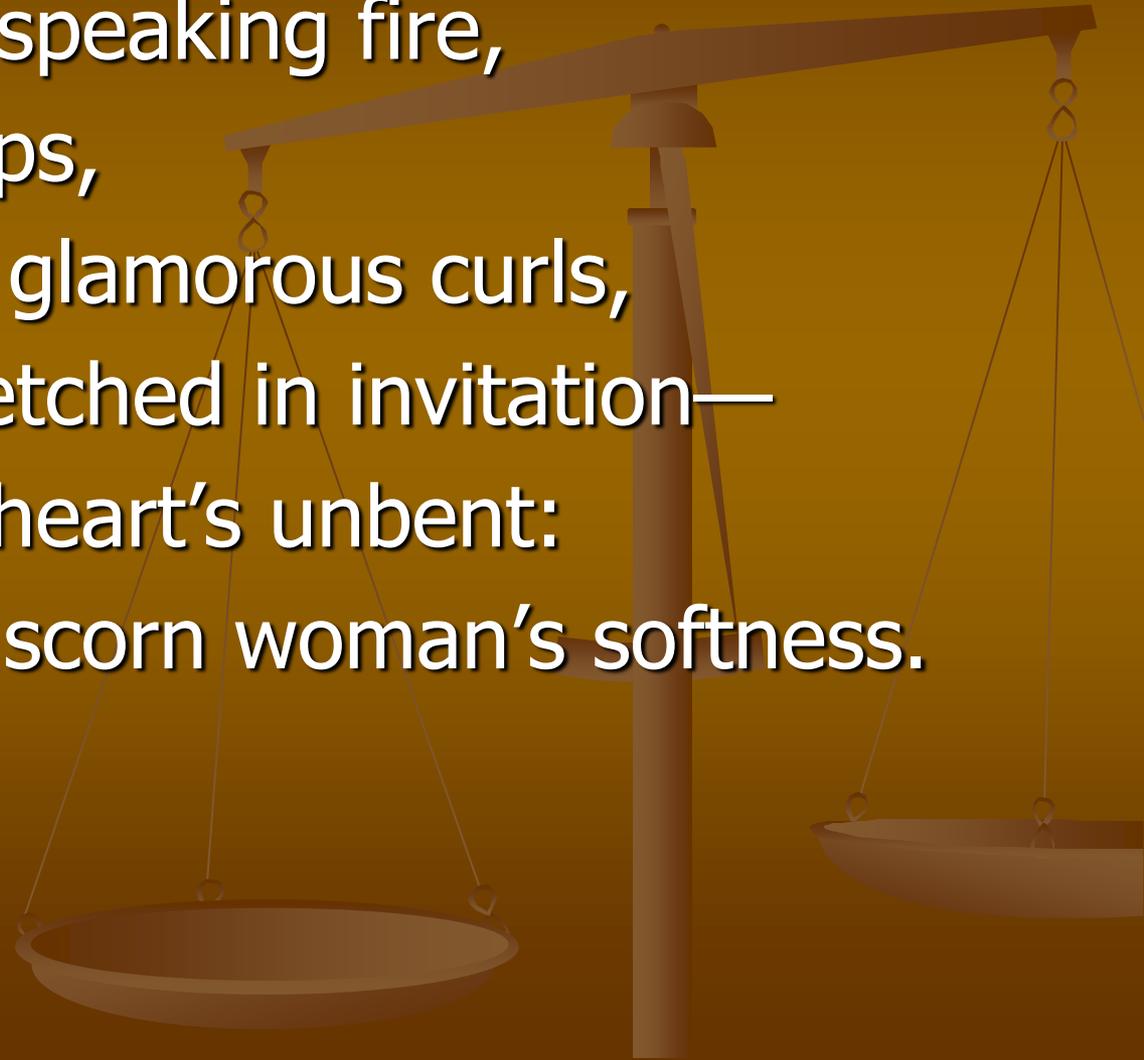
Macedonius 842

- She who shook and swayed among the Chorus Girls, the teaser with the golden Castanets, is gripped by age and failing Health. Lovers who once ran to greet Her shrink away. This waning moon, once proud,
No longer bears the imprint of a man.



Irenaios, 849

- Eyes filled with speaking fire,
Pouting painted lips,
Giggles, a toss of glamorous curls,
Coy hands outstretched in invitation—
For all that, your heart's unbent:
Wasting, you still scorn woman's softness.

