Review Article: A. RHOBY & N. ZAGKLAS (eds.), Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Texts and Contexts [BYZANTIOΣ. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 14], Turnhout 2018

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This volume brings together a number of scholars, who contribute a series of papers on secular –mainly– and ecclesiastical poetry of the middle and late centuries of Byzantium (10th-15th century). Byzantine poetry, particularly secular poetry of the 11th and 12th centuries, has attracted much attention in recent years, resulting in the production of several important monographs and articles. The present book could and should be viewed as an integral part of the said development, and at the same time as an important one, given the high calibre of all the contributions.

As regards Byzantine poetry in general, the study of primary sources is not always an easy task, since modern scholars are often forced to rely upon outdated editions of the 19th century, which by today's standards are justifiably deemed as unsatisfactory or, in some cases, even problematic. It comes as no surprise, then, that in their "Introduction" the editors stress the need of fresh editions of hitherto inadequately edited or unedited poems (pp. 1-5). The reader will certainly be pleased to find that the volume features a number of critical editions, mostly of texts that had not been edited previously.

Specifically, both papers on ecclesiastical poetry include critical editions. Theodora Antonopoulou's contribution ("Imperial hymnography: The canons attributed to emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. With the critical edition of the first canon on St John Chrysostom", pp. 211-244) deals, as the title indicates, with three canons attributed to Emperor Constantine VII (10th century) and also provides a critical edition of one of them; Dimitrios Skrekas's paper ("Translations and paraphrases of liturgical poetry in Late Byzantine Thessalonica", pp. 245-282) discusses several paraphrases of liturgical poetry related to the environment of Thessalonica in the 13th to the 15th century and in so doing provides a critical

edition of some. The educational character of the edited paraphrases and the performative instructions given in a manuscript containing a paraphrasis penned by Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (15th century), offer an intriguing insight into the cultural milieu of the era.

Renaat Meesters, with the collaboration of Rachele Ricceri ("A twelfth-century cycle of four poems on John Klimax: *Editio princeps*", pp. 285-386), presents a critical edition of a hitherto unedited cycle of four poems on the extremely popular *Ladder* of John Klimax (6th or 7th-century), which is accompanied by a brief analysis by Meesters ("A twelfth-century cycle of four poems on John Klimax: A brief analysis", pp. 387-406). In the introduction prefixed to the edition, Meesters discusses several issues, such as the problem of authorship (two Johns seem to be involved in the composition of the four poems, a certain John Komnenos and another one, who, according to the editor, is probably the redactor of all the verses), and the metrical character of the cycle. With regard to the latter, he argues that verses not stressed on the eleventh syllable constitute "anomalities" (p. 306) or "overt errors" (p. 307). In fact, such cases are not "anomalous" or "erroneous", rather less common and therefore significantly rarer than verses with an accent on the penultimate[1].

The edition is diligently executed, based on all seven manuscripts. As regards the *lectiones* of the Greek text, few cases are in need of further discussion (e.g. Poem 1, v. 49, p. 316: καὶ τῷ δε, with an enclisis, instead of καὶ τῷδε). Moreover, certain changes could be made in the punctuation (for instance, a semicolon is required in v. 47 of Poem 2, p. 326 – there are other similar cases throughout the text; on the other hand, vv. 60-65 of Poem 1, pp. 316-318 should probably be put in brackets).

As far as the translation is concerned, counter-suggestions could be made on several occasions. For instance, vv. 38-44 of Poem 1 (p. 316) are interpreted as follows (p. 317): "The birds approach, in the valleys, wonderful flowers, which breath [sic] out the sweetest scent. These are, I think, the words of the prayer which David has called 'like incense'; these please the mind of God more than (real) flowers, as the throat of one who is fasting, as the tongue, as the voice of one who sings psalms". The phrase "these please ... flowers" corresponds to τὰ γὰρ Θεοῦ τέρπουσιν νοῦν ἄνθη πέρι, which is probably better understood as: "for the flowers of God please the mind more than actual flowers", since it is insituated right before the "birds (i.e.

