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ὅπου πεισθεὶς ὡς παλαιοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ τεχνογράφοις,
οὐδόλως ἐξηρένησα ταῖς Τζετζικαῖς ἐρεύναις,
ἐν αἴσπερ ἢ ἀλήθεια ἐκ χάους ἀνατρέχει.
ἀλλ' ἐν ἐρεύναις Τζετζικαῖς τοῦτο τανῦν δεικτέον...

(Hist. XII 398, 65-68)

Table of contents

Abbreviations	vii
Introduction: A buffalo's-eye view	ix
TOMMASO BRACCINI – A neglected manuscript of Tzetzes' <i>Allegories from the Verse-chronicle</i> : First remarks	1
AGLAE PIZZONE – Tzetzes and the <i>prokatasstasis</i> : A tale of people, manuscripts, and performances . .	19
NUNZIO BIANCHI – Il figlio di capro e il libro sfregiato. Versi inediti di Tzetzes (<i>Laur. Conv. soppr.</i> 627, ff. 20v-21r)	75
YULIA MANTOVA – Tzetzes' scholia to the <i>Histories</i> as a source on the socio-cultural use of invective in Byzantium	105
MARC LAUXTERMANN – Buffaloes and bastards: Tzetzes on metre	117
GIULIA GERBI – <i>Epistulae ad exercitationem accommodatae</i> : Notes on some fictional epistles by John Tzetzes	133
JESÚS MUÑOZ MURCILLO – John Tzetzes on <i>ekphrasis</i> and the art of knowledge transfer	157
VALERIA F. LOVATO – From contentious hero to bone of contention: The reception of Thersites by John Tzetzes and Eustathios of Thessaloniki	185
CORINNE JOUANNO – L'Alexandre de Tzetzés : entre culture savante et culture populaire	211
UGO MONDINI – John of all trades: The Μικρομεγάλη Ἰλιάς and Tzetzes' 'didactic' programme . .	237
ALBERTO RAVANI – «And wishes also a paraphrase of Homer's verses»: Structure and composition of the <i>Prolegomena</i> to the <i>Allegories of the Iliad</i>	261
FREDERICK LAURITZEN – <i>Metapoiesis</i> versus allegory: Psellos and Tzetzes on <i>Iliad</i> IV 1-4	291
ANNA NOVOKHATKO – παρὰ τῶν τεσσάρων τούτων σοφῶν: myth and criticism in Tzetzes	303
JACOPO CAVARZERAN – Φλυαρεῖ Εὐριπίδης: Tzetze commenta Euripide?	317
JULIÁN BÉRTOLA – Tzetzes' verse scholia on Thucydides and Herodotus: A survey with new evidence from <i>Laur. Plut.</i> 70,3	335
THOMAS R.P. COWARD – Towards a new edition of Tzetzes' <i>Commentary on Lycophron</i>	359
CHIARA D'AGOSTINI – Borders to cross the bounds: John Tzetzes and Ptolemy's <i>Geography</i> in twelfth-century Byzantium	403
PHILIP RANCE – Tzetzes and the <i>mechanographoi</i> : The reception of Late Antique scientific texts in Byzantium	427

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of journal titles follow «L'Année Philologique». Those of the names of ancient authors and the titles of their works follow LSJ⁹, with such exceptions as «Eikasmos» house style dictates; any such exceptions ought to be self-explanatory.

Tzetzes' writings are abbreviated as follows:

- Alleg. Il.* *Allegories of the Iliad*: J.-Fr. Boissonade, *Tzetzae Allegoriae Iliadis. Accedunt Psel-li allegoriae*, Lutetiae 1851
- schol. Alleg. Il.* P. Matranga, *Anecdota Graeca e mss. bibliothecis Vaticana, Angelica, Barberi-niana, Vallicelliana, Medicea, Vindobonensi deprompta*, II, Romae 1850, 599-618, 749
- Alleg. Od.* *Allegories of the Odyssey*: H. Hunger, *Johannes Tzetzes, Allegorien zur Odyssee, Buch 1-12*, «ByzZ» XLIX (1956) 249-310; Id., *Johannes Tzetzes, Allegorien zur Odyssee, Buch 13-24*, «ByzZ» XLVIII (1955) 4-48.
- Carm. Il.* *Little-Big Iliad (Carmina Iliaca)*: P.A.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Carmina Iliaca*, Catania 1995
- schol. Carm. Il.* *ibid.* 102-243
- De metr.* *On Metres*: J.A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca e codd. manuscriptis Bibliothecarum Oxoniensium*, III, Oxford 1836, 302-333
- Diff. poet.* *On the Differences between Poets*: W.J.W. Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem*, IA: *Prolegomena de comoedia*, Groningen 1975, 84-94
- Ep.* *Letters*: P.A.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae*, Leipzig 1972
- schol. Ep.* *ibid.* 158-174
- Exeg. Il.* *Exegesis of the Iliad*: M. Papatomopoulos, Ἐξήγησις Ἰωάννου Γραμματικοῦ τοῦ Τζέτζου εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα, Ἀθήναι 2007
- schol. Exeg. Il.* *ibid.* 417-460
- Hist.* *Histories (Chiliads)*: P.A.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, Galatina 2007²
- schol. Hist.* *ibid.* 529-569
- Iamb.* *Iambs*: P.L.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae iambi*, «RSBN» n.s. VI-VII (1969-1970) 127-156
- Prol. com.* *Introduction to Comedy*: W.J.W. Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem*, IA: *Prolegomena de comoedia*, Groningen 1975, 22-38

- S. Lucia* *Life of St. Lucy*: G. Sola, *Ioannis Tzetzis hypomnema et S. Methodii patriarchae canon in S. Luciam* (2), «Roma e l’Oriente» XV (1918) 48-53; (3), XVI (1918) 106-115; (4), XVII (1919) 90-105
- schol. Ar. Nub.* *Scholia to Aristophanes’ Clouds*: D. Holwerda, *Jo. Tzetzae commentarii in Aristophanem, II: Commentarium in Nubes*, Groningen-Amsterdam 1960
- schol. Ar. Plut.* *Scholia to Aristophanes’ Plutus*: L. Massa Positano, *Jo. Tzetzae commentarii in Aristophanem, fasc. I: Prolegomena et commentarium in Plutum*, Groningen 1960
- schol. Ar. Ran.* *Scholia to Aristophanes’ Frogs*: W.J.W. Koster, *Jo. Tzetzae commentarii in Aristophanem, III: Commentarium in Ranas et in Aves, argumentum Equitum*, Groningen 1962
- schol. Hermog.* *Scholia to Hermogenes*: J.A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca e codd. manuscriptis Bibliothecarum Oxoniensium, IV*, Oxford 1837, 1-148
- schol. Hes. Op.* *Scholia to Hesiod’s Works and Days*: Th. Gaisford, *Poetae Graeci minores, III: Scholia ad Hesiodum*, Oxonii 1820
- schol. Lyc.* *Scholia to Lycophron*: E. Scheer, *Lycophronis Alexandra, II: Scholia*, Berolini 1908
- schol. Opp.* *Scholia to Oppian*: U. Cats Bussemaker, *Scholia et paraphrases in Nicandrum et Oppianum*, Paris 1849, 260-375
- Theog.* *Theogony*: P.A.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Theogonia*, Lecce 2019
- Trag. poes.* *On Tragic Poetry*: G. Pace, *Giovanni Tzetzes. La poesia tragica*, Napoli 2011²

For a complete list of Tzetzes’ works and their respective editions see I.C. Nesseris, *Η παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12ο αιώνα*, diss. Ioannina 2014, II, 515-540.

Epistulae ad exercitationem accommodatae:
Notes on some fictional epistles by John Tzetzes

1. *Epistulae ad exercitationem accommodatae* or *Musterbriefe*?

John Tzetzes¹ wrote 107 epistles which can be dated to the timeframe between the 30s and the 60s of the twelfth century. These letters were organized in a proper corpus and arranged for publication by the author himself, who provided them with a systematic commentary – ἡ βίβλος ἱστοριῶν, commonly referred to as *Chiliads*. The *Epistles* and the *Chiliads* are conceived to be complementary one to the other: this is a strong mark of originality that makes Tzetzes' epistles stand out from the rest of Byzantine letters collections.

The debate concerning the utilitarianism and fictionality of Byzantine epistolography which animated the twentieth century² has nowadays found a balance in the coexistence of both aspects in the different stages of reception and fruition of letters³. Although recognizing the high level of formality and literary elaboration of Byzantine epistles, which were meant for performance and publication, critics have recognized their value in the framework of élites communication and their importance for historical documentation.

Neither the production of letters on commission nor the composition of epistles intended to be used in schools were uncommon practices in the Byzantine

* I would like to thank Enrico Emanuele Prodi for his valuable advice: this work has been significantly improved by his contribution.

¹ For biographical information concerning John Tzetzes and his activity, see I. Nesseris, *Η παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12ο αιώνα*, I, diss. Ioannina 2014, 158-197 (available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10442/hedi/40859>); F. Pontani, *Scholarship in the Byzantine Empire*, in F. Montanari-S. Matthaios-A. Rengakos (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, I, Leiden-Boston 2015, 297-455: 378-385.

² Byzantine epistolography suffered from a systematic devaluation from scholars due to its obscurity and its lack of concreteness: see the famous and emblematic judgement by Jenkins, «a Byzantine letter is an impersonal rhetorical flourish which either contains no message at all, or, if it does, the message is couched in so obscure and allusive a fashion as to be nearly unintelligible» (R. J. H. Jenkins, *The Hellenistic origins of Byzantine literature*, «DOP» XVII (1963) 37-52: 45). See also the quotations listed by M. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop*, Aldershot 1997, 23-31.

