

REVIEW

BETWEEN PHILOLOGY AND THEORY: NEW WORK ON AUTHORSHIP IN MIDDLE BYZANTINE LITERATURE

Aglæ Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, and Identities*. Byzantinisches Archiv, 28. Boston and Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. Pp. xiv + 575. Hardback, €119.95 / £89.99 / \$168.00. ISBN 978-1-61451-711-5.

Byzantine studies have long parted ways with Classical philology, as the book under review abundantly shows: its aim, as stated in the Editor's stimulating introduction (3–18), is to investigate strategies of 'authorial self-production' in Greek high-brow literature from the ninth to the twelfth century CE, in terms of shape and construction of authorial *personae*, as well as in matters of legitimation, performance, and genre. Byzantine texts are thereby mostly considered in their medieval dimension rather than in their dialogue with the past, and occasionally compared with their coeval Latin counterparts—most notably in Ian Johnson's insightful *Nachwort* (276–94), where the issue of authorship in Latin texts from Medieval England is taken into account.

This is an interesting and promising approach; still, one may find it curious that throughout the volume virtually no hint is made to the long-standing popularity of similar questions in modern scholarship on ancient Greek literature (a body of writings which, for all its heterogeneity, represented the main foundation of Byzantine instruction). For instance, a recent OUP book¹ gathers several papers dealing with some of the topics discussed in Pizzone's collection: avoiding old-fashioned debates about authenticity of single works, they tackle the symbolic role of the author's name in (post-)post-structuralist terms (from Barthes to Foucault to Burke, the scholars here invoked on p. 3 and elsewhere), the role of authorial fiction in epistolography from Plato to Ignatius of Antioch (letter-writing being quite a popular genre in middle Byzantine literature, albeit not considered in the present collection), and the relationship between literary authorship and the problem of authors' signatures in the visual arts (a comparison that ought perhaps to have been made more explicit throughout the book under review, given its cultural and ideological implications).

¹ A. Marmodoro and J. Hill, edd., *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2013).

Thus, for instance, two essays in our collection tackle the issue of poetical ‘T’ and performance practices in hymns and prayers (Derek Krueger (105–17) on a ninth-century hymn by Joseph the Stoudite, and the dramatic enactment of the Gospel by a writer and a choir; Alexander Riehle (46–54) on hymns by women writers such as Kassia and Thekla, and the relationship between the speaking voice (Eve vs. Mary) and the intended choir (nuns? mankind?): yet, neither refers to the long and winding paths of the parallel debate in Pindaric studies, also relating to ‘liturgical’ poetry, albeit in a very different context. Foteini Spingou’s interesting case-study of the twelfth-century anonymous epigrams in ms. Marc. gr. 524 (139–53) leads to broader considerations about the authorial status of ecphrastic poems and dedicatory poems on artworks (as well as about the rationale of their extant collections), though it never compares the similar questions asked by Classicists about epigrammatic syllogae of the Hellenistic or imperial age. The rather obvious conclusion reached by Ulrike Kenens (155–70) in her study of the fate of Apollodorus’ *Library* in three sub-literary writings (the scholia to Plato; Ps.-Zenobios’ paroemiographic collection; John Tzetzes’ commentary on the *Alexandra*)² might easily have been enriched by way of a comparison with similar processes in ancient erudite sources such as scholastic papyri and the *Mythographus Homericus*.

Furthermore, I see that the authors of this collection share a disdain for ‘the frankly rather tedious matter of authorship in the modern sense of who-wrote-what’ (82): but was it really useless for Kenens’ readers, who are entertained at length on John Tzetzes’ methods of reshaping the wording of Apollodoran mythography, to learn that the same John Tzetzes has been credited by R. Wagner³ (and by other scholars after him) with the very authorship of Apollodorus’ famous Vatican epitome?

This is of course not to deny an inherent alterity between the ancient and the medieval Greek world in terms of ideology, religious tenets, cultural horizon, and so forth; however, the same categories may sometimes prove useful across the centuries, if in different shapes. Emmanuel Bourbouhakis’ fascinating paper (201–24) shows a deep historical awareness of this continuity while assessing the dialectic between authorial identity and authorial intention in a rather forgotten oration of Michael Choniates: more broadly, Bourbouhakis describes Choniates’ view of the controversial dynamic of *epideixis* and performance in Comnenian literary culture, taking into account both his direct models (especially the works of the so-called Second Sophistic, from Aelius Aristides to Lucian) and the social and intellectual place of rhetoric, public recitals, and *theatra* in twelfth-century Constantinople.