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1. See M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and contexts. Volume 2* (WBS 24/2), Vienna 2019, 320-323.

the monks) breathe the scent of the 'flowers' (i.e. the prayers)", and subsequently: "as *they please* the throat..., as *they please* the tongue and the voice...".

Another case that merits further discussion is found in vv. 46-49 of Poem 2 (p. 326), which reads: Ἀλλοτριοῖς πως σαυτὸν ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων, / ἀποξενοῖς πως σαυτὸν ἐξ ἀλλοτρίων<·> / ὅπως ξενισθῆς ἐν ξένοις, ξένος γίνη / ἀποξενούντων τοὺς ξένους σφῶν ἐκ ξένων. These lines are translated as: "You alienate yourself from what is yours; you estrange yourself from what is extraneous; in order to become a stranger amongst strangers, you become a stranger to those who estrange strangers from their own strangers". First, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων and ἐξ ἀλλοτρίων seem to refer to people (relatives and strangers respectively), not things or possessions (cf. in the *Ladder*, PG 88, 668: Χαλεπὴ ἡ πρός **τινα** τῶν οἰκείων ἢ καὶ ξένων προσπάθεια – my emphasis). Second, there seem to be too many ξένοι in the next verses. We may wonder whether the poet is playing with the double meaning of the word here ("a dear guest" and "a stranger"). Ξενίζομαι could also be understood as "to be entertained as a guest". With this in mind, there are two ways to translate vv. 48-49. The first one: "In order to be received as a guest among strangers, you become a stranger to those who estrange their guests [σφῶν goes better with ξένους; cf. Ἰλ. Σ 311: ἐκ γάρ σφεων φρένας εἵλετο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη] from strangers". In this case, the ἀποξενοῦντες are one's relatives, who inhibit their children from becoming strangers, namely from leaving their home and their family behind, and thus finding God (cf. in the *Ladder*, op. cit.: ὑπισχνοῦνται δολίως ἡμῖν οἱ ἡμῶν, καὶ οὐχ ἡμῶν, πάντα τὰ φίλα διαπράττεσθαι, σκοπὸς δὲ τούτοις τῷ ἀρίστῳ ἡμῶν ἐμποδίσαι δρόμῳ).

The second way to translate it: "In order to be received as a guest among strangers, you become a guest of those who estrange their guests from strangers". In this case, the ἀποξενοῦντες refers to the state of mind that will enable the contemplation of God (cf. in the *Ladder*, op. cit., 665: Ἔστω σου ὁ πατὴρ ὁ πρὸς τὸ φορτίον τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων συγκοπιάσαι δυνάμενος... κτῆσαι σύμβιον ἀναπόσπαστον μνήμην θανάτου, etc. (notice the use of the word σύμβιον, which could justify the understanding of ξένος as a guest). It should also be mentioned that apart from this passage there are other instances, this time mostly in Poem 1, which could be regarded as wordplays. These derive from the fact that in the first poem, the *Ladder*, that is the book, is likened to a garden. In this context, a word such as ὕλη (v. 17, p. 314) evokes both its meanings (the "matter" of the poem and a forest) – cf. v. 35, p. 314: ἐμφιλοχωροῦν τῷ νοημάτων δάσει (δάσος = a thicket and the density of something).

