

BUREAUCRATIC DISCOURSE, SIGNATURE AND AUTHORSHIP IN JOHN TZETZES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

Basandosi sull'opera di Giovanni Tzetze (1110-1185 circa), questo contributo offre un'analisi preliminare del ruolo svolto dalle pratiche burocratiche e dalla formazione legale nel definire autografia e autorialità nella Costantinopoli del XII secolo. Mettendo a confronto pratiche archivistiche e firme d'autore, questo articolo dimostra che elementi del discorso legale potevano essere sfruttati dagli intellettuali per rinforzare e mettere al centro la propria voce, superando così i limiti imposti dalle norme sociali e, a volte, la propria marginalità. Questo contributo ha un impianto comparativo, dato che prende anche in esame gli sviluppi della poesia volgare italiana in Sicilia, Bologna e Toscana tra il XIII e il XIV secolo, soffermandosi in particolare sull'opera di Francesco da Barberino. L'approccio comparativo vuole dimostrare che i legami tra scritture burocratiche/legali e scritture letterarie sono una costante transculturale dovuta a pratiche educative e scrittorie simili, mostrando quindi che il caso degli intellettuali italiani del pre-umanesimo è più la regola che l'eccezione.

Taking its cue from the work of John Tzetzes (1110-1185 ca), this paper offers a preliminary survey of the role played by bureaucratic and legal training in defining autography and authorship in 12th-century Byzantium. By comparing archival practices and authorial signatures, it demonstrates that features belonging to the legal discourse could be exploited by intellectuals to reinforce and re-center their voices as well as to overcome social constraints and, at time, marginality. The paper also takes a comparative perspective, by looking at the developments of vernacular poetry in Bologna, Tuscany and Sicily between 13th and 14th century, with a focus on the work of Francesco da Barberino. The comparative stance aims to prove that entanglements between legal/bureaucratic and literary writing are a cross-cultural constant emerging due to similar educational and scribal practices, thus showing that the case of the Italian pre-humanist intellectuals is the rule rather than the exception.

Bridging the gaps – between methodologies, fields, linguistic traditions, geographical compartmentalizations – is both one of the main aims and one the big merits of the most recent developments in medieval studies. The gap between “literary” and “documentary” writing is no exception. Scholars interested in the rise and spread of vernacular languages were among the first ones to call attention to the somewhat artificial divide between literary and non-literary writing, in particular when it comes to the earliest instances of written vernacular and their materiality. No less than thirty years ago Italianists such as Petrucci and Stussi have convincingly shown how the first literary vernacular texts took the shape of «traces» or «scritte avventizie» – a phrase hardly translatable into English – penned by notaries in the blank spaces left availa-

ble between documents.¹ In the *Memoriali bolognesi*, for instance, vernacular poetry has famously the function of reinforcing authenticity: filling in the blank spaces prevented additions and forgeries.² Equally, autography, one of the main characteristics of vernacular literature, has been shown to be closely connected with notarial habits. At the same time, western medievalists and Byzantinists alike have emphasized both the literariness and conscious design not only of imperial acts but also of wills, foundation-documents and cartularies as well as their role in the development of autobiographical attitudes.³ A new historical awareness has thus slowly emerged as regards the impact of bureaucracy in conceptualizing and consolidating authorship. Recent studies on Hoccleve and 'Uthmān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī also show that this is a recurring pattern across the medieval world, beyond Europe, and that it emerges in the presence of a strong bureaucratic lay culture – especially if such culture is characterized as socially distinct.⁴ Legal practices of authorization conflate with literary ones, in particular when the former are proprietary – that is when the rights to authorization are held exclusively.

The entanglements between literary and bureaucratic writing have been proven also for Byzantium. Not only, as mentioned above, have Byzantine literary historians pointed out and analyzed the rhetoric of documents and the contact points with learned production. Scholars interested in documents have also pointed out the role of versification in the bureaucratic sphere. Ten years ago, in a very informative book-chapter entitled *Epigrammi e documenti. Poesia come fonte per storia di chiese e monumenti bizantini*, De Gregorio⁵ provided a comprehensive presentation of a specific typology of inscribed epigrams, that is the epigrams accompanying or commenting on docu-

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¹ See STUSSI 2001 and PETRUCCI A. 1999.

² The *Rime* consist of a series of diverse texts (poems but also prayers) written in a public register where, according to a law passed in 1265, all private contracts had to be recorded. The aim was to fill the blank spaces between entries, thus avoiding unlawful insertions and additions. The *Rime* are just the most conspicuous example, others are preserved in documents coming from Venice or Friuli, as far as Italy is concerned. However, this phenomenon is not, by any means, confined to Italy alone. See STUSSI 2001, for a general survey of «textual vernacular traces» and a comprehensive bibliography. On the *Memoriali* and notarial culture see MARCON 1994.

³ See for instance the most recent TUCKER 2020. For Byzantium in particular more and more attention has been devoted to the literariness of wills and foundation-documents, and to their role in the development of autobiographical attitudes: see ANGOLD 1998; HINTERBERGER 1999, pp. 184-294; MULLETT 2007, pp. 182-209; PAPAIOANNOU 2012, pp. 99-121. Byzantine documents show developments that have precise parallels in the West. A particularly striking case is the increasing importance ascribed to record-keepers and archivists between the 11th and 12th century (see MULLETT 2007, p. 197 and GEARY 2007, pp. 106-113). For the authorial awareness of redactors, see below nt. 14.

⁴ On Hoccleve, an important voice of middle English poetry and a clerk (1368-1426), see KNAPP 2010. On al-Nābulusī (1192-1262), man of letters and civil servant working as a tax collector in Ayyubid Egypt, see STEWART 2018. On Byzantine bureaucrats as a social class see SHEAH 2020.

⁵ DE GREGORIO 2010.

ments. Although, as De Gregorio points out, those epigrams were not «scritte avventizie»⁶ but intentional compositions, the interaction between different modes of writing as well as different stylistic registers can provide us with important information about the sensitivity of redactors to the literariness of their endeavors. Unfortunately, for the Greek Middle Ages the picture is complicated by material constraints. Byzantinists suffer from a lack of archival evidence when it comes to lay administration – and crucial centuries such as the 12th are underrepresented also in monastic archives –⁷ that makes it difficult to ascertain whether phenomena somewhat comparable to those highlighted by Petrucci and Stussi happened also in Constantinople and its territories. I will confine myself to a most revealing figure: when it comes to notarial documents from Constantinople, only 9 have survived because they were preserved in provincial archives.⁸ Despite the fragmented picture, we can confidently say that in Byzantium too there were archival practices favoring the use of «scritte avventizie»: when collected in cartularies, for instance, chrysobulls carried fixing marks, that is writing or graphic signs where the sheets were glued together so as to prevent forgeries.⁹ However, we do not have any stable ground to build on. Equally, the rise of the vernacular is difficult to trace in its earliest phases.¹⁰ And yet, the questions still hold: does bureaucratic authorization affect or shape authorial practices? And if so, how? What was the awareness – or the lack thereof – of these two different modes of writing? Are there explicit attempts to distinguish the one from the other?