³ On the reception of letters see M. Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 31-43.

learned milieu. Both the reading of letters in school⁴ and the connection between preparatory exercises, in particular *ethopoia*⁵, and the epistolary genre are attested. It is likely that Tzetzes used some of his letters during his teaching activity; the endeavour of the production of the *Chiliads* itself (whose material is usually very well suited to teaching purposes) could point toward this direction. It being understood that *all* letters were eligible for use in teaching at a later stage of their reception, being by their very nature an expression of a public and ceremonial kind of communication⁶, some letters stand out from the corpus to various extents for their level of fictionality. Tzetzes' letter collection is advisedly recognized as a very useful instrument for tracing Tzetzes' network⁷. Nevertheless, critics have set aside some of these letters, considering them as not belonging to a proper communication network but rather being conceived from the beginning as models of epistolary communication.

In his edition, P.L. Leone singled out ten letters as being fictional literary exercises of sorts. He pointed out that *Neque desunt epistulae (7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 30, 52, 62-64) quae non idcirco ut mitterentur scriptae sunt, sed tamquam ad exercitationem accommodatae orationis suae ostentandae gratia a Tzetzta compositae esse videntur*⁸. Leone takes the expression *ad exercitationem accommodatae* from Giske⁹, who in turn borrows it from the title of the collection of fictitious epistolary models for school by Gasparino Barzizza (*Epistolae ad exercitationem accomodatae*, precisely), quoted by Förster¹⁰. Grünbart adds five more letters to this list (*Ep.* 16, 17,

⁴ A. Markopoulos, *Anonymi Professoris Epistulae*, Berlin-New York 2000.

⁵ See Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 42-43 and O. Vox, *Paideia ed esercizi retorici in Alcifrone*, in Id. (ed.), *Lettere, mimesi, retorica. Studi sull'epistolografia letteraria greca di età imperiale e tardo antica*, Lecce 2013, 203-250.

⁶ Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 17 speaks of «public intimacy».

⁷ M. Grünbart, *Prosopographische Beiträge zum Briefcorpus des Ioannes Tzetzes*, «JÖByz» XLVI (1996) 175-226. On Byzantine epistolography as a source for the knowledge of history, social network structure and everyday life, see P. Hatlie, *Redeeming Byzantine epistolography*, «BMGS» XX (1996) 213-248 and M. Mullett, *The detection of relationship in middle-Byzantine literary texts: the case of letters and letter-networks*, in W. Hörander-M. Grünbart (edd.), *L'Épistolographie et la poésie épigrammatique. Projets actuels et questions de méthodologie*. «Actes de la 16e table ronde», Paris 2003, 63-74.

⁸ P.A.M. Leone, *Ioannis Tetztae Epistulae*, Leipzig 1972, xviii-xix. The Greek text of all epistles comes from Leone's edition, with only some occasional changes in punctuation. Translations are my own.

⁹ H. Giske, *De Ioannis Teztae scriptis ac vita*, Rostock 1881, 4.

¹⁰ R. Förster, *Francesco Zambecari und die Briefe des Libanios*, Stuttgart 1878, 279.

20, 35, 41) and refers to them as *Musterbriefe*, model letters¹¹: his classification includes all the epistles which have an anonymous recipient (or whose sender is not supposed to be the author himself) and which must thus be understood as «Musterbriefe bzw. Auftragswerke»¹², “model letters or letters on commission”.

The letters which have been singled out for fictionality are thus, altogether, 15 out of 107: *Ep.* 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 30, 35, 41, 52, 62, 63, and 64, all belonging to the first section of the collection. Nevertheless, these letters cannot be classified as a unique compact group under the label of ‘fictional letters’: rather, a distinction has to be made between them.

2. Dealing with authority. Six *progymnasmata*-epistles in John Tzetzes’ corpus

If «every letter must be interpreted in terms of what is known of the recipient as well as the writer»¹³, a first discriminating factor is precisely if and how sender and recipient are made explicit in the epistle’s title. In six letters (*Ep.* 7, 9, 11, 15, 30, 52), the sender is mentioned using the indefinite pronoun, with the formula ὡς ἀπό τινος, “as if from somebody”. The first to notice the peculiarity of this expression was Giske, who pointed it out as a marker of fictitiousness: *ac primum quidem iam id, quod alii epistularum tituli habent illud ὡς ἀπό τινος, carent alii, demonstrat aliquid interesse inter has et illas*¹⁴. The sequence ὡς ἀπό + genitive is undoubtedly used to point out a difference between the *persona loquens* and the author regardless of genre: it can be found in the title of poems (e.g. Psellos *Carm.* 64 Westerink¹⁵), *progymnasmata* (e.g. an *ethopoiia* by Nicholas Mesarites¹⁶) and, of course, epistles (e.g. Michael Gabras, *Ep.* 414 Fatouros¹⁷). In epistolography, the indefinite pronoun is not unique to Tzetzes’ corpus (see e.g. the above-mentioned letter of Gabras), but it is more frequent in it compared to other authors’ collections. Being one of Tzetzes’ peculiar features, the presence of ὡς ἀπό τινος shows a deliberate precision in

¹¹ A similar appellation was introduced by Hunger in his classification of four different typologies of Byzantine epistles: he speaks of «Klischeebriefe», “epistolary models”, being the fourth sub-category (d) of the third typology, «Literarische Briefe», “literary epistles”. See H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, I: *Philosophie – Rhetorik – Epistolographie – Geschichtsschreibung – Geographie*, München 1978, 204-206.

¹² Grünbart, *o.c.* 180-181.

¹³ Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 18.

¹⁴ Giske, *o.c.* 5.

¹⁵ L.G. Westerink, *Michaelis Pselli Poemata*, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1992.

¹⁶ B. Flusin, *Nicolas Mésarités. Éthopée d’un astrologue qui ne put devenir patriarche*, in «Mélanges Gilbert Dagron», Paris 2002, 235-241.

¹⁷ G. Fatouros, *Die Briefe des Michael Gabras*, Vienna 1973.

the designation of the sender as indefinite and cannot be considered as irrelevant. The formula *ὡς ἀπό τινος* should thus be considered distinctive not only comparing to the 92 ‘real’ letters of the corpus but also comparing to the nine epistles which have been included by critics in the number of the fictional letters without having this marker.

Out of these six letters, *Ep. 52* has a particular status, having both the sender and the receiver plainly marked as fictional:

Ep. 52

Ὡς ἀπό τινος πρὸς τινα

Οὐκ ἐπιλήσμονες ἡμεῖς, ἐν κυρίῳ τριφίλητε ἀδελφὲ κύριε Θεόδωρε, οὐκ ἐπιλήσμονες ἡμεῖς ἀγάπης ἐσμὲν καὶ μᾶλλον τῆς σῆς καθαρᾶς καὶ ἀδόλου· ἔνθεν τοι μηδὲ συνώθει μηδὲ νύττε ἡμᾶς ταῖς γραφαῖς ὡσπερ τινὰς περὶ φιλίαν νοθροὺς καὶ ἀμνήμονας. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ καθ’ ἐκάστην ὡς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς σῆς ἀγάπης ὑπερλαλοῦμεν πρὸς τὸν ἀγιώτατον ἡμῶν δεσπότην τε καὶ πατέρα, ὅσα δὴ καὶ δυνάμεθα. Ἀπολαβὼν δὲ καὶ τὰ σταλέντα μοι ἀγριμαῖα παρὰ τῆς σῆς ἀδελφότητος εὐχαρίστησα τῇ ὄντως περὶ ἡμᾶς ἀδελφικῇ διαθέσει σου καὶ διὰ τοῦ παρόντος μου γράμματος προσκυνῶ σε καὶ κατασπάζομαι τὸν ἐμὸν ἀδελφόν. Ἐρρωσο.

To somebody as from someone

I am not neglectful, Theodore, most beloved brother in God, I am not neglectful of your affection and especially of your goodness and your honesty; so, do not urge and do not press me with letters as you would do with somebody who is sluggish and neglectful in friendship. Sure enough, I am talking every day to our most holy Lord and Father for your sake as well as for mine, as much as I can. Receiving the venison that was sent me from your brotherhood, I sincerely thank your fraternal disposition towards me, and with this letter I revere you and I embrace you as my brother. Farewell.

The fictionality of this letter, which is a basic epistolary model, is clearly stated by the title, where both the sender and the recipient are referred to with indefinite pronouns (*ὡς ἀπό τινος πρὸς τινα*). Judging from the epithets they are qualified with, the two correspondents are likely to be monks, but there is no further clue about them: even the name of the recipient, Theodore (‘a gift from God’), could be merely a standard name. The epistle, which is a model of a high-standard epistolary

conversation between equals¹⁸, does not provide any other information. The letter is a sort of repertoire of themes and tones which were typical of Byzantine epistolography: the absence of the sender (who is absent bodily, but not spiritually)¹⁹, the expression of friendship²⁰, the exchange of gifts²¹. The communication focusses on conventional friendship-related themes²²: brotherly affection and loyalty, the vivid memory of the friend, the mediation for the friend's sake, the gratitude for a gift, friendly devotion.

