

## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 28 (2018)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 28



**Book Review: "Toward a historical Sociolinguistic Poetics of Medieval Greek", eds. A. CUOMO- E. TRAPP, Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization (SBHC 12)**

*Αννα Σπυρίδωνος ΣΚΛΑΒΕΝΙΤΗ*

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.18840](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.18840)

Copyright © 2018, Άννα Σπυρίδωνος Σκλαβενίτη



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

ΣΚΛΑΒΕΝΙΤΗ Α. Σ. (2018). Book Review: "Toward a historical Sociolinguistic Poetics of Medieval Greek", eds. A. CUOMO- E. TRAPP, Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization (SBHC 12). *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 28, 385–387. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.18840>

A. CUOMO – E. TRAPP (eds.), *Toward a Historical Sociolinguistic Poetics of Medieval Greek* [BYZANTIOS. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 12), Turnhout 2017, pp. VIII+233, 11 b/w ill. ISBN 978-2-503-57713-5

The collective volume under review contains the proceedings of two workshops that took place in Vienna, on June 2013 and September 2014. It is the first work aiming at analyzing linguistic phenomena in Byzantine texts as products of a specific historical period and a particular society.

Introducing us to this brand-new perspective of Byzantine studies, A. Massimo Cuomo (Historical Sociolinguistics – Pragmatics and Semiotics, and the study of Medieval Greek Literature, pp. 1-33) declares that he is aware of the standardized way Byzantine scholars used the Atticized Greek language (a *sui generis* sociolect, according to Cuomo). Nevertheless, he claims that several data such as interlinear notes in the manuscripts can help us recreate the medieval speaker's insight into their own language (the so-called "Koine"). Moreover, Byzantine texts should – according to him – be re-evaluated and analyzed within their social framework, e.g. as a useful implement which reveals the culture of the writer and the way he communicates with other people, by sharing the same cultural references.

Klaas Bentein in his essay "Towards a Socio-historical analysis of ancient Greek? Some problems and prospects" (pp. 35-44), presents Roman and Byzantine papyri, analyzed with the "Systemic Functional Framework", an approach that focuses on the agentive role of the text, on writer's social status and on "social distance" between the writer and his readers.

Stefano Valente's essay "Old and new Lexica in Palaeologan Byzantium" (pp. 45-56) introduces us several lexica of the Palaeologan period, used for educational purposes. He emphasizes on Thomas Magistros' lexicon, as well as on a lexicographical work, falsely attributed to Zonaras. The large circulation of these Lexica proves the need of speaking and writing fluently the fictive Attic sociolect.

Daniele Bianconi's text, entitled "La lettura dei testi antichi tra didattica ed erudizione: qualche esempio d'età palaeologa" (pp. 57-83) initially focuses on a Planudean autograph, which proves that Planudes was teaching Aristoteles' Logic. Bianconi hereupon examines one of Gregoras' most well-known letters addressed to his friend and student Pepagomenos [P. L. Leone (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae Epistulae*, v. II, Matino 1982, ep. 4]. Examining several autograph scholia written by Gregoras in his letter, Bianconi reveals the didactic purpose of the text.

Inmaculada Pérez-Martin in her study "Aristides' *Panathenaikos* as a Byzantine schoolbook: Nikephoros Gregoras' Notes on Ms. Escorial Φ.I.18" (pp. 86-107) examines thoroughly Gregoras' autograph notes in ms. *Escorial Φ.I.18*, coming up to the conclusion that these scholia were part of a schoolbook for Gregoras' own school in Chora monastery.

In his essay "Georgios Akropolitis: Theory and Practice in the Language of Later Byzantine Historiography" (pp. 109-118), Geoffrey Horrocks traces elements of the vernacular language in Georgios Akropolitis' historical work, proving that spoken medieval Greek has influenced even the most carefully written samples of Palaeologan writings.

Ioannis Telelis' paper "Τεχνικὸς διδάσκαλος: Georgios Pachymeres as Paraphrast of Aristotelian Meteorology" (pp. 119-142) thoroughly explores the method Pachymeres used in order to explain Aristoteles' *Meteorologica* in his compendium-like synopsis named *Philosophia*. By citing excerpts from both Aristoteles and Pachymeres, Telelis concludes that Pachymeres' paraphrase occasionally deviates from the Aristotelian source-text, to facilitate comprehension, thus being possibly used as a tool for young students.

