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ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN  
KOMMISSION FÜR BYZANTINISTIK  
INSTITUT FÜR BYZANTINISTIK UND NEOGRÄZISTIK  
DER UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

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**MARC D. LAUXTERMANN**

**Byzantine Poetry from Pisides  
to Geometers**

Texts and Contexts

VOLUME ONE



WIEN 2003

VERLAG  
DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

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## FOREWORD

This book presents a survey of Byzantine poetry, secular and religious – but with one regrettable omission: hymnography, which deserves to be treated by someone with more expertise in musicology and liturgy than I can claim to possess. A survey must begin and end somewhere, and the choices made are by definition arbitrary: Pisides and Geometres are merely symbolic landmarks I have chosen to chart the history of Byzantine poetry before it reaches its peak with splendid poets such as Mauropous, Christopher Mitylenaios and Prodrimos. As Byzantine culture is not confined to Constantinople and its hinterland, the survey also comprises poetry written in former parts of the Byzantine empire; however, poetry composed in languages other than Greek within the cultural orbit of Byzantium is not included. Although the epic of Digenes Akrites, the Song of Armoures and other heroic ballads certainly go back to a centuries-old oral tradition, I do not treat vernacular poetry because we still know too little about its remote origins.

I discuss Byzantine poetry “in the Vienna mould”: that is, genre by genre, just as the late Herbert Hunger did in his admirable handbook, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*. However, as I do not think that genres are static, the main thrust of this book is to demonstrate the importance of historical context. When this book was nearly completed, the late Alexander Kazhdan published the first volume of his equally admirable *History of Byzantine Literature*. As is well known, Kazhdan objected to Hunger's approach, because in his view the undue emphasis on genres and literary imitation turns Byzantine literature into a literature without any historical dimension, and Byzantine authors into writers without a personality of their own. Although I share Kazhdan's concerns, I do think that we can understand an author much better if we know something about the literary tradition he is part of and the generic rules he applies or changes or subverts (see Mullett 1992). Generic studies, such as the present one, simply provide decoding tools with which we may unlock the hidden door to the wonderland of Byzantine prose and poetry. Once the door is open, the key is no longer important, and then we may start to explore the literary vistas lying ahead of us. Grammar, vocabulary, metrics and genre are just tools – but without them it is obviously impossible to make any progress in the field of Byzantine literature.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part, *Texts and Contexts*, forms an introduction to the whole book, in which I present the manuscript evidence and explain the crucial concept of context. In the second and third

parts, *Epigrams in Context* and *Poems in Context*, where various kinds of Byzantine poetry pass in review, I analyze a large number of texts and attempt to situate them in their historical contexts. The book is also divided into two volumes: the present volume contains parts one and two; the second one, due to be published in 2006, will contain part three. Although I fully subscribe to the view expressed in the famous Callimachean maxim: μέγα βιβλίον μέγα κακόν, I must confess that the book has become very voluminous indeed. And by dividing the bulk of the material into two volumes, I most probably would not escape the scorn of Callimachus, who would just point out that “two bulky books make two bulky evils”.

It is a great pleasure to thank all those who contributed, one way or another, to my research over the last few years and without whose invaluable help this book would have been quite different: Jean-Louis van Dieten, Wim Bakker, Eva de Vries-van der Velden, Paul Speck, Judith Herrin, Anthony Cutler, Ruth Webb, Alexander Kazhdan, Martin Hinterberger and Panagiotis Agapitos. I am most grateful to Kees Knobbe for meticulously checking my English. Thanks are also due to Johannes Koder and Otto Kresten for accepting this book for publication in the series of *Wiener Byzantinistische Studien*, and to Wolfram Hörandner for helping me in every possible way and introducing me into the mysteries of Byzantine poetry. I am most obliged to professors Koder, Kresten and Hörandner and to the anonymous readers of the *Akademie* for checking the text of the manuscript and correcting many silly mistakes and lapses of memory. Above all, however, there is one person to whom I owe more than words can express: Marjolijne Janssen, who has watched over the agonizingly slow composition of the book and has made it less agonizing with her love, her moral support and her exemplary patience. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie der Wetenschappen* for funding my scholarly research and to the *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften* for funding the publication of this book.