In five other letters (*Ep.* 7, 9, 11, 15, 30) the indefinite pronoun occurs only in the designation of the sender, while the recipient is qualified differently (generally by the post he holds). In three epistles, the sender's specific role or position is mentioned (a deacon, a stranger, a eunuch), while in two others he is described merely with the indefinite formula:

Ep. 7: Ὡς ἀπό τινος διακόνου πρὸς ἐπίσκοπον

Ep. 9: Ὡς ἀπό τινος ξένου πρὸς τὸν τοῦ Παντεπόπτου ἡγούμενον

Ep. 11: Τῷ Γαλήνῳ δουκὶ Θρακησίου ὡς ἀπό τινος εὐνούχου βαϊούλου πορφυρογεννήτου

Ep. 15: Τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ μητροπολίτῃ Πατρῶν ὡς ἀπό τινος

Ep. 30: Τῷ πατριάρχει κυρῷ Μιχαήλ ὡς ἀπό τινος

In any case, while the expression ὡς ἀπό + genitive, taken on its own, could have simply attributed the letter to a different *persona loquens*, for instance a real sender who commissioned to Tzetzes the drafting of the letter, the presence of the indefinite pronoun works rather as a precise mark of fictionality. In most cases, a precise communicative situation is built up, and the letters are imagined to be addressed to a well-defined authority in a quite specific occasion. These letters offer some examples of epistolary communication with clergymen belonging to various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (the bishop, *Ep.* 7; the abbot, *Ep.* 9; the metropolitan, *Ep.* 15; the patriarch, *Ep.* 30) and, in a single case, with a non-ecclesiastic

¹⁸ The presence of the appellative ἀδελφός indicates that the characters involved are equals, while a communication directed to a δεσπότης from a δοῦλος implies «a superior / inferior relationship»; see Mullett, *The detection* cit. 70.

¹⁹ See Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 13-15.

²⁰ Friendship was one of the most important themes of Byzantine epistolography, if not the most important overall. See Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche* cit. 222-223.

²¹ See Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 32-34.

²² See Grünbart, *o.c.* 183: «Dieser Brief ist ein Muster für die Pflege des freundschaftlichen Tones».

authority (the *doux*, *Ep.* 11). The systematic use of the terms δοῦλος and δεσπότης states that the communicative act has a vertical direction: these epistles do not concern peer-to-peer conversation (as *Ep.* 52 does) but address higher-ranking members of the hierarchy²³. These epistles seem to be meant to offer a model of interaction with authority, in order to address in an appropriate way someone who outranks the sender.

Ep. 7

Ὡς ἀπό τινος διακόνου πρὸς ἐπίσκοπον

Ἦγιασμένε μοι δέσποτα, ἡ τῶν γενητῶν πραγμάτων φορὰ ὡς ἐκ φύσεως ἀειρρόως κυβευομένη καὶ μεταπίπτουσα νῦν καιρὸν ἡμῖν ἐπεισήγαγε διαιτητὴν ἀκριβῆ καὶ ταλαντοῦχον φιλίας ἐπιγνώμονα. Δεῖξεις δὲ νῦν καὶ αὐτὸς εἰ μὴ τηνάλλως ἦσαν μῦθοι τὰ πρῶην λεγόμενα παρὰ σοῦ, ὡς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ὑπερλαλήσαις ὀλοσχερέστερον χηρευούσης τινὸς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ ναυκληροῦντος αὐτήν, καὶ ὡς δεῖξαις φιλίαν ὄντως ἀκραιφνεστάτην καὶ ἀπροσποίητον καὶ τῆς σῆς εὐγενείας ἐπάξιον. Καλεῖ γάρ σε μονονουχὶ αὐτὸς ὁ καιρὸς, ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἡ χηρευούσα Μίδεια, πληρῶσαι ἀκραιφνεστάτην σου τῆς φιλίας ὑπόσχεσιν ἀγωνισάμενον λίαν καλῶς ὑπὲρ ἀνδρὸς γνησίου καὶ φίλου τοῦτον τὸν δίαυλον. Εἰ δέ γε τοῦτον ἀεθλεύσας πληρῶσεις τὸν ἄεθλον, τὰ μὲν λοιπὰ τῆς φιλίας σιγῶ, τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ὀκνήσομαι τρανότερον ἐπιφθέγξασθαι, ὡς μία ποιμνὴ ἐσεῖται ἢ

As from a deacon to a bishop

My saintly lord, the movement of earthly things, since by nature it incessantly plays at dice and undergoes changes, has now given me the occasion to judge accurately and assess the balance of your friendship. and as a judge holding the balance of affection. You will now show if the words you recently said were not mere words, that you would speak on my behalf if a Church was in absolute need of a guide, and you would give proof of a friendship that is truly most pure and unfeigned and worthy of your nobility. It is all but the occasion itself – yes, and Midea which lacks a guide – that calls you to keep your most pure promise of friendship, accomplishing with extraordinary success this run of an honest and beloved man. If, after your struggling, you will have carried out the challenge, I will omit the rest about friendship; but I would not hesitate to declare this more clearly: that your flock and Midea will be a single herd.

²³ See n. 18.

τε σὴ καὶ ἡ Μίδαία. Ἐγὼ δὲ ἄσχιλος μυρίαίς γενόμενος δουλείαις καὶ περιστάσεσιν αὐτοπροσώπως ἰδεῖν σε οὐκ ἴσχυσα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐξελθεῖν με πάντως αὐτόθι· εἰδὼς δὲ τὴν φιλίαν ὅσα καὶ δύναται, διὰ τῆς παρούσης γραφῆς μου ἠξίωσα τὴν σὴν μεγαλοφιλίαν ἅμα καὶ μεγαλόνοϊαν τῶν φιλικῶν θεσμῶν μὴ λαθέσθαι. Ἐρρωσὸ μοι ἡ ἱερὰ κεφαλή καὶ αἰδέσιμος.

For my part, having become busy due to countless work and contingencies, I could not see you in person, since I absolutely could not leave at the moment; but knowing friendship and the things it can do, I pray through the present letter that the greatness of your affection and the greatness of your spirit does not forget the laws of friendship. Farewell, holy and venerable head.

In *Ep.* 7 a deacon addresses a bishop inviting him to fill the vacant see of the city of Midea²⁴. All we know about the characters involved is their position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which reveals a communication from a low-rank ecclesiastic to a high-rank one. The concrete occasion is quite clearly alluded as the appointment of a new bishop for the city of Midea, which is described as being desperately in need of a guide. The deacon apologizes to him for not having met him in person, adducing some general occupation that made him too busy to leave, and asks for friendship and goodwill. The reference to friendship implies a more concrete request: the sender aspires to hold the vacant post and asks the recipient to give him a preferential treatment while filling the post. The request follows a promise from the recipient himself, a promise that the sender hopes will be something more than mere words. There is no reference to time and space, and even the reference to the city of Midea could be the result of a conventional choice. The name ‘Midea’ in this letter is glossed in the *Chiliads* (*Hist.* VI 72, 670-697) in a passage in which Tzetzes draws up a list of names which are very similar in sound and spelling but different in meaning: Μηδείας, Μηδίας, Μιδείας, Μειδίας²⁵. This *Chiliads* passage shows an unusual and unprecedented treatment of the myth of king Midas. The reference to

²⁴ The name Μίδαία could be a misspelling of Μηδεία, a city in western Thrace mentioned in the *Notitia episcopatum* (cfr. *Not. Episc.* 17,262 Darrouzès); see also H. Ahrweiler, *Géographie historique du monde méditerranéen*, Paris 1988, 246.

²⁵ The first three nouns disambiguated in the list replicate the sequence of *Suda* μ 878-880 Adler. The attention dedicated to spelling is likely to reflect Tzetzes’ contempt for a certain attitude toward schedography. For Tzetzes’ criticism against schedographers, see P.A. Agapitos, *John Tzetzes and the blemish examiners: a Byzantine teacher on schedography, everyday language and writerly disposition*, «MEG» XVII (2017) 7-27.

the city of Midea brings in the history of its founder, king Midas. In the *Chiliads*, Midas is associated to ploughing and his accession to the throne is presented as fortuitous and unwilling: while he is going and ploughing, he is physically seized by the Phrygians, who needed a king, and crowned as their sovereign²⁶. The history of king Midas is used to recall the appointment of the sender as the bishop of Midea: as in the mythical past Midas was compelled to be king by the will of the Phrygians, now the city itself, which is lacking a guide (*Ep.* 7, pp. 15,23-16,2 Leone: καλεῖ γὰρ σε [...] ἢ χηρεύουσα Μίδεια), seems to urge the recipient to become its bishop.