² P. 168: ‘these Byzantines did not refrain from consciously altering their source text in many ways in order to respond to the differing needs of their contemporary readership’.

³ R. Wagner, ed., *Apollodori Bibliotheca*² (Lipsiae, 1926) xxv–xxx (esp. xxix).

The book is structured along three sections: modes, functions, and identities. The second one is perhaps slightly more heterogeneous: for instance, Luisa Andriollo's paper on John Geometres' epigrams (119–38) is more a discussion of cultural life and aristocratic ideology under the emperor Basil II, as well as of the negotiation between military virtues and Christian values in Geometres' poetry, than a specific inquiry on the author's role as such. But this section also includes the gem of the collection, namely Margaret Mullett's acute and perceptive analysis of different authorial practices in three twelfth-century monastic writings, such as the *Life* of Cyril Phileotes, the *Diegesis merike* about scandals on Mt. Athos and the *Testament* of Neophytos the Recluse at Paphos (171–98). We find here narratological and stylistic observations on the tension between a hagiographical work and the compilation of a *florilegium*, on the multiple authorship of a partly narrative and partly epistolary text where several voices intrude and echo one another, and finally on the sophisticated plotting of an ascetic founder's (and author's) self-portrait. The self-awareness and the skill of these authors, however concealed behind the rules and conventions of genre or the multiple curtains of narrative layers, is all the more striking as it does not stem from the refined Constantinopolitan elite, but from sometimes marginal monastic milieus.

Stratis Papaioannou's opening essay (21–40) is perhaps the most 'theoretical' one, in that it singles out a trend towards authorial display (in rhetorical practice and in the shaping of manuscripts—attention to manuscript transmission is overall rare throughout this collection) against the widespread 'authorless tradition' of hagiographies—the case of Symeon Metaphrastes' rewritings of lives and *martyria* represents thereby an interesting intermediate stage. Papaioannou acknowledges at the outset the lack of 'a single term that would translate the word 'author' in Byzantine Greek' (22; one may wonder if this is the case also in ancient Greek?), and highlights the importance of authority (and of the appropriation of authoritative texts) in the construction of Byzantine rhetoric.

In this respect, Aglae Pizzone (225–43) picks up much the same issues of authoriality, polygraphy, and style, with the help of another case-study, namely the *Prologue* by Nikephoros Basilakes: the references to Biblical, Classical, and Patristic *auctoritates*⁴ are here the key to unravel Basilakes' attitude towards written as opposed to oral delivery, towards authorial role and learned bookishness—Pizzone's ambitious paper sets the specific weight of this speculation against the frame of Comnenian literate culture.

⁴ The quotation from such a hotly debated text as Plato's *Seventh Letter* (341c) on pp. 233–3 ought perhaps to be followed by some closer contextualisation of Plato's criticism of written doctrines, and by comments clarifying the relationship between criticism of writing *tout court* and the choice to write anonymously.

Floris Bernard (41–60) insists on the apparent contradiction between two *topoi* in eleventh-century authors: the discourse of modesty and Christian humility on the one hand (whence the frequent claims of stylistic ἀφέλεια and purposeful ignorance), and the danger of ostentation and ambition lurking behind the overt display of authorship on the other. Bernard's thorough analysis of the negotiation between these polarities in works by Michael Psellos and John Mauropous reinforces his claim that what is at stake for Byzantine authors is the construction of an *ethos* that need not be consistent from one work to the other, from one context to the other: single statements on their work, therefore, do not necessarily always reflect the authors' fixed ideological stance.

Issues of authorship in particular genres surface in the case of the prayers ascribed to Gregory the Monk (M. Lauxtermann, at 77–86) and of the *Book of Syntipas* (Ida Toth, at 87–102): the latter, embracing a *corpus* of stories that circulated in various versions throughout the Mediterranean, entails a complex interplay between the concepts and roles of author and translator, as well as a dialogue between cultures highlighting the role of the 'humble' Greek mediator known as Michael Andreopoulos—this name appears in the prefatory book-epigram, a text that might call for a deeper investigation in the frame of a wider inquiry on the anonymity and personality of Byzantine scribes and author/scribes.