These questions are all the more crucial given that, in the West, the vocabulary of authorship partly emerged within the semantic sphere of political authority and legal authenticity.¹¹ Along these lines, it is perhaps not a coincidence that in Byzantium, too, an increased awareness regarding authorship co-occurs chronologically with the emergence at the imperial chancery of archival practices emphasizing the responsibility of individual functionaries in authorizing official documents.¹² In this paper I will not try to define the boundaries separating literary and non-literary discourse, nor will I linger on the thorny problem of “what literature is”.¹³ Rather, I will bring to the fore instances in which the awareness of such boundaries emerges and affects the construction of the writer’s Identity and authorship. I will do so by focusing on the work of John Tzetzes (1110-1185 ca) and by drawing a comparison with a distinctive case-study from Italian vernacular literature, Francesco da Barberino (1264-1348). I will also look at the practice of autography and at the way in which bureaucratic formulae and legal terms are used to sustain it within the sphere of literary writing.¹⁴ A

⁶ DE GREGORIO 2010 does not use the term, but the textual typology he refers to at p. 12 nt. 7 seems to leave little room for doubts.

⁷ See MORRIS 2008.

⁸ See SARADI MENDELLOVICI 1988, p. 26.

⁹ See MÜLLER 2008, p. 130.

¹⁰ For an overview on the question of the language see HINTERBERGER 2019, with previous literature.

¹¹ See in particular the different etymologies presented by Huguccio of Pisa in his *Magnae Derivationes* A 1.1-18. Huguccio is mentioned by Dante in the *Convivio* IV, VI 3-5 precisely as regards the Greek root («autentin» that is to say αὐθέντην) of the word «autore». On this topic, see CHENU 1927; STABILE 1970; MINNIS 1988, pp. 9-12; MÜLLER 1995; ZIOLKOWSKI 2009.

¹² See DÖLGER - KARAGANNOPOULOS 1968, pp. 120-121.

¹³ See MULLETT 1997, p. 289; ODORICO 2002, p. 62.

¹⁴ As far as autography in Byzantium is concerned, see in general HUNGER 1989, pp. 109-112, with

comparative perspective will help illuminate specific aspects of 12th-century Byzantine self-authorizing habits, showing that they follow, to a certain extent, cross-cultural patterns. Moreover, the practices testified by Francesco da Barberino have often been regarded as idiosyncratic to the late Medieval, pre-humanistic period.¹⁵ However, my comparative undertaking will demonstrate that at least some traits are already to be observed in the cultural life of twelfth-century Byzantium.

Byzantine intellectuals are constantly engaged with different types of writing, from literature proper to texts drafted for administrative, legal and judicial purposes.¹⁶ At the top of the social ladder a miscellaneous production, stretching from civil law to ecclesiastical poetry, was not felt as particularly problematic by the emperor Leo the Wise.¹⁷ Such a twofold perspective seems to be ingrained in Byzantine society. A shadowy figure such as Niketas Kyprianos, «consul of the philosophers» in the early 11th century, did not fall altogether into oblivion only because he signed a *praktikon* in 1104, using his official title.¹⁸ Bureaucratic documents, moreover, are filled with terms and formulae pointing to authenticity and legitimation, as well as to the intentions, and motivations of issuers and redactors.¹⁹ Documents and books were also famously preserved in the same physical spaces under the authority of the same officer.²⁰

But how were these modes of writing perceived? To remain in the 11th century, the work of Psellos seems to testify to some friction between the freedom of literary creation and the constraints of bureaucratic writing. As George T. Dennis puts it, Psellos «did not want to devote his time and energy to tedious demonstrations, dowries, degrees of kinship, inheritance, legitimate and illegitimate children, and, not least, people who had been kicked by horses, gored by cows, or bitten by dogs».²¹

In what follows I will take my cue from a passage from the letter collection of John Tzetzes examined by De Gregorio, and more recently by Grünbart.²² This 12th-century text provides one of the rare semi-explicit statements about the two – apparently competing – areas of bureaucratic and literary writing. In one of his letters, *Ep.* 47 Leone,

further bibliography. As for the Middle Ages in general see CHIESA - PINELLI 1994. For the Graeco-Roman period, see also DORANDI 1991. It shall be noted that autography could also have a “generative” power on its own, as shown in the 10th century by the exchange between Constantine the Rhodian and the eunuch Theodore the Paphlagonian, who was allegedly outraged after finding and recognizing Constantine’s autograph note complaining about the poor intellectual scene of his time (see MATRANGA 1850, p. 627 and see now VAN OPSTALL 2020, pp. 161-167).

¹⁵ For a thorough survey and reconsideration of the practice of autography in the West see now LONG 2015. Significantly enough, Long pre-dates the «rise of autography» to the 11th-12th centuries.

¹⁶ See MULLETT 1990, pp. 159-163.

¹⁷ See ANTONOPOULOU 1997, pp. 3-81.

¹⁸ LEFORT - OIKJONOMIDES - PAPACHRYSSANTOU 1990, pp. 626-627 nt. 52.

¹⁹ See SARADI 1999, pp. 124-125. Interestingly enough, the most widespread terms indicating authenticity, αὐτόχειρ and αὐτόχειρος were perceived as synonyms with αὐθεντής, a term connected with authorship in the West (see above, n. 11), even though in another semantic sphere (homicide: Photios, *Lexicon* α 3160; Suida, *Lexicon* α 4421).

²⁰ See WEHMEYER 1997.

²¹ DENNIS 1994, p. 188 (the passage draws on CRISCUOLO 1989, ll. 1895-1904). As to the relationship between rhetoric and law, see also MAGDALINO 2002, p. 173.

²² On the letter see MACRIDES 1985, p. 165 nt. 80; DE GREGORIO 2010; GRÜNBART 2005b, p. 418; GRÜNBART 2018, p. 330.

addressed probably in 1146 to the tax collector John Smeniotes,²³ Tzetzes describes two modes of authorship (and authorization) materially nullifying each other. I will provide the complete translation of the whole letter, as I believe that only by taking into account the context in its entirety, we can fully understand Tzetzes' intentions and his reaction to the facts he narrates.