Ep. 9

Ὡς ἀπό τινος ξένου πρὸς τὸν τοῦ Παντεπόπτου ἡγούμενον

Τολμῶν ὁ δοῦλός σου, θεοειδέστατε δέσποτα, καὶ πάλιν δέομαι τῆς σῆς ἀντιλήψεως· διέσωζες πρὶν ἡμᾶς ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν κιβωτόν, τὴν ἀγίαν λέγω μονήν, ἐκ τοῦ κατακλυσμοῦ τῶν βιωτικῶν περιστάσεων, ὥσπερ ὁ Νῶέ ποτε τὴν τῶν ἀπάντων ζώων ἀπόμοιραν, καὶ παντοίως ἡμᾶς χειραγωγῶν περιέθαλπες. Ὡς δὲ τῆς σῆς ἀπεφοιτήσαμεν κιβωτοῦ (οὐπῶ γὰρ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς τὸ τῆς βασιλικῆς ἀγανακτήσεως ὕδωρ ἐκόπασε), μυρίοις τοῖς δυσχερέσι παλαίομεν κρῦει τε ἀμέτρῳ πηγνύμενοι καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἀπάντων στερούμενοι. Ἐνθεν τοι καὶ πάλιν ὥσπερ ὑπό τινα σωτήριον

As from a foreigner to the abbot of the monastery of Christ *Pantepoptes*

I dare to call myself your servant, my godly lord, and again I need your protection; you have saved me before in your Ark – I mean your sacred monastery – from the flood of the difficulties of life, as Noah once saved a portion of all the living animals, and in guiding me you took care of me in all kinds of ways. Since I left your Ark – since for me the flood of the emperor's anger has not stopped yet – I have been facing countless hurdles, paralyzed by an immeasurable frost and devoid of all the necessary. Therefore, I seek salvation again in your godly protection as in a saving Ark, and I beg to have your former

²⁶ *Hist.* VI 72, 686-688: Μίδας γὰρ οὗτος ἀμαξεὺς ὦν τῶν ἀποτρυνόντων / βόας λαβὼν καὶ ἄροτρον, ἐξῆλθεν ἄροτρεύων / οἱ Φρύγες δ' ἀναρπάξαντες ποιοῦσι βασιλέα ("Midas, who worked as a ploughman, took his oxen and his plough and went out ploughing, but the Phrygians took him and made him their king"). This situation is a mythographic *hapax* appearing only in Tzetzes, since in Arrian (*An.* II 3) all this story is referred to Midas' father Gordius, rather than to Midas himself. A parallel can be found only within Tzetzes' own work: in *schol. Ar. Plut.* 287 Massa Positano the same history is reported with almost the same words in an abridged version of this passage.

κιβωτὸν πρὸς τὴν σὴν θεαιδεστάτην καταφεύγω ἀντίληψιν, χειραγωγίας τε τῆς προτέρας τυχεῖν ἀξιῶ καθ' ὅσον ὁ θεὸς ὀδηγήσει σε. Καὶ τίς γὰρ οὕτως ὡς σὺ θεοῦ μιμητής, τῶν πενεστέρων κηδόμενος, τροφή πεινῶντων, πόρος ἀπόρων καὶ συνελῶν εἰπεῖν θάλασσα παντοίων καλῶν;

Ἄλλ' ὦ Προμηθεῦ, ἐνδεῶν εὐεργέτα,
 ἀνθ' ὧν τὰ πάντα τυγχάνεις τοῖς ἀπόροις,
 ἀντιμετρήσαι σοι θεὸς παντοκράτωρ
 κληῖρον κατασχεῖν τῆς Ἑδέμ κληρουχίας.

guidance in as much as God will lead you. Who could be said to be, to such an extent as you, an imitator of God, a man caring about the poor, a nourishment for the starving, a way for the ones who have no way out and a sea that gathers all sort of goods?

But, o Prometheus, benefactor of the poor,
 In return for all the things you are for the desperate ones
 May Almighty God reward you
 by giving you a lot in the land of Eden.

Ep. 9 is a request addressed to the abbot of the Monastery of Christ Pantepoptes from an unspecified foreigner who declares himself in severe trouble, because someone in the court is opposing him. The epistle, which has a laudatory tone, offers an example of how to beg a higher-ranking person in order to obtain hospitality and protection. Great attention is paid to the choice of words, imagery, and allusions. The text has a solid and well-organized figurative basis: the image of the monastery in which the foreigner hope to find asylum is entrenched in the metaphor of Noah's Ark, the image of the flood of life's harshness is based on the flood myth narrated in the book of *Genesis*. The anger of God that originated the flood is replicated in the βασιλική ἀγανάκτησις which threatens the sender and compels him to seek refuge in his Ark once more.

The letter ends with four dodecasyllabic verses where the abbot, being a generous benefactor, is depicted as a Prometheus bound to be rewarded by God with a place in Eden. One could argue that Prometheus, although being undoubtedly a benefactor, did not quite receive a prize in return for his philanthropy; nevertheless, the choice of Prometheus is not left to chance. The Titan is effectively a perfect character for symbolizing benefaction toward mankind, and the association between Prometheus and a prize obtained from God could satisfy a certain taste for oxy-

moron, creating a sharper imagery. The Titan's name itself could moreover be, in Tzetzes' mind, a citation of the Christ's epithet *Pantepoptes*, eponymous of the monastery. The choice of this monastery, founded by Anna Delassene circa 1087 and named after "Christ the All-Seeing", is easily attributable to the great importance it had acquired during the Komnenian age, to the strong link it had with the Komnenians themselves and to the role it had in the statement of their power²⁷. Prometheus's name, meaning "foreseeing", "foreknowing" (in opposition to his brother Epimetheus, the "after-thinker") could thus be a fine reference to the epithet *Pantepoptes* of the title.

Ep. 11

Τῷ Γαλήνῳ δουκὶ Θρακησίου ὡς ἀπὸ τινος εὐνούχου βαϊούλου πορφυρογεννήτου

Μεγαλεπιφανέστατέ μοι αὐθέντα καὶ ἀδελφὲ δοῦξ τοῦ θέματος Θρακησίου, φῆμαι πολλὰ πολλοῦ τὸ σὸν φιλοδίκαιον περιθρulloῦσι καὶ κηρυκεύουσιν· ἡμεῖς δὲ μόνοι, ὡς ἔοικε, παρὰ τῆς σῆς μεγαλεπιφανείας τὸ Φιλοποίμενος πάσχειν δοκοῦμεν. Φιλοποίμην γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ὁ Κραύσιδος στρατηγὸς ὑπῆρχεν Ἑλλάδος, ἀνὴρ δὲ τᾶλλα γενναῖος τελῶν ἐνέδει

To Galen, *doux* of the Thracesian Theme, as from a eunuch, advisor of a porphyrogenite.

My most eminent lord and brother, *doux* of the Thracesian Theme, many reports resound everywhere and announce your love for justice, but I alone, it seems, appear to suffer the fate of Philopoemen from your Eminence. Philopoemen, son of Crausis²⁸, was general of Greece, although he was regarded as

²⁷ Scholars usually identify the *Pantepoptes* monastery with the mosque which is nowadays called *Eski İmaret Camii*, even if this identification is not unanimous. In regard of the monastery, see the introductory section of R. Flaminio, *La decorazione scultorea della chiesa di Cristo Pantepoptes (Eski İmaret Camii) a Costantinopoli*, in Ch. Pennas-C. Vanderheyde (edd.), *La sculpture byzantine, VIIe-XIIIe siècles*. «Actes du colloque international organisé par la 2e Éphorie des antiquités byzantines et l'École française d'Athènes (6-8 septembre 2000)», Athènes 2008, 39-53. Concerning the debate on the identification: C. Mango, *Where at Constantinople was the monastery of Christos Pantepoptes?*, «Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας» XX/3 (1998) 87-88.

²⁸ The name of Philopoemen's father is attested in all the sources as Craugis (e.g. *Plut. Phil.* 1,1; *Paus.* IV 29,8, VIII 49,2, etc.) but in Tzetzes' works, whether it is due to a conscious innovation or to inaccuracy, it is always spelled Κραῦσις, a form for whom there are no other parallels.

μορφῆς. Ἐνθεν τοι καὶ πρὸς ἐστίασιν ἐς περιφανοῦς τινος κληθεὶς Μεγαρέως καὶ ἀπελθὼν τῆς ἀπρεποῦς ἐκείνου μορφῆς πρόπουσαν τιμωρίαν ἐφεύρατο. Ἐτυχε γὰρ οἴκοι τῷ τότε μὴ παρεῖναι τὸν Μεγαρέα, ἡ δὲ τοῦ Μεγαρέως ἐκείνου γυνὴ δυσειδῆ τὸν Φιλοποίμενα βλέψασα ξύλα σχίζειν κελεύει θεράποντα τοῦτον νομίσασα· ὁ δ' ὢν τὸν τρόπον ἐπεικῆς τὸ κελευσθὲν διειργάζετο. Ὡς δ' ὁ Μεγαρεὺς ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν τοῦτον ἀνέκραγε· “Τί τοῦτο δοῦς, ὦ Φιλοποίμην;” “Τί δ' ἄλλο”, φησὶν ἐκεῖνος, “ἢ κακῶς μορφῶς τίννυμι δίκαν;” Καὶ ἡμεῖς δέ, ὡς ἔοικε, παρὰ σοῦ εὐνουχικοῦ σώματος ἀσθενοῦς τιννύομεν δίκας. Τί δέ μοι βούλεται ταῦτα κατάκουε. Ἀνεψιάς ἐμῆς ὀρφανῆς ἐν τῷ ὑπὸ σέ θέματι κτῆμα τυγχάνει προάστειον καὶ παντοίως ἐπηρεάζεται ἢ καὶ τελείως καταβιβρώσκεται. Ἄξιῳ γοῦν τὴν σὴν μεγαλεπιφάνειαν ἐαθῆναι τοῦτο ἀνεπηρέαστον, καὶ ἕξεις καὶ ἀπὸ θεοῦ χάριν καὶ ἀφ' ἡμῶν ἀγάπην καὶ ἀνακήρυξιν· εἰ δ' οὐ, ὁ ἐμὸς αὐθέντης εἰσάξει με καὶ ῥιφήσομαι παρὰ πόδας τοῦ κραταιοῦ ἡμῶν αὐτοκράτορος τοῦ πάντα δικαίως κρίνειν εἰδότης, καὶ τούτου μοι πάλιν ἐπαναλάμψοι τὸ δίκαιον. Ἡ ἀγάπη σου χαρισθεῖ μοι.

excellent as for the rest, he lacked in beauty. For this reason, when he was invited to a banquet by a famous man of Megara, getting there, he discovered the punishment that befitted his unbecoming appearance. Indeed, it happened that the Megarian was not at home at that time: that man's wife, seeing that Philopoemen was ugly, commanded him to chop the wood, mistaking him for a servant. Since he had a mild nature, he obeyed the order. When, after coming back and seeing all that, the Megarian cried out: “Why are you doing this, Philopoemen?” he said: “Why on earth, if not to serve the sentence for my ugliness?” And I too, it seems, serve the sentence for my weak eunuch's body at your hands. Listen what it means for me. In the Theme that you rule, there is a suburban possession belonging to a cousin of mine who has no relatives, and it is being damaged in all kinds of ways and it is completely decaying. I beg therefore your Eminence to keep it safe; you will get grace from God, and love and public praise from me. Otherwise, my lord will introduce me, and I will throw myself at the feet of our powerful emperor, who knows how to judge everything fairly, and thanks to him justice will shine again for me. May your love show favour to me.

