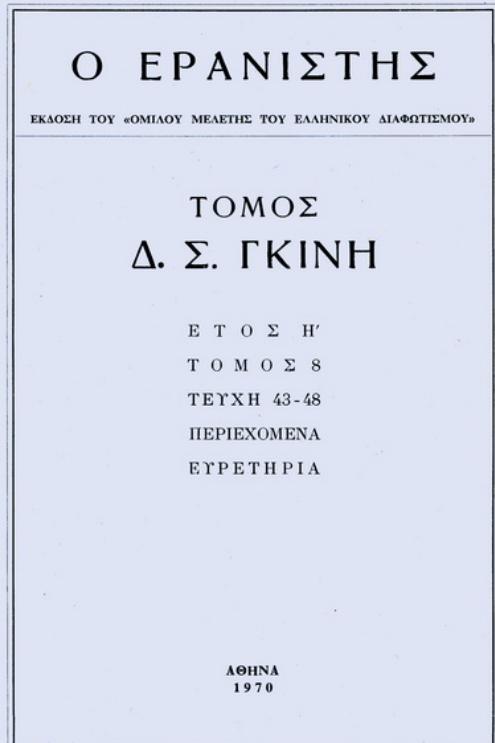


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Byzantios and Lucian

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BYZANTIOS AND LUCIAN

Any admirer of Lucian's Νεκρικοὶ Διάλογοι who hears or reads the delightful scene in Byzantios' Βαβυλωνία in which the tavern-keeper duns his former customers, now in jail, for the food and drink which they consumed in his Λοκάντα is likely to be reminded in a general way of Lucian's dialogue between Hermes and Charon (Νεκρ. Διάλ. 4, Jacobitz). In both, the creditor upholds the principle of «Reckon now, pay later» : Luc. Λογισώμεθα... δπως μὴ αῦθις ἐρίζωμέν τι περὶ αὐτῶν, Byz. "Ας λογαριαστούμενε δά, κι' ὑστερις πλερώνετεν πλιά. In both, prices are set (drachmas and obols, γρόσια and παράδεις) for items furnished ; in both, there are protests against excessive charges ; in both, the debtor avows his present inability to pay : in Lucian, because Charon's business is bad ; in Byzantios, on the general principle that no one ever pays debts in jail (...ποτὲς ἄντρωπος στὴ χάψι μέσα πλερώνει ;).

Now if one were to read Byzantios' scene in the first edition (Nauplion, Tombras and Ioannides, 1836, pp. 88 - 96), he would probably, as I have said, be struck by a general similarity between it and the passage in Lucian. He might, of course, very reasonably attribute this similarity to a fortuitous resemblance between the two situations.

If we turn, however, to the second edition of Βαβυλωνία (brought out by the author himself, Athens, Kastorhīs, 1840, pp. 78 - 85)¹, we find a number of interesting alterations in our scene. Both on the title-page and in the Preface Byzantios refers to such changes : Title-page, ... μετὰ προσθήκης πολλῶν ἀστειοτέρων περιόδων. Preface, σελ. ε', προσθαφαιρέσας δὲ καὶ πολλὰ χάριν ἀστεῖσμοῦ. Let us examine a particular set of changes (p. 82) consisting of the addition of four words absent from the first edition. They are uttered by the Λογιώτατος after the tavern-keeper has proposed to

1. Both the first and the second in the Gennadius Library in Athens. editions, and others, are to be found

charge him 27 γρόσια for τὸ πλακοῦτα. The pedant says, *inter alia*, Πολλοῦ λέγεις... Ὑπερηρίθμηκας παραλογισάμενος.

Now let us turn back to Lucian. When Hermes tries to charge Charon five drachmas for an anchor, the ferryman protests Πολλοῦ λέγεις (the genitive πολλοῦ parallels the genitive of price πέντε δραχμῶν in the preceding sentence). A few lines further on, in promising to pay later, when some plague or war in the world above crowds his vessel beyond its normal capacity, Charon says that it will then be possible to raise the money παραλογίζομενον τὰ πορθμεῖα, «by jacking up the ferry - fares».

The use of both expressions, πολλοῦ λέγω for “mention a high price” (apparently not found outside of Lucian,² and really appropriate only after a preceding genitive), and παραλογίζομαι for “overestimate” “overcharge”, seems to me to come very close to offering absolute proof that Byzantios modelled his passage on Lucian.

If this is true, we have in the two editions a remarkable instance of imitation in two stages. For all Byzantios’ justified scoffing at pseudo - antiquarianism, we can be sure that he knew the standard ancient Greek authors well. For him to have thought in a general way of Lucian’s dialogue between Hermes and Charon when originally planning his episode of the λοκαντιέρης and his jailed customers was natural enough.

If my hypothesis is correct, however, we have in the second edition an instance in which a resolutely contemporary Greek author, intent upon enriching a fairly successful «Spectacle dans un fauteuil», and on making it a first - rate stage play, turned back specifically and deliberately to a masterpiece of ancient Greek literature for the embellishment of his dialogue³.

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2. Jacobitz, in his second school - edition (Leipzig, Teubner, 1883, fasc. 2, p. 11), gives as parallels Ἀλιεὺς 48 and Βίων Πρᾶσις 26. In both these passages, however, the MSS. read πολὺ λέγεις, and πολλοῦ is an emendation.

3. Negative support for my hypothesis is provided by a passage in the *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*, (ed. G. Goetz, Leipzig, Teubner, 1892 [= CGL 3], p. 286) πόσου ἡ φελόνη;... διακοσίων διωρίων ... πολὺ λέγεις.