As for the difficult problem of transliterating Greek names or terms, I have followed the example of the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* with three exceptions: Cephalas instead of Kephalas, Planudes instead of Planoudes, and Mitylenaios instead of Mytilenaios. In the case of Cephalas and Planudes I follow the example of classical scholars, such as Alan Cameron; in the case of Mitylenaios I follow the example of the Byzantines themselves as well of the editor, Eduard Kurtz.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AnBoll</i>	Analecta Bollandiana
<i>AB</i>	Anthologia Barberina
<i>AP</i>	Anthologia Palatina
<i>API</i>	Appendix Planudea
<i>BCH</i>	Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique
<i>BF</i>	Byzantinische Forschungen
<i>BHG</i>	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca
<i>BMGS</i>	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
<i>BNJ</i>	Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher
<i>BollClass</i>	Bollettino dei Classici
<i>BollGrott</i>	Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata
<i>BS/EB</i>	Byzantine Studies/Études Byzantines
<i>BSI</i>	Byzantinoslavica
<i>Byz</i>	Byzantion
<i>BZ</i>	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
<i>CFHB</i>	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
<i>CIG</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum
<i>DChAE</i>	Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας
<i>DIEE</i>	Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος
<i>DOP</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
<i>EEBS</i>	Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν
<i>EO</i>	Échos d'Orient
<i>ΕΦΣ</i>	Ὁ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ἑλληνικὸς Φιλολογικὸς Σύλλογος
<i>FM</i>	Fontes Minores
<i>GRBS</i>	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
<i>Hell</i>	Ἑλληνικά
<i>IRAIK</i>	Izvēstija Russkago Archeologičeskago Instituta v Konstantinopolē
<i>JHSt</i>	Journal of Hellenic Studies
<i>JÖB</i>	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
<i>JÖBG</i>	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft
<i>Kriaras</i>	Λεξικὸ τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς ἑλληνικῆς δημόδους γραμματείας
<i>Lampe</i>	A Patristic Greek Lexicon
<i>LBG</i>	Lexikon zur Byzantinischen Gräzität
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell-Scott-Jones
<i>NE</i>	Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων
<i>OCP</i>	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
<i>ODB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graeca
<i>PO</i>	Patrologia Orientalis
<i>RAC</i>	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum
<i>REB</i>	Revue des Études Byzantines
<i>REG</i>	Revue des Études Grecques

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<i>RESEE</i>	Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes
<i>ROC</i>	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
<i>RSBN</i>	Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici
<i>SBN</i>	Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici
<i>SC</i>	Sources Chrétiennes
<i>SicGymn</i>	Siculorum Gymnasium
<i>StT</i>	Studi e Testi
<i>ThGL</i>	Thesaurus Graecae Linguae
<i>TM</i>	Travaux et Mémoires
<i>VV</i>	Vizantijskij Vremennik
<i>WSt</i>	Wiener Studien
<i>ZRVI</i>	Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta



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## PRIMARY SOURCES

- Alexander of Nicaea**  
*AP* 21–22; 281  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 316 and 454
- Anastasios Quaestor**  
*AP* XV, 28  
epigram  
epitaph  
satirical poem  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 282  
ed. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS 1900: 55  
ed. MERCATI 1929–30: 60  
ed. WESTERINK 1968: I, 322, 29–33
- Andrew of Crete**  
book epigram  
ed. HEISENBERG 1901: 508–512
- the Anonymous Italian**  
nos. 1–29  
ed. BROWNING 1963: 295–306
- the Anonymous Patrician**  
L. 47, 10–57, 7  
M. 415, 1–416, 48  
ed. LAMBROS 1922: 47–57  
ed. MERCATI 1927: 415–416
- the Anonym of Sola**  
nos. 1–8  
ed. SOLA 1916: 20–27 and 150–153
- Anthimos Chartophylax**  
poem  
ed. MERCATI G. 1937: 302–304
- Arethas of Caesarea**  
*AP* XV, 32–34  
book epigram  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 284–286  
ed. WESTERINK 1968: vol. II, p. XV
- Arsenius**  
On Easter Sunday  
ed. MATRANGA 1850: 670–675
- Arsenius**  
book epigram  
ed. FOLLIERI 1957: 116
- Bryson the Philosopher**  
On the Last Days  
ed. PERTUSI 1988: 162–166<sup>1</sup>
- Christodoulos**  
satirical poem  
ed. SODE 2001: 128
- Christopher Protasekretis**  
hymns 1–2  
ed. CICOLELLA 2000b: 72–77
- Constantine Cephalas**  
*AP* V, 1  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: I, 258
- Constantine the Rhodian**  
*AP* XV, 15–17  
satirical poems 1–2  
satirical scholia 1–3  
dispute  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 266–268  
ed. MATRANGA 1850: 624–626  
ed. BECKBY 1957–58: II, 30; IV, 288 and 292<sup>2</sup>  
ed. MATRANGA 1850: 627–632

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<sup>1</sup> The poem consists of 181 lines, of which Pertusi published vv. 1–35 and 46–66.

<sup>2</sup> Written in the margin of the Palatine manuscript next to *AP* VII, 26, XV, 37 and 40.

ekphrasis of the Church of the Holy Apostles	ed. LEGRAND 1896: 36–65
<b>Constantine the Sicilian</b>	
<i>AP</i> XV, 13	ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 266
Psogos	ed. SPADARO 1971: 198–199
Apology	ed. SPADARO 1971: 200–202
poems 1–2	ed. SPADARO 1971: 202
monody	ed. MONACO 1951: 458–462
Love Song	ed. MATRANGA 1850: 693–696
<b>Corpus of Monastic Epigrams</b>	
various gnomes	ed. ODORICO 1986: <i>passim</i> <sup>3</sup>
<b>Dionysios the Stoudite</b>	
book epigram	ed. SPECK 1968: 307–309
<b>Elias Synkellos</b>	
catanyctic alphabet	ed. CICOLELLA 2000a: 6–16
Lamentation on Himself	ed. CICOLELLA 2000a: 20–30
<b>Euphemios</b>	
verse inscription	ed. GRÉGOIRE 1922: no. 302
satirical poem	ed. PERTUSI 1952: 91
<b>Eustathios Kanikles</b>	
riddle	ed. STERNBACH 1900: 291–293
<b>Gennadios</b>	
see: Corpus of Monastic Epigrams	
<b>George of Pisidia</b>	
St. 5–106 and 108	ed. STERNBACH 1891: 16–18 and 1892a: 51–68
Q. 1–13	ed. QUERCI 1777: 1732–1740 <sup>4</sup>
In Heraclium redeuntem	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 77–81
Expeditio Persica	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 84–136
In Bonum Patricium	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 163–170
Bellum Avaricum	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 176–200
In Restitutionem Crucis	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 225–230
Heraclias	ed. PERTUSI 1959: 240–261
Hexaameron	ed. GONNELLI 1998: 114–244
Contra Severum	ed. QUERCI 1777: 1621–1676
In Resurrectionem	ed. QUERCI 1777: 1374–1384
De Vanitate Vitae	ed. QUERCI 1777: 1581–1600
De Vita Humana	ed. GONNELLI 1991: 123–130
In Alypium	ed. STERNBACH 1891: 1–4 <sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the contents of the Corpus of Monastic Epigrams, see chapter 8 (pp. 263–265).