In *Ep.* 11 the characters are described with a higher level of specificity, to such a point that we can identify the time and the place to whom the situation refers. The

sender is an unnamed eunuch, defined by his role as advisor of a porphyrogenite, and the receiver is Galen, *doux* of the Thracian theme. Grünbart identifies the recipient with the Galen who is attested in 1133 as *katepano* in Smyrna (which is in the theme of the Thracians) and dates the epistle to 1139²⁹. The emperor whom the sender declares himself ready to address if the *doux* refuses to help is anyway John II Komnenos (who reigned until 1143).

The communicative occasion is a request of protection (or a preventive move against any malversation) on behalf of a cousin, addressed to the *doux* by a eunuch holding a high place in the court. It is not clear which of the two ranks higher, since the addressee is called ἀϋθέντα καὶ ἀδελφῆ, but the relationship seems to be one between equals. The qualification of the sender as a eunuch is not a descriptive detail of secondary importance, since it imprints an important mark on the text. The sender's actual claim appears indeed to be relegated to a hasty and quite vague mention toward the end of the epistle³⁰, whose more substantial part deals with the sender's personal condition, filtrated through the anecdote of Philopoemen, the Greek general who was strong and noble, but, it seems, outstandingly ugly³¹. Just as Philopoemen, mistaken for a servant, must expiate his ugliness, similarly the sender, in spite of his high social position, perceives his condition of *eunouchia* as something to atone for³². The narrative element is of paramount importance, since the anecdote is extensively narrated and occupies most of the epistle, whose tone is even animated by the use of direct speech³³. The model of *ethopoia* appears to have a particularly strong influence on this epistle, which easily fits the characteristics of the exercise,

²⁹ Grünbart, *o.c.* 181. The date would be consistent with the frame of the collection of the *Letters*, which is supposed to follow a chronological order: *Ep.* 10, dedicated to the death of his brother Isaac, is dated 1138 (by both Giske, *o.c.* 9, and Grünbart, *o.c.* 184), *Ep.* 12 is dated to around 1138, and *Ep.* 13 dates to 1139 (Grünbart, *o.c.* 185; *paulo post decimam* Giske, *o.c.* 9).

³⁰ Tzetzes thus obeys the general tendency in Byzantine epistolography to avoid giving too much space to a third person whose presence, although necessary, could distract attention from the true focus of the letter, that is the relationship between the sender and the writer. See Mullett, *Theophylact* cit. 18.

³¹ Tzetzes' replication of the story is functional to the parallel he builds with the physical condition of the eunuch. Although all the ancient sources clearly say that Philopoemen had no real physical deformity, he proposes his ugliness as a matter of fact both in the epistle and in the history.

³² It is well known that eunuchs had social relevance in the Byzantine court and that *eunouchia* was a way of rising in society. Nevertheless, the despicable condition of eunuchs is a conventional *topos* in Byzantine literature. See C. Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance, entre réalité et imaginaire*, Paris 2014, 213-228.

³³ Tzetzes reproduces Plutarch's passages quite literally, inserting the direct speech exactly in the same place and using a very similar structure and equivalent words. Cf. Plut. *Phil.* 2,4; Tzetz. *Ep.* 11, p. 20,7-9 Leone; *Hist.* VI 84, 850-852.

so that one would not even be surprised to read it under the customary title of an *ethopoia*, “τίνας ἂν εἶποι λόγους...”.

Ep. 15

Τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ μητροπολίτῃ Πατρῶν ὡς ἀπό τινος

Ἄτρωνῆ μὲν καὶ ἄκοιμνον περὶ τὸ γράφειν τὴν γλῶτταν ἐσχήκαμεν, ὃ ἱερώτατε δέσποτα, οὗ ἔνεκα καὶ ὑπεστελλόμεθα ἐπιστέλλειν τῇ σῇ ἀγιότητι, καὶ τὴν Πυθαγορείαν ἀσκοῦντες ὠρώμεθα σιωπὴν, καθὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἡμῖν κατωνείδισας, καίτοι καὶ συγγενικὴν πατροθειόθεν στοργὴν εἰδότες τηροῦντά σε πρὸς ἡμᾶς. Πλὴν εἰ καὶ ταῖς γραφαῖς Πυθαγόρειον ἡσκοῦμεν τὴν σιωπὴν, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ καὶ τοῖς ἔργοις ἐπεσιγάζομεν, οὐδὲ πατρῴας φιλίας ἡμεν ἀμνήμονες, ἀλλὰ παντοίως τὰ πρὸς σὴν θεραπείαν ἐσπεύδομεν. Βραδεῖς δὲ οὐχ ἡμεῖς περὶ τὰς ἀποδείξεις τῶν σῶν τελεσμάτων ἐφάνημεν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ μὲν τὸν χρόνον τὸν πέρισυ κωλύμην δὴ καὶ αὐτὸς γενέσθαι γινώσκεις τὴν ἐκστρατείαν τοῦ κραταιοῦ ἡμῶν αὐτοκράτορος τὴν πρὸς Κιλικίαν καὶ Ἀντιόχειαν. Ἐστάλησαν μὲν γὰρ παρ’ ἡμῶν περὶ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν τότε οἱ πρόσγραφοι, ὅπως αἱ ἀποδείξεις ταχινώτερον γένοιτο, καὶ μόλις ὀψὲ ταύτας ἀπεδεξάμεθα, τοῦ πανσεβάστου σεβαστοῦ κυρίου Ἀδριανοῦ ταύτας ἀποκομίσαντος. Ἡ βραδυτὴ δὲ τῶν ἀποδείξεων τῶν τελεσμάτων τῆς νῦν ἐγχορονίας οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ποθεν ἐγένετο ἢ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ τὸν γραμματηφόρον ὑποχείριον εἶναι τῆς σῆς ἀγιότητος, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τοῦ μὴ σῶα πεμφθῆναι

To the holy metropolitan of Patras as from someone

My tongue is obscure and unadorned in writing, my holy lord, therefore I hesitated to write to your holiness and I seemed to practice the Pythagorean silence which you blamed me for, and yet I know the innate affection of uncle that you keep towards me. Even though I observe the Pythagorean silence in writings, nonetheless I am not silent in doing, and I am not forgetful of paternal love; quite the opposite, I was striving to be at your service. It is not I that am late with the receipts of these payments, but you know that last year the military expedition of our mighty emperor in Cilicia and to Antioch was an obstacle. At the time I sent the officers to Antioch, so that the receipts might happen more quickly, and I received them only a long time later, when the *pansebastos sebastos* lord Adrian brought them back. The now considerable delay of the receipts of your payments is due to nothing but the fact that the letter-carrier was not under the control of your holiness and that the payments

καὶ τὰ τελέσματα. ὅμως καὶ οὕτω τοῦ πράγματος ἔχοντος ἡμεῖς συγγενικὴν ἀγάπην ἐπιδειξάμενοι τὸ λείπον ἐθεραπεύσαμεν καὶ ταύτας ἀποπληρώσαντες ἀπεστάλκειμεν τῇ σῇ ἱερότητι. Τὴν εὐλογίαν τοῦ πρωτοκλήτου ἀποστόλου ἀπέλαβον καὶ τῇ ἀγιωσύνῃ σου εὐχαρίστησα. Περιεῖχε δὲ τὸ ἱερόν σου γράμμα δηλοῦν με τῇ σῇ ἀγιότητι, καὶ εἴ τινος ἐν χρειᾷ γενοίμην τῶν ὄντων καὶ γινομένων αὐτόθι, ἐγὼ δὲ εὖ ἴσθι ὡς δέομαι μὲν οὐδενὸς τῶν αὐτόθι ἢ τῆς σῆς ἀγίας εὐχῆς. Εἰ δὲ τινος καὶ δεοίμην ἐτέρου, οὐκ ἂν τῇ σῇ ἀγιωσύνῃ ἐδήλωσα· πολλοῖς γὰρ διαβεβόηται τὸ φιλότιμόν σου καὶ μεγαλόδωρον καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ τοῦτο λίαν καλλίστως ἐπίσταμαι· διὰ τοι τοῦτο καὶ εἴ τινος ἐδεόμην, οὐκ ἔδει πρὸς εὐγενῆ καὶ εὐγνώμονα καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἀρχιερέα καὶ μεγαλόδωρον καὶ μόνον τὸ δέον ἐπιστάμενον γράφειν με. Ἡ ἱερά σου καὶ θεία εὐχὴ χαρισθείη μοι.

were not complete when they were sent. However, even though this is the way things are, I took care of the rest and after topping it up I sent them to your holiness, giving proof of familial affection. I also received the blessing of the apostle who was called first and I expressed gratitude to your holiness. Your holy letter includes to the instruction to inform your holiness if I am in need of something among the things which are or have been here, but rest assured that I do not need any of the things that are there, except for your holy prayer. If I needed something else, I would not inform your holiness; indeed, your generosity and munificence resound in many places and I know them very well indeed myself. For this reason, if I needed something else, it would not be necessary for me to write to you, noble and right-minded and truly a high priest, and munificent and the one to be aware of what is needed. May your holy and godly prayer show favour to me.