The rest of the papers in the volume constitute detailed analyses on different aspects of Byzantine poetry synchronically or diachronically, often with a focus on the poetic work of a specific author or even on a single poem. Floris Bernard's contribution ("Rhythm in the Byzantine dodecasyllable: Practices and perceptions", pp. 13-41) tackles an important yet somewhat understudied topic, that of rhythm in Byzantine secular metres, which, as the paper shows, is closely connected to the study of punctuation (pp. 26-30) and accentuation (pp. 30-34) of verses in the manuscripts. As far as punctuation is concerned, Bernard argues that in iambic poetry it gives absolute priority to rhythm over syntax (p. 30), thus confirming by and large what relevant studies in prose have shown (pp. 25-26). Within this framework, he lays emphasis on the colic structure of the dodecasyllable, consisting of two *cola* of either 7+5 (hephthemimeral pause) or 5+7 syllables (penthemimeral pause), which the scribes generally separate with a comma or a semicolon, even when syntax does not call for such punctuation (pp. 29-30). Occasionally things become blurry, due to the lack of consistency in practice, as observed also in manuscripts of prose literature (p. 27), in conjunction with the Byzantines' unwillingness to treat the accentual features of the dodecasyllable in a theoretical manner – with the exception of pseudo-Gregory of Corinth's treatise, as well as implicit instructions given in didactic poetry (the "iambs on iambs", as the scholar aptly puts it – pp. 17-21). Nonetheless, Bernard sees a clear tendency for scribes, whether intentionally or inadvertently, to favour rhythm over meaning, as well as "accentual" features over "prosodic" features.

In addition, Bernard emphasizes the notion of "concision" (pp. 21-24), as prescribed in pseudo-Gregory of Corinth's treatise in the section on iambic versification, which he relates to the affinity of rhetoric prose and poetry in the Byzantines' minds (p. 22), and, interestingly enough, also to the Christian virtue of "moderation" (p. 24) – for versification is presented by pseudo-Gregory as a stricter and more disciplined form of prose writing. "Concision", Bernard states, is "comprising a full story in a few words" (p. 23) and is linked in pseudo-Gregory's scheme to the avoidance of enjambments (p. 24). Certainly, these remarks lay the groundwork for future studies in Byzantine poetic rhythm.

One aspect of Bernard's argumentation that could be further discussed concerns the use of the term "rhythmical" over "metrical" punctuation, for what the separation of the two cola seems to reveal is the perception of the accentual *metrical* attributes of the dodecasyllable, with its two distinctive hemistichs. On the other hand, "rhythmical" punctuation does indeed refer to a few unique cases, such

as the manuscript containing Mauropous' iambs (discussed on pp. 27-28), which is marked by elaborate punctuation. Even the cases of non-prosodic iambic epigrams consisting of two *cola* with seven syllables (pp. 35-36) show, in my opinion, that their composers were carried away be the "metrical", not the "rhythmical", pattern of the dodecasyllable that they had in mind. Even today it would be possible for an aspiring Greek poet to compose a 13-syllable iambic verse instead of a 15-syllable one, by adding five instead of seven syllables after the compulsory pause in the eighth syllable. Again, in my view, such an error would be of "metrical" nature. Be that as it may, Bernard's paper undoubtedly contributes significantly to our gradual understanding of the rhythm of Byzantine iambic poetry.

Nikos Zagklas' paper ("Metrical *polyeideia* and generic innovation in the twelfth century: The multimetric cycles of occasional poetry", pp. 43-70) showcases the metrical and generic innovations that took place in 12th-century occasional poetry. Zagklas' treatment of the subject is two-fold, as the occasional poetry composed under the Komnenoi and the Angeloi, which features metrical experimentations within the boundaries of a single poem or even in the form of multi-metric stanzas or cycles (i.e. separate poems in different metres but composed on the same occasion and thus with similar or identical content), is regarded both in terms of continuity and rapture. Ultimately, despite the fact that such experiments did occur sporadically in previous centuries, Zagklas concludes that they reached their peak during the 12th century, the *par excellence* era of poetry. A crucial aspect of this paper is of course the performative side of most of the poems discussed. A couple of remarks on the translation of the passages used: In one of Prodromos' hexametric poems, Zagklas translates ἀμπλακιάων as "faults" (p. 61). Within the Christian context of this composition, "sins" is probably preferable. Also, in Euthymios Tornikes' multi-metrical panegyrical cycle for Isaac II Angelos, ἔκαμες... λαλεῦσα, is translated as "you've done your part...! You chatted..." (p. 53). Perhaps it would be more accurate to construe it as: "You wore yourself out chatting..." – the same goes for the repetition of ἔκαμες in the next verse.