Historiography plays a modest role in this collection. Raimondo Tocci's paper (61–78) tackles Psellos' *Historia syntomos* as an utterly didactic work, which reduces universal history to a sequence of apophthegms amounting to a sort of *Fürstenspiegel*, interspersed with authorial intrusions designed to underline explicitly the model conveyed by ancient Roman emperors and to offer it to an imaginary pupil as food for thought. Then, almost two entire papers are devoted to Anna Komnene, as the most important representative of the 'gendered author' in Byzantine literature: A. Riehle (254–62) elaborates interesting thoughts on the historian's authorial *persona*, as well as on her statements concerning her work and her (imperial) family, which often reveal a remarkable self-awareness and pride, reaching far beyond the status normally allotted to women in the Comnenian age. Leonora Neville's paper on the authorial voice of Anna Komnene (263–74), while rightly picking up the issue of modesty sketched in Bernard's essay, is marred by the misinterpretation of a key passage in the *Alexiad* (4.8.1, p. 138 Reinsch-Kambylis, here on p. 269). Neville's translation is flawed in several respects (εἶθε is taken as εἶ, unreal statements as real, final clauses as causal), but one error is fatal: the gist of Anna's self-disclosure is that natural love hampers her enthusiasm in writing about her father's deeds, μή πως δόξαιμι τοῖς πολλοῖς ὑπὸ προθυμίας τοῦ λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατ' ἐμαυτὴν τερατολογίας παρέχειν ὑπόληψιν, 'lest I should arise suspicion of telling unbelievable tales out of my eagerness to speak about my relatives': this

becomes in Neville's translation 'by no means do I wish to seem to furnish the suspicion for the many of telling marvels about my people out of desire' (269), which then elicits unfounded speculation about Anna's 'desire for praise or glory' or the like (270–1).

This brings me to the final point of this review. While rich and varied in scope and quality, this collection suffers from a number of misprints (particularly in the Greek) and infelicitous English phrasings: such a prestigious series as the 'Byzantinisches Archiv' would perhaps require more thorough editorial input. This is all the more regrettable as some blunders may have broader consequences on the authors' arguments. I shall conclude with some examples.

On p. 49, Bernard builds part of his argument around the meaning of *περιττόν* in Psellus' *epitaphium in Nicetam* (ll. 80–4 Guglielmino: *τὸ περιττόν ἐν τοῖς παιδεύμασιν ἐνδεικνύμενοι*), but his translation of this term in a negative tone ('superfluous', 'empty virtuosity') disregards the occurrence of the adjective earlier in the same sentence: Psellos is arguing here that he and his friends are 'displaying their superiority in doctrine', as opposed to other pupils who were keener on showing their *περιττόν* in their *κόμη* and their outer appearance;⁵ neither does *τὸ περιττόν* bear a negative overtone in *or. in S. Symeonem Metaphr.* l. 310 (about Symeon's style), nor do any *οἱ περιττοὶ tout court* exist (as opposed to what Bernard argues), for Psellos speaks at most of *οἱ περιττοὶ τὴν σοφίαν* or *τὴν φράσιν*, i.e. he always indicates the domain of their (alleged) superiority or exaggeration. On p. 128 *ἡ Ὑψηλή* (an Ionian city mentioned by Theophanes Continuatus) becomes a river named 'Hypseles'. On p. 227, Pizzone prints the Septuagint text of *Ecclesiastes* 12.12 (*υἱέ μου φύλαξαι ποιῆσαι βιβλία πολλὰ οὐκ ἔστιν περασμός καὶ μελέτη πολλὴ κόπωση σαρκός*, *sic*: this is the pivotal text of her paper), but then she adds the translation of the New American Standard Bible (from the Hebrew: 'Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh', rather than 'My son, beware of making many books: there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh'). On p. 237, we find Eusebius (*in Evang. Ioh.* 5.1.10) stating, in Pizzone's translation, that 'if there were no hidden meaning and the sentence lying before us were not obscure, we would have infringed the commandment right on, since we did not beware of making many books', but what the Greek actually says (*ἡμεῖς γάρ, εἰ μὴ ἔχοι νοῦν τινα κεκρυμμένον καὶ ἔτι ἡμῖν ἀσαφῆ ἢ προκειμένη λέξις, ἀντικρυς παραβεβήκαμεν*

⁵ Incidentally, Bernard misunderstands and wrongly disparages Guglielmino's Italian translation, 'serietà della preparazione' meaning not 'seriousness' but 'strength in learning'.

τὴν ἐντολὴν μὴ φυλαξάμενοι ποιῆσαι βιβλία πολλά) is quite different: ‘unless the sentence before us [namely the quote from the Ecclesiastes] has some hidden meaning still obscure to us, we have violated the commandment, for we did not beware of making many books’.

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