This epistle too, like *Ep.* 11, contains some concrete details and references to facts and people and appears to be adapted to a real situation. The sender is completely undefined (both his name and his role stay obscure) and the epistle addresses a sender who is qualified only by his role of metropolitan of Patras. However, a specific historical event is referred to: the military expedition in Cilicia and to Antioch which John II Komnenos started in 1138. Since the sender says that the expedition was led during the previous year, the epistle can be dated with certainty to 1139. Another prominent figure is mentioned: Adrian Komnenos, son of the *sebastokrator* Isaac (the emperor's uncle), who took part in the expedition and was later rewarded with the position of archbishop of Bulgaria. The setting is bureaucratic: the

sender justifies himself for a delay in sending some documents attesting the payment of taxes. The anonymous writer says that he sent the documents to Antioch as required, but they were delayed due to some problems connected to the military expedition and that they are now waiting to be sent to Patras. He closes the letter by saying he topped up the payment himself and took care of the other things he was supposed to settle and reiterating his position of affection and trust towards the metropolitan. Being involved with tax payments and mediating between important clergymen, the sender is certainly supposed to be an official; Grünbart proposes to identify him with a *logariastes*, a fiscal authority dealing with the ecclesiastical hierarchy³⁴.

Ep. 30

Τῷ πατριάρχει κυρῷ Μιχαήλ ὡς ἀπό τινος

Τοσοῦτον ἐκ τῶν σῶν δοῦλος ἐγὼ πολλοστός, τοσοῦτον ἐλάχιστος, τοσοῦτον ἀνάξιος τῶν σῶν μεγαλοδωρεῶν, ὃ θεοπρόβλητε δέσποτα, ὃ πατριαρχῶν ἀκροθίνιον, ὃ τῶν ὑλαίων τούτων καὶ χαμερπῶν ὑπερ-κείμενε, ὃ παρὰ τῆς ἄνωθεν δεξιᾶς τοιούτοις δυσχερεστάτοις καιροῖς ἐπιβραβευθεὶς ἡμῖν φρουρὰ καὶ ὀχύρωμα, οὗ τὸ δάκρυον τὴν γῆν ἀνωμάλως ταλαντουμένην καταχεθὲν ὑπεστήριξεν ὡσπερ τι κολλητικώτατον ἔδρασμα, οὗπερ αἱ προσευχαὶ καὶ νηστεῖαι θεμελιούχον βάθρον γεγονάσιν ἄρρηκτον, ὃ τῷ ὑλαίῳ μὲν καὶ πηλίνῳ σώματι ἀνθρώπου, τῇ πολιτείᾳ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον, τοσοῦτον ἄτιμος ἐγὼ, τοσοῦτον ἀνάξιος τῶν σῶν μεγαλοδωρεῶν, θεοτίμητε. Ἐκτρέφεις μὲν γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς μυριάδας λαοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν Ἰησοῦν, κἂν οὐκ ἐξ ὀλίγων κλασμάτων,

To the Patriarch Michael as from someone

So much I am the last of your servants, so much the humblest, so much unworthy of your generosity, O God-blessed lord, o topmost among the Patriarchs, superior to these material and earthly things! You who have been established by the divine hand as our protector and fortress in these difficult times, whose tear, poured on the earth that shakes irregularly, strengthened it as the most tightly-joined support, whose prayers and fasts are an invulnerable foundation and basis, o man with a corporeal body made of clay but superior to humans in behaviour, so much am I dishonourable and unworthy of your generosity, o God-honored lord. You nourish thousands of people, as my Jesus did, and

³⁴ Grünbart, *o.c.* 182.

ἀλλ' ἐξ ὀλοκλήρων τῶν ἄρτων, καὶ χρυσίον δὲ ἄλλοις ἀφειδестέρως ἀντλεῖς καὶ ἄλλοις ἄλλα τὰ χρειωδέστατα, ἡμεῖς δὲ τῶν ἀρτοκλασμάτων καὶ τοῦ χοροῦ τῶν σῶν δαιτυμόνων καθυστερίζομεν ἢ καὶ παντελῶς παρορώμεθα. Τὸ περὶ πάντας γοῦν προσηνές σου καὶ φιλόανθρωπον, ὃ θεοείκελε δέσποτα, κάμὲ τολμητίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ δέομαι τῆς μεγίστης ἀγιωσύνης σου εὐλογίαν ἡμερησίαν προσκυρωθῆναί μοι δίδοσθαι ἐφ' ὅρῳ παντὶ τῆς ζωῆς μου.

not with a few bites, but with entire loaves; to some you give money abundantly and you provide others with what they need most; but I was falling behind the bites of bread and the choir of your dinner companions, or indeed I was completely neglected. Your kindness and your goodwill towards everybody, O God-like lord, make me daring too, and I ask your great holiness that your daily blessing is confirmed for me and given me until the end of my life.

This letter is addressed to Michael II Kourkouas (also named Michael Oxeites), who was chosen as Patriarch of the capital by Manuel I Komnenos and was in office from 1143 (the year of the death of both the emperor John II Komnenos and the Patriarch Leo Styppes) to 1146. Nevertheless, despite the mention of a specific recipient, the epistle seems not to refer to any practical communicative occasion. The epistle has a complimentary tone and, since most of its text is constituted by quite fulsome praises of the Patriarch, it hardly goes beyond a mere display of flattery. The Patriarch is portrayed with a trend for hyperbole and manifest exaggeration (*e.g.* his tears would be able to fix the earth shaken by an earthquake; he would feed thousands of people); he is represented as an extraordinarily generous person whose *euergesia* is comparable to the miracle of Christ feeding the crowd with five loaves (see *Matthew* 14,17-21, *Mark* 6,38-44, *Luke* 12-17, *John* 6,9-13). The unspecified sender, instead, presents himself as the only one who was left behind by his generosity, being unworthy of the Patriarch's divine benevolence. What the sender asks, after a long praise that was supposed to be introductory but that occupies in fact most of the epistle, is simply to benefit from the Patriarch's munificence.

In these six letters, Tzetzes creates a fictitious communicative situation in which the sender and the recipient act following the schemes and the conventions of Byzantine epistolography. They can be defined, with good reason, *progymnasmata-epistles*³⁵, since they share with preparatory exercises the role of rhetorical model,

³⁵ All these six letters are labelled as epistolary models by Maria Margarita Kevrekidou in her MA thesis: M.M. Kevrekidou, Το επιστολογραφικό *corpus* του Ιωάννη Τζέτζη: παραλήπτες, χορηγοί και προστάτες ενός λογίου του 12ου αιώνα, diss. Thessaloniki 2013 (available online at

the fictitious setting, and the adherence to the convention of their own genre.

3. *Ep. 12, 16, 17, 20, 35, 41, 62, 63, 64*: ‘real’ letters connected with Tzetzes’ activity

Beside the six epistles whose undetermined sender is qualified with the formula ὡς ἀπό τινος, nine more letters have been included in the number of the fictional ones. There is no consensus towards them among critics: if *Epp.* 62, 63 and 64 were already included in the number by Giske, *Ep.* 12 is considered fictitious only by Leone and Grünbart, while *Epp.* 16, 17, 20, 35 and 41 are suspected as *Musterbriefe* or *Auftragswerke* by Grünbart alone. All these letters are joined by the absence of the indefinite expression ὡς ἀπό τινος, absence which cannot fail to be significant in a *corpus* whose elaboration was carefully planned by its author himself. In titles of these epistles there is no mention of the sender; consequently, there is no reason to suppose that the author wants to attribute the letters to a different *persona loquens*. Once established that the sender of these epistles is supposed to be Tzetzes himself, the difference between them and the rest of the *corpus* (that is, the difference from the remaining 92 letters which are considered ordinary) no longer holds. Given that, these letters are more likely to be an effective part of Tzetzes’ communicative network and to be related to concrete situations, although they remain, unsurprisingly, strongly influenced by their literary perspective. A major part of these nine epistles seems to be related to episodes of Tzetzes’ scholarly and teaching activity³⁶.

Ep. 12: Πρὸς τινὰ γραμματικόν (To a grammarian³⁷)

Ep. 16: Πρὸς ἐπίσκοπον ἀξιοῦντα μετ’ εὐγνωμοσύνης τὰ στελλόμενα παρ’ αὐτοῦ δέχεσθαι καὶ Ἰωάννη τὸν Λέοντα ἐπιγράψαντα πρὸς ὃν ἐστέλλετο τὰ στελλόμενα (To a bishop who asks with

<http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/132536>). The epistles are defined as, respectively: επιστολή προγύμνασμα (*Ep.* 7, p. 34; 9, p. 36; 11, p. 37; 15, p. 42); επιστολή πρότυπο (*Ep.* 30, p. 54); επιστολή υπόδειγμα (*Ep.* 52, p. 72).