Maria Tomadaki's contribution ("The reception of ancient Greek literature in the iambic poems of John Geometres", pp. 73-95), as its title suggests, looks at the vast array of intertextual references that permeate the iambic poems of John Geometres, with an emphasis on the poet's reception of ancient Greek literature. Tomadaki argues that Geometres generally strives to assimilate references to the pre-Christian literary past in a dynamic way, thus attempting to subjugate the ancient Greek way of thinking, especially philosophy, to the Greek Orthodox

paradigm (pp. 84-86 & 92). She concludes that: "Geometres does not compete with the ancient authors, as for instance John Tzetzes does in the twelfth century" (p. 94), a remark that contributes to our better understanding of Geometres' poetic style and ideological stance.

The paper by Premyslaw Marciniak & Katarzyna Warcaba ("Theodore Prodromos' *Katomyomachia* as a Byzantine version of mock-epic", pp. 97-110) deals exclusively with Prodromos' *Katomyomachia*. An intriguing composition that was perceived by the great Herbert Hunger as a parody of the conventions of ancient Greek tragedy[2], and by Raffaella Cresci as a camouflaged satire on the imperial elite of the time[3], is now seen in all its multi-faceted glory: satire, parody (especially in relation to the ancient Greek *Βατραχομυνομαχία*), didacticism and educational purposes are all put on the table, along with comparisons to other Prodromic pieces, such as *Βίων πρᾶσις*. As a whole, this paper highlights the complexity of Byzantine "satire" (in the broad sense) of the 12th century, as well as the multiple purposes such works could serve simultaneously (p. 110)[4]. As regards the authors' remark that: "Prodromos uses the same lines from Euripides' plays in both the *Katomyomachia* and the *Bion Prasis*, see for instance *Hekabe* 1056 = the *Katomyomachia* 252 and *Bion Prasis* 89" (p. 105, n. 34), it should be taken into account that these lines often serve completely different purposes when transferred to another poem; for instance, the verse from *Ἑκάβη* is related to the mourning of a child in the *Κατομυνομαχία*, whereas in *Βίων πρᾶσις* it is recited by Euripides himself, in the face of his possible purchaser – thus it is not connected to the loss of the first buyer's daughter at all. Practically, this means that each text requires a close reading in its own respect.

Andreas Rhoby's paper ("The poetry of Theodore Balsamon: Form and function", pp. 111-145) scrutinizes the edition of Theodore Balsamon's epigrams by Konstantin Horna (1903). Through Rhoby's meticulous and fruitful analysis, Balsamon, whose work and personality seem to attract the attention of modern

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2. H. Hunger (ed.), *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg*, Graz 1968.

3. R. L. Cresci, Parodia e metafora nella "Catomiomachia" di Teodoro Prodromo, *Eikasmos* 12 (2001), 197-204.

4. On this field, see now: P. Marciniak – I. Nilsson (eds.), *Satire in the middle byzantine period. The golden age of laughter?*, Leiden – Boston 2021 (esp. Ch. Messis – I. Nilsson, Parody in Byzantine literature, 72-73, on the *Κατομυνομαχία* and its various interpretations, with an emphasis on its character as a school text; P. Magdalino, Political satire, 125-126, on the poem as a political satire).

scholars[5], emerges as a competent and intriguing poet in his own right, who composed a good number of epigrams on miscellaneous occasions and topics. Quite interestingly, humour, irony and playfulness are not absent from his poetry (especially in the epigrams concerning schedography, where wordplays and puns abound – see pp. 138-143). Rhoby divides the epigrams of Balsamon into four categories, namely: a) tomb epigrams, b) book epigrams, c) inscriptional epigrams and d) epigrams on schedography. In the first and third instance, the scholar's research on the said epigrams undoubtedly benefits from his own recent work in these fields.