ΤΩΙ ΛΟΓΑΡΙΑΣΤΗΙ ΚΥΡΩΙ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΙ ΣΜΕΝΙΩΤΗΙ

Ἄγιέ μου αὐθέντα, πολλές πολλάκις κατέθου τὰς εὐεργεσίας καὶ χάριτας πρὸς ἡμᾶς· καὶ νῦν δὲ πάλιν εἶπερ ποτὲ προσεπίθες ταῖς εὐεργεσίαις εὐεργεσίας καὶ ταῖς χάρισι χάριτας. Τίς δὲ ἡ τῆς γραφῆς μου δέησις ἄκουσον. Ὁ σεβαστὸς ὁ Βατάτζης ὁποῖου θέματος δουλείαν ἐνήργησεν οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι· τοσοῦτο γὰρ ἔμοιγε δημοσίων πραγμάτων καθέστηκε μέλησις, ὅποσον κολιοῖς βασιλείας ἢ ἀετοῖς τῶν νόμων τοῦ Πλάτωνος καὶ ταῖς ἀηδόσιν Ἀριστοτέλους συλλογισμῶν, εἰ βούλει δὲ προσεπίθες καὶ τῶν Χρυσίππου. Τοῦτου γοῦν τὴν δαμοφορίαν τοῦ θέματος, ὅποσον ἄρα καὶ εἶη, ἀνατεθῆναι τῇ σῇ αὐθεντία νῦν αἰ φῆμαι διεκηρύκευσαν. Ἰκέτης οὖν γίνομαι διὰ τῆς παρουσίας γραφῆς, ὡς εἶπερ ἡ σῇ αὐθεντία τῷ προρρηθέντι σεβαστῷ συναντήσῃ, τὸ τοῦ Πατρῶν ἰατροῦ μὴ ἐπηρεασθῆναι παιδάριον ἡμέτερον ὄν συγγενές, τῷ ῥηθέντι δὲ συνεξελθὼν σεβαστῷ. Οἶδε δὲ ἡ σῇ αὐθεντία καὶ τὸ παιδάριον ἀκριβῶς τὸ μωρόσοφον ἐκεῖνο καὶ δοκησίσοφον, ὃ τοὺς ἰάμβους ποτὲ τῷ τέλει τῶν πρακτικῶν ἐνεχάραξε, καὶ τούτου ἔνεκεν ἡ σῇ αὐθεντία οὐκ ἐπέγραφε ταῦτα, ἀλλ' ἐκινδύνευον ἀπρακτῆσαι τὰ πρακτικά, εἰ μὴ καὶ τότε σου ἐδέηθημεν περὶ τούτου· καὶ πάλιν ἡ γραφὴ ποιεῖται τὴν δέησιν.

To the lord accountant John Smeniotes

My blessed master, more than often you enforced beneficial and gracious acts for our benefit: do it again now, if you ever added benefits to benefits and favors to favors. Please, listen to the prayer carried by this letter. The *sebastos* Vatatzes got in charge of a theme I ignore: I care about the public affairs as much as jackdaws care about kingship or eagles about Plato's *Laws* and nightingales about Aristotle's syllogisms, and, if you want, you may also add Crysippus' ones. Well, rumors announced to me that your Lordship was assigned the tax collection of that theme, whichever it might be. Through the present letter I now turn into a petitioner: in case your Lordship meets the above mentioned *sebastos*, the son of the doctor from Patras, that young man who is our relative, may not be abused, he who went together with the above mentioned *sebastos*. And your Lordship knows him all too well, that youngster, a foolish and self-proclaimed wise, who once wrote his iambs at the end of the *praktika*, so that your Lordship did not subscribe to them and they were even at risk of becoming ineffective, had not we prayed you back then about that matter, on that occasion too? Now the letter is praying you again.

The σεβαστὸς Βατάτζης mentioned in the letter is a member of the powerful Vatatzes family, famously connected with the Thracian theme and by then related to the imperial family.²⁴ Vatatzes is presented as in charge of an unnamed theme. The expression used by Tzetzes – δουλείαν ἐνήργησεν – could refer to an array of high-ranking civilian officers, from the *doux* down to the tax collector.²⁵ Grünbart argues that the

²³ See PBW Ioannes 493. See CHEYNET 2006, pp. 4-5. By mid-century, John was also in charge of the administration of the properties belonging to the Pantokrator monastery in the surroundings of Thessalonike (see HARVEY 1989, p. 229 nt. 125).

²⁴ See MAGDALINO 1993, pp. 207-208. For further prosopographic details, see GRÜNBART 1996, pp. 201-202.

²⁵ See, for instance, the later document pertaining to the tax exemption of the Monastery of the Theotokos Lembiotissa, near Smyrne (MIKLOSICH - MÜLLER 1871, p. 254, 13-16). On *douleia* see SHEPPARD 2009, p. 68 nt. 81; BARTUSIS 2012, pp. 418-419.

sebastos Vatatzes was also in charge as tax collector before John Smeniotes.²⁶ In fact, it might well be the case that the *sebastos* and John Smeniotes held two different offices within the same theme.²⁷

Be that as it may, in the first part of the letter, Tzetzes pretends to ignore any political and geographical connection, favoring philosophical and classicizing name-dropping over mundane and topical accuracy.²⁸ Such statements must be interpreted against the double speak characterizing the whole letter collection. First of all, we must not forget that the collection itself was the result of a careful selection and anthologization,²⁹ later subject to comment by Tzetzes himself, in the *Historiai*. Hence, every single letter was there for a purpose. The story of Tzetzes' young relative cannot therefore be taken as purely anecdotal. On the contrary, it contributes to the (self)-ironic picture of contemporary society conveyed by Tzetzes in the epistolarly. The first part too does not have to be taken at face value. As recently shown by the detailed analysis of Chiara D'Agostini, Tzetzes was notably and self-consciously acquainted with geographical knowledge, which he deemed crucial to the curriculum.³⁰ In fact, besides being of obvious relevance for future administrators of the empire, geo-political knowledge was important also when it came to archival practices, since, when collected in cartularies, documents were organized geographically.³¹ Such practice was certainly familiar to Tzetzes, who had earned his living as a secretary, albeit for a short time, in his youth. By feigning (an unlikely) ignorance, Tzetzes seems therefore to take on a sloppy persona, almost putting himself on the same foot as his protégé.

The first part of the short letter artfully prepares the grand finale, where Tzetzes takes sides for his unnamed young relative. The *παῖδριον* is described in comic and Aristophanic terms as an *enfant terrible*, well equipped to argue against his superior's authority. In the *scholia* in Aristophanes's *Clouds* *μωροσόφος* is referred to the humorous portrait of Socrates' pupils, whereas in *Historiai* VIII 201.429, while talking about the *Frogs*, Tzetzes contrasts *μωρόσοφοι* and good old *αὐτόσοφοι* – a term that speaks volumes about self-authorisation. The parallel might even evoke the despised “schedographic” training, based more on form than content.³² The youngster seems to be now working for the *σεβαστὸς Βατάτζης*, but he was once in the service of John

²⁶ GRÜNBART 1996, p. 202. As for the honorific of *sebastos* and his relevance to the Komnenian era see MAGDALINO 2009, pp. 223-224. On the office of the logariast see GUILLAND 1969; HERRIN 1975, p. 272.