³⁶ This article does not include text and translation of all these nine epistles, by reason of space and focus: I only provide the Greek text and the English translation of *Ep.* 12 and of the triptych of *Ep.* 62-64, i.e. of the epistles which are classified by Leone as *ad exercitationem accommodatae*.

³⁷ Although neither *Ep.* 12 nor *Ep.* 17 seem to be fictional, it seems remarkable that the recipients of *Ep.* 12 and 17 are indicated using the expression πρὸς τινά. The expression does not occur in the corpus except in some of the fictitious epistles, five out of the total 107 (*Ep.* 7, 9, 12, 17, 52). It may be relevant that πρὸς + accusative is the construction which is used to refer to the addressee of *ethopoiiai*. It is used by Aphthonius (*Prog.* IX 4) to indicate the character the speech is addressed to in the genre of *ethopoiia* which he calls “double”, and the recipient of the *ethopoiia* was already referred to with the expression τὸ πρὸς ὃ ὁ λόγος by Theon (*Prog.* 70,24-25, p. 115 Spengel).

frankness to receive the things that were sent from him and who dubs John, to whom he sent them, ‘Lion’)

Ep. 17: Πρὸς τινα γραμματικόν (To a grammarian)

Ep. 20: Ἦρωας ὑβρίζοντι λουτροκανθάρω³⁸ (To a scarab who insults heroes)

Ep. 35: Φίλφ ἀξιώσαντι γράψαι ἱκετηρίαν κομψὴν ἀττικίζουσιν (To a friend who asks to write a refined supplication in an Attic style)

Ep. 41: Τῷ πατριαρχικῷ ὑπομνήσκοντι (To the Patriarch’s ὑπομνήσκων)

Ep. 62: Ἀπαιδευτοῦ πατρί (To the father of an ignorant child)

Ep. 63: Τινὶ διαβολεῖ (To a slanderer)

Ep. 64: Τινὶ μωμοσκόπῳ (To a blemish-examiner)

Ep. 12

Πρὸς τινα γραμματικόν

Λογιώτατε γραμματικέ, ἀρκούντως παρὰ τῆς σῆς μεγαλεπιφανείας παροινηθέντες τε καὶ παιχθέντες ἠνέγκαμεν· ἐλογισάμεθα οὖν δέον μηκέτι τὴν σὴν ἐξωχληθέναί μεγαλεπιφάνειαν, ἵνα μὴ καὶ περαιτέρω τὰ τῆς παροινίας ἡμῖν προχωρήσειε. Τὰ δ’ ἄλλα σιγῶ, τὸ δὲ τῶν γραφησομένων ἐδάφιον καλῶς καὶ πλατέως τοῖς βουλομένοις πάντα δηλώσειεν, ἀμέραι δ’ ἐπίλοιποι μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι³⁹. Οὐ τῶν ῥαδίως γὰρ

To a grammarian

O most learned grammarian! I have tolerated enough to be outraged and mocked by your magnificence; I think therefore there is no more need for me to importune your magnificence, so that your outrage does not proceed further against me. I omit the rest, but the text of what will be written will explain everything correctly and abundantly to the ones who want to know: «the future days are the wisest witnesses». I am not among those who can easily be

³⁸ As far as we know, the word λουτροκάνθαρος is an absolute hapax, being attested only in the title of this epistle. The epithet is undoubtedly an insult; Grünbart, *o.c.* 185 defines it as: «eine Schabe, die sich gerne im Feuchten aufhält (vielleicht *blatta orientalis*)». The reference is to the Homeric Thersites who, being a coward, criticizes the Greek heroes and could be an allusion of a less talented scholar who dares to criticize a more brilliant colleague (namely Tzetztes himself). On Tzetzean insults see Julia Mantova’s chapter in this volume; on Tzetztes and Thersites, that by Valeria F. Lovato.

³⁹ Pind. *Ol.* I 33.

παιζομένων ἡμεῖς, κἄν ἀνέχεσθαι καὶ μακροθυμεῖν μεμαθήκαμεν. Ἔρρωσο παίζων ἡμᾶς, εἰ παικτέοι σοι λογιζόμεθα, ἀλλ' ἔδει καὶ Προμηθέως φροντίδα ποιεῖσθαί σε, μήποτε καὶ πεῖραν λάβῃς Μεταμελείας τῆς Ἐπιμηθέως παιδός.

mocked, even if I have learned to tolerate and be patient. Go on mocking me, if you think I should be mocked, but you should also take care of Prometheus' thoughts, in order not to experience *Metameleia* [*i.e.* 'repentance'], daughter of Epimetheus.

Ep. 12 is piece of vivid and caustic irony directed against a colleague. Tzetzes reports that he has been mocked and discredited by the recipient, a grammarian, and to have run out of patience towards his behaviour. This epistle is radically different from the group of six *progymnasmata*-letters in terms of contents and form: it is neither an epistolary model nor to a letter produced on commission, but rather a small piece of a literary *querelle*. *Ep.* 12 does not show the typical features and the topoi of Byzantine epistolography, it focuses on the blame of a single adversary and seems to refer to a concrete episode. Based on the corresponding passage in the *Chiliads*⁴⁰ (VI 85, 854-895) the dispute may have arisen from a disagreement on etymology. The focus is on wine and on drinking games such as *kottabos*, and on the etymology of *παροιμία* and *προπηλακισμός* in particular. It seems that the controversy could have originated precisely from a different etymology: while a grammarian – whose name does not even deserve to be mentioned – states that the word was derived from 'mud', Tzetzes offers a different (and of course better) etymology connecting the word to wine and to the comic and symposiastic sphere.

The fact of portraying colleagues as villainous, injurious, and ignorant people, together with the strong (and somewhat threatening) self-defense, is a fairly characteristic trait of Tzetzes' production. The teaching milieu of the Komnenian age was a working environment in which competition was fierce and where each professional was busy not only affirming his ability as a scholar and a teacher but also criticizing others' work in order to discredit his rivals⁴¹. Tzetzes, who was not part of the circles

⁴⁰ A reference to *Chiliads* themselves could be seen in the mention of "the text of what will be written" which "will explain everything correctly and abundantly". After all, to clarify things and to provide information to those who wants to learn is exactly the aim of the *Chiliads* in relation to the *Epistles*: see also the introduction to this volume, pp. xxiii-xxv.

⁴¹ All Byzantine literature is scattered with references to cases of harsh competition and mockery of rivals between scholars and schoolteachers. See for instance F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry 1025-1081*, Oxford 2014, 254-259, 266-276. Rivalry between schools was

which were closer to the court and did not manage to obtain a prestigious teaching position, had a compelling need of self-promotion⁴².

Ep. 12 is not an isolated case in Tzetzes' letter collection, since there are many other letters addressed to more or less identifiable colleagues or learned men. A parallel could be found with the homonymous *Ep.* 17, where Tzetzes harshly urges a colleague to give him back some book that he had borrowed. A polemical invective (not necessarily directed against a colleague, even if it is most likely) animates also *Ep.* 20, when the recipient, described as an insect who dares to insult heroes, is mocked because of his vile aspect and behaviour and is compared to Thersites insulting the Achaeans⁴³. *Ep.* 16 focusses on the contrast between Tzetzes and a bishop. The letter is highly sophisticated, and it is so strongly centred on the private relationship between the two that it is sometimes obscure to decode for the external reader. Nevertheless, some elements seem to emerge clearly: an exchange of gifts undoubtedly occurred, as well as a crack in the friendship between the sender and the recipient and a skirmish concerning the appellative 'lion' that the sender gave to Tzetzes, blaming him for being arrogant and voracious. As far as *Ep.* 35 is concerned, the addressee is referred to as a rhetor and the focus is on rhetorical production and imitation (one of the corresponding passages, *Hist.* VIII 169, 94-123, contains the definition and practical examples of the Hermogenic concepts of κόλλησις, the union of a quotation with one's own text, and παρωδία, the union of a quotation with one's own text with a partial redrafting and reinterpretation, see *Herm. Meth.* 30 Rabe).

The last three epistles of this group, included among the fictitious epistles by Giske, Leone and Grünbart, are connected to concrete teaching controversies. These

also framed in specific contests between pupils centred on the practice of schedography. On schedography see I. Vassis, *Schedographie*, *NP XI* (2002) 152-153, and, at least, R. Browning, *Il codice Marciano Gr. XI.31 e la schedografia bizantina*, in *Miscellanea marciiana di studi bessarionei*, Padova 1976, 21-34; I. Polemis, Προβλήματα τῆς βυζαντινῆς σχεδογραφίας, «*Hellenika*» XLV (1995) 277-302; and recently P.A. Agapitos, *Literary Haute Cuisine and Its Dangers. Eustathios of Thessalonike on schedography and everyday language*, «*DOP*» LXIX (2015) 225-242; Id., *Learning to read and write a schedos: The verse dictionary of Paris. Gr. 400*, in P. Odorico-S. Efthymiadis-I.D. Polemis (edd.), *Pour une poétique de Byzance. «Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros»*, Paris 2015, 11-24; Id., *Blemish examiners* cit.; F. Nousia, *Byzantine Textbooks of the Palaeologan Period*, Città del Vaticano 2016, 49-92.

