Some Considerations on the Historiographical Work of Georgios Pachymeris

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https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.908

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To cite this article:

The prominent thirteenth-century scholar Georgios Pachymeris is undoubtedly one of the figures about which a considerable number of articles and studies on various aspects of his historiographical work have been written. In the last three decades a remarkable renewal of the interest on this important text of Byzantine historiography has been noticed, and this is mainly due primarily to the systematic and patient research of the French scholar Albert Failler. It is well known that Failler not only prepared the new complete critical edition of Pachymeris’ historiographical work, and of its *epitome*, but has also written more than thirty papers dealing with chronological, prosopographical and other details of the work. Yet, and in spite of all these studies, various other texts of Pachymeris were only generally known and there did not exist a synthetic contribution on the life and work of the famous Byzantine *πολυίστωρ*. Anyone seeking information about Pachymeris had to consult some (older or recent) general works*.

* The present paper was delivered as a free communication at the XXth International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Paris, 20-26 August, 2001) and is printed here in a slightly modified form.


3. See the references in S. Lampakis, *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης* (as below, note 10), 237-238.


or the manuals of the history of Byzantine Literature, Philosophy etc., as well as no more than ten encyclopedic articles which mostly repeat—not always without errors—the outlines sketched by Krumbacher and more recently by Hunger, and nothing more. Although Pachymeris’ importance in the literary renaissance of the Palaeologan period has been widely acknowledged, there has not been any systematic and synthetic study of his historiographical work, or even of his other writings. For these


8. See above, note 6.

reasons I decided to look into the complexities of Pachymeris’ literary œuvre, and to develop below the following considerations.

The historiographical work of the author does not provide any significant details about his personal data, most of which can be found in the preamble of the work. This προοίμιον certainly follows the traditional formulas of literary composition, but still, it gives us a hint about the author’s character and attitudes. It is remarkable, for example, that Pachymeris declares himself as being Κωνσταντινουπολίτης τό ἄνεκαθεν: we must emphasize that the author, well known for his preference in atticising phrases and expressions, here he prefers to use a rather vernacular form, «Κωνσταντινουπολίτης», and not the archaic «Βυζάντιος». This is indicative of an emotionally loaded attitude towards the lost imperial capital of Constantinople and of the expected reconquista.

In relation to the title of the work, Διάγραμαί Ἰστορίαι in Greek or Relations Historiques as it is translated in the new critical edition by Failler, we can observe that such a formulation is not to be found anywhere in the titles of other works of Byzantine historiography. Why did Pachymeris choose this type? First of all, it echoes clearly the Platonic phrase συγγραφικώς έρειν (Phaedo, 102 d), that is, to describe with precision and exactitude, like an «author». We must bear in mind that Pachymeris was also copying Platonic works, some of which not only he transcribed, but also


11. See the references in LAMPAKIS, Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, 21-38.


14. Διάγραμαί Ἰστορίαι I.1, ed. FAILLER, (as in note 2), I, 23, 2.

15. Comparing this to a similar case we may recall the more vernacular expression «πολίτης» that Pachymeris employs when referring to his father’s descendance from Constantinople: ὡς γὰρ πολίτης ὢν ἐκεῖνος ἐπέκειν τό ὁποίο ἔπειτο καὶ ἐπικτήμονα της πατρίδος συμβαίνει: Διάγραμαί Ἰστορίαι II.27, ed. FAILLER, (as in note 2), I, 203, 13-16.

16. As it is the case e.g. with the ninth-century scholar Νικήτας ὁ Βυζάντιος or with the famous fifteenth-century scholar Μουσάθ: Ἀναστάσιος, also known as ὁ Βυζάντιος.


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commented upon them\textsuperscript{18}; so, we may assume that he was well acquainted with the work of the ancient Greek philosopher, and his way of expression. Furthermore, throughout the work, Pachymeris, when referring to himself, uses the words ό συγγραφεύς, ό συγγραφέος, ό συγγράφων, or other similar expressions\textsuperscript{19}, something that is undoubtedly not accidental, since the first meaning of the words συγγραφή and συγγραφεύς has to do exactly with the description of facts contemporary to the writer. The title Συγγραφικοί Ίστορίαι then means «histories of the author» exactly in that first sense of the word and in my opinion, choosing this form Pachymeris wanted to stress once again something that he has already stated in the prooemium of his work: namely, that he will narrate accurately and in a truthfully way events that took place during his own lifetime\textsuperscript{20}.