<sup>4</sup> The numbering is mine. Q. 1 = line 1; Q. 2 = lines 2–5; Q. 3 = lines 6–7; Q. 4 = lines 8–13; Q. 5 = lines 14–17; Q. 6 = lines 18–19; Q. 7 = lines 20–21; Q. 8 = lines 22–23 (=St. 61b); Q. 9 = lines 24–25 (=St. 61c); Q. 10 = lines 26–27 (=St. 78b); Q. 11 = lines 28–30 (=St. 84b); Q. 12 = lines 31–41 (=AP I, 120); Q. 13 = lines 42–54 (=AP I, 121).

<sup>5</sup> Pisides' poems and epigrams can also be found in the edition of TARTAGLIA 1998. He reproduces the previous editions with some minor changes: see the "Nota critica" in his edition, pp. 58–60.

- Ignatios the Deacon**  
*AP* XV, 29–31; 39a  
 iconoclastic epigrams  
 monody  
 paraenetic alphabet  
 Adam and Eve  
 Lazarus and the Rich  
 fables nos. 1–45
- Ignatios the Headmaster**  
*AP* I, 109–114
- John Geometres Kyriotes**  
 Cr. 266, 1–352, 2  
 S. 2–13  
 Sa. 1–14  
 dispute  
 hymns on the H. Virgin  
 Metaphrasis of the Odes  
 Life of St. Panteleemon
- John Kommerkiarios**  
 Life of St. Mary of Egypt
- John of Damascus**  
 Drama of Susanna  
 poem on the H. Trinity
- John of Melitene**  
 epigrams 1–3  
 epigram 4  
 epitaph 1  
 epitaph 2
- John the Grammarian**  
 iconoclastic epigrams
- John the Syrian**  
 see: Corpus of Monastic Epigrams
- Kassia**  
 A 1–160, B 1–27, C 1–97  
 M 1–9
- Kometas**  
*AP* XV, 36–38; 40
- Kyriakos of Chonai**  
 catanyctic alphabet
- Leo Choirosphaktes**  
 epigrams 1–4  
 epitaph  
 monody  
 epithalamia 1–2
- ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 282–284 and 288  
 ed. *PG* 99, 436–437 and 476  
 ed. CICOLELLA 2000a: 42–54  
 ed. MÜLLER 1891: 321–322  
 ed. MÜLLER 1886: 28–32  
 ed. STERNBACH 1897: 151–154  
 ed. MÜLLER 1897: 264–281
- ed. BECKBY 1957–58: I, 172–174
- ed. CRAMER 1841: 266–352  
 ed. SAJDAK 1929: 196–198  
 ed. SAJDAK 1930–31: 530–534  
 ed. GRAUX 1880: 277–278  
 ed. SAJDAK 1931: 61–78  
 ed. CRAMER 1841: 352–366  
 ed. STERNBACH 1892b: 3–41<sup>6</sup>
- ed. STERNBACH 1900a: 319–321
- ed. *PG* 136, 508 (two verses)  
 ed. CANART 2000: 153–154
- ed. HÖRANDNER 1970: 115–116  
 ed. MAGUIRE 1996: 21, n. 49<sup>7</sup>  
 ed. LAUXTERMANN: Appendix III, 308–309  
 ed. ŠEVČENKO 1969–70: 191
- ed. *PG* 99, 436 and 476
- ed. KRUMBACHER 1897a: 357–368  
 ed. MYSTAKIDIS 1926: 317
- ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 288 and 290–292
- ed. LAUXTERMANN 1999c: 101–102
- ed. KOLIAS 1939: 130–132  
 ed. MERCATI 1929–30: 60  
 ed. CICOLELLA 2000a: 66–70  
 ed. CICOLELLA 2000a: 76–82 and 86–88

<sup>6</sup> There are also a number of epigrams and poems that may be attributed to Geometres, but these ascriptions are not certain: see pp. 301, 303–304 and 315–316.

<sup>7</sup> For the ascription of these six epigrams to John of Melitene, see Appendix III.