Divna Manolova's "The student becomes the teacher: Nikephoros Gregoras' Hortatory Letter concerning Astronomy" (pp. 143-160) sheds light on the way Gregoras managed to become an expert in mathematical Astronomy, continuing Metochites' efforts and then handing over his knowledge to his own students, especially Isaac Argyros. Manolova cites numerous extracts from Gregoras' Letters, as well as from "Florentios", in order to prove that the student (Gregoras) became a teacher specialized in astronomical knowledge. Among these extracts the most noteworthy is the "Hortatory Letter concerning Astronomy".

Finally, Paolo Odorico, in his study "Identité et craintes. Théodore Pédiasimos á Serrès au XIVe siècle" (pp. 161-174) analyzes an interesting theological text of Pédiasimos, emphasizing on the political role of his ecclesiastic speech, written for the celebration of St Theodore Stratelates. Odorico traces an early use of the word

γένος (attributed to people sharing Greek language and the Byzantine culture) in Pediasimos' speech and points out the necessity of the word in a period when the city of Serres was under Serbian control.

The volume ends with the abstracts of the papers, written in English (pp. 175-180), the bibliography (pp. 181-219), a general index (pp. 221-229) and an index of manuscripts (pp. 230-233).

This collective volume makes a considerable attempt to insert modern sociolinguistic theories in byzantine texts. Of great significance is the fact that several byzantine manuscripts are re-examined as schoolbooks (see above, Telelis', Bianconi's and Perez-Martin's papers, as well as Cuomo's introduction). There are, however some omissions or misunderstandings in several papers. For example Valente's essay lacks an important lexicon of the Palaeologan period, written by Nikephoros Gregoras and preserved in several manuscripts usually under the title *Ἐκ τῶν τεχνολογιῶν τοῦ Γρηγοῦρά*<sup>1</sup>. Finally, Bianconi's work on Gregoras' Letter to Pepagomenos is deficient in the "realia" this letter offers us; specifically the repeated words *ἀκαιρία* and *ἄωρία* lead us to the conclusion that the epistle was written between 1351 and 1354<sup>2</sup>. It is the period of Gregoras' imprisonment in Chora monastery. Thus, he could not have possibly taught at that time in the private school he founded there around 1325.

To sum up, we think that this book is a valuable contribution to the knowledge of Palaeologan literature and to the manifestation of the special interest Byzantine scholars showed towards linguistic matters.

ANNA SKLAVENTI

IHR/NHRF

---

1. S. LINDSTAM was the first who attributed this work to Gregoras, in his review to R. GUILLAND' s books, *Essai sur Nicéphore Grégoras*, Paris 1926 and *Correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras*, Paris 1927, see *BZ* 29 (1929), 304-309. Of course one cannot easily understand that it is a lexicographic work, since its first part is a theoretical essay on both grammatical and linguistic changes.

2. Gregoras complains both of his illness and his misfortune; he even claims he prefers death to this sort of life, see *Nicephori Gregorae Epistulae* [ed. cit. supra], ep. 4, 46-59: *Εἰς γὰρ τοῦτο τύχης ἐλήλαται τὰ ἡμέτερα, ὡς δυοῖν ἐπιρρημένων εἰς αἴρεσιν, πότερον ζῶντας περιστοιχίζεσθαι ταῖς ἐνούσαις νόσοις καὶ κηρσίν, ἢ τῆς ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου λήξεως ἀποικίαν ποιῆσθαι ταχεῖαν, θάπτον ἂν ὡς διχόθεν ἀναγκαιότερον ἐλοιμέθα θάτερον, λέγω δὴ τὸ τῆς ἀποικίας τὸ κουφότερον θνήσκειν γὰρ ἀνάγκη, πάσχειν δ' οὐκ ἀνάγκη..* On the dating see A. ΣΚΛΑΒΕΝΙΤΗ, *Συμβολή στη μελέτη των επιστολών του Νικηφόρου Γρηγοῦρά*, διδακτορική διατριβή, Ἰωάννινα 2014, 55-56 [=phdtheses.ekt.gr/eadd/handle/10442/38832].