²⁷ With the *sebastos* acting as a governor? This would explain why Tzetzes anticipates a meeting between the two. The modern Greek translation of the letter seems to imply such a reading (ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΑΔΗΣ 2001, p. 131).

²⁸ In the *Historiai* he presents these *adynata* about philosophers and animals as proverbs (VIII 242 and 243).

²⁹ See GRÜNBART 2005a.

³⁰ Chiara D'Agostini is currently completing a PhD dissertation on the reception of Ptolemy in Byzantium at the University of Southern Denmark. I thank her for all the fruitful discussions.

³¹ See again the cartulary of Lembiotissa (BEIHAMMER 2014, p. 67).

³² There is also the more common *δοκησίσοφος*, for which see Aristophanes, *Peace* 44 and *Historiai* X 323.228 (in tune with Tzetzes' anti-philosophical bias). The fact that Tzetzes shows in the letter a liking for philosophers while defending the young relative described as a fashionable literatus has again to be read against the background of *ἀμφοτερογλωσσία* characterizing the whole collection and the self-commentary in the *Historiai* (see PIZZONE 2017 and AGAPITOS 2017, p. 36). For Tzetzes and schedography, see again AGAPITOS 2017 with previous bibliography.

Smeniotes. The young man was probably active as a secretary and used to prepare for John documents, such as tax inventories or the like, to be signed, as it was customary for lower-ranking personnel working for higher officers.³³ Problem is that Tzetzes' relative could not resist the temptation of filling with verse the blank space at the end of the documents.³⁴ We cannot be completely sure about the meaning of Tzetzes' allusion. Is he modulating the usual *topos* of the literatus lacking writing material and desperately using any available surface to satisfy his urge to write?³⁵ Did the young man write self-authored lines or someone else's verse? Or perhaps did he act as a scribe, signaling that the job was done, by penning colophon verses at the end of the document?³⁶ Or else, did he underline the artful quality of his bureaucratic writing by penning a final verse summary, as Tzetzes himself used to do in his works and as De Gregorio believes?³⁷

Whatever the answer, what interests me here is that Tzetzes stages the contrast between two different activities and two types of writing available to trained intellectuals: versification and bureaucratic prose. These two activities had their own distinctive hallmarks. Language was the first one. Even though we do not have diglossy proper, the atticizing style customarily used for dodecasyllables was different from the language used in documents, a Byzantine *κοινή*.³⁸ Second, if we focus on the writer's agency, an even starker difference emerges. Not only does Tzetzes' young protégé write in his own hand; he does so also by his own will. Unlike bureaucratic writing, in the form of documents' drafting and compiling, poetry is depicted as eluding authority and social, hierarchical constraints. The least we can say is that Tzetzes has an ambiguous attitude in the letter toward his relative's endeavor. On the one hand he seems to describe the boy as an exemplar of the "new wave intellectuals" he otherwise despises;³⁹ on the other, however, he seems to sympathize with his "defiant literariness". Such an ambiguity, I argue, is due to his own position and is reflected also by the way he himself relates to and exploits bureaucratic writing practices.

Just as in the first part of the letter the names of ancient philosophers overshadow administrative jargon, in the second part versification is described as more powerful than bureaucratic prose. The former impinges on the pragmatic value of the latter. Through his iambi, the anonymous youngster makes John Smeniotes' authorization useless and even impossible. Only the officer's subscription makes writing operational: filling the relevant space with verse invalidates the content of the document. Moreover, at that time *praktika* could also serve the function of enforcing judicial pronouncements (*hypomnemata*).⁴⁰ Hence, not only do the iambi defile the *praktika* themselves,

³³ In LEFORT - OIKONOMIDES - PAPACHRYSSANTOU 1990, n. 51 (dated to 1103), for instance, the *sebastos* John Komnenos appoints two of his men, the *logariastes* Basil Choirospaktes and the *grammatikos* Nikolaos, to write and issue a *praktikon* on his behalf.

³⁴ On verse-writing as an identity factor in the 12th century, see JEFFREYS 2009; on the link between poetry (and in particular iambi) and rhetoric in Byzantine culture see HÖRANDNER 2009, p. 205.

³⁵ See MAGDALINO 1993, p. 324.

³⁶ On colophon verses see LAUXTERMANN 2003, pp. 200-201.

³⁷ See the verses closing one of the recensions of the *Historiai*, published in LEONE 1969-1970.

³⁸ See for instance BRANDS 1969 and HINTERBERGER 2007, in particular pp. 126-127.

³⁹ The most iconic description is in the *iambi* published by LEONE 1969-1970.

⁴⁰ See LEFORT - OIKONOMIDES - PAPACHRYSSANTOU 1990, p. 75.

they also turn the previous bureaucratic procedures into dead letter, quite literally. Not to mention the fact that, by signing the documents, John Smeniotes would also have subscribed to the iambs, whatever their content was, thus authorizing their message along with that of the *praktika*.

It would be tempting to see in the boisterous behavior of Tzetzes' relative an earlier parallel of phenomena linked to the emergence of vernacular literature in the Italian 13th century and, more in general, in the West during the 13th century.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, the first evidence of Italian texts in *volgare* is found on notarial documents. Besides the peculiar instance of the *Rime dei Memoriali bolognesi*,⁴² the case of Ser Ildebrandino di Diotisalvi is most telling: in 1270-1271 Ildebrandino, a notary from San Gimignano, entrusted the first autograph Italian sonnets to the recto and verso of a city register's cover. It has been noted that the casual writing of these verses testifies to the ongoing subordination of vernacular literature to Latin as well as to the material obstacles faced by someone willing to compose in the vernacular.⁴³ Unfortunately, we cannot know whether the iambs drafted by Tzetzes' relative had any functional relationship with the *praktikon*, which would allow for meaningful comparison with the verses of the Italian notaries. And yet, I would argue that also the episode narrated by Tzetzes testifies to an attempt of overcoming subordination. From what we may infer, however, the clash is not between two different languages. Rather, we see the contrast between functional/pragmatic and literary writing as well as frictions due to the attempt to escape hierarchical constraints. Tzetzes' letter tells a story of self-confidence, as the verses penned by the young man end up having a pragmatic value on their own, overcoming bureaucratic formulae.