A few observations and counter-suggestions on the translations: In epigram no. 41, the first two verses (*Τὴν κνιδοχορτόπλουτον εὐνούχων φύσιν/ ἀκριδομικτόβρουχος ἁρπάσοι φύσις*) are translated as: "The eunuchs' nature rich on [sic] stinging nettle and grass / may be rescued by the nature consisting of grasshoppers and bush crickets". *Ἁρπάσοι* here is better understood as "seized", even "destroyed", for Balsamon wishes to juxtapose the "nature" of the other eunuchs with that of his own *εὐνουχοπουλίδιον*, regardless of what the actual purpose of the epigram was (discussed in pp. 139-140). In addition, the optative requires a different syntax in the translation: "May nature... seize the nature of eunuchs", etc. Furthermore, the title of epigram n. 23 (*Στίχοι ἐκδοθέντες τῷ εὐνουχοπούλῳ*) is translated as: "Verses published for the little eunuch" (p. 140); perhaps "handed over" or "delivered" (to) is more accurate than "published".

Last, the final verses of epigram no. 16 (*εἴπερ δὲ τυφλώττουσιν εἰς φίλους φίλοι, / οὐκ οἶδα καὶ γὰρ εὔχομαι μηδὲ βλέπειν / τοὺς ὀξυδερκεῖς πρὸς τὰ τῶν φίλων πάθη / καὶ τυφλοπαθεῖς πρὸς τὰς ἰδίας τύχας*) are translated as: "When friends are blind towards friends, I do not know: I also do not pray for seeing for those who are sharp-sighted regarding the passions of the friends and who tend to blindness regarding their own fate" (p. 142). First, *εἴπερ* would be better construed as "if indeed"; *καὶ γὰρ εὔχομαι* is more difficult to fathom. It could be translated both as "for I wish" –the subject of *βλέπειν* being the accusatives that follow–, but also as "for I proudly declare" –the subject now of the infinitive being *ἐγώ*. Indeed, as Rhoby argues, these three verses are not very clear, we may assume though that what Balsamon is trying to do here is to urge his friend to focus on his own beautiful

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σχέδος (unless irony is involved due to the use of the word τύχη, which could mean both "good fortune" / "success" and "ill fate"/ "bad luck"), instead of being ready to criticize his friend's (i.e. Balsamon's) attempts at schedography.

The contributions by Krystina Kubina ("Manuel Philes – a begging poet? Requests, letters and problems of genre definition", pp. 147-181) and Marina Bazzani ("The art of requesting in the poetry of Manuel Philes", pp. 183-207) are two sides of the same coin, meaning that essentially they deal with the same topic, but from a different angle. Kubina's paper[6] lays the groundwork for the approach and analysis of Philes' poetry in a theoretical manner, arguing that many of the poet's epigrams can be read as "verse letters" (pp. 157-173) – a mode of literary expression that was not unknown in previous centuries (pp. 171-172, n. 99)[7]. At the same time, the scholar rejects the term "begging poetry" for Philes' works, stressing rather the art (and act) of "pleading" as a literary mode (pp. 173-178 and again in the "Conclusions", pp. 179-181). With regard to this last remark, Kubina maintains that Philes' "pleading" poetry is not comparable to the so-called begging poetry of the 12th century (pp. 175 & 179).