- The Bath of Leo VI  
Thousand-Line Theology  
On Thermal Springs
- Leo of Sardis**  
book epigram
- Leo the Philosopher**  
*AP* IX, 200–203, 214, 578; XV, 12  
satirical poems 1–2  
Job
- Leo VI**  
catanyctic alphabet  
poem on the lily  
homily no. 26
- Mazarenos**  
*AP* I, 106–107
- Methodios**  
epigram on the Chalke
- Metrophanes of Smyrna**  
hymn
- Michael Chartophylax**  
*AP* I, 122
- Michael Synkellos**  
hymn
- Neilos the Younger**  
book epigrams 1–4
- Nicholas the Patrician**  
gnomic epigrams 1–2
- Nikephoros Ouranos**  
catanyctic alphabet  
poems 1–2
- Niketas the Philosopher**  
epigrams 1–5
- Paradeisos**  
quatrains 1–99
- Parthenios**  
book epigram
- Photios**  
hymns 1–2
- Ps. Constantine the Sicilian**  
love poem
- Ps. Leo Choiosphaktes**  
epithalamium
- Ps. Theodore of Stoudios**  
epigrams 1–4  
poems 1–2
- ed. CICCOLELLA 2000a: 94–106  
ed. VASSIS 2002: 71–153  
ed. GALLAVOTTI 1990: 86–89
- ed. STERNBACH 1900: 305
- ed. WESTERINK 1986: 198–199  
ed. WESTERINK 1986: 200–201  
ed. WESTERINK 1986: 205–222
- ed. CICCOLELLA 1989: 21–24  
ed. MERCATI 1936: 497–498  
ed. ANTONOPOULOU<sup>8</sup>
- ed. BECKBY 1957–58: I, 170–172
- ed. MERCATI 1920: 215–216
- ed. MERCATI 1929–30: 56–59
- ed. BECKBY 1957–58: I, 180
- ed. CRIMI 1990: 29–34
- ed. GASSISI 1906: 53–54
- ed. STERNBACH 1900: 303–304
- ed. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS 1899: 68–70  
ed. MERCATI 1950: 569–571
- ed. STERNBACH 1902: 85–86
- ed. *PG* 106, 867–890
- ed. STERNBACH 1900: 305
- ed. CICCOLELLA 1998: 308–314
- ed. MATRANGA 1850: 696–698
- ed. CICCOLELLA 2000a: 110–114
- ed. SPECK 1964a: 36–37  
ed. SPECK 1964a: 37–39

<sup>8</sup> TH. ANTONOPOULOU, *Leonis Sexti Imperatoris Homiliae*. Due to be published in the *Series Graeca* of the *Corpus Christianorum*.

- Seneca Iatrosophistes**  
*AP* I, 90 ed. CAMERON 1983: 284–285
- Sergios**  
 iconoclastic epigram ed. *PG* 99, 437
- Sophronios Iatrosophistes**  
 hymn ed. GIGANTE 1957: 139–143
- Sophronios of Jerusalem**  
 epigrams 1–3 ed. CAMERON 1983: 285, 290 and 291  
 hymns 1–22 ed. GIGANTE 1957: 25–138
- Stephen Kapetolites**  
 iconoclastic epigram ed. *PG* 99, 437
- Stylianios**  
*APL* 387c, v. 5 ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 510
- Stylianios**  
 dispute ed. GRAUX 1880: 277–278
- Symeon the Metaphrast**  
 catanyctic alphabet ed. ALLATIUS 1669: 132–133 (no. I)  
 poems 1–2 ed. ALLATIUS 1669: 133–136 (nos. III–IV)  
 epitaph ed. VASIL'EVSKY 1896: 577–578  
 satirical poem ed. VASIL'EVSKY 1896: 578  
 monody ed. ŠEVČENKO 1969–70: 210–212  
 erotapokrisis ed. MOREL 1600: 1–3  
 hymn ed. KODER 1965: 133–137
- Symeon the New Theologian**  
 hymns 1–58 ed. KODER 1969–73: I, 156–301, II, 10–493;  
 III, 10–309; and ed. KAMBYLIS 1976: 45–462
- Theodore of Kyzikos**  
 book epigram ed. STERNBACH 1900: 306–307
- Theodore of Studios**  
 nos. 1–123 ed. SPECK 1968: 109–307  
 iconophile poems ed. *PG* 99, 437–442
- Theodore the Paphlagonian**  
 dispute ed. MATRANGA 1850: 627–632
- Theodosios of Dyrrachion**  
 paraenetic alphabet ed. HÖRANDNER 1989: 143–145
- Theodosios the Deacon**  
 The Capture of Crete ed. PANAGIOTAKIS 1960: 94–124; and ed.  
 CRISCUOLO 1979: 2–39
- Theodosios the Grammarian**  
 panegyric ed. LAMBROS 1884: 129–132
- Theodosios the Monk**  
 epigrams 1–2 ed. GALLAVOTTI 1987: 58, n. 11<sup>9</sup>  
 monody ed. GALLAVOTTI 1987: 58
- Theophanes the Grammarian**  
*AP* XV, 14; 35 ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 266 and 286
- Thomas the Patrician**  
*APL* 379 ed. BECKBY 1957–58: IV, 506

<sup>9</sup> The original texts of these two book epigrams are lost, but we have Gaetani's translation in Latin.