The ambivalence encapsulated by Tzetzes' short missive ultimately conveys a deeper ambiguity, one that lies with the agency of the literati who also served as functionaries. Thanks to their education and skills such literati, like Tzetzes and his relative, often had the means to dictate or even write official documents but did not have the power to authorize them. Christian Gastgeber has recently summarized the role of first-rang intellectuals, from Arethas to Choniates, as "Diktatgeber" in drafting imperial documents: «Sie hatten freie Hand in der Gestaltung; gerade das notwendige Formular wie das Protokoll (und Eschatokoll) musste eingehalten werden».⁴⁴

Such a tendency finds the most spectacular example – at least on the basis of the evidence still available – in the post-Nicaean period. The cartulary of Makrinitissa and Nea Petra, assembled between 1280 and 1286 and unfortunately lost in the 1904 fire of Turin's Royal Library but still surviving in previously published fragments, can be seen as an extreme development of the trends highlighted by Gastgeber. The documents collected in the cartulary, former Taurin. gr. 237 Pasini (B. VI. 1 [b. VI. 17]), related to two foundations under the patronage of Nikolaos Maliassenos and Anna Maliassene Palaeologina, form an anthology proper. They are re-ordered, introduced

⁴¹ See PETRUCCI L. 1994. For a description of such «casual writing practices» in the early Western Middle Ages see also PETRUCCI A. 1999.

⁴² See above nt. 2.

⁴³ PETRUCCI A. 1985, p. 223.

⁴⁴ GASTGEBER 2003.

by προθεωρία, commented upon, and connected through dedicated iambic epigrams.⁴⁵ All in all, the cartulary included 17 prose texts and 21 iambic poems. Today we can only read 4 prose sections and 7 poems.⁴⁶ Significantly, the authenticating signatures of patriarchs, emperors and despots from the original documents are replaced by tetrastichs penned by the actual redactor of the cartulary.⁴⁷ The manuscript, which was a luxury illuminated exemplar, was a powerful statement to the – fully perceived – literariness of documents.

Moving down the line, from functionaries of the imperial offices to local administrators, highly trained individuals working as secretaries, such as Tzetzes himself in his youth, must also have been aware of the power lying with their autography, even though they lacked formal authority on the documents that they drafted. The conflict perceived and voiced in Tzetzes' letter is caused precisely by the unavoidable formulaic apparatus as well as by the need for a validation through an official signature stressed by Gastgeber.

It comes therefore as no surprise that Tzetzes in his oeuvre adopts a “bureaucratic” voice to authenticate his own verses, thus overcoming the limitations of his own position and bridging autography and authorization. The most blatant example comes from the *Historiai*, Tzetzes' commentary on his own letter collection. In four manuscripts belonging to the second and chronologically later recension of the work, labelled as b by his editor,⁴⁸ the commentary to the letters is followed by a series of self-standing poems, preceding the text of the collection proper. A first and shorter one (22 lines) is a iambic composition introducing the theme of children's education. A longer one (272 lines) centers on education, with a colorful description of the gang of intellectuals, significantly labeled as «buffalos» monopolizing the Constantinopolitan scene. Finally, we find a 17-line book epigram in exameters and 46 final iambs addressed against Andronikos Kamateros.⁴⁹

The last poem is closed by a poetic seal, a *sphragis*, borrowed from Sophocles, and is followed by six lines, bearing Tzetzes' signature.⁵⁰ The text reads as follows (vv. 350-360):⁵¹

⁴⁵ Before the fire the surviving texts were edited in PASINI 1749, vol. I, pp. 319-362 and MIKLOSICH - MÜLLER 1890, pp. IX-XI and 330-430. The textual evidence has been re-examined by DE GREGORIO 2010, pp. 58-96. Previous bibliography includes MAGDALINO 1978, pp. 145-146, BARIŠIĆ 1975 and TRAPP 1972.

⁴⁶ DE GREGORIO 2010, p. 62.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 64-67.

⁴⁸ Paris. Gr. 2750 (13th); Cantabrigd. Gr. Ee.6.35 (late 15th or early 16th); Monac. Gr. 338 (15th); Laurent. Gr. Plut. 69.14 (15th); LEONE 1969-1970, p. 127.

⁴⁹ If Tzetzes actually conceived of the three poems as immediately following the *Historiai*, we might regard them as reinforcing his authorial intentions and emphasizing to the attacks against Andronikos Kamateros entailed by the *Historiai*. On the final verses, from another perspective, see also the remarks offered by LUZZATTO 1999, p. 20. On Andronikos Kamateros, see BUCOSSI, 2014, XIX-XXVI and AGAPITOS 2017.

⁵⁰ Whether the signature pertains only to the iambic poems or to the whole of the *Historiai*'s second recension has been matter of discussion. See LEONE 1969-1970, p. 130.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 146. Leone's edition has ἐπιφράγιζε but ἐπισφράγιζε, which is to be found in Par. Gr. 2750, f. 208r (see fig. 1) seems to be the correct reading.

Ἀλλ' ὦ Σοφόκλεις, ὦ Σοφίλλου παιδίον,
 γνώμαις ἐπισφράγιζε σαῖς τὸ βιβλίον·
 «κᾶν ποτ' ἄνδρες, ἄνδρα θαυμάσαιμ' ἔτι,
 «ὄς μηδὲν ὦν γοναῖσιν εἶθ' ἄμαρτάνει,
 «ὄθ' οἱ δοκοῦντες εὐγενεῖς πεφυκέναι
 «τοιαῦθ' ἄμαρτάνουσιν ἐν λόγοις ἔπη.

Ὡς ἀντεβλήθη ταῦτα τοῖς πρωτογράφοις
 ταῦτα δ' ἐφευρέθησαν ἰσχυρὸν λόγων,
 Τζέτζου κατεστρώθησαν ἐν τῷ σεκρέτῳ,
 ὑπογραφήν δ' ἔσχηκεν ἦν τινα βλέπεις.
 Τζέτζης λογιστῆς τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ νέων.

So, Sophocles, son of Sophillos,
 please, do seal the book with your thoughts:
 «Never again, my fellows, will I be amazed
 if some nobody by birth does wrong,
 when those who are deemed noble
 do so wrong in their discourses».

As they were collated with the original,
 and invented by the power of words,
 these texts were deposited in the archive of Tzetzes,
 and obtained a signature that you see here:
 Tzetzes, auditor of the ancients and the moderns.

Not only are the final lines modeled after the stock phrases used to authenticate official documents,⁵² the *mise en page* too imitates that of chancery subscriptions. Although dating to one century after Tzetzes' life, the Paris. Gr. 2750 shows how the scribe emphasized the chancery modules in the final lines of the poem and especially in the signature (see fig. 1). Even a very late manuscript such as Cantabridg. Gr. Ee.6.35 emphasises Tzetzes' signature by putting it between two crosses. It shall also be noted that Tzetzes' signature is introduced by a tetrastich detailing how the document was “issued” and the prerogatives of the issuer. In this respect the last block of iambs – a self-standing piece as shown by the graphic layout of the Paris. Gr. 2750 – serves the same function as the tetrastichs of the cartulary Pasini 261. Tzetzes, however, is both the redactor and the issuer, he is both the one who dictates or writes the text and the one who authorizes it. He is a logariast who does not make use of any secretary, unlike John Smeniotes, but who produces his documents by himself. As shown by my recent discovery of a section of Tzetzes' lost *Logismoι*, Tzetzes builds his persona of literatus by using the blueprint of the grand logariast,⁵³ an imperial officer particularly prominent in the 12th century and hierarchically superior to the logariasts supervising the single *sekreta*,⁵⁴ such as Smeniotes. Chronologically the first publication

⁵² See HART 1880-1881, p. 61.