⁴² See M. Savio, *Polemica e invettiva nelle opere di Giovanni Tzetze: screditare i concorrenti e pubblicizzare l' "eccellenza tzetziiana"*, «*RFIC*» CXLVI (2018) 181-238; Ead., *Screditare per valorizzare. Giovanni Tzetze, le sue fonti, i committenti e la concorrenza*, Roma 2020; A. Pizzone, *Self-authorization and strategies of autography in John Tzetzes: The Logismoi rediscovered*, «*GRBS*» LX/4 (2020) 652-690, esp. 678-690.

⁴³ Maybe a metaphor of an untalented and arrogant scholar who disparages his more brilliant colleagues.

are the three shortest epistles of the corpus, being constituted by a single sentence: *Ep.* 63, the shortest ‘letter’ overall, is made of seven words which constitute a single trimeter⁴⁴. The author himself refers to *Ep.* 64 as ἐπιστόλιον (*Hist.* IX 298, 959), while in the scholion to *Ep.* 62 (*schol.* 92,10, p. 169 Leone) these letters are called Λακωνικὰ ἐπιστολαί. Sure enough, they are but very short and caustic messages whose meaning is, at a first glance, quite obscure, and can be understood only by the person they have been written for. Their shortness and their obscurity are likely to be the main cause of their unanimous inclusion among the fictional ones. Nevertheless, these epistles, which share a berating and mordent tone, prove themselves to be connected with the environment of teaching and literary controversies.

***Ep.* 62**

Ἀπαιδεύτου πατρί

Οὐ βούλομαι δι’ ἀβελτηρίαν υἱοῦ πατέρα λυπεῖν· σωφρόνιζε οὖν σὺ τὸν υἱόν, εἰ τῷ ὄντι πατήρ.

To the father of an ignorant child

I don’t want to vex the father for the silliness of the son: so recall your son to his senses yourself, if you really are a father.

***Ep.* 63**

Τινὶ διαβολεῖ

Ὁ Μῶμος πάντα ὄρῳν ἑαυτὸν οὐχ ὄρῳ.

To a slanderer

Although he sees everything, Momos can’t see himself.

***Ep.* 64**

Τινὶ μομοσκόπῳ

Σὺ μὲν τὰς ἐμὰς φαλλάινας ἐμέμψω· σοὺς δὲ σοφοὺς Τηλέφους νενόμικας.

⁴⁴ The use of the trimeter is likely to imitate the model of the *gnomai monostichoi* attributed to Menander, and Euripides’s *gnomai*.

To a blemish examiner

You blame my φάλλαινοι, but you call your wise men Telephoi.

If the first one, *Ep.* 62, is a reproach to a father for the boorishness of his son, *Ep.* 63 is addressed to a slanderer who, like Momos, sees everyone else's blemishes and makes fun of them but is unable to recognize his own. *Ep.* 64, though appearing completely obscure at a first glance, has been instead demonstrated to provide a cross section of a concrete linguistic and exegetical dispute.

Tzetzes himself offers us an explanation of this cryptic message in *Hist.* IX 297, 946-959⁴⁵. He explains that the reference to the blamed φάλλαινοι must be traced back to his commentary to Lycophron's *Alexandra*, where he explained the different kinds of φάλλαινοι⁴⁶, respectively the cetaceous (that is, the whale presented in Lycophron's verse alongside dolphins) and the insect (the moth), both of which named after their habit of jumping toward the light. Tzetzes offered several names in which φάλλαινοι can be called: φάλλαινα, ψύχη, ψώρα, πυραυστούμορος, and, in the everyday language, κανδηλοσβέστρα ('lamp-extinguisher'). In offering these lexical entries, he is not only listing synonyms, but he is also providing a fairly complete lexical overview, inclusive of different stylistic registers. He glosses the conventional word φάλλαινα, employed by Lycophron, not only with words belonging to the same register, but also with a synonym coming from the vernacular, like κανδηλοσβέστρα. The blemish-examiner whom the epistle addresses is a person who browses his colleagues' works in the desperate search of a blemish to reproach them for: the reference is to another (anonymous⁴⁷) scholar who blamed Tzetzes for mixing different registers and mocked him for using vernacular Greek while glossing Lycophron⁴⁸. Since criticizing colleagues was a proper weapon to harm their career,

⁴⁵ Panagiotis Agapitos exhaustively reconstructed the whole story: see *Blemish* cit.

⁴⁶ The animal is called φάλλαινα in the commentary to Lycophron and φάλλαινοι, systematically, in the epistle and in the *Chiliads*.

⁴⁷ Tzetzes defines him as "buffalo-priest", so the scholar is likely to be involved in the ecclesiastic hierarchy, but this is the only – very weak – clue toward his identification.

⁴⁸ The buffalo-scholar and his work cannot be identified, but it is possible to follow the debate on Tzetzes' side, since he usually builds a strong and explicit system of links between his own works, quoting himself and often reusing passages of his own other works. The issue of κανδηλοσβέστρα occurs in a great number of his works: besides the *Epistles* and the *Chiliads*, it appears also in his scholia on Lycophron, on Aristophanes (*schol. Ar. Ran* 507a Koster), and on Oppian (*schol. Opp.* p. 404 Dübner). There is a remarkable difference between two redactions of Tzetzes' *Commentary to Aristophanes*: while in *schol. Ar. Ran.* 855a Koster the gloss to the verse is very simple and mentions only the brain, the version of *schol. Ar. Ran.* 854 Koster presented by ms. *Ambrosianus* C 222 inf. (the second redaction) adds a precise reference to the *Telephus* as Euripides' play.

Tzetzes could not have found a better way to pay his μωμοσκόπος back than to denounce one of his blemishes in return. In *Hist.* IX 299, 960-980 he informs us that the so-called buffalo wrote a sort of comedy for Patriarch Leo Styppes and called the Patriarch's brain 'Telephus', inappropriately quoting a verse from Aristophanes' *Frogs* (855) in which Dionysus warns Euripides to dodge because Aeschylus, hitting him out of anger with an enormous word, could spill out the Telephus from his head. The buffalo, Tzetzes says, does not understand Aristophanes' reference to Euripides' play *Telephus* and misunderstands the verse, considering 'Telephus' as a learned way to refer to the brain.

None of these nine epistles can be considered a fictional epistolary model: all of them are clearly related to a more or less practical occasion and to the activity of their author.

4. Drawing conclusions

The fifteen letters which have been singled out as fictional or written on behalf of someone else do not form a homogeneous group. Six of them (*Ep.* 7, 9, 11, 15, 30, 52) are effectively epistolary models, while the other nine (*Ep.* 12, 16, 17, 20, 35, 41, 62, 63, 64) are 'real' letters that Tzetzes sent during his life and career and that relate to concrete episodes, exchanges, and often disputes. In these last epistles the recipient is not identified, but he is alluded to in a way that, although remaining obscure for us, must have made him well recognizable in the learned circle in which Tzetzes's works circulated and in which the literary *querelle* was disputed⁴⁹. The two groups show different features in both content and form.

A first visible clue is the title: an explicit mention of the presence of a different sender occurs in the fictional letters, where the *persona loquens* is clearly distanced from the author with the indefinite pronoun and the use of ὡς (ὡς ἀπό τινος). The coherent and systematic presence of this formula, occurring in the fictional epistles, ensures the distinctive role that the title plays in the internal classification in the eyes of Tzetzes himself. The indefiniteness of the title, for its part, ensures that the purported sender is not a concrete person who commissioned the letter and states the fictional nature of the text. These six epistles can be described as *progymnasmata*-epistles, because they are conceived and act as a preliminary exercise and a model for composition. In them, Tzetzes chooses a sender and a recipient among a variegated multitude of typical characters of the society of the time (the monk, the bishop, the

⁴⁹ The non-outspoken mention of the recipient, who is often a competitor or an enemy, could be responding to a rhetorical mode of both attacking in an indirect manner and focussing on self-promotion.

patriarch, the eunuch, the *doux*, the foreigner) and builds up a concrete communicative occasion meant to be the scenario of the text. The quantity of details provided concerning the situation is uneven: in some epistles the communicative occasion is just vaguely sketched (*Ep.* 52) or even unmentioned (*Ep.* 30), while in others the situation is described in some detail and more characters are introduced (*Epp.* 11; 15). While the sender is totally indefinite (*Epp.* 15; 30; 52) or designated only by his social role (*Ep.* 7, 9, 11), the recipient is sometimes identified as an actual authority of the time (like the *doux* Galen in *Ep.* 11 and the patriarch Michael in *Ep.* 30); nevertheless, it has no consequence either on the text or on its fictionality. The characters generally act in a bureaucratic milieu: the imaginary sender, from time to time, faces several different situations in which he must deal and interact with authority and to create and maintain relationships inside the bureaucratic and ecclesiastical hierarchy.

In these letters almost all the topoi of Byzantine epistolography are explored: the expression of friendship and affection (*Ep.* 15, 52), absence and the excuse of the impossibility of a face-to face meeting (*Ep.* 7), the justification of a delay in communication (*Ep.* 15), the complaint for one's own personal condition (*Epp.* 9, 11, 30) and the (sometimes pleading) request of protection and help (*Ep.* 9, 11, 30) or of a post one aims to hold (*Ep.* 7), the eulogy of the recipient (*Ep.* 9, 11).

On the contrary, there is no reason to seclude the other nine letters (*Ep.* 12, 16, 17, 20, 35, 41, 62, 63, 64) from the remaining 92 epistles of the corpus, since they perfectly insert themselves into Tzetzes' communicative network and they have no fictional elements.

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