Frequently quoted authors of the eleventh and twelfth centuries:

<b>Christopher Mitylenaios</b> nos. 1–145	ed. KURTZ 1903: 1–100
<b>John Mauroπους of Euchaita</b> nos. 1–99 poem	ed. LAGARDE 1882: 1–51 ed. KARPOZILOS 1982: 71–74
<b>Michael Psellos</b> nos. 1–92	ed. WESTERINK 1992: 1–464
<b>Michael the Grammarian</b> nos. I and IV–IX	ed. MERCATI 1917: 115–117 & 128–135
<b>Nicholas Kallikles</b> nos. 1–37	ed. ROMANO 1980: 77–128
<b>Theodore Balsamon</b> nos. 1–45	ed. HORNA 1903: 178–204
<b>Theodore Prodromos</b> poems I–LXXIX nos. 80–250	ed. HÖRANDNER 1974: 177–552 list of works written by or attributed to Prodromos, in: HÖRANDNER 1974: 40–72
Tetrasticha 1–293	ed. PAPAGIANNIS 1997: 4–308
<b>Theophylaktos of Ohrid</b> nos. 1–15	ed. GAUTIER 1980: 346–377

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**PART ONE:  
TEXTS AND CONTEXTS**





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*Chapter One*

BYZANTINE POETRY IN CONTEXT

In *The Secret of Eloquence*, a book on Arabic stylistics written in 1062 by the Syrian Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji, we read an amusing anecdote about a line of al-Mutanabbi († 965) which happened to come to the attention of the Byzantine emperor: “It is related that a certain Byzantine king – I believe it was Nikephoros – asked about the poetry of al-Mutanabbi. They recited to him the line:

It was as if the white-and-ruddy camels were resting on my eyelids: when they stirred, [my tears] streamed forth.

Its meaning was explained to him in Greek; but he did not like it. “What a liar this man is!” he said. “How can a camel rest on a man’s eye?!” Now I do not believe that the reason for this lies in what I said before about translating from Arabic into other languages and the disparity in this respect; but there exist in our tongue metaphorical and other beautiful conventional expressions such as are not found in other languages”<sup>1</sup>.

The beautiful line of al-Mutanabbi that baffled the emperor may seem absurd even to modern readers who have little or no acquaintance with the literary conventions of medieval Arabic poetry. In order to understand the bold metaphor of “camels on eyelids”, the reader certainly has to know that the sorrow of leaving one’s beloved or staying behind when someone else leaves, is usually expressed in Arabic poetry by portraying the caravan of camels trailing into the desert at dawn. The reader furthermore has to know that the verb *sala*, used in al-Mutanabbi’s line for the “streaming” eyes, is also often used to denote camels “moving in single file”<sup>2</sup>. Thus there is a connection between weeping eyes and departing camels, which accounts for the striking metaphor used by the great al-Mutanabbi. Without this crucial information, however, the line is almost incomprehensible – which is why Nikephoros Phokas, if he is indeed the ignoramus who listened to the recital of al-Mutan-

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by G.J. VAN GELDER, *Camels on Eyelids and the Bafflement of an Emperor: a line of al-Mutanabbi “translated” into Greek*, in: *Proceedings of the XII<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association. Spaces and Boundaries*. Munich 1988, vol. III, 446–451.

<sup>2</sup> VAN GELDER (see footnote above), 447–448.

abbi's poetry, reacted as he did. As he was obviously not familiar with the conventions of Arabic poetry, the image of "white-and-ruddy camels resting on one's eyelids" seemed absolutely grotesque.

Over the last two decades scholars have been saying that it is time that we finally start to appreciate Byzantine literature<sup>3</sup>. In these papers written in defence of Byzantine literature, the black sheep of the flock of Byzantinists turns out to be Romilly Jenkins, whose damning comments on the subject are quoted time and again as the *non plus ultra* of short-sightedness: "The Byzantine Empire remains almost the unique example of a highly civilised state, lasting for more than a millennium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone"<sup>4</sup>. The quote can be found in his book on the romantic poet Dionysios Solomos – the founding father of Modern Greek poetry, who Jenkins obviously greatly admired. From his critical comments it becomes clear that Jenkins looks at Solomos' poetry from a very Anglo-Saxon perspective: Keats, Shelley, Byron<sup>5</sup>. These poets represent the kind of poetry he is familiar with and has learnt -at public school presumably- to regard as the pinnacle of poetic achievement. It is against the background of the romantic movement and its literary values, too, that we should view Jenkins' biased and uncharitable verdict. What he expects from Byzantine poets and unfortunately does not get, is the sort of lyricism which he, born and bred on a wholesome diet of British romanticism, considers to be the essence of poetry. In this respect, Jenkins certainly resembles the Byzantine emperor who laughed at al-Mutanabbi's poetry simply because it was not like anything he was familiar with. However, before we start criticizing ignorant emperors and prejudiced scholars, let us first consider where we stand as modern readers at the turn of the twenty-first century. Our aesthetic value judgements are based on a corpus of texts promoted through the school system and sanctified by the literary popes of our time. Sadly enough, even if we wanted to, it is impossible for us to remain entirely unaffected by modern tastes and preferences. There is no point in denying that we look at things from a contemporary perspective. If we judge Byzantine poetry -say, the poems of John Geometres- on the narrow basis of our own literary preferences, it certainly falls short of our expectations. It is different, it does not fit into our literary canon, and it does not correspond to modern aesthetics. Some people (such as Jenkins) will stop reading Byzantine poetry once they see that it is not their cup of tea; others will try to appreciate it on its own terms. Appreciation presupposes knowledge. It also presupposes that we try to read

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the various contributions in *Symbolae Osloenses* 73 (1998) 5–73.