⁵³ See PIZZONE 2020 and <https://cml.sdu.dk/news/cml-blog-john-tzetzes-in-the-margins-of-the-voss-gr-q1-discovering-autograph-notes-of-a-byzantine-scholar>.

⁵⁴ See MAGDALINO 1993, p. 229.

of the *Logismoi* as an independent editorial product, as a book, also happened in the mid 40s, around the time when letter 46 was written.⁵⁵ Tzetzes' irony thus emerges even more starkly. His self-appointment as grand logariast was part of his public persona – he insists on it repeatedly throughout his oeuvre.⁵⁶ Within this a literary game, Tzetzes is writing not so much to a fellow administrator, but to a subordinate. At the same time, he shows off an ignorance in administrative matters that would have been all the more misplaced for a grand logariast in charge of the finances of the Empire.

Tzetzes' proclaimed autography is part of the same ironic self-portrait as "literary officer", so to say. Although (self)endowed with authorizing power, he still lacks the actual bureaucratic apparatus of a major imperial officer. That is also why in the scholia on Aristophanes Tzetzes refers to his pen by the "nickname" of ὑπογραφεύς (secretary).⁵⁷ Tzetzes writes in his own hand both because he has given himself the authority to do so and because he does not have any actual secretary to dictate to. The Vossianis G Q1 carrying the *Logismoi*, moreover, is a copy edited by the hand of Tzetzes' himself. The numerous autograph notes dotting almost every page are, once again a form of autographic validation, a signature warranting authenticity against scribal misinterpretation.⁵⁸

Tzetzes' strategy, the entanglements with bureaucratic writing, as well as his emphasis on self-dictation (the pens as secretaries), autography and ἐπιγραφή provide a fitting parallel with cultural developments characterizing Western Europe between the 13th and the 14th century. In the last ten years, in particular, scholars have emphasized the pan-European, pervasive nature of *dictamen* and his literariness.⁵⁹ The role of chanceries and of the relevant corporations in promoting such developments can be – and has been – hardly underestimated.⁶⁰ The *ars dictaminis* practiced by notaries and chancery officers is now regarded as a cognitive *forma mentis*,⁶¹ which also affected the composition in the vernacular(s). Even more importantly for our concerns, the relationship between literariness and *dictamen* is not only one of rhetoric, but also of graphic patterns. On the one hand, treatises on *dictamen* such as the ones by Guido Faba (1190-1243 ca), both in Latin and in the vernacular, were copied using the dignified *textualis* in manuscripts following the gothic layout.⁶² On the other, chancery writing emerges as a typology suitable also for literary works in the vernacular. For instance, the earliest manuscripts transmitting the *Tesoretto* and *Favolello* by Brunetto Latini (1220-1294/5 ca), an author usually regarded as innovating the traditional rhetorical modules of *dictamen*, are penned mostly in a cursive chancery hand.⁶³

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ See *Commentary on Hermogenes* pp. 131, 30-132, 1-2 Cramer; *Historiae* XI 369, 246-249; *Commentary on Aristophanes' Frogs* v. 100a, p. 733, 4-6; v. 1328, p. 1076, 40-1079, 89 Koster.

⁵⁷ See *Commentary on Aristophanes' Plutum* v. 733, p. 170, 4 Massa Positano and LUZZATTO 1999, p. 143 nt. 5.

⁵⁸ The notes are currently being edited by myself, Elisabetta Barili and Stefano Martinelli Tempesta.

⁵⁹ See DELLE DONNE - SANTI 2013.

⁶⁰ MONTEFUSCO - BISCHETTI 2018.

⁶¹ ADAMSKA 2016.

⁶² See GHIGNOLI 2013.

⁶³ BERTELLI 2008, with MEIER 2017.

As for the use of *sphragis*, his role in Western vernacular poetic traditions, was highlighted already by Curtius.⁶⁴ Needless to say, classical models played a decisive role.⁶⁵ However, it is worth noting that the tendency to use poetic seals exploiting documentary practices and discourses becomes more evident – predictably – when poets double as literati and notaries. Case in point are the signature practices of 13th century Italian notaries-poets, such as Giacomo from Lentini and Brunetto Latini. Both used to encapsulate their name in the verses they produced, imitating the notarial *signum*.⁶⁶ Recent studies, moreover, have shown that the legal practices of these poets affected also their style and expressive modules.⁶⁷

As far as Tzetzes is concerned, the need for authentication was also prompted by palpable preoccupations. His work is characterized by constant anxiety regarding the risks of plagiarism and forgery. The *Historiai* makes no exception. On the contrary the work offer a powerful representation of the material hardships often entailed by the passage to the book form. Tzetzes' *scholia* enlightening details about the *Historiai* production process, in particular as far as the collection and the conservation of the author's *σχεδία* are concerned.⁶⁸ The most remarkable and best-known episode concerns a follower of Tzetzes dying in the imperial palace. According to one *scholion* to the *Historiai* unidentified soldiers, after his body, had sold all the fellow's belongings, including Tzetzes' writings:⁶⁹

Ἐκεῖτο δὲ ἡ ἱστορία ἐν τῇ πολυῖστορι πρώτη ἐπιστολῇ. Στρατιῶται δὲ ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ βιβλίδια πολλὰ τῶν ἐμῶν πονημάτων εὐρόντες ἐν κέλλῃ τινὸς τῶν ἐμῶν ὀμιλητῶν, τεθνηκότος ἐκείνου, ἀπημπολήκασιν, ὁ μὲν τεσσάρων χαλκῶν, ὁ δὲ ἕξ, καὶ ἄλλα πάντα ὁμοίως ὡς ἀναζητῶν ταῦτα, παρὰ τινος ἔμαθον τῶν περὶ τὴν βασιλείῃς αὐλήν.

Here there was the story included in the very learned first epistle [*To Lachanas*, now *Historiai* IV 141.470-779]. Some soldiers of the palace, after finding many booklets, result of my work, in the room of a follower of mine, who was dead, sold them, one for forty bronze coins, another one for six, and all of them for similar amounts of money, as I came to learn from one of those who are close to the imperial palace, since I was looking for my writings.

In another note Tzetzes explains that a person among the «careful ones» tried to trace the buyers in order to copy the missing texts and add them to the bulk of the work.⁷⁰ Interestingly the way Tzetzes qualifies this friend of his – as belonging to the φιλοπόνοι – might point to the careful keeping of borrowed texts. At least this is the meaning of the adverb φιλοπόνως in the use of the late glossator of Vat. Ottob. 154,

⁶⁴ CURTIUS 1948, pp. 402-404.