Bazzani adopts a more practical approach, studying several epigrams of Philes in order to spotlight the nuances of the "art of requesting" in his poetic work. Like Kybina, Bazzani notes Philes' occasional boldness, even to the point of cloaked insolence and harsh irony, which can be traced in some of his epigrams addressed to the emperor and the empress, as well as to other magnates – although he could easily become submissive when required (pp. 185-200 & 206). Philes' attitude is rightly placed within the social and cultural circumstances of the time, namely the code of "patronage" and "friendship" between the powerful giver and the dependent receiver, which refers to a relationship that is both private and public in nature – the latter in the sense that this relationship was being constantly observed and assessed by public opinion (p. 190). The scholar lays particular stress on Philes' carefully chosen vocabulary, which either strengthens the message the poet wishes to get across to his recipient (pp. 186-189, 205) or results in intriguing ambiguities and double meanings (pp. 194, 198). In regard to the said ambiguities, perhaps

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6. Cf. her more recent work on Philes's poetry: *Die enkomiastische Dicthtung des Manuel Philes. Form und Funktion des literarischen Lobes in der frühen Palaiologenzeit*, Berlin – Boston 2020; Eight unedited poems to his friends and patrons by Manuel Philes, *BZ* 113/3 (2020), 879-904.

7. See now K. Kubina – A. Riehle (eds.), *Epistolary poetry in Byzantium and beyond. An anthology with critical essays*, London 2021.

we can find one more in an epigram addressed to the powerful sebastos Theodore Patrikiotes, in which Philes is openly critical of the latter for sending him low-quality meat (p. 199). The last word of the epigram is *εὐμήχανε*, which Bazzani regards as "a palinode of some sort" (p. 206), through which Philes restores his subordinate status and acknowledges the superiority of his recipient (*op. cit.* and p. 200). The adjective, whose vocative case the scholar translates as "oh, ingenious one", has been used, among others, by Aeschylus in his *Eumenides* (v. 381), as an attribute of the soon to be appeased, yet still vindictive Erinyes. On the other hand, within Christian context, the noun *εὐμηχανία* could also refer to "God's power in bringing good out of evil" (Lampe, *A patristic Greek lexicon*, s.v.). Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that Philes is once again playing with words. Another possible instance of wordplay can be found in the second epigram addressed to his friend Pepagomenos, where Philes is asking his friend to lend him a hat (p. 202). Pepagomenos is described as "the season of spring" (*ἔαρ*) and the hat as "a white lily" (*λευκὸν κρίνον*), which *τῇ χρυσαυγεῖ τῆς χλιδῆς ὥρα βρύει*. Bazzani translates *ὥρα* as "beauty", but it could be surmised that Philes is also referring to the meaning of "season – time of the year", consistent with *ἔαρ* and *κρίνον* in the previous verse.

To these, a remark on the translation could be added: The second epigram addressed to the emperor ends with the two lines: *Οὐ κρύπτεται γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἡ γυμνότης, / εἰ καὶ τὸ πεινῆν συσκιάζοι τις τάχα* (p. 190). The poem is also cited by Kubina (p. 180). Bazzani translates the *εἰ καὶ* of the last verse as "even if", which is preferable to Kubina's "even though". Both scholars perceive the concluding verses as self-references ("for in no way (my) nakedness..." by Kubina; "for my nakedness..." by Bazzani), though perhaps it makes more sense if read as a maxim: "For nakedness cannot be hidden by any means, / even if someone casts a shadow over the state of (one's) hunger". Still, the last verse remains ambiguous, for who is hiding behind *τίς*, the emperor or the poet himself? In the first case, Philes would mean that the emperor is providing him with food, but not clothes; in the second case, that the poet will be able to conceal his hunger, but not his nakedness. Last, there is a misprint in the epigram addressed to "To the emperor's secretary" (*Τῷ ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου* – p. 194), for in the third verse, one should read *κράξει* instead of *κράσει* – the translation reads "will brawl out", as if *κράσει* were the right *lectio*.

To conclude, given the growing interest in Middle and Late Byzantine poetry, evident in recent scholarship, the present volume constitutes an important collection of well-written essays rich in ideas, which will surely contribute to the

further development of this field. If anything, it is gratifying to see that Byzantine poets, such as John Geometres, Theodoros Balsamon and Manuel Philes, are being read as self-sufficient artists who opted for their own personal literary style. And of course, good critical editions are always valuable and deeply appreciated.

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