<sup>4</sup> R. JENKINS, *Dionysios Solomos*. Cambridge 1940, repr. Athens 1981, 57.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the first two pages of his book where we find these three names along with a rather embarrassing defence of the colonial hegemony of the British Empire.

with Byzantine eyes and allow ourselves to indulge in the pleasures of Byzantine literature – which is only possible by means of what Coleridge called “a willing suspension of disbelief”. It means that we will have to decipher the literary codes of Byzantine poetry and to understand it as the Byzantines would.

This is also what this book attempts to do. I do not think that we should apply modern literary criteria to a literature that follows its own set of rules. I do not think either that we should apply the precepts of classical scholarship to a literature that is not classical (although the Byzantines tried very hard to make us believe that they wrote as the ancients did). Here we have a fundamental hermeneutic problem. Krumbacher, Dölger and Hunger view Byzantine poetry from the angle of German *Altertumswissenschaft*. They recognize that the hallowed triad, epic-drama-lyric poetry, is of little help in defining the genres of Byzantine poetry; but they do not ask themselves why they should approach Byzantine poetry from this viewpoint in the first place. Having recognized that Byzantine poetry cannot easily be divided into these three categories, they react in different ways. Krumbacher refuses altogether to try and categorize Byzantine poems according to genre. That would be of little use, for “die schöne Gliederung nach Gattungen” which we find in ancient poetry, does not exist in Byzantium; “der eklektische Charakter der Dichter und der Mangel einer grossen, deutlichen Entwicklung innerhalb der einzelnen Arten” renders “eine strenge Durchführung der Eidologie” totally impossible<sup>6</sup>. Dölger (who finds in Byzantine poetry only “eine Aushöhlung des Gedankengehaltes und ein Erlahmen der Phantasie”, which often leads to “Geschmacklosigkeit”) expressly states that “das übliche literarische Schema der dramatischen, epischen und lyrischen Literatur” does not apply to Byzantine poetry. However, after this apodictic statement, Dölger goes on to say that the Byzantines did not write drama, but instead devoted themselves to two genres only: “Dichtungen in epischer Form” and “in lyrischer Form” – without so much as an explanation as to why he suddenly uses the terms “epic” and “lyric”, which he himself said did not apply to Byzantine poetry<sup>7</sup>. Hunger’s line of argumentation is even more peculiar. He fully subscribes to the verdict of Krumbacher, but “trotzdem” he thinks that a literary history, such as the one he is writing, cannot do without some form of classification: “Ausgangspunkt für eine Gliederung dieser Übersicht werden aber doch wieder die alten Genera sein müssen”. He cautiously adds that there are great differences between ancient and Byzantine poems and that it is often difficult to classify Byzantine poems according to the classical genre system: “Deshalb sollen die Gattungsbezeich-

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<sup>6</sup> KRUMBACHER 1897b: 706.

<sup>7</sup> DÖLGER 1948: 13, 15, 15–17, 17–23 and 23–28.

nungen [namely, epic, dramatic and lyric poetry], zumindest in den Titeln, unter Anführungszeichen gesetzt werden” [as Hunger indeed does in the titles attached to the relevant chapters]<sup>8</sup>. The word “müssen” speaks volumes. We “*have to*” use these generic terms. But why should we? Why should we use terms that do not apply to Byzantine literature? Well, we *have to* because Hunger does not question the intrinsic validity of this system of classification. And neither do Krumbacher and Dölger. They merely repeat what they have learnt at school. In fact, it is questionable whether the classic triad holds true for any literature, including ancient Greek poetry. The concept ultimately goes back to Plato (*Rep.*, 392c–394c). But Plato has been misunderstood in modern times by Fr. Schlegel, Schelling, Hölderlin, and other exponents of the German romantic movement, for he does not speak about *genres*, but about “*modes of enunciation*”<sup>9</sup>. There are three modes: (1) plain narration – the author speaks *propria voce* (for instance, in the dithyramb); (2) imitation (mimesis) – the author does not speak himself, but lets his characters do the talking (for instance, in tragedy and comedy); and (3) a mixture of both – the author sometimes speaks with his own voice and sometimes lets his characters speak (for instance, in the Homeric epics). The example given by Plato of the first mode of enunciation (incidentally, the only sort of poetry he is willing to accept in his ideal republic), the dithyramb, has little to do with the modern concept of lyric poetry. In the dithyramb the poet usually narrates in the third person and speaks about the deeds of gods and men; in modern lyric poetry, the poet usually speaks in the first person and expresses his personal emotions. In fact, the Byzantine panegyric praising the deeds of noble emperors comes much closer to Plato’s definition of the first mode of enunciation than modern lyric poetry. Justice after all! The Byzantines wrote the sort of “lyric poetry” that Plato prescribed! But did they really? Once again, Plato is not interested in genres, but in forms of representation: the author’s voice, the character’s voice and the mixed voice. He gives a few examples of the kinds of poetry in which each of these voices can be heard, but he does not discuss ancient Greek genres. Thus, it is simply wrong to apply a totally misunderstood concept of Plato, the holy triad of arch-genres, to Byzantine or, for that matter, to any literature. The theories of German philosophers are quintessential to understanding the basic tenets of the romantic movement, but are utterly worthless for the comprehension of other literary periods and other cultures.