⁶⁵ Poetic seals were introduced by Theognis in the sixth century BCE (see CONDELLO 2009-2010), a poet very well-known and quoted by Tzetzes (see for instance the verses for Kyrnos, 1, 173-179, quoted in the *Commentary on Aphthnios' Progymnasmata* in Voss. Gr. Q1 f. 2r or the lines in the scholion to the first letter: 4,8, pp. 158, 14-159, 7 Leone).

⁶⁶ See BIANCHINI 1995.

⁶⁷ See BRUNETTI 2019.

⁶⁸ Tzetzes expresses his complaints about the fact that some of the preexistent material he needed for his book got lost for various reasons. Some exegetical “stories” were apparently in the hand of followers or pupils, who did not want to return them (*Scholion ad Chiliadem* IV 469b). See SPELTHAHN 1904, p. 26.

⁶⁹ *Historiai* VI 40, introductory prose note.

⁷⁰ *Historiai* VI 63, introductory prose note.

for instance.⁷¹ This meaning is all the more likely as Tzetzes in the passage quoted above qualifies his own work as *πονήματα*. Tzetzes' notes on the *Historiai* tie in very well with another poem, which is being currently edited by Nunzio Bianchi. The poem is copied at ff. 20v-21r of the famous Florentine codex Conventi Soppressi 627 preserving four ancient novels.⁷² The iambic lines revolve around a book, which had been sent to a room of *sakellion*, a term that usually indicated the treasury, supervised once again by the logariasts.⁷³ Part of the material was cut away and stolen by a «son of a billygoat». Deeply angered, Tzetzes had replaced the lost material by pasting new lines to the disfigured roll. The mention of the *sakellion* shows once again the entanglements – even at a material level – of Tzetzes' activity with the administrative vocabulary of the empire.

It is safe to say that Tzetzes like his pupils had undergone a double training in both rhetorical and administrative matters. The nature of our sources allows us to see more of the former, but the latter, more or less informally, must have been there. There are also historiographical biases that prevented the modern reader to gain awareness of legal and bureaucratic undertones in the writing of Byzantine literati. If, as we have seen at the beginning, scholars have been chasing after the literariness of documents, less interest has been shown for the documentarism of literature. This is a problem of perspective that does not affect only Byzantine studies, but also other branches of scholarship on medieval literature. Quite recently for instance, Meier and Zanin⁷⁴ have stressed the fact that the ways law affects literary discourse in early Italian vernacular poetry has not been fully investigated and understood. Equally, it is well possible that, upon a closer and more targeted look, some 12th century innovations, especially as regards prose and poetry,⁷⁵ are better understood if looked at from this perspective. After all, official titles feature often in the inscriptions preceding occasional poetry, as testified also by the Florentine codex, mentioned above.⁷⁶

Going back to Tzetzes, it is also necessary to remember that he had very practical and “commercial” reasons for controlling his production. Furthermore, these reasons were particularly pressing in first stages of the circulation of his work, before the “publication” of his writings in book-form. Many of his texts had a didactic purpose – they were Tzetzes' stock-in-trade and hence indirectly endowed with a market value.⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, Tzetzes tried to protect his own interests by marking his intel-

⁷¹ Vat. Ottob. 154 (15th), f. 142, see ATSALOS 1971, p. 168 nt. 4.

⁷² See BIANCHI 2006, pp. 207-244. Bianchi (forthcoming) provides a translation and a contextualization of the poem.

⁷³ See “IRHT_GR_ARCHIVES_NOTICES_MSS_id_15899” *IDEAL*, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://ideal.irht.cnrs.fr/document/819038> (p. 26 of the document).

⁷⁴ MEIER - ZANIN 2019, p. 8.

⁷⁵ See ZAGKLAS 2017, pp. 240-241.

⁷⁶ See BIANCHI 2001.

⁷⁷ See for instance *Scholia in Aristophanis Ranas*, v. 843a, 933.1-12; 936.1-14; v. 897, 952, 13-954.14 Massa Positano. On plagiarism at Tzetzes' expenses see BUDELMANN 2002, pp. 150-151; CULLHED 2014. Such a “market value”, based on the novelty of Tzetzes' teachings and his ability to attract students, is to be distinguished from the remuneration directly offered by patrons. On Tzetzes' struggle to maintain freedom and at the same time secure patrons see LOVATO forthcoming, with a detailed analysis of Tzetzes' different authorial personae. For a more traditional approach on the same issues, see SAVIO 2018 and 2020.

lectual property. And here is where authorization strategies drawn from legal practices come into play. Such strategies implied also a strict quantification of the material produced. That is why Tzetzes includes a functional element like stichometry in the poetic seal of the *Historiai*:⁷⁸

Λοιπὸν τὰ τούτου παύσωμεν, τοῦτον σφραγίδα θέντες,
σφραγίδα καὶ συμπέρασμα ταύτης ἡμῶν τῆς βίβλου.
Τέλος βίβλου ἱστορικῆς Ἰωάννου τοῦ Τζέτζου τῆς διὰ στίχων πολιτικῶν, Ἄλφα δὲ καλουμένης,
ὧν στίχων πολιτικῶν τὸ ποσὸν μυριάς μία καὶ δισχίλιοι ἑπτακόσιοι πενήκοντα ἑννέα.

But now let's stop here on this, putting this seal,
sealing and concluding this book of ours.

This is the end of the historical book of John Tzetzes in political verses, the book called Alpha, including an amount of political lines equivalent to 12759

As we have seen above, an even more complex *sphragis* seals the text in one of the branches of the work's manuscript tradition. Elsewhere I have shown the complex and multilayered – both conceptually and chronologically – nature of the *Historiai*.⁷⁹ We are to do with a proper «authorial book», following Petrucci's definition,⁸⁰ a carefully curated editorial object, whose production is painstakingly controlled by the author himself. In this respect, Tzetzes' autography and self-commentary reminds – in the form rather than in the content – of practices widespread later on in the Italian 14th century. Self-exegesis is famously a hallmark of Dante's production.⁸¹ Yet, it is the editorial experiment carried out in the early 14th century by Francesco da Barberino that shows some notable similarities with Tzetzes' *Historiai*.