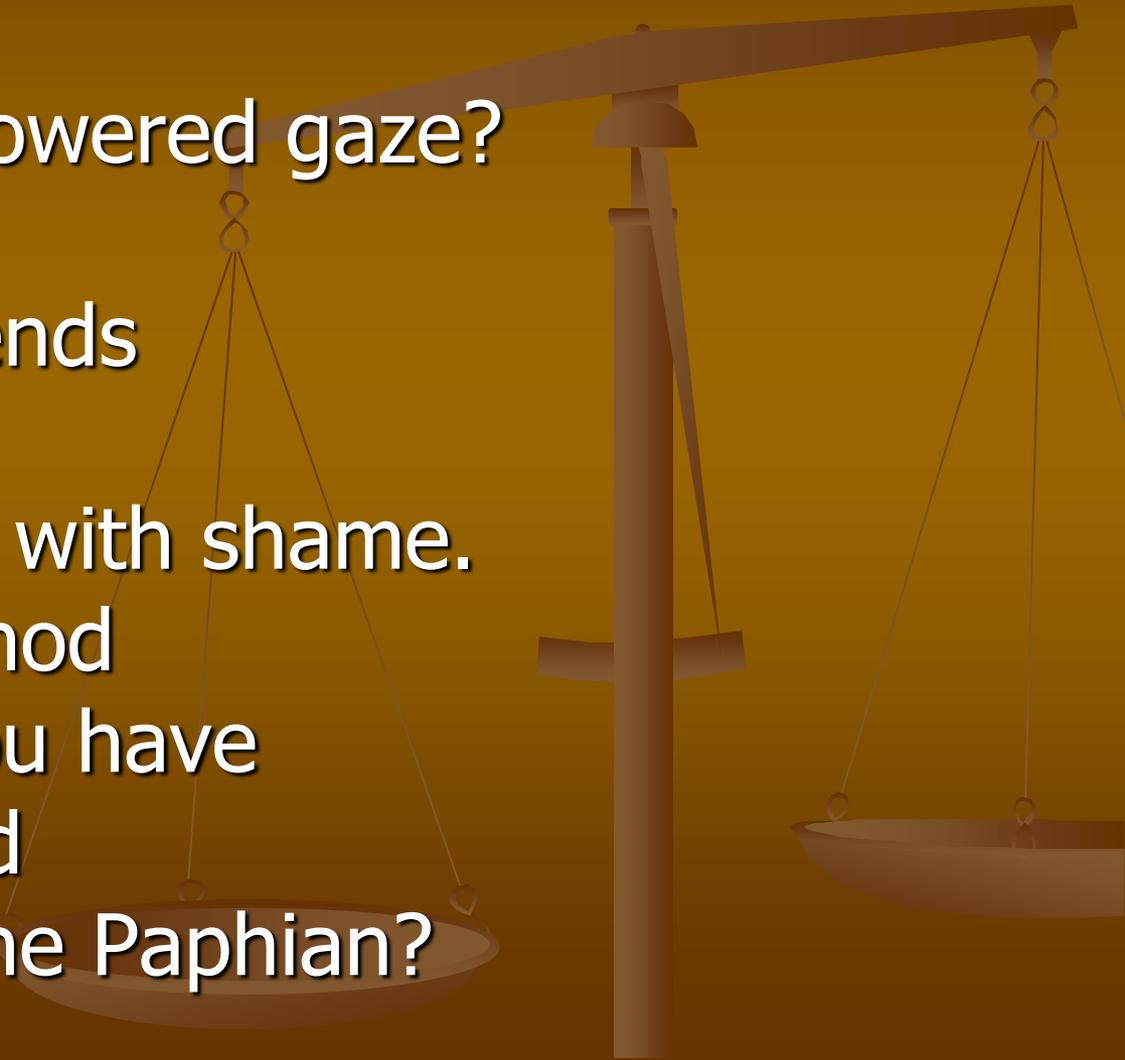


Irenaios 850

- Why is the floor, Chrysilla,
honored thus
by your lowered gaze?

Please don't fidget
with your girdle-ends
like that.

Kypris has no truck with shame.
could not a little nod
Signify that you have
submitted
to the Paphian?



Summary

- Poets were court poets
- Themes were erotic, ironic, comic, and political
- Religious literature took the form of Hymns and was not really part of the court poetry
- Highly learned and influenced by Hellenistic Greek literature