The term “*epigram*” is another splendid example of a much used, yet entirely misunderstood literary concept. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines

<sup>8</sup> HUNGER 1978: II, 108.

<sup>9</sup> See G. GENETTE, Introduction à l’architexte. Paris 1979 (repr. in: G. Genette et al., *Théorie des genres*. Paris 1986, 89–159). The term “mode of enunciation” is a literal translation of the term Genette introduces: *mode d’ énonciation*.

the term as follows: “A short poem leading up to and ending in a witty or ingenious turn of thought”. Here the epigram is characterized by two features: it is short and it has a “*pointe*” at the end. This procrustean definition more or less corresponds to what most people nowadays mean by the word “epigram”, but it would probably have made little sense to the Hellenes and the Byzantines. They would not have understood the definition for two reasons. First, their epigrams are not always “short”; secondly, their epigrams hardly ever end in a “*pointe*”. The modern definition of the term goes back to the Renaissance, when the humanists rediscovered the epigrams of Martial<sup>10</sup>. Martial’s epigrams are indeed often short and witty. And so are the epigrams of other first-century poets, such as Lucilius<sup>11</sup>. Hellenistic and Byzantine epigrams, however, are not always as short as the ones of Martial, but may easily turn into full-length poetic texts<sup>12</sup>. And although they can be quite witty, Hellenistic and Byzantine epigrams (in contrast to the early Roman ones) are not structured so as to bring about the effect of the big bang at the end. These epigrams certainly achieve poetic closure, but they end in a whisper, not with a theatrical exit accompanied by the slamming of doors. Thus the “Martalian” definition of the term, which we have wholeheartedly embraced in ordinary parlance, does not do justice to the Hellenistic or the Byzantine epigram. The question is: should we continue to give credit to a Renaissance interpretation of the term based on Martial, or should we try to understand the different phases of the history of the epigram? Should we cling to a basically unhistorical concept, or should we view the epigram as a genre that changed in the course of time? It will be obvious what my answer is. It will also be clear why I object to Kominis’ definition of the Byzantine epigram. Kominis rightly states that it is difficult to distinguish epigrams from poems and that brevity is not a useful criterion in sorting out the Byzantine epigram: “περὶ συντομίας (...) οὐδεὶς δύναται νὰ γίνῃ λόγος”. But strangely enough, he then continues by saying that one should regard as epigrams primarily those Byzantine poems that have a maximum length of 8 to 12 verses (the length of most epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology*), and exceptionally, poems of up to 20 verses if there is valid “internal evidence” (such as inscriptional use or inclusion in a collection of epigrams)<sup>13</sup>. This makes little sense. Kominis first rejects brevity as a characteristic of the Byzantine epigram and then uses the verse length of ancient

<sup>10</sup> See P. LAURENS, *L’abeille dans l’ambre. Célébration de l’épigramme de l’époque Alexandrine à la fin de la Renaissance*. Paris 1989.

<sup>11</sup> For brevity as an essential feature of epigrams of the first century AD, see *AP* IX, 342 and 369.

<sup>12</sup> For the length of Hellenistic epigrams, see CAMERON 1993: 13. For the length of early Byzantine epigrams, see *AP* V, 294 (24 vv.), IX, 363 (23 vv.), and IX, 482 (28 vv.).

<sup>13</sup> KOMINIS 1966: 19–20.

epigrams as a valid criterion. His notion of “internal evidence” looks much like a second line of defence. Quite unexpectedly we are told not only to count the number of verses, but also to pay attention to generic features. However, he does not clarify for what pertinent reasons Byzantine texts of more than 20 verses, which have those generic features, should not be called epigrams. For instance, is the famous verse inscription on the St. Polyeuktos (*AP* I, 10) not an epigram, simply because it consists of 76 verses? Is one of these internal criteria of Kominis in fact not the inscriptional use of epigrams? Thus, the absolute maximum of “20 verses and no more”, which Kominis is willing to accept if there are good reasons for it, is as arbitrary as the number of “8 to 12” he adopts because that is the “normal” length of ancient epigrams. What this means is that Kominis, even though he is well aware that Byzantine epigrams are not always short, still clings to the traditional, that is: Renaissance and post-Renaissance, definition of the term “epigram”.

These criticisms are by no means intended to belittle the outstanding achievements of scholars, such as Krumbacher, Hunger and Kominis, to whom I am much indebted. I hope to have made clear, however, that we should learn to question the validity of the literary terms we are familiar with and which we inadvertently apply even to literatures that are not like ours. We should learn to look at Byzantine poetry, not from a modern point of view nor from the angle of classical scholarship, but through the prism of Byzantine literary perceptions. When the emperor heard al-Mutanabbi’s line, he ridiculed it because he did not understand the literary conventions of Arabic poetry and unwittingly applied his very Byzantine reading experiences to a literature that is not Byzantine. By using a literary terminology with which we are familiar, but which has really nothing to do with Byzantine literature, we run the risk of committing exactly the same error.