Between 1305 and 1312, Francesco da Barberino compiled his *Documenta amoris* or *Documenti d'Amore*, a work regarded as a «landmark in the history of the book».⁸² The *Documenta amoris* consist of three textual layers: a primary, vernacular text in verse, a Latin paraphrase and a substantial Latin commentary, both of them in prose. Thirty-one miniatures complete the book. Unlike Tzetzes' *Historiai*, however, the *Documenta* have a strong fictional frame: invited to Love's castle, the author is lectured by twelve women-virtues, inspired by Eloquence. After writing down the lectures, both in Latin and in the vernacular (using two pens and both hands in rotation), he comments on them in Latin, to grant the work a wider circulation.⁸³

We have two contemporary manuscripts preserving the *Documenta amoris* and they both testify to Francesco's meticulous editorial work, complete with frequent curses against copyists and their unreliability.⁸⁴ Significantly, Francesco refers to some of the treatises composing his compilation as *ystorie*⁸⁵ and he chooses to posit himself

⁷⁸ XIII 496.667-71

⁷⁹ See PIZZONE 2017.

⁸⁰ «Libro d'autore»: see PETRUCCI A. 1984, pp. 402-404. Cfr. also CURSI 2010.

⁸¹ See BARÁNSKI, 2005. More in general, on the Italian 14th century, see BATTAGLIA RICCI 2010.

⁸² See BARNES 2010, p. 573.

⁸³ *Glossa ad Prohemium*, II, 26-27 Albertazzi; *Tractatus amoris*, II, 587 Albertazzi.

⁸⁴ The mss. are the Barb. lat. 4077 and the Barb. lat. 4076 (see ALBERTAZZI 2008, p. IX for further bibliography). As to the curses against copyists see PETRUCCI A. 1985, pp. 224-225.

⁸⁵ See for instance *Glossa ad v.* 389-390, p. II 62 Albertazzi.

within the tradition of the scholastic commentary.⁸⁶ At the same time, he links his authorial control and editorial care to his profession of notary, characterized by accuracy in annotating, reviewing and authenticating official documents.⁸⁷ Francesco also frequently voices his concerns about authenticity and plagiarism.⁸⁸ Finally, he scorns mercenary book-production and reacts to it by advocating the primacy of autography.

All these features are usually regarded as an anticipation of Petrarch's humanism. And yet, as we have seen, in 12th-century Byzantium an intellectual such as Tzetzes develops comparable strategies to support his compositional practices, thus securing the legal ownership of his writings. Such similarities depend to some extent on analogous background-conditions: despite the enormous differences in the respective political and social structures, in both cases bureaucracy (and consequently the written text) played a primary and, at times, overwhelming role, while intellectuals frequently had to fulfill administrative tasks. There are also major differences, of course, beginning with the subject matter and the character of moral instruction that is much less present in Tzetzes' work.⁸⁹ Even more crucially, yet, Tzetzes' endeavor appears to be much more radical. Whereas the *Historiai* are, quite explicitly, a self-commentary, the *Documenta*, according to the narrative fictional frame chosen by Francesco, are not, at least theoretically, a self-commentary. The authorial agency is not situated in Francesco himself, but in Love's eloquence: *Testus solius Amoris est*.⁹⁰ Love does inspire the twelve virtues-lecturers, whose words Francesco reports and comments on. That is why, Tzetzes' attempt to turn himself into an established author is much more radical.⁹¹

To sum up, Tzetzes resorts to a web of very complex strategies to legitimate his own production. In so doing, he anticipates trends emerging only later on in the West, as shown by 13th-century Italian notaries-poets or by Francesco da Barberino's autography in the 14th century. By resorting to notarial signature practices, Tzetzes transforms the nature of the original: not a mere preparatory draft anymore, it becomes a prestigious prototype, an authenticated copy with a superior authorial value. Tzetzes' master-copies are brought up to the same level as, say, respected *codices antiquiores* or autographs of monastic founders, preserved for devotional reasons.⁹²

From an operational point of view notarial writing strategies are put at the service of literary writing, thus replicating on a larger scale the hierarchy jokingly hinted at in the letter to John Smeniotes. On the one hand, the anonymous youngster usurps official documents and writes down lines nullifying them, on the other, Tzetzes appro-

⁸⁶ While using notarial compositional practices (see PETRUCCI A. 1984, pp. 405-410), Francesco also explicitly mentions "publication" modes typical of university-handbooks. Of Lady Docilitas, for instance, he says *quaedam interserit ut doctores faciunt in ordinariis librorum lecturis, quae qui vult colligere potest, qui autem dormire vel somnari potest et male* (glossa ad v. 117, p. 29 Albertazzi).

⁸⁷ Cfr. *Documenti d'amore*, glossa ad v. 5954, p. II, 482 Albertazzi.

⁸⁸ See for instance *Tractatus amoris*, p. II, 587 Albertazzi.

⁸⁹ Different is also the *mise en page*: in the *Documenta d'amore*, text and commentary are on the same page, according to the tradition of the Latin glosses and commentaries. See HOLTZ 1984; HOLTZ 1995; WILSON 1984.

⁹⁰ *Glossa ad v. 117*, p. II, 30 Albertazzi.

⁹¹ Tzetzes eventually overcomes the "dual status of commentaries" (see BUDELMANN 2002, p. 141), nullifying the boundaries between author and commentator.

⁹² See THOMAS - CONSTANTINIDES HERO 2000, vol. I, pp. 13-14.

priates bureaucratic formulae to support his writing, eventually overturning his own social subordination. As an “author” he lays claim to a strong autonomy, one that he could not possibly enjoy in his capacity of secretary when he was young.

At this point, however, a *caveat* is necessary. It must be noted that Tzetzes’ boldest authorial statements are found in secondary texts, be they secondary in theory (the *Historiai qua* ancillary commentary) or in practice (glosses and marginal paratexts). Needless to say, in neither case we are confronted with texts of private nature. Even in glossing ancient manuscripts, Tzetzes is very aware that his notes would be read by the next generations of scholars and scribes.⁹³ However, when it comes to the “primary” text – in our case the *Letters* – the strategy chosen by Tzetzes appears to be much less aggressive. The first letter, opening the collection and hence endowed with a programmatic value, shows a strong apologetic tone. Tzetzes takes up the traditional persona of the unfairly attacked intellectual, pushed to writing in order to defend himself.⁹⁴ This gap tells us that the freedom Tzetzes could openly grant himself was still somewhat “marginal”, both literally and metaphorically, and needed indeed indirect strategies such as those I have tried to highlight.

Finally, one could say with some degree of plausibility that Tzetzes’ strategies of self-authorization culminate precisely in his final editorial project. If really the *Historiai* were designed to be the book Alpha, in the collection of the books written by Tzetzes – sixty as he informs us –,⁹⁵ his self-exegesis would have preceded the works devoted to the great authors of the past such as Homer. If so, the order of his collected work would have replicated the axiological relationship established in the *subscriptio* at the end of the iambi.

Be that as it may, the legal self-authorization encapsulated in Tzetzes’ signature effectively conveys by itself both his uninhibited attitude toward tradition and the consequent creative power of his autography.

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⁹³ See the text in LUZZATTO 1999, pp. 104-105.

⁹⁴ Ep. 1, pp. 1-4 Leone.

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