As for the general character and the tone adopted in these «histories of the author», the opinion of Krumbacher\textsuperscript{21} according to which Pachymeris places great emphasis on doctrinal and theological issues, finding in this way a kind of consolation for the unpleasing political situation of his time, is frequently repeated in the recent bibliography, but may be considered as somehow misleading. Hunger’s opinion differs slightly as he thinks -like others- that Pachymeris writes as a client of the patriarchate, but nothing more\textsuperscript{22}. This may be partly true, but it may also lead to erroneous opinions with reference to the value of the Histories as a historical source.

Any discussion of the matter requires first of all the use of statistics. In the first part of the Histories, the six books on the reign of Michael VIII, on a total number of 194 chapters, only 60 deal with theological issues, that is, less than one third of them. In addition to that, most of them refer specifically to the so called Schisme of the Arseniates\textsuperscript{23}. The second part of the work, the seven books on the reign of Andronikos II, gives a slightly different picture. To be more precise, the seventh and

\textsuperscript{18} See details in LAMPAKIS, Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, 181-184.
\textsuperscript{19} See M. HINTERBERGER, Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien 22], Vienna 1999, 300.
\textsuperscript{20} Bearing all these in mind, it seems that the rendering of Συγγραφικοί Ίστορίαι as Relations historiques does not transmit the meaning of the Greek phrase, since it does not regard ιστορικοί συγγραφεί or άναφοράι but exactly the opposite: so the title «authorial histories» would be much more adequate.
\textsuperscript{21} KLEMPACHER, Geschichte, 288.
\textsuperscript{22} HUNGER, Proflene Literatur, I, 447.
\textsuperscript{23} See P. GOUNARIDES, Το κίνημα των 'Αρσενιατών, Athens 1999; 'Αναστασία ΚΟΝΤΟΠΑΝΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Το σχίσμα των 'Αρσενιατών. Συμβολή στή μελέτη τής πορείας και τής φύσης του κινήματος, Βυζαντινά 8, 1999, 177-235.
the eighth books of the Συγγραφικοί Ίστορίαι contain a total of 70 chapters, 53 of which deal directly with the troubles in the Church during the first years of Andronikos’ government, when, as a result of a completely different policy regarding the problem of the ecclesiastical union, there was a continuous changing of patriarchs, five in total, in a time span of nine years. As for the rest five books, only 30 chapters out of 172, deal exclusively with ecclesiastical matters. Most of these refer to the troubles caused by the austerity of the patriarch Athanasios Ist.

At that time the circumstances were such, that led Pachymeris to describe in detail the crucial ecclesiastical problems of his time, which, as I proposed above, were directly linked to the political developments. However, the author devotes on these matters only 143 chapters, out of a total number of 456 chapters of his historical narrative. It is evident that the part devoted to ecclesiastical problems is not disproportionate as far as its length and place are concerned in the entire narration (a position that was previously held). To put it in another way, Pachymeris would have been out of place if he had not paid attention to these facts exactly, and if he had ignored them.

One more point. Behind a simple and unembellished narrative we can clearly discern how cautiously Pachymeris avoids encomiastic and laudatory expressions when referring to Michael VIII. But with reference to Andronikos II and his son Michael IX, he seems much more cautious and moderate in his criticism, recognizing the difficulties they were confronted with. Certainly this fact is related to his friendship and collaboration with the son and the grandson of Michael VIII.

In any case, Pachymeris conceived his narrative as a whole, as a complete and continuous account of 49 years of history, from 1258 up to 1307, when Andronikos also completed the forty-ninth year of his age. That coincidence is not accidental. It has to do with numerical considerations, since 49 is the number 7 multiplied by 7, a number with particular meaning in popular belief. It was exactly in the year 1307 that some events took place, which, according to Pachymeris, seemed to promise something better for the empire, so the author decided to end his narrative exactly with that year, believing, as it seems, that the choice of this number would perhaps contribute to the long-awaited improvement of the state affairs.

Certainly we must keep in mind that Pachymeris was not only a historian. He was one of the most proliferate writers in the history of Byzantine literature. We shall not


refer in detail to other aspects of his work. Nevertheless, in conclusion, some comments must be added on his rhetorical exercises. As they happen to follow the model of classical theoreticians of rhetoric, they are considered to be mere imitations of their ancient models, and apparently this is the reason why they are so little studied, remaining practically unknown. However, a careful reading reveals first of all similarities in the vocabulary employed in the exercises and the histories. Secondly, the exercises preserve thoughts and personal views of the author with reference to events that he experienced personally. For this reason I would suggest that they should be studied in detail, in order to offer the possibility of a fuller appreciation of Pachymeris' mentality and a better interpretation of his entire work.

26. For a detailed study see Lampakis, Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, 135-180.