In order to understand what Byzantine poetry is really all about, there is basically only one way out of the dead-end maze of modern prejudices and traditional misunderstandings: to look at the texts themselves and at the contexts that generated them. What is needed above all is a historicizing approach. The main thrust of such a scholarly approach is to study Byzantine poetry as a historical phenomenon (which is, incidentally, not the same thing as seeing it merely as a mine of historical information) and to understand it on its own terms. Byzantine poems are poems that are Byzantine. They are not modern – how could they be? They are not classical – why should they be? The tautological definition of Byzantine poems being poems Byzantine, which I have chosen simply to put things straight, does not mean that I regard the Byzantine identity as something that did not change in the course of time. Everything changes – even perennial Byzantium, where time often seems to tick away so slowly that it can only be measured against the clockwork of eternity. That Byzantium looks so perfectly timeless and immutable, is an

accomplishment of great genius. It is in itself an astonishing work of art, manufactured by thousands of diligent Byzantines working in close co-operation to produce the effect of timelessness in their paintings, hymns and writings. It is what Yeats so eloquently dubbed “the artifice of eternity” in his famous poem *Sailing to Byzantium*. But an artifice it is, and we should not be fooled by it<sup>14</sup>. Things did change in the Byzantine millennium: political constellations, military situations, economic prospects, social structures and attitudes, religious views and cultural orientations. And of course, along with all these fundamental changes Byzantine literature changed as well. The pace of change may have been remarkably slow compared to the precipitous developments of the last two centuries, but then again, Byzantium was a medieval society. Seen from the perspective of the Middle Ages, Byzantium certainly kept pace with the equally slow developments in the medieval West. The gradual changes that we observe in Byzantine society and literature more or less evolved with the same slack rhythms and movements as in the West (it can hardly be a coincidence that in both cultures dark ages, cultural revivals, pre-Renaissance tendencies, religious backlashes and the beginnings of vernacular poetry took place in approximately the same periods). However slow the pace of these changes may have been, it is incorrect to view Byzantine culture as static – to do so would mean falling into a trap which Byzantium itself has prepared.

Since we know so little about Byzantine poetry, and since we continuously make the mistake of comparing the little we know to both classical and modern literature, it is time to broaden our horizon and become acquainted with the texts themselves. First the sources, and only then the theories. That is the only way to make progress, even if it means that we, like Baron von Münchhausen, have to drag ourselves by the hair out of the morass of modern misapprehensions. If we study the manuscript material at our disposal closely, there is enough evidence to reconstruct Byzantine literary perceptions. The evidence there is consists of the following: the classification system of collections of poems and anthologies, the lemmata attached to poems and epigrams, the texts themselves which often contain internal indications as to their original purposes, and occasional remarks in Byzantine letters, text books and rhetorical writings. I am convinced that what the Byzantines themselves report, is far more important than the opinions of modern scholars, myself included. Of course, their remarks on poetry and genres need to be interpreted and weighed against the evidence of the still extant Byzantine texts. They certainly can not be accepted at face value. However, a study that does not take into account what the Byzantines have to say about their own poetry, is by definition

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<sup>14</sup> See P. LEMERLE, *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin*. Paris 1977, 251.

doomed to fail. The trite maxim “*ad fontes*” also holds true in this particular instance. If we want to understand Byzantine poetry, let us above all listen to the Byzantines themselves.

If the evocative anecdote about al-Mutanabbi’s line and the emperor’s negative response to it implicitly teaches us an important lesson, it is that any text, whether in Arabic, Byzantine Greek or another language, needs a context to be fully understood. Context is a vague concept. It includes anything relevant to the text one is reading, but which is not expressed in so many words and is therefore not entirely self-evident. It involves a number of questions: when, where, by whom, for which audience, what genre, at which occasion, for which purpose, and so forth. In this chapter I shall discuss three contextual aspects of Byzantine poetry: the function of the epigram, the relation between poets and patrons, and the forms of literary communication between poets and public.

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### *The Byzantine Epigram*

The *Souda* presents the following explanation of the term “epigram”: “all texts that are inscribed on some object, even if they are not in verse, are called ἐπίγραμμα”<sup>15</sup>. It is rather surprising that the *Souda*, or the ancient source from which it culled this information, niggardly sticks to the etymology of the term and does not refer to the literary genre. This is all the more surprising because the lexicographers of the *Souda* made extensive use of the anthology of Cephalas and must therefore have known perfectly well what an ancient epigram was like. Whenever the *Souda* quotes a few verses of an epigram from Cephalas’ anthology, the text is invariably introduced by the standard formula: ἐν τοῖς ἐπιγράμμασιν<sup>16</sup>. Therefore the question arises: why does the *Souda* define the ἐπίγραμμα as an “inscription”, whereas elsewhere it uses the same term in connection with the literary texts found in the anthology of Cephalas?

<sup>15</sup> ADLER 1928–38: II, 352, no. 2270: ἐπίγραμμα: πάντα τὰ ἐπιγραφόμενά τισι, κὰν μὴ ἐν μέτροις εἰρημένα, ἐπιγράμματα λέγεται. See also the definition in the *Λέξεις ὁητορικαί*, ed. I. BEKKER, *Anecdota Graeca, I. Lexica Segueriana*. Berlin 1814, 260, 7, and in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, ed. TH. GAISFORD. Oxford 1848 (repr. Amsterdam 1962), 358, 23: ἐπίγραμμα: οἱ πεζοὶ καὶ ἔμμετροι λόγοι ἐπιγράμματα καλοῦνται.

<sup>16</sup> See CAMERON 1993: 294.



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